Vol. XIII. No. 10 October, 1921

THE PLEBS

AGITATE EDUCATE ORGANISE

WHAT PEACE IS THERE
between the hyena and the dog: and what peace between the rich man & the poor?

Ecclesiasticus XIII·18.

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THE PLEBS

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

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CONTENTS

10,000 Please take a good look at this figure. It's going to be the PLEBS circulation this winter—with your help. Yes, we know times are hard. They're hard on us as well as on you! But what of it? *When can there be a better time to drive home the aims and the lessons of Independent Working-Class Education than just when times are hard for the workers?* Now is precisely the time when every keen Pleb will put his back into the work more energetically, and more hopefully, than ever.

And the I.W.-C.E. movement needs the PLEBS—there's no need here to labour that point. 10,000 a month would give us a margin to spend on propaganda leaflets and other kinds of publicity, as well as help finance those Textbooks. This winter we have to hold our own against two monthly "rivals"—both good journals, too. But the PLEBS alone concentrates on I.W.-C.E. It's YOUR mag.—*boost it.*

A TALK *with* L. B. BOUDIN

A GOOD talk with the author of *The Theoretical System of Karl Marx* and *Socialism and War* was, all Plebs will agree, as happy a way of spending an afternoon as any Pleb could desire. Also, it was too enjoyable an experience for a Pleb to keep to himself. I have only space to note down here a few of Comrade Boudin's comments on subjects of interest to PLEBS readers, and in justice to him I must state clearly at the outset (i.) that I write from memory, and (ii.) that he has not seen a proof of this article, and may therefore wish later to amplify or modify remarks attributed to him.

First, let me report that Comrade Boudin likes the PLEBS.

" I suppose I get thirty or forty Socialist and Labour journals regularly," he told me. " Some of them I never look at ; in others I glance down the list of contents ; the PLEBS is one of the few of which I *always* read something, even though I may not read every article. And I congratulate you boys of the Plebs movement—if you'll let me call you so—on the consistent quality of the magazine you put out."

I told Comrade Boudin we liked him to call us boys, and that we certainly regarded him as at all events one of our " spiritual fathers."

" That's nice of you," he said. " And that being so I'll presume on my relationship to give you a bit of criticism. Don't get academic. Don't concentrate mainly on expositions of *theory*. *Apply* your theories. I like those ' Geographical Footnotes ' you've been publishing. That's the kind of thing you should do more of. You may smile at *me* saying it, but I'm not over fond of economic theory. Economic theory is merely a *tool* to be used for the right understanding of History, past and present. History—that's *our* groundwork ! And Economic Geography, as a study of some of the most important facts and factors in present-day history, is one of the most vital subjects you can study in your colleges and classes."

I told him in this connection of our appreciation of *Socialism and War*, and urged him to consider the possibility of a Plebs Edition. He promised at once to do so, and I hope we shall hear from him on this matter shortly.

Our conversation moved on to other topics discussed in the PLEBS recently.

" I'm interested in life—in *facts*," he said. " That, to me, is the essence of Marxism. Marx was a man who, above all else, *went on learning*. I think that man is a better Marxian who gets hold of all the facts he can, and honestly tries to form a judgment on those facts, than the other fellow who has merely learned a few phrases by heart. . . . I don't like to see folks claiming that Dietzgen gave ' final ' answers to certain questions. Marx himself gave no ' final ' answers. Let me say I think there's been too much ' Dietzgen worship ' in certain sections of our movement. Dietzgen was an honest thinker, with a spark of genius in him. But to rank him or his work alongside Marx and Engels is, I think, a big error of judgment. That doesn't mean that I don't realise Dietzgen's real value. But it annoys me to see it foolishly exaggerated. . . . Yes, I'm interested in Bertrand Russell—he and H. G. Wells are the two men I'd best like to see inside our movement. And if they're honest with themselves they *will* be, sooner or later ! "

Q.

The PLEBS CONFERENCE *on* CLASS CO-ORDINATION

THE Plebs Conference on Class Co-Ordination will be held on Saturday and Sunday, October 8th and 9th, at the Clarion Club House, YARDLEY, Birmingham (not Handforth, as wrongly stated last month).

Accommodation will be provided at the Club House, the charge being 6s. for tea, supper, bed, breakfast and dinner (i.e., from Saturday afternoon to Sunday afternoon). Will all those intending to be present send in their names, *stating whether they will be leaving Sunday evening, or staying over to Monday morning*, to :—

T. D. SMITH,
12, Old Meeting Street, West Bromwich,

before October 4th ?

The Conference will open at
3.30 P.M. ON SATURDAY.

How to Get There.—(1) Tramcar from centre of Birmingham to YARDLEY terminus. Walk three-quarters mile down Coventry Road to Wagon Lane; ten minutes' walk up Wagon Lane—Club House on right-hand side. (2) Take "Red" bus from Bull Ring for Coventry; alight at Wagon Lane.

¶ Comrades wearing Plebs' badges will be at G.W. Sta. (Snow Hill) and at L. & N.W. Sta. (New Street) if visitors will notify T. D. Smith (address above) not later than Friday morning, October 7th, of the time of their arrival.

CONFERENCE AGENDA

It will be noticed that since the Conference was first planned, the principal subject for discussion has been changed from Teaching Methods to Class Co-Ordination.

At their meeting on August 25th, the Plebs League E.C. received a letter from the Governors of the Labour College, inviting them to appoint a deputation to discuss with the Governors the question of Provincial Class Organisation and Co-Ordination. The Plebs E.C., after lengthy discussion, drew up a list of *immediately practical* proposals to place before the Governors (see below). These included a request that the Governors should meet representatives of the provincial classes at an early date; and the E.C. further decided to suggest that the Birmingham Conference be taken advantage of for this purpose, and that the Conference be devoted primarily to the discussion of the question of Class Co-Ordination.

The Plebs' deputation met and interviewed the Governors, and the latter have agreed to send Messrs. Ablett (S.W.M.F.), Charlton (N.U.R.), and Craik (Principal of the College) as their representatives to the Conference. This deputation can, however, only attend on the Saturday, and the agenda had accordingly to be arranged to fit in with this arrangement.

The general programme of discussion will, therefore, be as follows :—

SATURDAY AFTERNOON.

1. *Outline, by Plebs E.C. representative, of proposals* re *Class Co-Ordination put to College Governors by Plebs E.C.* (*see below*).

2. *Discussion, by district and class representatives, of these proposals; suggested amendments, revisions or additions.*

In order to make the most use of the short time possible for this part of the discussion, class representatives are urged to concentrate on the main point, viz., *What part the Governors of the College can play in a national scheme of class co-ordination;* and to reserve all other matters—general criticism, organisation of local districts, etc., etc.—for the Sunday discussion. It is suggested, further, that one representative only from each district should take part in this discussion, and that names be handed in to the chairman before the opening, together with a brief summary of their amendments, etc., for use in compiling PLEBS report.

3. *Reply by the Governors.*

SUNDAY.

1. *Summary of previous day's discussion.*

2. *Resolution to be moved on behalf of Plebs E.C.:—*

That a Provisional National Joint Committee for Independent Working-Class Education, consisting of representatives of (i.) district class areas, (ii.) the Governors of the Labour College, and (iii.) the Plebs League E.C., be appointed at this Conference; and that this provisional Committee carry out the work of class co-ordination pending the more complete organisation of districts, and the election of representatives therefrom next year.

3. *Discussion and determination of the work to be immediately undertaken by the Committee, including:—*

(A) Division into district areas: centres already existing, and best centres for future development.
(B) Best method of remedying present shortage of tutors; and formation of register of approved tutors.
(C) Plans for employment of tutors during summer season.
(D) Organising of Summer Schools.
(E) Issuing of National Appeal Fund for I.W.-C.E. Classes.
(F) Best methods of organisation in new districts.
(G) Model propaganda leaflets, syllabuses, etc.
(H) Model constitutions for District Councils in differing areas.
(I) Sub-Committee to act as Court of Appeal in any local disputes.
(J) Sub-Committee to act as advisory body to districts regarding courses of reading, text and reference books, etc.
(K) Consideration of desirability of Conferences (e.g., on Teaching Methods, Adolescent Education, etc.) from time to time.
(L) Appointment of Press Secretary, to arrange for reports to PLEBS and all Labour papers.

PLEBS PROPOSALS TO GOVERNORS

The proposals made to the College Governors by the Plebs E.C. were based (A) *on the belief that a Joint Committee (as suggested above) would be the best body to undertake the actual work of co-ordination;* (B) on the fact that as representatives of two Unions only (the Unions which finance the College) the Governors were only likely to undertake such responsibilities as would be justified from the point of view (i.) of gaining additional support for the College from other Unions, and (ii.) of increasing the interest of their own members in its aims and work.

The Plebs E.C., therefore, suggested that the Governors should:—

1. Print *propaganda leaflets*, outlining the aims of I.W.-C.E., and supply these to the various districts.
2. Print *syllabuses* in the principal subjects taught by the College and Classes, and supply these as above.
3. Inaugurate a National Appeal Fund for I.W.-C.E., part of which would go to the College and part to the classes.
4. Permit the use of the College buildings and gardens at Kew for a four- or six-weeks' Summer School for class tutors next year; and appeal to Unions to grant short-period scholarships for same.

The Governors' reply to these proposals states :—

1 & 2. That they are willing to print leaflets and syllabuses as suggested.
3. That they are unable to inaugurate a National Appeal Fund.
4. That they are willing to grant the use of the College at Kew for a Summer School *on a non-residential basis.*

These proposals, and the Governors' reply, form the basis of the Saturday discussion. The Plebs E.C. representative will express the E.C.'s point of view as regards the answer made by the Governors ; class representatives will, it is hoped, express their views on both the proposals and the answer ; and the Governors will speak for themselves.

DO—

Remember to bring your PLEBS *with you, to serve as agenda paper.*
Remember time, place, date, etc., etc., of Conference, and let us get to business promptly, and get through agenda satisfactorily.
Remember that suggestions for future activity are more helpful than criticisms of past shortcomings.

COLONIAL *and* IMPERIALIST EXPANSION : *A Marxist Analysis*

II.—The Class War of Merchant Capital

WE have seen that it was the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the burghers of the towns which produced the overseas expansion of the 17th century. A new class had arisen —the merchant class—whose interests lay in trade, and who in order to gain profit demanded monopoly of markets. Thus arose the theoretical system called Mercantilism, which had as its object the creation of a National Monopoly, in the colonies for home products, at home for colonial products (which were not, however, allowed to compete with goods produced at home).

This Mercantilist period may be divided into four divisions :—

(I.)—1497-1625. *Beginnings—Voyages of discovery—Buccaneering and treasure-hunting—Early colonisation by merchant companies.*[1]

(II.)—1625-1689. *Class war—Struggle of merchant capital for political supremacy.*

(III)—1689-1800. *Mercantilism supreme in the State—Period of Whig predominance in Parliament—Commercial wars—State the instrument of merchant capital.*

(IV.)—1800-1832. *Decline of mercantilism—The Industrial Revolution and the rise of industrial capital—The Whigs become a reactionary influence fettering the rise of the industrial bourgeoisie—Decline of interest in the colonies.*

" I." we have already considered ; a consideration of " II." lies before us.

[1] An excellent historical novel describing this buccaneering period is Kingsley's *Westward Ho !*

Now, the critic of Marxism is apt to object to our thesis that the period when the Stuarts were on the throne saw the class struggle of merchant capital against landed property, the former gaining supremacy by the Revolution of 1689; and to pride himself on having refuted it, when he has pointed out the fact that political power during the 18th century was still in the hands of the landed aristocracy. J. L. and B. Hammond, in their *Village Labourer*, have shown how the Parliamentary franchise, even in the boroughs, was almost entirely in the hands of a few landed proprietors. And Lord Acton wrote: "For the Divine Right of Kings it [the Revolution of 1689] established the Divine Right of Freeholders, and their domination extended for 70 years under the authority of John Locke, the philosopher of government by the gentry." In the matter of Parliamentary representation there might seem to have been, with the decay of the old towns, retrogression and not progress.

But although these facts are true, our statement is nevertheless correct and for this reason:—In England there was no such clear-cut line of distinction between the various classes of property owners as there is to-day between property owners and the proletariat. Many members of the landed aristocracy had come in touch with the new ideas of the towns, and had invested their money in the new commercial enterprises of the merchant class. Thus a cleavage gradually arose among landed proprietors themselves; between those whose sole interest was in land and rent, and those who in addition had interests in commerce. For instance, the incorporators of the Virginia Company in 1612, in addition to 56 city companies and 110 merchants—included 21 peers, 96 knights 28 esquires and 58 gentlemen.

We have already seen that the Tudor monarchs were favourable to the new merchant interests of colonial expansion. Pollard tells us that "the limiting of the county franchise . . . left Parliamentary representation mainly in the hands of the landed gentry and the prosperous commercial classes. . . . A century and a half was to pass before Parliament again met so often or sat so long as it did during the latter half of Henry VIII.'s reign. . . . The interests of the King and of the lay middle classes coincided. . . . In ecclesiastical politics they as well as the King had their grievances against the Church."[1] Engels speaks of a "compromise between the rising middle class and the ex-feudal landowners" and goes on to say:—

> "Fortunately for England the old feudal barons had killed one another off during the Wars of the Roses. Their successors, though mostly scions of the old families, were so much out of the direct line of descent that they constituted quite a new body with habits and tendencies far more bourgeois than feudal. . . . Henry VIII. while squandering the Church lands created fresh bourgeois landlords wholesale. . . . Consequently ever since Henry VII. the English aristocracy, far from counteracting the development of industrial production, had on the contrary sought indirectly to profit thereby; and there had always been a section of the great landowners willing to co-operate with the leading men of the financial and industrial bourgeois."[2]

It was this cleavage in the ranks of the landowners that became the basis of the later political division between the Tory aristocracy and the Whig aristocracy; and this absence of clear-cut distinctions between classes of property owners in England is the reason why progress during the last two centuries has been gradual rather than catastrophic, by com-

[1] Pollard, *Henry VIII.*, pp. 256-257.
[2] Engels, *Historical Materialism*, pp. 12-13.

promise rather than by revolution; and not, as bourgeois writers like Dicey would have us believe, because of the beauties of the British Constitution or the "inherent good sense" of the British people.

The Stuart kings did not so much do less to aid overseas expansion than did the Tudors, but merely less relatively to what the expanding needs of merchant capital required. There were serious disputes between James I. and the Virginia Company over the taxation of Virginia tobacco.

> "The King showed an inclination to favour Spanish tobacco, which, as the Virginian tobacco paid Customs duties, was manifestly both unjust and impolitic. . . . It was in vain that the colony appealed to the English Government that measures should be taken artificially to raise the price. The policy which prevailed was that cost what it might the Royal revenue must be maintained."[1]

Under Charles I. a conflict arose between New England and the Crown; and at one time the Massachusetts Bay colony threatened revolt. Charles' taxation was too unfavourable to merchant interests and led to growing opposition to the Crown. "Unless taxes had been exorbitant Charles I. would never have been put to death; the extortions of the Exchequer under Charles II. added to the unpopularity of the Stuarts, and it was the exactions of James II. . . . that hastened the Revolution of 1688."[2] In addition it appears that "the inefficiency of the admiralty arrangements under Charles I. disgusted the trading classes and directly prepared the way for the fall of the Monarchy."[3]

On the other hand, many leaders of the Long Parliament were closely associated with colonial expansion[4]; the Parliamentary party in the Civil War drew its support largely from the towns, especially commercial London, and from the small yeomanry farmers (e.g., Cromwell's Ironsides), and we find "the victorious Parliamentary Party embarking on a spirited colonial policy."[5]

Cromwell did much for merchant capital in aiding colonial and trade expansion. Egerton calls him "a great imperial ruler, perhaps the only Englishman who has ever understood in its full sense the word Empire; the leader who made England for the first time and the last at once the greatest naval and military Power in Europe."[6] As far back as 1628 the Mercantilist writer, Thomas Mun, had shocked established ideas by pointing out that no longer the Spaniards but the Dutch were our commercial rivals, and hence in the eyes of merchant capital our national enemies. Cromwell fully realised this; and his Navigation Act of 1651 "finally ruined Dutch trade and made our growing empire a single commercial organisation."[7] It provided that goods could only be imported into Great Britain by ships of the producing country or by English ships. Likewise, colonial trade was monopolised to English ships. This hit the Dutch carrying trade. In 1655 Cromwell's fleet captured Jamaica, an event which "began that long process by which the State, following in armed strength the progress of its merchants to every corner of the globe, enlarged itself into a world-wide empire."[8]

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[1] Egerton, *Short Hist. of Brit. Colonial Policy*, p. 34.
[2] Buxton, *Finance and Politics*, p. viii.
[3] Cunningham, *Growth of Eng. Ind. and Commerce*, p. 14.
[4] Egerton, *loc. cit.*, p. 59.
[5] Egerton, *loc. cit.*, p. 59.
[6] Egerton, *loc. cit.*, p. 64.
[7] Jose, *Growth of the Empire*, p. 46.
[8] Jose, *loc. cit.*, p. 39. This was interrupted between the Restoration and the Revolution of 1689. Empire is used here rather loosely.

But Cromwell's dictatorship in the interests of merchant capital was distasteful to the landed aristocracy, even to those with interests in commerce. Charles II. profited by the lesson of his father's execution, and tried to secure his position by conciliating the interests of both forms of property. He conciliated merchant capital by renewing the Navigation Act in 1660. He conciliated the small country gentry by abolishing certain remnants of feudal restrictions which had borne heavily upon them, and by restoring to their original owners estates confiscated by Cromwell or sold under pressure of taxation.

> "Those, who had invested their money in public lands became permanently alienated from the new Government. . . . The permanent feud between the Royalists who had sold their lands and the Roundheads who had bought them embittered English politics for the next generation and underlay the later animosities of Whig and Tory."[1]

James II., however, was less wise than his brother Charles. He refused to "toe the line" to merchant interests and tried to assert his authority against that of Parliament, which merchant capital made its political instrument. He showed favour to France, who was becoming our commercial rival in the colonies. The commercial interests, therefore, intrigued with William of Orange and brought about the Whig Revolution of 1689. Engels speaks of "the compromise of 1689":—

> "The political spoils of 'pelf and place,'" he says, "were left to the great land-owning families, provided the economic interests of the financial, manufacturing and commercial middle class were sufficiently attended to. And these economic interests were at that time powerful enough to determine the general policy of the nation."[2]

Nearly the whole of the representation in Parliament was in the hands of the landed aristocracy still. But a section of the aristocracy in addition to owning land had money invested in merchant capital, and so had interests in commercial expansion as well. These formed the backbone of the Whig Party.

In France, also, we see this same class struggle going on; but there the class cleavage appears to have been rather more distinct, and it was complicated by the power of a third class—the clergy, based on Church property in land. It was largely because in England merchant capital was supreme over the State and framed national policy in its own interests, while in France it was not, that in the wars of the 18th century French colonies one after the other were lost to England, and England came out "on top."

In England for a time after 1689 there was a compromise between Whigs and Tories. But soon the Whigs gained the supremacy in Parliament, in 1714 by a conspiracy secured the royal succession to the House of Hanover in their favour, and "the accession of the House of Hanover marks the rise of commerce to power in the political world."[3] With Walpole merchant capital found its first Prime Minister. Throughout the 18th century merchant capital was in possession of political power; and we see the whole power of the State being used to further the interests of merchant capital by energetically aiding colonial and trade expansion. The 18th century shows the supremacy of Mercantilism.

MAURICE H. DOBB

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[1] *Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. V., p. 95.
[2] Engels, *Historical Materialism*, p. 13.
[3] Jose, *Growth of the Empire*, p. 70.

PRODUCTION *and* POLITICS

VIII.—The Beginnings of Our Bourgeoisie

In this article Walton Newbold traces the forces at work undermining the social economy of feudal England—the forces which were to bring into being that new social order against which we, in our turn, are working to-day.

IN my last article (May PLEBS) entitled "The Sheep in Statecraft," which dealt with the rearing of sheep with a view to the sale of wool for profit, we commenced to bridge the gulf between the mediæval and the modern world. The rearing of animals on the manorial lands, not merely to supply the needs of one manor or lordship, but to augment the surplus of skins and wool available for trade with the agents of foreign buyers or with merchants from the boroughs, occasioned as time went on an entire change of outlook both of tenant and of landlord.

It became possible to increase the rent roll of a domain without adding to it by the seizure of other tracts of cultivated land. The desired increase could be obtained at the expense of the rights of common enjoyed by the customarily established but otherwise socially and politically impotent villeins and cottars. It could be obtained, moreover, without adding to—in fact, whilst diminishing—the number of labourers employed. Wool was a commodity that could be exchanged for wares brought in from the great marts of Italy and Flanders, making available to the manor-lords the rich stuffs and innumerable luxuries of the South.

The trade in wool hastened the transformation of labour-dues and rents-in-kind into money-rents and made more speedy the transformation of the tenant in villeinage into a tenant farmer holding by lease or copy-hold. It also resulted in many manor-lords availing themselves of the Statute of Merton, enacted by the "parliamentum" or "great council" of the magnates attending on the King at Merton Priory in 1235, which permitted them to appropriate portions of the "waste" over which their tenants, free and unfree, had common rights, so long as they left "a sufficient quantity" of common for the needs of the tenantry. The safeguard was left vague enough and for two centuries landlords used and abused these powers, powers obtained in violation of immemorial and popular custom by what is, practically, the earliest "Statute" of which we have record. Here, the manor-lord used the King's prerogative in the "great council of the realm" to set aside custom to the advantage of his class. More than a century later, by the Statute of Labourers, the manor-lord used the King's prerogative "in parliament" to bolster up custom, also to the advantage of his class.

He who has eyes to read let him read the lessons of history.

During the 14th and 15th centuries the old manorial system of tenure —labour-rents and the like—passed almost completely away as a result of the growth of commodity production of wool and the continuous application of bourgeois methods and bourgeois money to the management of manorial estates.

The new revenues made available to the Crown from the wool-tax enabled the Edwards to pursue their policy of aggression against Scotland and France—a case of the class notions of an earlier economic epoch being

forwarded by the material means of a new class and a new economy. These wars were financed by taxes and by loans to be repaid out of the farming of taxes. By the reign of Edward III., native merchants were beginning to compete with the Italians and the Hanse for the privilege of exporting wool and collecting the taxes thereon.

The King, whose one concern with the wool-trade was to extract a revenue from it, whether by tax, borrowing or confiscation, could not but end in forfeiting his arbitrary powers in fact, though not in theory, to syndicates of English merchants, to privileged collectors and to an eventual combination of landlords and merchants, joined together in defending their otherwise divergent interests against the common insecurity, arbitrary seizures, debased currency and favour shown to foreigners.

There had been coming more and more into view, from the time of Henry III., the Society of the Merchants of the Staple, "the first and ancientest commercial society in England, so named from their exporting the staple wares of the kingdom." Membership in this Society was open to any member of any merchant guild and, presumably, to freemen of the guilds of London. This Society gained in importance throughout the 14th century, exporting chiefly wool, skins and leather. It was the first fellowship, association or company of native merchants to be licensed for overseas trade and it received its sanctions solely with a view to facilitating the collection at fixed places of a regular and ascertained revenue from export dues. It was recognised by Parliament in 1354.

We must now give attention to the merchant, trade and craft guilds, from whose ranks were recruited the members of the Society of Merchants of the Staple and other and later fellowships and companies of traders.

In the feudal manor, the lord required implicit obedience from all who dwelt upon the land whereof he was the superior. His rights were in continuous process of extension by means of new usurpations. His claims were reinforced by the sanction of the Church which, within the manor prior to the 11th century, was indistinguishable from the secular lordship. To these two authorities the loyal submission of every tenant was demanded. Any combination to resist or bargain with them was denounced as godless conspiracy and mortal sin. Yet the tenantry, both free and unfree, persisted in combining, and found in guild organisation a means of renewing by the fiction of an assumed "brotherhood" the tie of fellowship which the earlier system of kinship had formerly afforded.

The guilds survived the attempt of lordship, temporal and spiritual, to suppress them. They, generally, made the pretence of being fraternities devoted specially to the service of some patron saint and met to tell their beads and discuss their grievances at some Station of the Cross, at some statue and, later, in some chapel endowed by and reserved to their use.

At first, they existed as illegal and sinful bodies. Later, they secured the protection of the Church by the fiction that they were societies of pious men. Later still, they attained to recognition by feudal law, being chartered as corporate personalities holding land and rendering suit and service, i.e., paying for their privileges in hard cash.

Until the 16th century there was only one type of association of traders having any real importance in any but a very few of the greater towns of England, viz., the merchant guild. This was, generally speaking, an association of the free tenants having the sole right of trading within the

town and, in the case of towns on royal demense, considerable rights of trading throughout the realm. It was the merchant guild which, in most cases, purchased bit by bit the freedom of the town, making itself the ruling-body and " supplanting a more ancient constitution which was simply that of a privileged township or privileged manor."

In London, where economic development resulted in a greater differentiation of trades and crafts, and where the feudal magnates had, until the 13th century, the government of the city in their own hands, there was no merchant guild. There communities of alien merchants held great economic power. The trades which first became influential in London, economically and politically, were those engaged in victualling the Court, the religious communities, the feudal magnates and the general populace. The fishmongers and the vintners were amongst the most potent. Then there were the mercers, who sold by retail articles of attire, and the goldsmiths who had much to do with King and nobles as moneylenders and providers of bullion. It was landed magnates of London engaged in the import trade, the greater freemen of the victualling guilds and the more prosperous members of merchant guilds in sheep-grazing districts who collected wool for export to and sale in Flanders and who formed the Society of Merchants of the Staple. They exported chiefly raw materials and became somewhat exclusive.

Meanwhile the manufacture of English wool into undyed cloth was proceeding apace in London and many lesser towns, with the result that the richer merchants of the Mercers' Company, who sold haberdashery and imported silks as well as clothing materials of native origin, banded themselves together into the Fellowship of the Merchant Adventurers of England or the Brotherhood of St. Thomas of Canterbury, and securing a charter in 1406 set themselves to export cloth to the ports across the North Sea, more particularly to Flanders and Holland. Theirs was an association exporting a manufactured article and open to all English merchants on payment of a moderate entrance fee.

The members of these two Societies, the Staplers and the Adventurers, selling abroad wool in the raw and partially manufactured, exchanging a product of the manor as a commodity for money or other imported articles, often landholders turned merchants, town dwellers for the most part, were throughout three centuries changing the whole economy of England and effectively undermining the established political system of feudal society.

We do not see them at all plainly in the pages of orthodox history. The whole foreground is filled with the chivalry of 14th and 15th century England, in complete armour, their coatings blazoned with the crazy pattern quarterings of a too perfected heraldry, riding recklessly from field of war to tilting ground, from foreign foray to civil brawl, wasting in senseless faction and with prodigal hands the resources which a senile political system could still extort from a younger and more progressive economy of production.

Mediæval England vanishes from the scene at Bosworth, but long before that time the sheep bleating beneath the shears had signalled the passing of manorial society.

J. T. WALTON NEWBOLD

(To be continued.)

TEN-MINUTES' TALKS *with* NEW STUDENTS

VIII.—Destitution and Distribution*

LAST month in discussing poverty we saw that so long as tools remained primitive, poverty was bound to be the common lot of man. We noticed, however, that although poverty was unavoidable in the early stages of man's history, just because his productive capacity was so low, such an explanation could not be true of to-day's poverty. It could not be true because of the wonderful machinery invented under the stimulus of capitalism.

Capitalism, through that wonderful machinery, has solved the problem of production, but it has left a great problem unsolved—the problem of distribution. It has shown us how to produce the goods, but not how to distribute them. And the fact that this problem is still unsolved is strikingly evident whenever we look around us to-day.

When we examine the activities of the capitalists, we find them actually destroying things that much labour has gone to produce and things of which great masses of the people are in dire need. You will have read of the fruit trust tumbling bananas into the sea to keep up prices; and of the rubber-growers cutting down production by 25 per cent. for the same reason. In Brazil, when the coffee harvest exceeds a certain amount, the surplus is by law automatically destroyed, despite the fact that there are millions who would be glad to get it. Obviously, there must be something far wrong with distribution when things like that occur regularly.

We are continually being told that millions of days of productive labour are lost every year through strikes. These strikes occur because the workers are not satisfied that they are getting their share of the goods produced—because they are not satisfied with the methods of distributing the goods. Here, again, we have evidence of the unsolved problem of distribution.

We have heard much recently about "ca' canny." We've been told that the workers do not work as hard as they used to do. To whatever extent that is true, it is true because many of the workers now realise, consciously or unconsciously, that owing to the present bad method of distributing the products of their labour, working hard enriches not them, but the boss. In other words, the unsolved problem of distribution encourages ca' canny.

When we turn to the gigantic numbers of the unemployed, we find they are not unemployed because of lack of tools or raw material; because they can't produce things; or because the things they can produce are not required by the masses; but because these things cannot be distributed *at a profit!*

If production was the burning problem of the past, distribution is the burning problem of the present. It is this failure in distribution that is causing untold misery to the world's workers. Their situation reminds

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*G. W. (Salford).—You suggest that capitalism has played no constructive part in history. Surely you don't mean that! This month's *Talk* replies to the remainder of your letter.—J. P. M. M.

one of the equally desperate situation in which a chicken finds itself once in a lifetime. For the first three weeks of its life the chicken lives within the egg where it is very warm and comfortable, and where there is plenty of food. When the first three weeks of its life are up, it discovers that between it and the food outside is the hard wall of the egg-shell. Unless it breaks through, it starves to death. That is the position of the working class to-day. The problem of distribution is the wall that cuts them off from wealth, leisure and culture ; and there is only one way out for them—and that is to *break down the wall.*

Production to-day is artificially strangled by the method of distribution. Goods are only distributed so long as a profit follows. " No profit, no distribution," say the capitalists. The result is idle machinery, destruction of goods, army corps of workless men. Profit fails as a regulator of distribution ; a new regulator must be found, not individual profit, not the profit of a class, but *general need.*

The capitalist class will never attempt to bring about such a revolutionary change. That is the great task history has set the working class. It is a task that can only be solved by a working class that *understands* it. Hence, the need for the independent education of the working class.

J. P. M. MILLAR

WILL HEWLETT: *In Memoriam*

WILL HEWLETT, as PLEBS readers already know, was killed as a result of a train disaster in Russia. He had gone thither as a Communist delegate to attend the Third International Congress at Moscow.

The Plebs League and the working-class movement in general are so much the poorer. No longer will our lodge meetings, mass meetings and conferences be brightened by his vivid personality ; never again shall we see him disposing of PLEBS, *Communists*, etc., at street corners. And the hills will echo no more to the tramp of his feet on his weekly expeditions to districts where Marxian classes were non-existent (the " white patches " on the map as he used to call them) for the purpose of " making a start."

But although our comrade has left us early, his period of " active service " was not short. It goes back long before the " dogs of war " were let loose ; to those early days when " Ted " Gill was struggling for the ideals of the Labour College. Hewlett was Ted's comrade in arms. Later, circumstances forced him to carry on alone, and it was he who was mainly responsible for the work which led to the financing and supervising of the classes by the Western Valleys Council. He also fought furiously against the Federation's " war time " proposal to sell the Labour College. He realised the importance of such an institution to the working-class movement, and its preservation was his great concern.

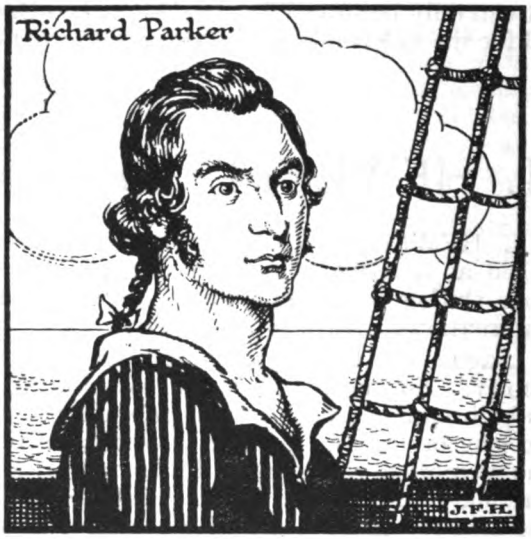
The fruits of his labours as tutor and class organiser can be best made known by stating that he leaves behind him no small band of Plebeians, who will not merely lament his loss, but will strive to achieve the task he set himself. In this way only can we honour his name.

BRIN ROBERTS

"ADMIRAL" PARKER

In this sketch R. W. Postgate tells the story of the Mutiny at the Nore, 1797, for interesting documents concerning which see his "Revolution: 1789 to 1906," pp. 70-74. The Mutiny cannot be said to be of great historical significance, but as a revolt of the "under-dog" against brutal conditions it is of undoubted interest to proletarians of a later day.

AMONG the quota men taken on board Admiral Buckner's fleet at the Nore in 1797 was one who had seen better days. By name Richard Parker, he was "thirty years of age," writes his historian Neale; "and both in feature and mould of person he was entitled to the term of manly comeliness." Educated at Exeter Grammar School he had entered the Royal Navy as a midshipman, and became in 1783—at 16 years of age—an acting lieutenant. His career was checked partly by his own fault—at least, he gained the reputation of



extreme irritability; and when the Treaty of Versailles removed any probability of early promotion, it appears that he left the Navy with the intention of settling down in Scotland.

Restless as ever, he rejoined the Navy in 1793 as an officer. In December of that year he met the disaster which thrust him out of the respectable class to which he had belonged. He refused to obey an order which he thought unreasonable; was court-martialled and degraded to the rank of a common seaman. A year later he was discharged ill and went home to attempt to earn a living as a schoolmaster. He fell into debt and was imprisoned. To a competent sailor the way out was clear. He took the King's bounty-money—£20—which more than covered his debt, and re-engaged himself as a common seaman.

He found his fellows at the Nore in a condition of great misery. The long and wearing war upon the French Republic had now lasted full three years. Almost unbelievable privations had been undergone by the seamen.

Not even if regularly paid would their wretched wages (19s. a month) have sufficed to keep their families without recourse to parish relief. But their wages remained unpaid for long periods, so much so that they had to petition that no arrears be greater than six months. Deductions were made on various excuses, and, as one of their petitions said, they lived "in indigence and extreme penury." The unrestrained speculation of contractors made their food vile and frequently inedible. The corruption of the administration docked it further in quantity and quality.

To these sufferings were added plain tyranny by the officers. The seamen were in practice submitted absolutely to the arbitrary will of their captain. There is on record a case of a commander killing the leader of a deputation with his own hand. No naval historian denies that the seamen suffered outrageous indignities and brutal punishments, frequently without the least justification. "Rome had her Neros and Caligulas," the Nore seamen wrote in their Address to their countrymen, "but how many characters of their description might we not mention in the British Fleet?"

This extremity of misery and degradation was just tolerable in time of peace; the additional sufferings of war had spread the spirit of revolt. It was an atmosphere of rebellion which Parker found on board the *Sandwich*. Independent and energetic, he at once took the side of the rebels. Rumours were current of firm action taken by the Channel Fleet at Spithead to secure sailors their rights, and a mutiny was probable at any moment. Disloyal the seamen were not, but they were determined to put an end to the horrors of Navy life. One seaman wrote to the Admiralty:—

For the Lords Commissioners of the Board of Admiralty.

Dam my eyes if I understand your lingo or long proclamations, but, in short, give us our due at once, and no more of it, till we go in search of the rascals the enemys of our country.

HENREY LONG.

Nore, of June 1797. On Board his Magesty Ship Champion.

At the beginning of May delegates arrived secretly from the Channel Fleet at Spithead. Briefly, they announced that their fellows had become tired of bad and little food, low wages, imprisonment on board when in harbour. On April 17th, receiving no reply to repeated petitions, they had mutinied, dismissed the unpopular officers, and flown the red flag. The Admiralty had at first replied with violent threats of punishment. The men, however, had stood firm, and in the end the Lords Commissioners had travelled down to Portsmouth, declared practically all their demands granted and promised pardon. But no pardons appeared, the promised reforms were not fulfilled, while the Bill containing their demands was delayed in Parliament. They were not going to suffer the fate of the *Culloden* mutineers, who had surrendered upon promise of pardon and then been murdered. So on May 7th the whole fleet had mutinied again. No one knew what would be the end of it all; therefore, said the Spithead delegates, they were there to ask their brothers of the Nore to follow their example.

Although there were but twelve ships at the Nore, and these not a fleet so much as a casual aggregation of ships put in for various purposes, the seamen showed no lack of *esprit de corps*. There was no hesitation in the answer to the Spithead men. All that was asked of the Spithead delegates was how to organise a mutiny. They listened carefully to the delegates' account of how the Channel Fleet was organised, and imitated it meticulously to the last detail. Each ship was to elect a committee, whose president was

to act as captain. From each ship two delegates were to be sent to the flagship, and the President of the delegates was to act as Admiral of the Fleet.

There was much secret going to and fro between the ships, and in the end Richard Parker was selected for the difficult post of "Admiral." The day selected for the revolt, May 12th, was cunningly chosen, for on that date the superior officers had to attend a court-martial on the *Inflexible*. The ships were thus left in charge of lieutenants, and at half-past nine or thereabouts in the morning the seamen of each ship crowded forward, gave three cheers, and ran up red flags. All the ships were in the hands of the mutineers by the end of the day. Admiral Buckner had not the heart to go back to his flagship, the *Sandwich*, where Parker was already in control. The officers were unprepared, and in a few hours the old authority had disappeared.

The Admiralty received Buckner's report with equanimity. The Spithead mutiny was well on the way to settlement, and they regarded the Nore outbreak as a mere subdivision of it. They expected that the Nore men would automatically return to work when the Spithead seamen did. Thus the Nore mutineers had eight days in which they were practically left to themselves.

They employed this time in organising the fleet. Although the delegates were an elected authority, they were none the less firm in enforcing discipline. Drunkards and rioters were punished. No "private liquor" was allowed. All officers who had not already been sent ashore were retained as hostages, but treated with careful respect.

On each ship there was an elected Committee of twelve, one of whom acted as captain. On board the *Sandwich*, or, more frequently, at the "Chequers" in Sheerness, sat the delegates, two from each ship. At their head was the President, Richard Parker, now in fact, if not in name, Admiral of the Nore Fleet.

(*To be concluded next month.*)

LABOUR *and the* WORLD CRISIS

IV.

WHEN war broke out in 1914 the imperialist ambitions of the nations had made themselves abundantly clear. There were well-defined areas which were recognised as "spheres of interest" for respective "Powers." It was recognised, too, amongst far-seeing men that sooner or later the continued development of capitalism, the expansion of production, the need for new sources of raw materials, competition for markets, and the struggle for fresh spheres for investment, must ultimately bring matters to a head.

High tension in political circles, the reflex of financial interests, had existed for a number of years, and that because foreign policy is dictated by the needs of the dominant capital within a nation. No one amongst the men who followed this development and recognised the drift of capital interests was in the least surprised, or in the slightest doubt, as to the real cause when war was declared. The chief interest in the secret diplomatic documents since published is merely the opportunity they afford for com-

paring the measure of duplicity practised by each nation, striving to hide from the others its real aims.

It had been apparent for some time that the day was fast approaching when the supremacy of the capitalist nations would depend upon the possession of sources of raw materials to satisfy the demands of industry. Early in the struggle it was recognised that this was no ordinary conflict involving the destiny of some isolated part of the earth's surface, but a life-and-death struggle for existence on the part of powerful capitalist nations. The victorious side might possibly go on to greater power and strength—the defeated be bound down by terms dictated by the conquerors. Realising this, both sides set themselves to organise the whole of their resources, and to brace themselves for a long struggle.

Even the war-mongers were astonished as the struggle proceeded and the demands made upon them mounted higher and higher. It was not so much the withdrawal of vast armies of men from industry, although that in itself was a tremendous task, as the staggering demand for materials of war, guns and munitions of all kinds, ships, and countless numbers of other goods. Industries producing these materials developed to an amazing degree. All available labour-power was directed into these industries, and the assistance of other nations was sought for the same end. Working men will remember, too, the attempted introduction of foreign labour into this country, probably with the double purpose of producing munitions and relieving our own men for deadlier work.

All materials and resources were devoted to the struggle. "War" industries expanded as if by magic. The "Will to Win," or the lack of it, made and unmade reputations. Men were judged according to the zeal displayed in furthering the mad gamble. In every belligerent country the same thing went on. War industries were forced on to ever greater production, while other, for the moment, less essential industries were neglected. At last even the necessaries of life became a serious problem and some attention had to be devoted to these. Still this did not reduce the clamour for munitions.

Reserve supplies of food were gathered from every part of the world. Countries and continents were swept clean, and it became clear that the end could not long be delayed. Exhausted, with starvation staring them in the face, one side or the other would be compelled to give way. The final rally of the Allies, aided by the United States of America, decided the matter by the defeat of Germany.

But what of the cost? Dimly it began to be perceived that the problems of peace would be no less difficult than those of war; that victory itself might be a hollow mockery.

Industries had to be reconstructed, vast factories and workshops given up. To deal with the huge mass of capital and the large number of men involved, and direct them all to the production of things useful in peace, was no small problem. It was made more difficult by the comparative neglect of other industries during the war period. Nothing but the momentarily essential things had been attended to; efficiency of plant, machinery and material had everywhere been impaired. In other cases it was found, when all else was ready for the resumption of production on a peace basis, that raw materials were not available. *Production for war purposes had completely destroyed the necessary proportion between the various branches of industry.*

Nations emerged from the conflict in varying degrees of insolvency. The more resourceful had already made preparations for the resumption of ordinary trading relations, with allied and enemy nations alike. Few, however, were in this position. In the main, they found themselves exhausted, their credit abroad disappeared and the means of reviving their neglected and decaying industries destroyed. This proved to be as great an evil for the stronger as for the weaker nations. One suffered because it could not purchase the means of production and other necessaries. The other suffered because it could not sell. Here, again, comes the question of supply and demand in its proper relation to production. There is a need, but not a paying demand. People are in dire want and an abundance of the means to relieve their suffering exists. But it *does not pay* to relieve their suffering!

English and American industries were unimpaired by the ravages of war, excepting in so far as the essential proportions were destroyed, but their position is almost as bad as that of France, Italy and Germany. Certainly unemployment is greater in England and America. Austria is so far broken up and weakened that no one knows what will ultimately happen. Germany and a number of other countries, including Russia, require huge quantities of materials of all kinds, *means* which to a large extent are stored up in England and America, but the suffering countries lack the means of purchase.

It is not a question of the British capitalist having scruples about trading with his erstwhile enemy; but simply of that enemy's inability to pay. English, French, German and Austrian capital has joined in many a transaction since peace was declared. And in France, fair France, there are some who would even now make an Alliance with Germany.

"Reparations" have become a joke. Were it not for the underlying tragedy the "Peace" would be the greatest farce in history. One wonders whether it was intended to be more than a sop to the bitter feelings of hatred manufactured during the war, those feelings misrepresented as "patriotic sentiment." The working class has still to learn that hatred of the Germans, as Germans, does not extend very far above its own ranks.

Our business as labour-propagandists is to show our fellows that the real "Hun" is the exploiter—the profit-hunter. And of him no one country has a monopoly!

W. H. MAINWARING

(To be continued.)

ECONOMICS *without* HEADACHES

X.

THE capital of a manufacturing concern may be divided into—

(1) Fixed Capital—buildings, machinery } Constant
(2) Circulating Capital—coal, oil, raw materials } Capital.

(3) Circulating Capital—Wages } Variable Capital.

All the fixed capital and that portion of the circulating capital represented by the materials used up in the processes of production are classified as constant capital, because they reappear again in the commodity produced. It is difficult to distinguish the pint of oil poured into the bearings of a machine in the finished article, but the owner of the capital takes good care that everything is provided for when his goods go to market. But no more than the value of the goods used can be added to the value of the commodity, and so we say that that portion of the capital is not "surplus-value producing."

The amount used for paying wages is the part that brings in the return; it buys the commodity labour power which produces the surplus value. But the employer calculates his profits upon the whole of the capital advanced, that is, upon the part that produces surplus value and the part that does not, and the consequence is that the rate of profit often appears low, though the rate of exploitation of the worker is high. Thus, if a company with a capital of £10,000 made £1,000 in one year, the rate of profit would be 10 per cent., but if only £2,000 had been used for paying wages the profit would really be 50 per cent.

The importance of this analysis is seen when we come to consider the various changes which take place in industry. Where work is carried on by hand labour, the amount of capital invested in plant is relatively small, and the amount used for paying wages relatively great; a capitalist may therefore be able to secure a good rate of profit without an intensive exploitation of his labourers. But where machinery is generally in use, the portion of capital laid out on constant capital is greater and consequently the rate of exploitation must increase unless the rate of profit is to go down. Improved—and therefore more costly—machinery makes this still more necessary. The operative who is handling a linotype or a Herbert turret has to produce goods great enough in value to provide dividends on the money invested in the costly machines, in addition to dividends on the capital used to pay his wages. As the tendency is always towards more and more complicated machinery per operative, the cry for "increased production" may be translated into an appeal to the worker to turn out more goods in order to provide as great if not a greater return on the large amount of capital he handles.

When the capitalist is calculating the amount of his constant capital used up in the production of commodities he is forced to do it in rough-and-ready fashion. He cannot say that four shillings of machine has been worn away, and so he adopts a "10 per cent. to depreciation" system. Now a factory allowing 10 per cent. each year has in the course of ten years allowed enough to provide for the renewal of all the fixed capital. Some of the plant may be worn out, some not, but the capitalist has to his credit, (*a*) a depreciation fund equal to the original value of his factory, and (*b*) his factory at its present value.

If we neglect all consideration as to what the original capital of a concern was, or where it came from, we may regard the surplus value as being produced by the workers, and the capital as being found by the capitalist. For the first few years of the life of a company this will continue to be the case; but after that one may say that the capital itself has been provided by the workers employed. Consider the Maypole Dairy Co., which has had its capital returned in the form of interest 14 times in 13 years; and the Amalgamated Press, which has had its capital back six times in 15 years. In these cases it is obvious that the fortunate shareholders could scarcely claim to have provided the present capital of the company—since they have had their capital back over and over again. Similarly there comes a time in the history of all companies when the capital represents surplus value got out of the workers.

The amount of capital in use in society tends to grow, and since it can only grow, like the ten talents, by being put to use, it must grow at the expense of the workers who produce the increase. But it cannot grow if capitalists spend what comes to them yearly on their own maintenance and pleasures. The capitalist has always before him the choice between spending his income or reserving a portion for further reinvestment. A motor car foregone this year may mean two cars next year. If he can abstain from a given extravagance, his income will be the greater because of what the economists like to term his "abstinence." Nothing is said as a rule about the abstinence of his workers!

This turning of surplus value into capital is of great importance to the workers. If £1,000 produces an income of £200, and this £200 is in turn invested and produces £40, and the £40 produces £8, the total amount upon which profits have to be produced will be £1,248. This kind of thing goes on every

day, and the consequence is that the workers are not merely reproducing the conditions in which they originally find themselves, but are ever widening the breach between themselves and the capitalist.

The investment of new capital is not always an easy matter. There may be many investors looking for suitable fields into which capital can be poured, and supply being greater than demand, the price of capital—that is to say, the interest to be paid for its use—will tend to decline. The "falling rate of interest" is not necessarily accompanied by a lessening in the rate of exploitation; indeed, the capitalist in order to secure a market for his goods may exploit his workers more than ever, though he may not be getting very much on his total capital. A period when spheres of investment are not very plentiful is often a period of great extravagance on the part of those with wealth. They spend more freely what they cannot invest, and as such a time is often accompanied by great waves of unemployment, we see chronic misery on the one hand and more waste than usual on the other.

As the total amount of capital in use increases, the output of commodities must increase if profits are to be maintained. The discovery of a new market is a favourable occasion for capital investment, and often on such an occasion there is a rush to supply the goods required. But, after a time the market is more than supplied, the warehouses are stocked with unsaleable goods, and a "slump" follows the "boom" as inevitably as night follows day. When the "slump" period arrives it promptly aggravates its own diseases by turning a considerable number of workers on to the streets. Now these workers are in themselves a potential market for a certain quantity of goods, and with them out of a job the demand for commodities is reduced still further.

The chief reason for the alternating periods of "boom" and "slump" lies in the fact that capitalist production is anarchical. Goods are turned out to take their chance of being sold and to compete with other goods. When they cannot be sold a frantic attempt is made to realise something from the wreck, and bankruptcy may follow. But after each "slump," and the elimination of a few competitors, the capitalists as a whole emerge not necessarily sadder, but certainly wiser men. Each "slump" is an incentive to joint action and a spur towards combination.

In the *Report of the Committee on Trusts** instances are given of associations of employers who have collectively agreed to allocate a given percentage of the estimated total productivity of the industry to each firm. If a firm by accident or design does more than its share, it must pay a fixed amount into a "pool"; if it produces less, it draws from the pool, and so in some cases it happens that firms are not producing at all but continue to draw a substantial revenue—an interesting form of capitalist ca' canny. But even with such devices as these, the bottom occasionally drops out of the market, and the cycle, "boom"—"slump"—"boom," repeats itself with the monotony of the movements of a reciprocating engine.

W. McLAINE

* C.D. 9236 (6d.).

STUDENTS' NOTES *and* QUERIES

W. BROWN (Nelson):—No, class-consciousness is not merely an individual sense of injury, but very often it starts from that. When a man recognises that this individual smart exists not only for him but for all his fellow wage-workers he is a step further on the road, and the more he learns about his own class and of social relations as they have been, are, and will be, the more that sense of injury is broadened into an entirely new outlook on life.

CYNIC (Trealaw) writes interestingly and at length concerning the question: *Does a commercial traveller add value to a commodity?* He suggests that it is worth treating more fully. Unfortunately for him other readers see in it only a point of academic interest and hence the brevity of previous replies.

It is quite clear that selling a thing once or "umpteen" times does not add to its value. Circulation is the dead part of process so far as the creation of value is concerned. The grocery company, however, must get the average rate of profit or else it will refuse to carry on this necessary work. (The working grocer is half wage-worker, half capitalist.) The value of the labour expended by the shop assistant in *realising* the value of commodities is charged for by the circulating capitalist in his reckoning with the industrialist, while the shop assistant gets the value of his labour-power. So while his labour does not create any S.V. so far as the commodity is concerned it does from the point of view of the grocery company. Speaking strictly, the labour of the S.A. *yields* S.V. to its exploiter, and this word should have been used instead of "create" in the footnote on p. 61, *Worker Looks at History*. Please read again the references and reply given in the January PLEBS.

The difference in the example given by CYNIC between *selling* jam or books and *transporting* those things is surely obvious. Dietzgenists should have no difficulty in seeing that though production cannot exist without circulation the two things are as different as day from night. Yet day and

night cannot be abruptly marked off in their beginning and end; and neither can production and circulation. In some cases it is quite clear; e.g., the producer counting the time lost during which he stands idle in the market-place. In other cases the producer does not even finish production by carrying to market but leaves that to another capitalist. Sometimes this carrying capitalist is also the selling capitalist and may perform both operations simultaneously. This is where confusion comes in for those who do not probe beneath appearances. Theoretically we can always divide production of a commodity, its transport to market, and its sale.

Those who object to lengthy discussion of this matter argue that it does not help us to organise the shop assistants, which after all is what matters. On the other hand it *does* help us to recognise that much work necessary to capitalism will be avoided under a consciously controlled system of production and distribution. It also prevents any worker continuing to believe that his exploiter is the little grocer round the corner or the middleman who supposedly exploits him in *consumption*.

Another student asks, *What does the stockbroker do?* He merely sells stocks and shares, which are again titles to S.V. In capitalism these titles take the price form; the stockbroker is the agent in the buying and selling of these things, which pass from hand to hand a thousand times without interfering with the particular concern on which they depend.

Apropos of the help given by the M.C.H. in understanding, e.g., new literary forms, here is an attractive little "side line" which we are convinced would make an interesting essay:—"The M.C.H. and Clothes." With the help of Lester Ward and Müller Lyer one might settle whether they were first for use or ornament. A particular chapter in *Penguin Island* and some passages from *Sartor Resartus* would give atmosphere. Then the changing attire of the sexes might be interlinked with social changes, and Veblen's *Theory of a Leisure Class* could be used to explain fashions as the proof that certain men and women have the money and leisure to introduce constant changes into their apparel.

And while we are suggesting new ground there are some very interesting details needing grouping in Hammond's *Town Labourer* on the forces behind the Wesley and Whitefield movements. The authors here provide interesting support for the Marxian interpretation.

M. S.

TRA LA MONDO: *Esperanto Notes*

BY "POPOLANO"

AT long last the international language seems to be coming into its own. Two recent items of evidence of this trend are to be found in recent events connected with the British Association and the Association Française pour l'Avancement des Sciences. A committee appointed by the British Association to inquire into the practicability of an international auxiliary language, after examining in a thoroughly dispassionate and scientific spirit the various solutions proposed, ruled out (1) Latin, as too difficult; (2) English or other national tongue, as liable to excite national jealousies; and arrived at the conclusion that an invented language, such as Esperanto or Ido, is the best solution. Almost at the same time, the Association Française pour l'Avancement des Sciences has passed a resolution in favour of Esperanto.

At the Prague Esperanto Congress in August a new organisation of Ruĝuloj (Reds) was founded with the title *Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda* ("world association *without* nationality"). I presume that Henri Barbusse will be asked to accept the presidency, as he had already accepted the hon. presidency of the meeting which inaugurated the new Association. The organisation starts off well with 400 members. The resolution passed concerning it will appear in next month's PLEBS. Meantime all interested should write to S.A.T. at the address: 23 rue Boyer, Paris 20.

Mark Starr and his wife have recently returned from a visit to Germany. While there Starr addressed, in Esperanto, several groups of the German Labour Esperantist Association and also two important meetings of the Communists in Altona and Berlin. I was particularly pleased to read a sentence on a postcard received from him: "Now, more than ever before, I realise the value of the international language."

Kara Popolano,

Estas bonega sperto loĝi se nur dum du semajnoj en Esperantujo. En Hamburg kaj Berlin la samideanoj bonvenis nin kaj faris ĉion por feliĉigi nian viziton. Mi parolis antaŭ la grupoj de G.L.E.A. (Germana Laborista Esperantista Asocio) en la du urboj kaj ankaŭ al du gravaj komunistaj kunvenoj ĉe Altona kaj Berlin. Ĉie la kamaradoj sendas salutojn. La G.L.E.A. ne partoprenas en la laboro de la burĝaj Esperantistoj sed ne plene konsentas kun "Liberiga Stelo" rilate al naciaj organizajoj. Ni ĝojis aŭdi pri la enkonduko de Esperanto en kelkajn germanajn lernejojn. Multaj estroj socialistaj kaj komunistaj ne interesiĝas pri internacia lingvo, ĉar ili mem, babilante fremdan lingvon, ne volas perdi personan gravecon kaj monopolon. Tamen, tian kontraŭstaron G.L.E.A. venkos. Bedaŭrinde mia raporto pri la Brita Ligo de Esperantistaj Socialistoj enhavis malmulton.

Certe alilanda vojaĝo plej bone pruvas la utilecon kaj efikecon de Esperanto. Per ĝi ni senpere konatiĝis kun multaj veraj samideanoj inter la laboristoj, ni trairis la muzeojn sub lerta gvido, ni aŭskultis pri la problemoj kaj okazintajoj de niaj kamaradoj. Neniam mankis al ni helpantoj.—For la landlimojn kaj la lingvobarilojn! Antaŭen la internacia laboristaro!

Samideane via, MARK STARR

DIETZGEN, BERGSON, *and the* NEW PLEBS TEXTBOOK

WE seem to have stirred up a hornets' nest! "Why Russell?" asks Oliver Jones, and drops a tear over the folly of those who ignore Dietzgen. "Why Bergson?" inquires S. M. Connelly, another good Dietzgenite. "P. L. E. B." is filled with righteous wrath because we "connect the atavistic crudities of M. Henri Bergson with the New Movement in psychology, and integrate them in a system of proletarian philosophy." After this salvo we are grateful to "Nordicus," who finds our suggestions for a reading course in psychology "excellent," and whose only complaint is that we have misstated the price of one book.

Now let us first clear the ground of Dietzgen. We don't "ignore" Dietzgen for a moment. But what "P. L. E. B." says about him answers Comrades Connelly and Jones. "P. L. E. B." welcomes, as we do, the promise of Craik's book. W. W. C. will doubtless give us the "guts" of Dietzgen, and British students will not have to wrestle with him in translations which are by no means above criticism. (No translations are, but there are degrees!) Both Jones and Connelly insist that Dietzgen fifty years ago actually (and finally?) answered the three fundamental problems to which we referred in our review of Bertrand Russell's last book, (August PLEBS)—"What really exists? How do we know? How do we think?" Dietzgen himself made no such claim. He *attempted* an answer to all three and his answer to No. 1 (*Brain Work*, p. 66) might be quoted as an anticipation of Bertrand Russell's: "Matter is not so material and mind is not so mental as is generally supposed."

Pannekoek (Introduction, p. 21) indeed declares that Dietzgen definitely solved the problem of the relationship between "matter" and "mind," which of course underlies the problem, What really exists? We think Dietzgen merely endeavoured to show that this problem, like many others, was wrongly formulated by dualist philosophy. As regards the questions, *how* do we *think*, and *how* do we *know*—was it possible for Dietzgen to give final answers when the investigations of the New Psychology had not even been begun? Is it possible for anyone to formulate final answers to-day, when to-morrow may bring new lights as revolutionary to our extant conceptions as the lights which the psychology of this generation owes to the investigations of such thinkers as Janet and Freud?

Why Russell?

Why Russell? We did *not* recommend this author's *Problems of Philosophy*, but his *Analysis of Mind*. Here, too, our critics cross one another out. Against Oliver Jones, we quote "P. L. E. B." who writes: "In his later work [*Mysticism and Logic*] Russell has completely recanted the traditional Platonic standpoint taken up in his H.U. booklet." Part of the interest of Russell's philosophical writings lies in the author's freedom from the trammels which for most philosophers are imposed by their own earlier works. He does not hesitate to revise his conceptions in the light of new thought. We recommended his *Analysis of Mind*—to advanced students—precisely because we, who have read Dietzgen, found that we had a good deal to learn from Russell; that he restates some of Dietzgen's main conclusions in terms more accordant than Dietzgen's could possibly be with the general data of contemporary scientific knowledge. But we did not say that we considered certain elements of Russell's philosophy to be essential constituents of the new proletarian outlook. We said this of Bergson.

Why Bergson?

Why Bergson? Not because we think that the average proletarian student should spend his time over Bergson in the original. Generally speaking, originals must be left to specialists and class-leaders. We are eagerly expecting the PLEBS textbook of Marxist Economics precisely because the first volume of *Capital*, plus the two pamphlets *Wage Labour and Capital* and *Value, Price and Profit*, need condensing and modernising, editing and explaining, for the use of contemporary proletarian students. *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* are originals of inestimable value; but to-day's student of biology will do best to approach the subject through a compend which puts Darwinism in its place in relation to Mendelism, Weismannism, and so on. Craik's book is to tell what we all ought to know of Dietzgen. In like manner, Wildon Carr presents the essentials of Bergsonism in attractive and readable form. It does not follow that we accept, or advise others to accept, Bergsonism in its entirety. But in *Creative Revolution* (Chaps. XI. and XII.) we have tried to explain how Bergson fits in to the scheme of proletarian thought. If "P. L. E. B." has read that book, and still asks "Why Bergson?" we have no answer that will move him.

Let us try, nevertheless, to reformulate the case for "creative revolution," the idea of which no less than the name was partly derived by us from Bergson. We approach the matter from the battle-ground of those, on the one hand, who declare that Marxism and the M.C.H. mean that "material causation" and "economic evolution" work *inevitably* towards the social revolution and the establishment of the co-operative commonwealth; and of those, on the other, who insist on interpreting Marxism in the sense that it is "up to us," consciously and purposively, to achieve that consummation.

Postgate writes pithily in last month's PLEBS: "I . . . believe . . . that the capitalists *may win*. If I believed . . . in a *certain* victory of the workers, I would get a nice quiet job and abandon my present activities. If it's certain, why worry? Why run the PLEBS?"

The PLEBS *"Outline of Psychology"*

We have had the privilege of reading in typescript the PLEBS *Outline of Psychology*, now in the press. Here what to us seems the same point is touched upon in technical language (§77): "Is conation capable of being described in terms of matter and energy; or is it due to an independent agency, a vital force which acts independently of the eternal flow of cause and effect? *The final answer to this question still eludes us.*" (Italics ours. The PLEBS psychologists, be it noted, do not think that Dietzgen "finally" answered the question fifty years ago!)

Let us put the matter in our own words before we come back to Carr and Bergson. The crux is this. Is there a difference between the meaning of the word "cause" as we apply it to the interactions in a *non*-living universe; and as we apply it to the interactions between *living, feeling,* and *thinking* organisms with one another and with the non-living elements of the *composite* universe in which we have our being? We do not know. But we are confident that it is premature to assert, as the *metaphysic* termed "materialism" (nothing to do with the M.C.H.) asserts that there is no such difference. And we are quite sure that to contend that there may be such a difference does not imply the acceptance of "atavistic" beliefs in God, immortality, etc. ("exorcised spooks"—see *C.R.*, pp. 185 and 186). As to "free will," this has been magnified into a spook by certain schools of theologians; the problems which surround it have been rendered turbid by mystics and by those whose minds were obscured by obsolete philosophies and psychologies; but our recognition of these facts does not shuffle the fundamental crux out of the world of thought and action. Let us turn to Bergson as expounded by Carr (*The Philosophy of Change*):—

> "There is, then, a condition of freedom without which there can be no change, no process, no creation. This condition is an open universe. When, therefore, we press this problem of the future to an end it comes to this: Is the universe open to our activity or is it not? Is what will be, now written for whoso can read; or is it unwritten, waiting to be written? Is each moment only making explicit what the previous moment held implicit, or is there continual new birth, continual coming to existence, not only of the unforeseen, but of the unforeseeable? This is the essential problem of freedom."

Fatalism and Determinism

In the PLEBS *Psychology* a distinction is drawn between "fatalism" and "determinism." The former is the acquiescence in the Kismet (Fate) of the Turks, or of our own pious folk who say "It's all for the best"—mere phrase-making as a rule, belied by the phrase-makers' actions. The "determinism" of the psychologist leaves a limited freedom for those who are consciously creating the future, a blank page waiting for us to write on it. If otherwise, if the future is no more than a scroll which time will unroll, "Why worry? Why run the PLEBS?" The PLEBS *Psychology* tells us that the contradiction between the apparently universal validity of material causation, and the assertion of the validity of human conation is "a phase of the great master-contradiction of life, in which one part of matter appears to strive against the inevitable law of the degradation of energy."

An admirable statement—characteristically Bergsonian! And yet the writers of these words have deprecated our championship of

Bergson on the ground that the study of his works may cause some of the weaker sheep to stray out of the Marxist fold! Like "P. L. E. B.," these doughty psychologists are terribly afraid of the introduction of the thin end of the theistic wedge!

A Confession of Unfaith

For our part we are as confident as Marx or any bolshevik of them all that "religion is the opium of the people! (So is "sport" under capitalism!) We will echo Shelley in his advocacy of "the necessity of atheism." All this has been old stuff for countless generations, ever since the wise man said in his heart that there is no God. But we are not afraid of Bergson because his philosophy has, or may be conceived to have, theistic trends; any more than we are afraid of Darwin because he complaisantly introduced some sermon-stuff anent "the creator" into the closing paragraph of *The Origin of Species*. If we extol a baker's bread, it does not follow that we like his lemon cheese-cakes or consider them wholesome fare. Persons who are so weak-kneed that they will be thrown off their spiritual balance by the theistic elements (if any) in Bergson are of no use to the revolutionary movement.

Why Bergson? Because in our opinion Bergson is the author of the most telling contemporary statement of the creative revolutionist's case as against the don't-worry-evolution-will-do-it-all type of folk who believe themselves to be flesh and blood when in reality they are only made of putty. Some will perhaps find the most effective answer in our own book. Many will find it in the PLEBS *Outline of Psychology*. "In my Father's house are many mansions." There are many different facets of truth, and many different types of mind. It takes all sorts to make a revolutionist's world.

EDEN & CEDAR PAUL

NEWS *of the* MOVEMENT

What may well prove to be one of the most important events in I.W.-C.E. history will take place this month—the Birmingham Conference. This time it is not a case of the PLEBS rounding up a bunch of folk and telling them what they ought to do; but a number of delegates coming from flourishing districts to band together in order to make the whole movement more effective, and to get the punch in the right places. The Plebs League is, of course, responsible for spreading the fundamental ideas which have worked as leaven. But the League will only be one partner in the Joint Committee which we hope will be formed. As usual we have little or no finance—we are used to that. What we have is keen enthusiasm, and the will to co-ordinate our movement so as to get the best possible out of it for all districts. It is in that spirit that we meet at Birmingham to begin, we hope, a new chapter of our history.

We hope all class and Plebs Group secretaries are discussing the Conference. One or two of the districts have been active, and Sheffield has already sent out 40 circulars calling attention to the Conference. If you can't be present, write what you want to say; but remember to send it well before the 8th. This is a bad time to scrape together railway fares for delegates; but a big lot depends on a good Conference, so if you can't come yourself take the hat round and send the other fellow!

And don't forget that we're going to get a 10,000 *circulation this winter!*

A Southport comrade writing under the name of "Marenghol" in the *Southport Guardian* has been fluttering the local dovecots in a battle with W.E.A. supporters. As is usual in these disputes, the side which believes in brotherly love is, as the vulgar put it, getting "shirty" as the controversy goes on. A really good newspaper controversy keeps things lively in any district, and other comrades are advised to follow "Marenghol's" example. Whenever either head of the W-Hee-Haw appears, hit it! That's a good general rule.

Ten thousand a month. Don't forget!

The LONDON Organiser is full of plans for the winter, and comrades in the different districts of London should get into touch with him. He is anxious to organise a lending library, also a collection of lantern slides and diagrams for use in classes, and will be glad to hear from any Plebs League branch secretaries who are interested. All group secretaries in London are asked to keep in touch with the Organiser (send him reports, requests for speakers, suggestions for circulating the Magazine, etc.). In this way we can develop the London movement.

Colchester, Chelmsford and Ramsgate are the latest (to hand) Plebs Groups to be formed after a visit from the said London Organiser. Secretaries' names follow for the benefit of local Plebeians and friends:—

COLCHESTER, L. Ward, 34, Victor Road.
CHELMSFORD, E. Barrell, 2, Rose Villas, Fairfield Road.
RAMSGATE, J. J. Riley, 62, Hardres Street.

The Ramsgate secretary reports a good group. Debates and lectures are being

arranged and Margate and Broadstairs are to be encouraged to form kindred organisations. Also the Magazine is receiving a push in all the new groups. Remember our objective—10,000 a month.

Colchester and Chelmsford have run Labour College classes for the last two years, as there is a local band of comrades who make up in keenness what they lack in numbers. The very appearance of our movement in these two country towns and the threat of the same thing occurring in Maldon and Braintree is a "sign and portent!" Essex is rural England with a vengeance. Success to the new groups.

Comrade A. Okey writes pointing out that we gave his address wrongly in last month's Magazine. All friends in Ilford and district pelase note 18, Raymond Road, Leif Street, Ilford. Comrade Okey reports the formation of a local committee of well-known comrades and hopes that classes will result.

It is hoped to hold a Plebs Reunion and Social in London before Christmas. The London Organiser will have the arrangements in hand and more will be heard of this anon.

The Bradford Branch of the Labour College and Plebs Classes held a conference on Saturday, September 10th, at the Textile Hall, Bradford, over 50 T.U. delegates attending. M. F. Titterington presided, and W. W. Craik outlined the principles and objects of Independent Working-Class Education. It was decided, after a most useful and interesting discussion, to form a Bradford and District Council for I.W.-C.E., to which the delegates promised to do all in their power to persuade their various unions to affiliate. The objects of the Council will be mainly to extend and co-ordinate the various classes now in process of formation and to bring working-class education under the direct control of the unions.

On the Sunday evening, a successful public meeting was held with W. Brooke as Chairman, and Craik again as principal speaker, the subject of his address being "The Reorganisation of the Trade Union Movement."

Locally the conference and public meeting are both regarded as being highly successful, and with the enthusiasm then displayed as a send-off for the winter campaign the local committee look forward to the most successful season yet held.

It is with deep regret that we learn of the death of Comrade Jack Selkirk, well known in Socialist circles in Macclesfield and Liverpool district. He worked hard and valiantly for everything the PLEBS stands for. His name, though not well known to the majority of our readers, recalls helpful messages and more material help which we have had from him at various times. We take this opportunity of offering our condolences to his wife and daughters.

W. H.

A NEW COMPETITION

PLEBS POSTERS

We cannot afford to print posters to make the PLEBS known in the dark places of the earth. So we are going to

DO IT ON THE CHEAP

We want Plebeians to do some for us. Before you begin making sarcastic remarks about the ability of PLEBS artists you must be told quickly that

EVERYBODY IS EXPECTED TO DO IT

whether they've done it before or not! It all started with the following letter:—

DEAR EDITOR,—I beg to offer your readers the following recipe for a recreation for winter evenings.

Take a number of PLEBS Stamps (The more the better!—ED.), then search among your old rubbish for a colour print or magazine illustration. It needn't be "arty," but it is all the better if it is attractively coloured. Next "frame" the picture by sticking the stamps neatly round the margin. Result: a useful poster which will do good service if exposed in a suitable place. Rather good fun may be had by the attempt to adapt the subject of the picture to propaganda purposes; this gives scope for any amount of ingenuity. As illustration I may mention a "Lion Hunt" which I have just treated in this fashion. Several fearsome beasts are being valiantly approached by two armed men, while a third hunter is running away. I have labelled the lions "Ignorance," "Apathy," etc.; the brave hunters "Plebs," while the runaway sports the mystic letters "W.E.A." Thus is produced quite a good substitute for an I.W.-C.E. cartoon.

Another useful method of employing the stamps with maximum effect is to place them in such a position as to form a "?" or the letters P L E B S.

I trust the debt will soon be stamped out, but I hope the stamps will be continued permanently, for they form an invaluable method of propaganda.

Yours frat., ERNEST JOHNS

There's the idea! And we herewith offer £1 worth of books, to be chosen by the winner and supplied by the Plebs Book Dept., for

THE BEST POSTER

advertising the PLEBS. It can be carried out on either of the lines suggested by our correspondent—or you may strike out a new line for yourself. Our only condition is that not less than six Plebs stamps figure somewhere in the design.

Posters should reach us not later than Nov. 5th; and if they are to be returned, stamps (postage, not Plebs) must accompany them. Otherwise, we shall make use of the posters ourselves, and send them around for the use of districts.

Result of competition in December PLEBS.

LETTERS *from* PLEBS

We are anxious that our correspondence columns should be as valuable and as interesting a feature as any other in the PLEBS; *and with a view to giving as many readers as possible the opportunity of sharing in the limited space at our disposal we have decided that, henceforth, the maximum length of any letter published must be* 400 *(four hundred) words; and that letters shorter than that will have preference. Please note this rule, as letters which exceed the maximum will not, after this month, be published.*

THE LABOUR COLLEGE CURRICULUM

DEAR COMRADE,—Those whose student-days at the Labour College are over must have read with mixed feelings the short sketch in last month's PLEBS of the changes in the curriculum now to be put into operation; mixed feelings—of regret that they themselves will be unable to share directly in the advantages of the new scheme, and of gratification at the evidence it gives of a genuine desire to increase the efficiency of the College.

At a time when "Anti-Wasters" everywhere are shrieking for economy (meaning thereby economy in the things that matter to workers—education, housing, and so forth) it is cheering to see a body of Labour men set an example of farsightedness by inaugurating new developments in the educational institution which they control. The obvious benefits and advantages of the new scheme will assuredly far more than justify the additional financial expenditure involved.

The Governors of the College are to be congratulated on their clear recognition of the fact that they better fulfil their duty to the members of their two Unions by refusing to rest content with anything less than the best attainable, than by saving pence and wasting opportunities.

Yours frat.,
J. P. M. M.

Edinburgh.

DEAR COMRADE,—The article on the new curriculum at the Labour College in August PLEBS must have been read with interest and pleasure by everyone interested in I.W.-C.E. Congratulations to all concerned in its inception and carrying out!

I think the wisest decision of all is the inclusion of courses of "general instruction." We want to train "specialists." But to attempt to make specialists of men who have had little or no general education (and it is not the fault of our students that this is true of the majority of them) is bound to have disappointing results. The wider a man's knowledge, the better use he can make of the Marxian method. Concentration on essentials is one thing; entire ignorance of less essential subjects of study quite another.

It is reassuring to see that, so soon after the re-establishment of the College, the lessons of experience have been learned—and promptly applied.

Yours frat.,
A. D. B.

Sheffield.

WATCHING LEADERS

DEAR COMRADE,—The recent failure of the Triple Alliance has brought the question of leadership to the fore. It is ushered in by a campaign of personal recriminations possibly unparalleled since Chartist days. This tirade of apportionment of praise and blame proves that the rank and file have a false conception of the place of leaders in social movements. Both victory and defeat are accredited to those who theoretically "lead." This popular view is that false and pernicious theory of progress—the "great man" theory. We are, or should be, out to fight this view.

But, first of all, in what way is it false? Ultimately, it amounts to an unscientific conception of causality. For a cause, after all, is not an isolated single fact, but a "totality of the conditions in the presence of which an event occurs." This popular "great man" theory would have us reduce a cause to one solitary factor—leaders.

Now, the presence of leaders lacking courage and revolutionary vision can be considered as *one* of the factors which comprised the "totality of conditions" in the presence of which a miners' defeat took place, but who will contend that it was the only or most powerful factor? Why not lay the onus upon any one of the other factors? If the leaders are the one "efficient" cause of, say, defeat, how is it that the same man can at another time be deemed the agent of victory? Might not some of the other factors have changed—e.g., the constitution of the organisation, or the market conditions of the industry's product?

To counteract this false view is not easy. It derives much of its vigour from the tendency of untutored and undisciplined minds to personify causes. The savage exemplifies the same attitude when he sees a personality lurking behind each branch that the wind releases on his skull. He cannot grasp a complex and somewhat abstract combination of rotten wood fibre,

the power of the wind, and gravitational force as bringing about the unhappy result. Following the habit of his ancestor, the worker to-day cannot visualise a complex set of social conditions bringing about defeat or victory; it needs must be personified by him in a man—a "great man." This method also saves him the trouble and discomfort ("mental conflict") of perhaps discovering that he himself is in part responsible.

Surely all who pride themselves upon being educators of the workers should do their utmost to weaken, in order finally to destroy, this pernicious doctrine. Yet there are some socialists who by word and act are doing much not to weaken but to strengthen it.

Yours,

F. P.

Rhondda.

The Coming Revolution

Dear Editor,—I have certainly no quarrel with the tone and temper of Postgate's letter in your August issue in reply to my own of July, and I should not attempt to continue the controversy if he did not challenge me on a specific point.

I will not ask him for his five-pound notes because he contradicts me on a statement which I did not make, and it would be a shame to take the money.

I did not say that Marx ever *said* that "through its trade union structure British Labour was likely to be able to establish a peaceful economic revolution." What I said was that Marx *believed* this. My authority for the statement is Engels, who wrote at the end of his preface to *Capital* (my italics) :—

> . . . . "Surely, at such a moment, the voice ought to be heard of a man whose whole theory is the result of a life-long study of the economic history and condition of England, and whom that study led to the conclusion that, at least in Europe, *England is the only country where the inevitable social revolution might be effected entirely by peaceful and legal means*. He certainly never forgot to add that he hardly expected the English ruling classes to submit, without a 'pro-slavery rebellion,' to this peaceful and legal revolution."

Yours, etc.,

Gerald Gould

Art and Propaganda

Dear Comrade,—In your review of my article on "Art and the Worker" you protest against the sentence, "Our playwrights must prepare proletarian dramas that . . . end not in virtue rewarded, but in international concord and working-class triumph," and you say you would regard such as "a besetting sin of propagandist art." You also quote for us G. B. S.'s warning that "we are coming fast to a melodramatic formula in which the villain will be a bad employer and the hero a Socialist."

I detest melodrama, and I am not anxious to see our proletarian playwrights working to a formula. But I must join issue with you when you write of "the besetting sin of propagandist art." Our art *must* be propagandist. I can see MacTavish rubbing his eyes when he reads your protest, and rejoicing over "the one sinner that repenteth," for surely you have joined the "impartialists."

The Plebs movement is essentially a revolt against the idea that workers should merely study life as it is or was. The W.E.A. lecturer tells his students that the wages of an agricultural worker in the 16th century were so much, and leaves it at that. The Plebs lecturer explains why. The two lecturers look at the present in the same way; one says merely that things are as they are, the other says *why* they are as they are.

Similarly with the future proletarian art. Proletarian art must deal with causes and subjects, rather than with individuals.

The repertory movement is an example of how not to do it. When in Manchester, I frequented Miss Horniman's late lamented Gaiety Theatre (now, alas! a picture house), and saw Shaw, Galsworthy, Ibsen, Brighouse, etc. In *Strife* we had a picture of a cause spoiled because the ending was shirked,

and it was made into a conflict of "character" between the strike leader and the employer. *Hindle Wakes* was "a real life" picture of Lancashire, but though the problem "Should Fanny marry Alan?" was set, it was not answered.

Marxism does not consist in the mere setting of problems—it supplies the means whereby the student can solve the problems.

Our proletarian artists must endeavour to portray not only ordinary every-day lives, but some idealised proletarian future, so that the necessary spur to action may help them along.

Perhaps I may mention a method adopted by the Russian Prolet-Cult. In my talks last year with Poliansky in Moscow he explained how one proletarian play had been produced. The students had taken an English picture, "On Strike," in which a miner is shown standing at his cottage door with his wife and child. He is on strike, and looks pretty miserable. This picture was studied, and the students were asked to stand round it and express their thoughts concerning it—not in a formal manner, but just as they occurred to them. A stenographer took down their observations, and from the results a play was written up. The idea was, first of all, to ask why the man was on strike, then to imagine how the strike was being conducted, then to consider the employer's methods, and so on. When the job was finished, the play was not the work of an individual, but the joint work of the class.

Yours frat., W. McLAINE

[1. We must apologise to McLaine for having had to cut down his interesting letter.

2. McLaine must apologise to us for misreading (and in his second paragraph misquoting) the phrase on which he "joins issue" with us. We did not write of "*the* besetting sin of propagandist art"; but of working to a formula as "a" besetting sin of, etc., etc. And as McLaine admits that he likes "working to a formula" no more than we do, that part of his letter is cancelled out.

3. Of course, all art is consciously or unconsciously propagandist. Our condemnation of "formula art" was based not merely on the fact that it is bad art, but—more important at the moment—bad propaganda.

4. McLaine opposes (quite falsely) "causes" to "character." He instances two plays which raised *social* problems, and answered them, if at all, only in terms of *individual* character. We agree with his criticism of both plays (*cf.* the criticism of Drinkwater's *Lincoln* in August PLEBS). But a play (or a novel or a poem) need not shirk a *problem* even though it depicts *character*. Ibsen's plays, for instance, did not.

5. The main point about the Russian "Co-operative" play is—Was it a good play, either as art or propaganda? McLaine does not tell us.—ED., PLEBS.]

The Douglas Scheme

Sir,—In the August Plebs "M. S.," after admitting that he has not read Major Douglas's books, proceeds to condemn his scheme in a few lines and a few bald assertions. This is so unlike what might be expected of the Plebs, that I feel compelled to venture the following observations.

The Douglas *New Age* Scheme is the product of a continuous examination of the present economic system and a criticism of current economic thought by Major Douglas and the *New Age* writers, extending over the past three years. It is the consummation of the National Guild Scheme originally conceived and propagated by the *New Age* writers. It is claimed by its authors to be the only concrete and practical proposal extant for the solution of the social problem.

In view of these facts, coupled with the brilliant reputation of the *New Age* writers, it is surely nothing less than an impertinence for your contributor to condemn the scheme without any further examination than having heard a lecture by Major Douglas, in which obviously only the fringe of the subject could be touched.

However, to examine the criticism. Major Douglas has shown that the control of the policy of production in every industry is not in the hands of workers, management, or shareholders as such, but in the hands of those who control the issue of credit, i.e., the bankers and financiers. It is quite true that these people, comparatively few in number, are very largely interested in the directorates of the various industries; but it is equally true, and much more important, that the great majority of the employers are outside this coterie of financiers and are themselves the slaves of the system and suffer under it only in a less degree than the workers.

Your contributor will probably agree that the present system contains within itself the seeds of its own decay, and that the crash is not only inevitable but imminent. This fact, which is what makes the scheme practical and capable of immediate application, is the factor which will render the scheme anathema to that section of the people whose religion is the class war. The Douglas Scheme would have the effect of making every member of the community a capitalist, and would make the dividend replace the wage to an ever greater extent. There is no question of legerdemain. The scheme simply proposes that the workers shall obtain control of the issue of credit in exactly the same way the financiers do, i.e., by setting up their own banks.

Your contributor further demonstrates his ignorance of the subject in that he makes no reference to the second part of the scheme which deals with the fixing of prices. This part of the scheme provides for the selling of goods at less than cost price. This is in effect giving credit to the consumer, thereby rectifying the root cause of our present difficulties, which is that the people are not able to buy back the commodities they produce.

In conclusion, I may say that it is no more possible fully to explain the Douglas Scheme within the limits of a letter than in a lecture. Consequently, I can only advise your contributor and the readers of the Plebs generally to study the scheme for themselves, by reading Major Douglas's books, *Economic Democracy* and *Credit Power and Democracy* and the correlated writings in the *New Age*.

Such advice would have come more gracefully from your contributor, and would have been more in keeping with the reputation of the Plebs than the misleading and incomplete report of the scheme you published.

Yours faithfully,

Thomas K. Justice

["M. S." writes: If a man of Major Douglas's ability—with a *New Age* reputation!—cannot do more than "touch the fringe" of his proposals in a lengthy lecture, they must be intricate indeed. For the rest, I am content to let your correspondent's letter speak for itself. His exposition, I think, will scarcely serve to convince Plebeians that I was over-hasty in my judgment.]

The Study of History

Dear Comrade.—I am reminded by the Postgate–Newbold duel—in which the former rejects industrial and economic history, whereas the latter depreciates the value of a study of the French Revolution—of Mehring's account in his brilliant biography of Marx of the intellectual development of Marx and Engels.

Mehring points out that Marx came to Socialism or Communism by way of a study of the economic and political aspects of the French Revolution. Engels came to the same result by way of a study of the industrial development of Great Britain.

Mehring points out how it was the amalgamation of these two methods of study that proved so extraordinarily fruitful—just as it was the practical experience of Engels that helped the more theoretical Marx to get a grasp of the realities of economic life, while Marx's theoretical insight threw light on the practical experience of the other.

The moral I would like to draw is that it is idle to waste time in debating the relative values of studying either the French Revolution or British economic history—since both are essential for one who will understand our time. Certainly the conditions of France at the time of the great revolution are not those of Great Britain to-day or then. That objection, however, only applies to any attempt mechanically to draw deductions from what happened then.

I hope Postgate won't find my "wrathful gibberings" hard to understand this time.

Yours,

J. B. Askew

REVIEW

AN OPTIMIST

The Labour Movement: Its conservative functions and social consequences. By Frank Tannenbaum. (Putnam's.)

IT may not be really true that "kind hearts are more than coronets, and simple faith than Norman blood," but if there *is* anything in it then Mr. Frank Tannenbaum must be an aristocrat of great affluence. For, in the above book, his faith in the Labour Movement as the executioner of the capitalist system is absolutely complete, and the quiet, kindly manner in which he announces the death sentence of production for profit would almost reassure the Federation of British Industries; while our pathetic old friend, the widow who depends for her existence on the dividends from a few shares, would never feel a draught at all.

Mr. Tannenbaum is an American writer, and by the "Labour Movement" he means the Labour Unions, and does not include Labour political organisations as we do in this country. The book is divided into three sections — Cause — Method — Consequences, and is refreshingly free from the terms which the new student of labour matters often finds so puzzling. He does not explain the *cause* of the Labour Movement by the Marxian theory of value, but he makes it very clear that the machine is now the centre of social gravity, and that the control of the machine by the capitalist means insecurity for an ever-increasing number of workers, who, in order to gain some measure of economic stability, combine together to eliminate competition within their ranks.

In the section on *method* our author sets out to prove that all Labour Unions are revolutionary in fact if not in theory, "Revolutionary activity consists in the absorption, the wresting of power and control by one group from another—and that is what every Labour Union does. It gains power from the employer." He differentiates, however, between the conservative unions which assert that they accept the present social system and do not wish to destroy it, and the radical unions which do *not* accept the present social system and seek to replace the individual control of the employer by the group control of the workers. "The radical labour element . . . educates the Labour Movement into a realisation of its own inevitable destiny. I say inevitable because the only way the conservative Labour Movement could hope to save the individualist system would be by disbanding its organisation and ceasing its activities. It cannot continue to function, to grow, to become powerful as a Labour Movement without ultimately displacing the capitalist system, and the radical element in the Labour Movement serves to make this fact clear and conscious to the conservative, thus increasing the idealism and the speed as well as the intensity of its activity." After the recent sickening spectacle of our British Unions being beaten to their knees, it is some consolation to know that we have still two allies—time and the machine—one to goad us into action, and the other always at our disposal to allow us to carry out our activities.

In addition to carrying on the struggle for wresting power from the capitalist the Labour Movement is shown to be moving in the direction of economic equality. The minimum wage, the uniform length of working day, and, in many instances, the amount of work performed in that day, all tend to reduce the economic difference between men, and help to create an outlook favourable to the transition period from one form of society to another.

Mr. Tannenbaum also gives a very good exposition of the phrase "Dictatorship of the Proletariat." The most timid worker could have no fear of it after this lucid explanation of what it really means. "The significance of the 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' is that it is a new construction of citizenship in which the formula that divides the citizens from the non-citizens is the simplest and most inclusive that has ever been made the practical basis of government. The requirement for citizenship is labour. This distinction excludes from active citizenship only the imbecile and the child. The distinctions of race, class, colour, sex, religion, property and education have no significance for admission to the right and privilege of the group." He points out further, that as no one may enter a labour union who is not a worker, the most conservative labour union and the Soviet Government of Russia have the same common starting point—Work.

Unfortunately, there is no announcement as to the price of this book. If it were cheap I should recommend it to the average trade unionist. It would point out the part he is destined to play as an organised worker without "putting the wind" up him at the outset. The keen Plebeian might find that it covers already familiar ground, and is not sufficiently "meaty" for his consumption, except for a thought-provoking chapter on "Labour and Education" in the section on "Consequences." This I hope to deal with more fully in a future article.

ALICE PRATT

The PLEBS' BOOKSHELF

I HAVE a good many times in these pages put in a plea for *Simplification* as an ideal to be aimed at in our proletarian education; and urged PLEBS contributors to write with this ideal in mind. But in view of quite a few letters we have been receiving lately I feel compelled to say that certain of our critics want to carry simplification a little too far. The man, for instance, who writes objecting to a particular article because it contains no less than seven words (he encloses a list) of which he does not know the meaning is expecting too much. What, in Chambers', Nuttall's or Webster's name, is a dictionary for? And how does he expect ever to carry his education a step further if he isn't constantly encountering new words and as regularly looking up their meanings in his dictionary? One important difference between the civilised man and the savage is the greater range and extent of the former's vocabulary; and a 20th century proletarian student who objects to his vocabulary being added to is showing himself to be rather hopeless material.

No. Simplification — simple sentences rather than complicated ones, short words rather than long ones *where short words express the same meaning*—is one thing; and it is a thing the best writers of English prose have always aimed at. "Infantile-ification" is another. The extent to which PLEBS writers are compelled to use new or comparatively little-known words is a measure of their success in breaking loose from old, orthodox concepts and classifications. And this may involve some little mental effort—and maybe the use of a dictionary—on the part of their readers. What of that? The PLEBS never set out to provide light reading for idle moments. Its aim is to fit proletarians to make a much bigger effort than that involved in looking up the meaning of half-a-dozen unfamiliar words.

* * *

We had hoped to announce this month a definite date for the publication of PLEBS Text-book No. 1, *An Outline of Psychology;* but the work of final revision, indexing, division into sections, and so forth has taken considerably longer than we anticipated. It is work, however, that is worth doing well; and it *has* been done well in this case. If the *Psychology* is not in every way—get-up, type arrangement, binding, illustrations, etc. —a model textbook, it will not be the fault of those who have been working hard on it during the past few weeks.

We go to press before the final arrangements about printing have been made, and are, therefore, still unable to state definitely the price of the book. But we are hoping to be able to issue it at the price originally fixed on for the series—2s. 6d. If this is impossible, we shall keep as close to that figure as we can. And every good Pleb will, the moment a definite announcement appears, send cash for his copy (or copies) and so help us in meeting the big bill which publishing a book nowadays involves.

* * *

It is quite appropriate that, at the opening of our winter campaign, and just before we inaugurate our own Textbook series, Eden & Cedar Paul's book on our movement should be published. The contents list appearing on another page is sufficient evidence of the book's special interest for Plebeians. I am looking forward to seeing the review of *Proletcult* in sundry Organs of Public Opinion. It strikes me that there will be not a few alarmed appeals for immediate and drastic action against this dangerous, subversive movement (i.e., us). E. & C. P. don't exactly conceal their conviction of the importance or the influence of I.W.-C.E. Nor do they waste words on the "false routes." "Whither is your *highway* to lead?" they ask. "Round and round the mulberry bush? . . ." Poor old W-Hee-haw!

In its account of the actual history of our movement the book is authoritative. All the chapters dealing with the Plebs League, the C.L.C., and the class movement were read and revised by Geo. Sims; and what Sims doesn't know about the growth of I.W.-C.E. in these islands isn't worth knowing. Get your copy from the Plebs Book Dept. now.

* * *

An article on "Historical Materialism and Literature," by the undersigned, is unavoidably held over owing to pressure on our space this month, as also are letters from R. Fox, J. B., "Theosophist," S. W., F. Baldwin, P. E. M., B. Wright, H. Bolton and others, and several reviews.

J. F. H.

ARE YOU A PLEB?

CONSTITUTION OF THE PLEBS LEAGUE

OBJECT

To further the interests of independent working-class education as a partisan effort to improve the position of Labour in the present and to aid in the abolition of wage-slavery.

METHODS

Assisting in the formation of classes in social science, such classes to be maintained and controlled, wherever possible, by Trade Unions, Trade Councils, or other working-class organisations. The issuing of a monthly magazine. The assistance in every way of the development of the Labour College or any other working-class educational institution with the same educational policy.

Membership and Management

SUBSCRIPTION. Each member shall pay 2s. 6d. a year to the central fund of the League, subscriptions to run from January to December.

BRANCHES. Individual members shall wherever possible form branches. Every such branch to be responsible for its own expenses, and to have a voting strength at the Meet according to its membership. The work of a branch shall be to promote the establishment of social science classes, and when and where such classes are established to assist in the maintenance of a genuine working-class educational policy; to arrange for propaganda on the aims and objects of the League, by public meeting, visits to T.U. branches or other working-class organisations, press controversy, or any other method; to extend the sales of the Magazine and other Plebs publications; and to report to the E.C. on the activities of our own or other educational organisations.

ANNUAL MEET. An annual meet of members shall be held, at a convenient centre, in the early part of each year. Any alteration of the constitution shall be raised by resolution at the Meet and decided by postal ballot of all members taken afterwards.

ADMINISTRATION. The administration of the League shall be in the hands of an E.C. of seven members, meeting monthly, with, in addition, the Hon. Sec. and Editor of the Magazine. These all to be nominated, by not less than two members, a clear week before the date of the Meet, and elected by postal ballot of members, to be taken afterwards. The E.C. are empowered to decide on the practical application of League aims and policy, and to enforce same where necessary.

PLEBS LEAGUE, 11a, PENYWERN RD., EARL'S COURT, S.W.5

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