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THE PLEBS MAGAZINE

"I can promise to be candid but not impartial."

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New Tactics for the Social Revolution

The distinction between the left wing and the right wing of the socialist movement may be considered under two different heads, the difference in method and the difference in aim. The main purpose of the present article is to consider the former, but at the outset a brief word may be said anent the latter distinction. It may be summarised by saying that while the socialists of the right are content to work for the coming of socialism as a gradual outgrowth of the existing forms of political and economical institutions, and that by socialism they seem to mean little more than state capitalism or collectivism, or at any rate a centralised bureaucratic state wherein the contrast between the working class and the ruling class will persist with some of its crudities and harshnesses discreetly veiled, the socialists of the left are working for a social revolution which will completely transform the world as we know it, so that the words and the very ideas of master and servant, employer and employed, ruler and ruled, will have become obsolete. The change will be revolutionary; it may or may not be violent and sudden; it will certainly be cataclysmic. How it will appear in retrospect, the hardest prophet cannot venture to say, but to us who look forward to the change its essential features seem to be comprised, as far as the economic field is concerned, by the complete disappearance of the wage system, and, as far as the political field is concerned, by the annihilation of

the centralised class-ruled state. Those who do not consciously work for these two aims are not socialists of the new school, and, be they young or old individually, they belong to the past generation.

The differences in method between the two wings of the socialist party are in correspondence with the differences in aim. In the French socialist party, the Parti Unifié, or Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière, it has been customary since its foundation to dwell upon the threefold method of realising socialism, by way of the co-operative movement. All these tactical methods (the "holy trinity," as we used to call it in the French party before the war) are avowedly based upon the theory of the class struggle. But it did not require any intimate acquaintance with the socialist movement in continental countries to realise that, as far, at any rate, as the leaders are concerned, the devotion to Marxism is no more than lip service, and that the political chiefs certainly, the co-operative and trade union leaders probably, have as little desire for the social revolution in their time as the leaders of the British Labour Party. The movement is their livelihood; the movement has lifted many of them into a new social environment, their attitude towards socialism has come to resemble that of not a few Irish parliamentarians towards Home Rule. A fine slogan, ever accompanied, consciously or unconsciously, by the whispered prayer, "May the comfortable old order last my time!"

Those who are out for the social revolution, those whose temperament, philosophy, or economic status, one or all, makes it impossible for them to come to terms either with capitalism (overt or camouflaged behind state socialism) or with Fabian collectivism, may formulate their tactical methods in the shape of what we will venture to call the new trinity, or, as it please you, the unholy trinity. The threefold line of the new advance is by way of (i) industrial unionism; (ii) the working out of an entirely new method of political organization, to replace parliament and the bourgeois "democratic" state; and (iii) independent working class education.

Under the limitations of space imposed by a necessarily parsimonious editor we can make no attempt to discuss the reasons for the failure of trade unionism (old style) and the co-operative movement as revolutionary forces. It is known that both were revolutionary at their inception; it is known that both have failed to be revolutionary in action and have long since ceased to be revolutionary in spirit. Let that suffice. But a brief explanation why the attempt to bring about socialism through the instrumentality of parliament must necessarily fail may be permitted. Throughout the history of the different forms of polity it will be found that each type of economic power has had its peculiar and appropriate method of political expression. The political activities of primitive communism were manifested through the folk-mote, or general assembly of the people. The city states of classical Greece, Rome during the days of her first expansion, and the later Rome during the era of world-conquest, world-rule and world-exploitation—each had its own peculiar form of political expression suited to that particular type of slave state. Agrarian feudalism, with its serf peasants as the subject class and its barons and their retainers as master class, had another political form; the medieval guilds secured their fullest political expression in the patriciates of the Swiss towns. With the rise of the economic power of the middle classes, a new form of political organization has everywhere come into existence. Parliaments elected upon a territorial basis by universal suffrage are the ultimate expression of class rule in this particular form. Broadly speaking, the political history of the last three centuries has been the perfecting of parliamentary government as the political method by which the capitalist class asserts and maintains its dominance, as against the feudal magnates it has overthrown, and as against the new social type of wage-slaves it has created. Under peculiar conditions, as in Germany and Japan, a semi-feudal political organization may persist for a time alongside the new

economic power, but those who know Germany best will know that the imposing machinery of popular government, with cabinets "responsible to the electorate," and all the rest, were in prospect in the very near future, and could have been secured for what they are worth without the cost of this war which is "to make the world" so very "safe for democracy."

But capitalism and its political expression parliamentarianism, may well tremble, for the younger generation is in sooth knocking at the door. Another economic power is arising, the economic power of the workers, organizing by new and up-to-date methods. Now if we Marxists read the lesson of history aright, this new economic power will find for itself a new form of political expression. It will not, probably it cannot, secure the overthrow of capitalism through capturing the political state as we know it to-day. It will not realise socialism through parliament.

Let us make it perfectly clear that when we suggest that parliamentary action is, as far as we are concerned, futile, we are not repudiating *political* action. This would be absurd. By a natural, common, and unfortunate confusion of terms, "political action" is in such discussions as this apt to be used as synonymous with "parliamentary action." For during ten generations parliamentary life has in Great Britain been the most conspicuous form of political activity, and just as to the average person of short views it seems that capitalism has always existed and will always exist, so also does it seem that parliamentary democracy is a perennial institution and, apart from parochial trivialities, the sole comprehensible method of political activity. Every Marxist student, nay, every competent student of history as expounded by capitalist historians, knows better, but Marxists and competent students of history are not found wherever two or three are gathered together.

Yet wherever two or three are gathered together to pursue certain common life aims, and wherever conflicting interests have to be harmonised, or, if irreconcilable, to struggle for victory, there political action is born. The question for the revolutionary proletariat is, what form of political organization, what method of political activity, will best favour the assertion of the growing economic power of the workers, organized in the new industrial unions; what method will best hasten the overthrow of capitalism and the disappearance of the wage system? The workers' committees movement, the outgrowth of the shops' stewards' movement, is inspired with the revolutionary aim, but those most active in promoting it look upon it chiefly as a method for securing the control of industry. They concentrate their attention upon its economic aspect. To us it seems to have a wider, a political significance. It is the basis of an entirely new method of political organization; it is the skeleton of the means by which the economic power of the workers will secure its new political expression. This is why the analogy between the workers' committees movement here and the soviet revolution in Russia is so full of interest and so abounding in promise for the future. Allowing for differences in the economic development of Russia, differences which it would take too long to discuss in this article, the soviet state may be regarded as a bold attempt to create the political organization of the coming time. In this perspective, the forcible dissolution of the Constituent Assembly (a sacrosanct parliament !) by the Bolsheviks was the most obvious and logical proceeding for the Bolsheviks during the opening days of their power. Anyone who condemns them on this count may be a good democrat, but is certainly a bad socialist.

With industrial unionism as the foundation of our new economic organization, with workers' committees aiming primarily at the control of industry, and secondarily (it may be as yet almost unknown to themselves) at the construction of a new political organism, we have two members of our trinity. In advocating these, we make common cause with the guild socialists, who are industrial unionists and convinced advocates of the control of industry by the workers. The fact that they envisage the survival of territorial

parliaments as embodiments of certain aspects of political activity need not concern us if they are wholeheartedly revolutionary in their desire to overthrow capitalism and are prepared to join us unreservedly in pursuing the tactics we advocate. The future will decide whether the political organization of the future will be of the soviet or of the parliamentary type. There is the Russian precedent to guide us, and we "British Bolsheviks" may well incline to believe that in the critical hours of our own revolution our rallying cry will be, "All power to the Workers' Committees!" When the storm has blown itself out shall we not find that the bourgeois institution of parliament has, like an unsubstantial pageant, faded? Mayhap not even a "purified" wrack will be left behind on which to hang the tattered political vesture of the Consumer's State so dear to the theorists of the National Guilds League.

In the third of our tactical methods, independent working class education, we may expect the guild socialists to make common cause with us, for they are avowed exponents of the method of the class struggle, and they consider that only through the deliberate spread of class consciousness among the workers will class be overthrown. Nay, do we not find that even the W.E.A., as shown in its recent *Education Year Book*, has been practically converted to the notion of the necessity for tendentious education? But if the W.E.A. is coming over into our camp, is it not time for us of the Plebs League to ask whether we should not have marched a little farther forward? Have we as yet seen all the beauties, have we as yet understood all the powers of this third person of the trinity? In the concluding sentences of a brief article all that it is possible to say is that a far more extensive conception of the new tactic in this department is at least possible, and perhaps realisable in the near future. Nothing, perchance, would quicken progress more effectively than a great extension of the movement so well begun a decade ago by the Plebs League and the Labour Colleges. But for details we must refer to a pamphlet now in the press entitled *Independent Working Class Education*.

EDEN AND CEDAR PAUL.

An Outline Industrial History Course

This syllabus of a lecture course in Industrial History has been prepared for South Wales more particularly, as the references will show, but the general scheme can be adapted for use by or assistance of tutors and class leaders throughout the country. J.T.W.N. will be pleased to render assistance to these in compiling their own syllabuses, drawing local analogies, or in aiding them to consult source books and papers. The idea of this method of study is to encourage members of the classes and, more especially, teachers to apply their Marxian theory to specific questions such as Parliament, the State, Imperialism, Labour Organization—Political and Industrial, etc.; and to make of history a living and intimate interest by bringing into the course materials drawn from the social and political story of the regions in which the class members live. Letters to J.T.W.N. on this question should be addressed c/o Editor, *Plebs Magazine*.

Lecture I. Aim of the Course.—(i.) To show the rise of the several systems and methods of property holding and production, surviving or prevalent at the present day. (ii.) Growth of private property in land, and rise of a land-owner class on the one hand and a landless proletariat on the other. (iii.) Development of capitalist system of production. (iv.) Rise of the industrial proletariat and how it came to organize in trade unions, co-operative societies and political labour organizations. (v.) How industry is evolving and what methods of organization and action are necessary to secure economic and social emancipation.

TEXT-BOOKS FOR THE COURSE.—*A Worker Looks at History* (henceforth referred to as Starr; *Easy Outlines of the Modern Working-Class Movement* (Craik); *Capital*, Vol. I.; *The State* (Paul).

Wherever possible:—Gibbins' *Industrial History*; Lafargue's *Evolution of Property*; Engels' *The Mark*; Connolly's *Labour in Irish History*; Engels' *Condition of the Working Class in 1844*.

Books which should be made available through the Central Class Committee: Hammonds' *Village Labourer*, and *Town Labourer*; *Select Documents of Economic History* (Brown and Tawney); Hakluyt's *Voyages*, Vols. i., iii.; Gibbins' *Industry in England*; Myers' *History of Canadian Wealth*; Brailsford's *War of Steel and Gold*; Rothstein's *Egypt's Ruin*, etc., etc.

Lecture II. Social Beginnings.—(Some may desire to expand this into two lectures, but the aim has been to get over the earlier period as quickly as is consonant with efficiency). (i.) *Tribal Economy* as originally existing in South Wales and amongst the Celtic and Germanic Peoples. Methods of land-holding, social organization, production of simple needs. (ii.) Development of *Manorial Economy*: lord of the manor, freemen, villeins, cottars, etc.; demesne land, common, waste; methods of government and organization of agriculture. (iii.) *Rise of Feudalism*: effects of foreign conquest in Wales, England, etc.

REFERENCES.—*The Mark*, pp. 1-16. Starr, Chap. iii. iv.; *Origin of the Family*, Chap. vii.; *The State*, Chaps. i. and iv.; *Evolution of Property*, Chap. iv.

Lecture III. From Serf to Peasant and Wage-Worker.—(i.) Remission of personal service, suit and forced labour for money rent; lord of the manor transforms Demesne Land into entailed estate and employs wage-workers. Development of freehold, leasehold, copyhold and of different classes of peasantry. *Break up of the Manorial System*. (ii.) The Black Death. *The Peasant Revolt*. The Golden Age of the English Peasantry.

REFERENCES.—*The Mark*, pp. 17-26; Starr, Chaps. v. and viii.; *The State*, Chap. vii., pp. 118-124; *Dream of John Ball*, William Morris. *Jack Cade*, Joseph Clayton.

Lecture IV. The Town and the Guildsman.—(i.) Beginnings of Handicraft and Trade. Manorial Villages in some cases become Towns. Rise of the *Merchant Guild*. Development of *Craft Guilds*. Acquisition of Corporate Rights by the Towns. (ii.) Richer members of the Guilds defy regulations and employ non-freemen. Rise of the Liveried Companies in Greater Towns. Beginnings of Capitalism. (iii.) Wealthy Tradesmen and Merchants purchase manors and become Landowners. *Beginnings of the Nobility*. E.g., Rise of Bristol, Gloucester and Exeter. West Country Cloth Merchants or Clothiers; e.g., the Hanburys, goldsmiths of London, become a Monmouthshire County family in 16th Century.

REFERENCES.—Starr, Chaps. vi. and vii.; *The State*, Chap. viii.; *Evolution of Property*, Chap. v., pp. 127-140; *The Revolt of Ghent*, William Morris. *Pilgrims Shell*, Part II., Sue. *Town Life in the 15th Century*, Mrs. J. R. Green (see references to Bristol, Gloucester, and other corporate towns). *The Buried City of Kenfig*. (Some interesting charters, etc.)

Lecture V. The Creation of the Landless Proletariat.—(i.) *Wool grown and exported* from England to Italy to pay Papal and monastic dues; e.g., Neath Abbey and Tintern Abbey. Wool grown and exported to Flanders. *Establishment of Staples and Poundage Tax*. Beginning of *Royal Revenues from Trade*. (ii.) *Manufacture of Wool into Cloth*. Increased demand for wool. Establishment of *Company of Merchant Adventurers*. Beginnings of *Enclosures*, 15th-16th Centuries. (iii.) *Confiscation of Monastic Lands*. Grants to Gentry, e.g., Mansels of Margam, Herberts of Tintern, Williams of Neath. Beginnings of Capitalist Sheep Rearing. (iv.) *Wholesale Confiscations of Charities and Lands*. (v.) Disbanded soldiers, expropriated peasantry.

unemployed clerics, pensioners, dependents of the Church form the new *Proletariat*. (vi.) *Penal Legislation, Poor Law*. (vii.) Cheap labour for clothiers. *Laws made to encourage cloth trade*. West Country Gentry and Crown both seek an outlet for cloth; e.g., *Voyages of Devon and Bristol Mariners*. Disturbances in Somerset about 1592.

REFERENCES.—Starr, Chaps. viii., ix., and x.; *Capital*, Vol. I., Chap. xxvii., pp. 740-745; Chap. xxviii., pp. 758-765; Hakluyt's *Voyages*.

(Remaining Eight Lectures next month.)

Reviews

TRADERS AND FINANCIERS OF OTHER DAYS.

Now that circumstances are again making London the battleground of the rival interests of trader and manufacturer, it is interesting to review the past struggles of these orders. The stories these books * tell of pitched battles with sticks and stones in Cheapside, of assault and battery on the road to St. Stephen's at Westminster, or of tumult in the Guildhall are not likely to be repeated, but the underlying differences seem often strangely familiar.

In *Finance and Trade under Edward III.*, Professor George Unwin and his collaborating students give us some invaluable sidelights on the social and political life of London during the 13th and 14th Centuries. The picture drawn by the editor of these papers in "Social Evolution in Medieval London" is admirably illustrative of the anarchy and chaos of affairs in the centuries following on the Conquest. The medley of interests, disguised sometimes under religious forms, again as fraternities, guilds, foreign settlements, Jewish communities or feudal orders, all jumbled together in the capital, owning different lords and subject to conflicting or ill-adjusted jurisdictions, is a condition of affairs hard to visualise but essential to conceive.

In J. R. Green's *Short History of the English People*, and other works, this confusion can be traced in the making as the several types of communal organization dissolved, formed themselves, or blended their characteristics in changing proportions and altered permutations. London was peculiarly a haunt of traders, of traders drawn from far and near, so numerous and so predominant that it never had a Merchants' Guild as had other and lesser towns. At an early date, wool-staplers, vintners, fishmongers, and others were drawing together, whilst within their trade they were divided again by national allegiance and racial barriers. There were Italian wool-dealers, Gascon wine-sellers, German merchants trafficking in various commodities, and there were, first, the Jewish money-lenders, and, thereafter, the Knights Templars, the Lombards and the Florentine bankers. The story of the economic and financial relations of the 13th and 14th Centuries was the record of the endless and disordered inter-play of these interests in dealing with the Crown, the wool-growers, the landed magnates and the rising estate of manufacturers. The struggle for the supremacy of Parliament was hampered by attempts, often successful, of the king to establish a Council of Merchants, who came together to arrange the collection and fixing of wool subsidies. Thus we discover wool-growers and land-owners in antagonism to the middle-class merchants of the town. Again, we find English wool-staplers denying free entry to foreign wool-dealers and coming into conflict with the interests of the growers, as the fishmongers of London, on the other hand, came in colli-

* *Trade and Finance under Edward III.* Edited by Prof. Geo. Unwin. (Manchester University Press, 15/- net.)

The Romance of Commerce. By Gordon Selfridge. (John Lane, 10/6 net.)

The Quintessence of Capitalism. By Werner Sombart. (Remaindered at 5/6.)

sion with the rest of the citizens in restricting the liberty of Yarmouth herring-sellers. City and provincial dealers, Gascon and London wine-sellers, importers and taverners bargained with the king or intrigued in the Common Council of London. The king we find with no settled policy except that of obtaining the maximum of financial with the minimum of regulation on his expenditure. His dealings with Parliament, the "Commons" of London, the Council of Merchants, the Craft Gilds, the Italian bankers, each and everyone were conditioned by his never-ceasing demand for money. He pledged his faith and broke his word, sold and retracted charters, summoned and disregarded Parliament, obtained supplies and then levied forced loans and "illegal" aids, borrowed money and appropriated wool that had been lent to him, imprisoned his creditors or showered on them manors and offices. The king certainly favoured the merchants in the same spirit as he had favoured his Jews. They alone could help him with ready money and they sent *their* aids without accompanying them sword at side and lance in hand.

The Florentine bankers who had grown rich in the service of the Papacy, such as the Medici, the Bardi, the Peruzzi, and others learned how easy it was to grow rich as the creditors and agents of kings and the princes of the Church. But they also knew how faithless their debtors could be. The Bardi and the Peruzzi came to grief in their transactions with Edward III., as did de la Pole, of Hull. The Medici were more fortunate in their dealings with Rome and even allied themselves with the reigning dynasty of France. Jacques Coeur, banker to the Valois, and the Fuggers of Augsburg were less happy in their dealings with the monarchs of France and of Germany. The great Charles V. owed his election to the imperial dignity in very large measure to the enormous payments made on his behalf by Raymond and Anthony Fugger. A fortune founded in weaving was augmented and finally brought to ruin by transactions with the princes of Germany. The story of these things is told in an interesting but eminently superficial way by Mr. Gordon Selfridge in his book, suitably entitled *The Romance of Commerce*. It contains much useful information. There is not much written about the Fuggers in English nor about any of the South-German financiers of the 16th Century, whose capital did so much to develop the mineral enterprise of Central Europe and Sweden, and which, in the case of the Hochstetters, accompanied by their technical skill, is found at Neath and at Tintern Alley in the reign of Elizabeth.

Another useful work on this same theme is Werner Sombart's *Quintessence of Capitalism*, now remaindered at 5/6. He persists in standing on his head to interpret events in the light of the spirit of capitalism, but that does not seriously detract from the mass of invaluable data which the voracious German has collected and assimilated. To a Marxian reader the book should prove stimulating and instructive. We can hardly recommend *The Romance of Commerce* to the slender purses of our readers, though it would be an informative work if it could be taken out of an Institute Library. Professor's Unwin's collection of essays is in another category altogether, and for anyone desiring to make a deeper study of the period when Parliament arose, when the Craft Gilds were assuming corporate personality and when capitalism was in its early infancy, it would prove a profitable investment. It is by no means a popular work, but as an accession to economic research is to be most cordially welcomed.

J. T. WALTON NEWBOLD.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE W.E.A.

The most interesting thing about this book *—to a Plebeian—is the overwhelming evidence it affords of the fact that, as time goes on, the W.E.A., whether it likes it or not, simply cannot help coming over more and more to

* *The W.E.A. Education Year Book*, published by the Workers' Educational Association, 16, Harpur Street, Holborn, London, W.C. 1. Cloth, 5/- net. Special cheap edition obtainable from the W.E.A. only, paper covers, 3/6 net. Postage Sixpence extra in each case.

the C.L.C.—Plebs position. It is all very well for Mr. Mactavish to deprecate (p. 332) "the policy of class-conscious isolation pursued by the Plebs League"; the fact remains that, as it realises the implications of its own aims—of its very name, in fact—the W.E.A. becomes more "class-conscious," too. Thus, from being "non-political" and all the rest of it, it has perforce taken the field with a definite Education Programme for Labour; thereby encouraging Mr. W. Leach, of Bradford, to remark (p. 63) :—

The W.E.A., in publishing its programme of education reform, has at last come into the open to justify its title. Gone, let us hope for ever, is the limitation it foolishly imposed upon itself in existing merely to secure for working men and women, after a hard day in field or factory, the nearest cheap imitation of university training that was to be had. It is now a fighting organization, with a real fighting charter upon which to question Parliamentary candidates, harass Ministers, and make itself thoroughly disagreeable to the enemy and a live force in the army of those who work for wages. . . .

True, Mr. Mactavish still shrinks from being "disagreeable to the enemy," and warns our rulers and governors (p. 333) that—

if adequate public facilities are not provided for the serious study of working-class problems *in an educational atmosphere* (!) with the assistance of qualified teachers and tutors, that which the public purse will not do for them they will do for themselves, and "they who pay the piper will call the tune." Adult working-class interests centre round social and industrial problems. They (*sic*) are seeking a way out. Assisted in the right way they will find it, and ultimately effect social and industrial changes by bloodless and peaceable methods. But if denied such assistance they will approach the study of these problems embittered by the injustices of their industrial experiences, and the old gospel of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" will find a new application.

But then organizations have a habit, these days, of leaving their Gen. Secretaries a quarter of a century or so behind; and we may yet see the W.E.A. unblushingly and with unchristian callousness, demanding an eye for an eye, etc., the while its Secretary wrings his hands in the rear, and continues to invoke the enemy's aid in "doping" his fellow-workers. For Mr. Mactavish alone among the many contributors to the volume indulges in this sort of treasonable (to his class) talk. "Bourgeois intellectuals," like Mr. Shaw and Mr. J. A. Hobson, pipe to a very different tune. The former, in his plea for "controversial education," (p. 31) warns Mr. Mactavish's friends fairly and squarely that controversial education "would tear away the camouflage from commercial civilization"; and, further, that—

all our conventional schools at present teach false ethics, false science, false history, and false hygiene. *And if there were sufficient vested interests in false geography and false arithmetic they would teach these too.*

Such language must grieve Mr. Mactavish sair! And what must he think of Mr. J. A. Hobson's warning (p. 51) to the workers to be on their guard—lest they should rush into educational grooves prepared for them by those who are not true friends of democracy and working-class culture, but who will use education to divide, divert, and render innocuous the democratic movement . . . ?

Or of the same gentleman's castigation of "the class politician, the charitable donor, the college don, and the expert bureaucrat" who "will make every effort to ensure that (working-class) education shall be conducted on 'safe' lines"; first, by means of "orthodox class culture, falsely figuring as 'humanities,' with a scientific, historical, and philosophic teaching selected and imposed by the clerical, pedagogic, and official classes," and calculated

to "destroy the essentially revolutionary power of thought"; and second, (after keeping out "dangerous" influences) by "inserting motives and atmospheres positively serviceable to their cause"—"thimble-rigging education with three P's—Patriotism, Piety and Productivity."

If the W.E.A. persists in putting such inflammatory stuff in the hands of the workers, it must not be surprised if it finds itself, willy-nilly, busily (but "impartially," of course) engaged in the *real* working-class struggle—the struggle for the abolition of wage-slavery. Mr. Cole, for instance (p. 372) is apparently waking up to the implication of the C.L.C. point of view:—

If (he says) all the C.L.C. says about the W.E.A. is true, then the working-class ought to take the whole educational system out of the hands of the State and run it for themselves. . . .

Precisely. (Mr. Cole adds, "on Socialist Sunday School lines." But I think that is intended as sarcasm.) Does Mr. Cole, the Guildsman, except "the educational system" from the things which the workers are to control?

The *Year Book* is a stimulating production. But the W.E.A. must either live up to its contributors or be more careful another time! J.F.H.

WANTED:—One copy of *Plebs* for September, 1910, also bound volumes or complete unbound volumes for any year. Bound volumes for 1917 are now ready. If those who ordered them will please forward cash (5/- post paid) they will be despatched at once. Only limited number available.

Correspondence

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE PLEBS.

SIR,—At the meet it was resolved that the Executive Committee be empowered to reorganize the Plebs League so as to put the control of the body on a basis more in accord with the later development of the Movement. I desire now to emphasise the eminent desirability of immediately putting the League on a more genuinely democratic basis.

When the League was formed, and for some years afterwards, it was in the nature of a fraternity of students, comparatively few in number, and almost entirely concerned with the propaganda of their ideas. As yet very few of them had become so much involved in industrial activity as to be unable to give their main attention to educational matters. The life of the League centred upon the College, and its members, not merely at the Meet but in continuous intimacy, were able to control and direct its policy and the conduct of the Magazine. The organization which now no longer reflects the needs of the Movement was then appropriate to the requirements of a small body of closely associated propagandists.

Latterly a change has come about as a result of several different causes. For one thing, many of the early adherents of the League have become so engrossed in the labour activities of their industry and their locality that they are unable to assist with the Magazine or with the central direction of the League. In the meantime, though the College is closed and the founders are dissipated throughout the industrial movement or otherwise occupied, the need for independent working-class education on Marxian lines has struck its roots deep and far afield. Friend and critic are agreed that the demand for Marxian literature is tremendous. Huge consignments of Kerr's books are being brought in and cleared out within a few days of arrival. Everywhere the rank and file movement is growing apace and wherever it grows the demand is for classes on Labour-College lines.

This necessitates a re-organization of the Plebs Movement so that the League and the Magazine may more faithfully represent and express the will

of the rank and file. Our educational movement must avoid direction from the top, instruction by leaders, control by the elders. We must, on principle, do all we can to prevent the entrenchment of any "official element" in the League. We stand for an authority delegated by the rank and file and not for a replacement of one set of leaders by another. At present, the officials and Executive Committee of the League are appointed by the Meet, which no longer reflects the Movement. This can no longer come together in its folk-moot at Earl's Court to order its affairs as it could do a few years ago. It is only a few, a "rump," a handful of Londoners and others more financially favoured than the rest who can get there. Between the annual meetings, the rank and file have no control. The E.C. has no means of knowing what are the problems and difficulties of the districts.

What is now required is that the protagonists of the Plebs idea should form themselves into branches, to watch the interests of the College and classes, to commence these classes and conduct them until they can be transferred to the control of the local Labour Movement or Trade Union branch, and, generally to act as a "ginger element." These branches should come together into districts with their District Councils and should send to form the E.C. delegates from these districts. Scotland, the North-Eastern, Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire, Midland, London, South Wales and Western Districts would then control the League in all its activities. The E.C. should meet in some central place, like Manchester or Derby, every 3 or 4 months as a Committee of District Delegates. The District Committees would consist of Branch Delegates. In this way every member, branch and district would feel a responsibility for and share in the League and its Magazine. Let the Plebs learn of the Soviets and commence at once to make a living reality of democratic control. Yours fraternally,

J. T. WALTON NEWBOLD.

OURSELVES.

DEAR COMRADE,—As you have repeatedly told us that the "Plebs" is going through a financial crisis, it is the duty of every reader to rack his brains to see what he can do to help. To me it seems that when the Magazine appeals for help most readers ask themselves, "How much can I give?" Money is tight; most of them can give but little, and having asked the question the matter ends. But money is not *everything*! There are many other ways of helping the magazine.

The Rationalists have a "Big Push" on, and in the last few issues of the *Literary Guide* there have been many suggestions for making the effort a success. We Socialists would do well to use some of these methods.

Another important way of helping to get the magazine better known is by "permeation." I am quite aware how obnoxious this Fabian idea is to some of us, but I am convinced that it is one of the best means of obtaining publicity. This permeation consists of letters to the local press. Do not think I advise sending letters to editors saying, "I like the *Plebs* and think it very good and thought I might mention it so that others could get to hear of it." Editors *won't* accept such letters. You must wait your opportunity and butt in at the proper moment. For instance, there is a strike in your town and the local paper has some correspondence on it. Write a letter giving the Marxian views (do not let it be known you are a Marxist) of the strike. Your letter will be challenged. Well and good. The Editor is morally bound to give you an opportunity to answer an attack. Now is your time to give the Plebs a mention.

THE SOCIALIST Monthly 2d.

A good instance of this was in the "Under the Clock" column of the *Daily News*, which gave a whole paragraph to Mark Starr's book. (This was before the book was published).

Every Plebeian can be his own press agent for the sake of the cause. With five thousand readers all helping in five thousand different ways we could not possibly go down.
Yours, "X."

DEAR COMRADE,—It has been said that the Plebs League is to supply ginger to the Labour Movement. May I suggest that before passing this commodity on, the League retains some for its own use?

I am a new-comer, but I feel that all these appeals are a disgrace to us.

I can guarantee 2/- per month, and if *half* the folk (2,500) who take the magazine did likewise, that would be £3,000 per annum. Think of that!

Yours, etc.,

"GINGERING BEGINS AT HOME."

Plebs Publications—Please Ponder

This month, for the first time since 1915 we have been unable to meet our printer's bill. It is not possible to get any credit, so that two months unpaid, bills will settle all our problems, for we shall be one of a crowd of small enterprises that have perished during the war. If everyone would pay each month for what they get and if those who owe us money would send along even part of their account we should not have to worry. Although we have appealed in these pages for individual assistance before we have never yet asked Plebeians to beg in support of the Magazine. We do so now in all seriousness. Ask your trade union branch for a donation, and make a collection whenever you can for the Magazine. The movement is flourishing as never before, and yet the Magazine that made that movement will die before Christmas if something is not done by the rank and file to assist us.

We are fully aware that we have made appeals before, but we are faced now with the biggest fight of all, and we cannot survive without your active assistance. If you think **anything** about the *Plebs* you must put it first now.

Our printer's bill for the reduced Magazine is between twice and three times what it was for the 24 pp. Magazine a few months ago.

We hope to be able to give the price and full particulars of Ablett's book next month. Paper restrictions are hampering us on every side, and it is only through the generosity of a comrade coming forward with a big loan that we have been able to consider publication at all. Book all the orders you can so that we can get to work and have the book out before Christmas.

Class secretaries, please note we can still supply *A Worker Looks at History*, *What does Education Mean to the Worker?*, and our two leaflets, *How to Form a Social Science Class*, and *Short Study Outlines*.

NOW READY.

LESSONS OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

By N. LENIN

(President of the Council of People's Commissaries of the Russian Socialist Republic).

Price 3d., post free 3½d.

Usual Terms to Branches.

B.S.P., Literature Dept., 21a Maiden Lane, Strand, London, W.C. 2.

News of the Movement

We hope to be able to give a report next month of the Conference called by the LIVERPOOL and District Committee for the Promotion of Independent Working-Class Education, on September 22nd.

The Sec. of the Glasgow and West of Scotland Branch, Plebs League, is now—Francis Raffher, 76 Stratford Street, Maryhill, Glasgow.

The DONCASTER (Labour College) Industrial and Economic Class recom-
ences on Sunday, October 6th, 2.45 p.m., in the Trades Hall. Sec. (*pro*
tem), Jos. Potter, 179 Askern Road, Bentley, nr. Doncaster.

The CENTRAL LONDON Plebs announce a series of Lectures on Economics by Mr. C. Terry, commencing Thursday, October 3rd, at 8 p.m., and Sunday, October 6th, at 11 a.m.; Labour College, 13 Penywern Road, Earls Court, S.W.

A highly successful year's working was reported at the Second Annual Meeting of the C.L.C., North of England Branch, on September 14th. Classes were held last winter at Ashington, Pegswood, Cramlington, Bedlington, Wallsend, Newcastle (4) S. Shields, Marsden, Burnhope, Consett, Throckley and Chopwell (2), and the Financial Statement shows a balance in hand of £26 4s. 5d.

From Eden and Cedar Paul we learn that they hugely enjoyed their "tour" of the Rhondda; and from Rhondda Plebeians we get glowing accounts of lectures—and of the discussions which followed. We have also to acknowledge the receipt of £1 2s. 2d., collected for the Plebs at the meetings at Tylors-town, Ferndale, and Ynyshir, and forwarded to us by E. & C.P.

The Plebs Bookshelf

W. N. Ewer's *Paying the Piper: A Word on War Loans and War Prices* (The Herald. 6d.), although a very brief booklet, strikes me as being as good a piece of *simplification* as I have struck for some time. It is so damnably difficult for the man "well up" in a subject to begin at the beginning and make it easy for the novice. Ewer can do it—and does it here. His careful explanation of the methods by which the Government has financed the war (by borrowing), the consequent creation of a large paper currency, and the inevitable fall in the purchasing power of money and general rise in prices is as lucid as it is forcible. "From the *national* point of view, the whole transaction (raising loans, and paying interest out of taxation) is nothing more or less than taking money out of one pocket and putting it into the other." BUT—"you cannot consider the nation as a whole; its unity exists only in the perorations of war-orators; *actually* it is composed of classes—and the class-incidence of the burdens under a tax-system and a loan-system are entirely different. . . . In a word, the policy of loans is a device by which the cost of war can be shifted, not as the stock argument has it, from the shoulders of the present generation to the shoulders of posterity, but from the shoulders of the wealthy to the shoulders of the poor." What must Labour do about it? "Accepting as inevitable an era of high prices, it must use its economic and political power not in a dangerous attempt to bring prices back to the old standard, but in a determined endeavour to adjust incomes to the new level. That means a strenuous fight for higher wages. . . . We have allowed our master to call the tune, and in some form or other we must needs pay the piper. Only—we must remember it when we are settling certain other accounts."

Owen or Marx? That is the question Messrs. Cole & Mellor raise in *The Meaning of Industrial Freedom* (Allen & Unwin. 1/- net). "Socialism has

become reformist"—and it is largely Marx's fault. "While Marx himself, in discarding the unscientific spirit of the earlier Socialists, contrived to preserve much of their idealism, the effect of his system . . . was a decay of idealism. For Marx changed Socialism from a moral into an economic doctrine. . . . Socialism ceased to be first and foremost a question of freedom, and became a question of material well-being." It thereby "doomed itself to become opportunist and reformist." "Marxian Socialism has all along had much ado to keep its programme distinct from the programmes of Social Reformers. This may seem absurd to the Marxian, who sees in Marx the apostle of revolution; but it is none the less true that Marx, himself a revolutionary, is largely responsible for the lapse of Socialism into a self-destructive reformism." Then we get to Owen. "Somehow or other the spirit of Idealism that moved Owen and the Trade Unionists of the 'thirties must be recaptured." "The world is returning to the ideas of Owen." For Owen "saw that labour, in order to control its own life, must create an instrument capable of carrying on production." Yet, strangely enough, we are told a few pages further on that the Guildsman "holding the Marxian view that freedom rests upon the control of industry, builds his Utopia upon that basis"! Freedom, in short, is the goal of Socialism. "Freedom rests upon the control of industry"—which is a Marxian idea. The meaning of Industrial Freedom (for which the Guildsman struggles) is this very control of industry by the workers. Therefore—away with Marx, and get back to Owen! I confess I can't quite see it. I like better—"The artists and the men of imagination have turned against machinery because it has destroyed craftsmanship; but it has done this, not because it is machinery, but because it has been the bond-slave of capitalism, which is far older than the Industrial Revolution." That is sound sense. Can it be that the other—the somewhat feeble Marx-belittling—is merely a sop to the distinguished and undistinguished I.L.P.'ers whom it is deemed politic to lure into the Guild-fold?

* * * * *

Socialist Sunday Schools: A Review, and How to Open and Conduct a Proletarian School, by Tom Anderson (Proletarian School, 550 Argyle Street, Glasgow. 6d.), is a somewhat random discussion of the theory and practice of making and training young Socialists. Much of it is unexceptionable. Some of it is—well, incoherent. We are suddenly informed, for instance, (p. 17) that Messrs. Ramsay M'Donald and Bruce Glasier "don't believe in the Class-war, repudiate the Class struggle, will not admit the Materialistic Conception of History, are both men pursuing 'the will to the wish' of the innate idea, the spirit, etc. *The same applies to most of the students of the Ruskin College and the Plebs Leagues.*" Well, we live and learn! And I have read the following over several times in the hope of discovering just what its author means by it:—"The superstition of culture is spreading in the working-class movement; or, to be more correct, we are having the cultured person created among ourselves. . . . We have the cultured comrades of the Ruskin College and the Plebs League. Some may think that the Plebs League cannot claim to a high form of culture, owing to the fact that they are not controlled by the master-class, but are a distinct Plebs body. Might I ask what is a Pleb? To the cultured person a Pleb is the genteel name given to a person who interests himself or herself in the Labour movement." I have an uneasy feeling that comrade Anderson's "getting at" somebody; but I can't quite make out who—or why. What have we done to deserve this? And the further definition of a cultured person (p. 16) as "one who dresses immaculately, who speaks correctly, who smokes the best cigars, and holds the safety valve on behalf of the master-class, but without an ounce of Revolution in his being"—doesn't help matters. The Plebs I have met may have lusted after those "best cigars," but they rarely got the chance of smoking 'em—or of holding that safety-valve! I hereby invite Tom Anderson to write and explain himself.

Shall the Plebs continue to Exist ?

DEAR COMRADE,—

You will read in the Magazine a Report of the work we have been able to do during the past year. You will notice that there is in the financial statement no charge for office-rent, or salaries, and this is because up to November, 1917, all our work has been done voluntarily. The success of our organization was the only reward that was ever looked for by those comrades who have devoted their time to, and slowly built up, our Movement. During the last four years the work of the League and Magazine has increased so much that it is now impossible for anyone to carry it on in their spare time. You will notice in the Report that in March our Editor was sent abroad on Active Service, so that the entire work of carrying on the Magazine and Publications Department fell upon the shoulders of the Sec.-Treas. It is hardly necessary to state that *this entails whole-time work of an arduous nature*, and a number of friends guaranteed that a salary should be paid in order that the work could be done until the Annual Meeting.

The following resolution was passed at the Meet:—"That this Meeting calls upon the E.C. to start an Organizing Fund for the purpose of paying a salary to the Secretary." for it was felt that the League, as a whole (and possibly readers of the Magazine) would like to show their appreciation of the work already done by contributing to such a Fund. The work to be done is not only a great responsibility but entails the expenditure of many hours a day. The Plebs must be kept growing, and without some such Fund we can no longer exist.

The E.C. suggest that members (and friends) try to guarantee a small sum weekly, either individually or in groups, and so make the Fund a charge on the whole Organization. REGULAR CONTRIBUTIONS, however small, will be the most useful, but any sum will be welcome.

We regret that owing to a falling off in the contributions no salary has been paid to the Sec. for eight weeks, and we urge all to send cash or promises as soon as possible to

**Sec. Organizing Fund : J. H. Pratt, 13, Havelock Road,
Shrewsbury.**

We make this statement so that all may know exactly where we stand. The Sec. is to be paid 30/- per week. If it were not for the cost of paper and printing we could meet this expense out of current receipts, so that in making our appeal we feel sure our Comrades will understand that the Organizing Fund at the present time is the life-blood of the Magazine.

SHALL THE PLEBS CONTINUE TO EXIST ?

We are, yours in the Cause,

J. T. W. NEWBOLD
GEORGE MASON
C. T. PENDREY

B. SKENE MACKAY
C. TERRY
FRANK JACKSON