

Vol. XI, No. 4.

May, 1919.

The
PLEBS
MAGAZINE



*Printed by Fox, Jones & Co., at Kemp
Hall, High St., Oxford, & published
by the Plebs League
at the same address.*

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THE PLEBS MAGAZINE

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

Vol. XI.

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Reason and Force

"We are in danger of losing our sense of proportion." With those words a contributor to the *Railway Review* opened a recently appearing article on "Reason or Force." Unfortunately the author did not live up to the standard implied in his introductory sentence. Instead of overcoming the "danger" he succumbed to it.

To lose one's sense of proportion consists in exaggerating differences. On the other hand, it can consist in failing to distinguish differences. All error is the result of either over-estimating or under-estimating. It is the work of reason to distinguish and classify the things which we experience, the objects perceived by our senses. Reason is also a perceptible fact of our experience and therefore as much an object of investigation as cabbages and capitalists. That reason has not had the same considerations for our thought as have other things, is, on the theoretical side, mainly responsible for a lack of proportion in our judgments.

An understanding of the nature of reason gives us consistency and system in the understanding of the nature of things. It discloses to us the fact that reason is not an independent treasure box from which is produced a wealth of eternal truths, but only an instrument which operates in connection with the senses and sensory material. Reason and experience are not two roads to knowledge, but one and the same road.

Reason is itself an experience. "Reason" is itself a "force"—one force among other forces. There are those, however, like the author of "Reason or Force," who oppose "reason" to "force" as if the former were some

independent entity above and beyond force. "Reason" is elevated to the throne and "force" must prostrate itself at the footstool. The difference is exaggerated. The connection is overlooked. There is "force" in "reason" and there is "reason" in "force."

The question of "reason" and "force" cannot be solved so long as they are considered from a purely abstract point of view. In order to arrive at a practical understanding about them, the abstraction must be resolved into the concrete elements which compose it. There is no more an abstract reason or force to be found anywhere than there is an abstract vegetable or animal. Just as the latter classification embrace the most diverse vegetables or animals, so "reason" as a general classification sums up the most diverse varieties of practical reason, and similarly with "force."

In the case under discussion, there are two well marked varieties of "reason" which correspond to two well-marked economic classes of persons, that of workers and that of capitalists. Those different reasons which express themselves in theory and practice concerning the industrial and political problems of the day, are not purely subjective states of consciousness, but represent, in thought, objective differences, differences in material social conditions and, much more, mutually antagonistic differences. Each class stands on its reasonable rights and, therefore, "force" decides.

This "force" manifests itself in various ways. The force at the disposal of the capitalists expresses itself in a variety of concrete forms, industrial, judicial, military, etc. Similarly the force which the working class commands through its organization expresses itself in different ways, industrial and political. Each expression of force has its appropriate reasons. The workers may differ among themselves as to how this force should be applied at a given time. Some may argue for one force, others for a different force; but there is "reason" in each case.

There is no tactic or policy which is absolutely reasonable, true and good. A tactic is reasonable only in its time and place. Its justification rests on no eternal unvariable principles, but on circumstances, and its applicability to the same. Given the object in view, and the conditions prevailing, that tactic is reasonable which accomplishes the object in the fullest way, and all other tactics or forces are unreasonable in comparison.

Strikes are not reasonable in themselves. Neither is the opposite "not to strike" attitude, absolutely reasonable. When we examine the claims of the anti-strike absolutists, like the *Railway Review* contributor, it soon becomes evident that theirs also is no abstract reason, but a very special particular reason which they pit against other special reasons. They lose their sense of proportion in this: they convert their reason into *the* reason, the special into the general, the relative into the absolute, and only theirs is the truly reasonable brand. With them, there is no other reason except their own. All opposition to them is just "force." They are the true worshippers of the "goddess" Reason. All others are the heathen exponents of brute force.

Because a demand is conceded without a strike, it is implied by these idol-worshippers that this concession is made independently of organized force and is due to the "goddess" or, rather, to one of her gifted and devoted disciples! It is forgotten that the demand is the demand of an organization, and the concession a concession to an organization, not to a number of disorganized individuals. Where was the magic of the "goddess" when organizations were few and feeble? Is it not significant that the appeals to the "reason" of the working class have multiplied in the degree that the force of working-class organization has multiplied? Yes! there is "reason" in "force." The "reason" of the representative is not the decisive factor in securing a gain without a fight, but the power possessed by the represented. The power of a leader is not his own power, but that of his organization.

Even the advocates of "pure reason" admit sometimes the use of ungodly unreasoning "force." They think they give nothing away in saying this, because they qualify the use of strikes by the words, "as a last resort." Reason, then, appears to have limitations, limitations which indeed "let the cat out of the bag." For to justify a strike as a last resort is to acknowledge that the force of organization is the decisive factor, that the last is the first in importance.

W.W.C.

The Wisdom of Joseph Dietzgen

AN APPRECIATION.

It is commonly to be noticed that historians or exponents of Marxian theory begin by talking about Hegel. The reason for this is not very apparent. Chronologically, there is some connexion, it is true, as between alchemy and chemistry: genetically there is, however, probably no relation at all. Hegel—to use a flippant phrase—represents the dying gasp of those *soi-disant* philosophers whose method of acquiring knowledge is the antithesis of that mode of thought developed by the scientific discoveries of the century that followed. Marx, on the contrary, stands for the invasion of the field of sociology by that kind of analysis which the physical sciences had perfected.

The gap which separates them cannot be better appreciated than by applying, as Dietzgen did, the searchlight of the materialist interpretation of history to the development of philosophic theory in particular. It is much more difficult to trace the factors involved in the building up of a philosophic system than of a fashionable mode of art, because the philosophic is not so directly trammelled by public demand, and also because the philosophic of an epoch often does not crystallise out clearly till it is called into question, *i.e.*, until the forces making for its disintegration are already manifest.

Nevertheless there are certain points which emerge fairly clearly, if it is borne in mind that many of the rival philosophers have not been saying opposite but merely different things, and the multiplicity of schools reflects rather the manifold scope of their inquiries than their disagreements. In fact, there have really been only two types of modern philosophy—the "rationalists" and the empiricists; and the philosophic significance of the first term is replete with social meaning also. Till the 19th century philosophic thought had been predominantly absolutistic, or "rationalist": it started from general principles alleged to reside in the human "reason" to build up a universe into which the facts of experience must fit as best they might; in consequence it discussed hypotheses as to the nature of reality or the apprehension of the "thing-in-itself" under the ambitious title of metaphysics. Two factors probably contributed in the main to the prevailing fashion: partly the animistic habits of thought belonging to religion when it was essential to the coherence of the existing chaos; and—more powerfully—the deification of reason accompanying the revolt of mercantile society against the social power of the Church. For it must be remembered that bourgeois thought never freed itself from an animistic outlook till long after the industrial revolution, the boldest spirits of the 18th century being "Deists."

During the 19th century the discovery of machinery and, with machinery, of new means of technique for scientific investigation, turned the "economic rationalism" born of the antipathy of the mercantile classes to the Church into a new channel. Both together contributed to the growth of the physical sciences, and the method of the scientist—unlike the philosophers hitherto—started not with the human "reason," but with facts, proceeding thence to principles that could be confirmed by the appeal to fact. The work of Marx and Engels was to correct the intellectual aimlessness or, alternatively, theo-

logical superstition hitherto characteristic of the study of history, by an introduction of analytical method, deducing thereby in the materialist conception of history a generalisation which to ourselves is as fundamental for a coherent comprehension of the data as the theory of organic evolution in the world of living organisms. At least it can be said that its critics have neither improved on it nor offered a substitute, and the sociologist who rejects it is forced to regard his own study in a light as unscientific as Botany when Linnaeus was classifying flowers by the number of their stamens. Modern science, born chiefly of the industrial revolution, was insatiably permeating all fields of thought.

Now machinery brought into being a world illimitably more vast and various and bewildering. The bewilderment found expression in the re-birth of romanticism in poetry: the variety and vastness dethroned the goddess Reason and substituted Experience; that is, in philosophy the tendency termed variously phenomenalism or sensualism, but preferably *empiricism* became increasingly the predominant mode of inquiry. Philosophers like Hume began to reflect that "our own mind being narrow and contracted, we cannot extend our conception to the variety and extent of nature, but imagine that she is as much bounded in her operations as we are in our speculations." In other words, the basis of knowledge henceforth becomes pre-eminently the world of experience.

This new attitude necessitated a changed face in many ways. It meant that philosophy must abandon many of its problems to science and admit that others were—to adopt Ostwald's happy phrase—of the nature of a "scheinproblem"—meaning less. This Dietzgen styles the Positive Outcome of Philosophy. Although Comte first excluded Metaphysics from polite conversation, it was Dietzgen who first stated clearly, more than a quarter of a century before the modern physicists Ostwald and Machs—the illusory nature of the thing in itself. We now accept this principle as part of the grammar of science. Scientific investigation has to deal with the relation of things to one another: a philosophy claiming to be based on experience cannot therefore recognise any intrinsic reality in phenomena outside the sum of their reactions known. The quest of the metaphysician is meaningless when the significance of "reality" is analysed.

Thus, in much the same relation as Marx stands to the social study of his time does Dietzgen to contemporary philosophy. The one represents the invasion of sociology by scientific analysis, the other the rehabilitation of philosophy by the scientific method. Students of Dietzgen who claim for his teaching finality vitiate the whole meaning of his work; for the scientific temper is ever inimical to finality, and the empiricist above all recognises the existence of "more in heaven and earth than is dreamed of in his philosophy." In fact, Dietzgen's disclaimer of finality closely brings him into relations with the latest developments in empirical philosophy. The Radical Empiricism (sometimes called pragmatism and humanism) of our time asserts the relativity of all truths to human need, and though James has, with Jesuistical casuistry, devised out of this an ingenious defence of Presbyterianism, in the hands of a philosopher for the proletariat, Georges Sorel, it has become a heavy bludgeon against the exploiter. For Sorel is essentially a pragmatist. And, in orientating his ethics of the proletariat round the material facts of existence, Dietzgen exhibits and anticipates the true pragmatic temper.

LANCELOT HOGBEM.

NEXT MONTH: First of two special articles by WALTON NEWBOLD on "Ireland in Revolution."

Revolution—How ?

[We print the following article, not because we are in agreement with the writer on many of the points he raises, but because he emphasises the need (urged in recent issues of the *Plebs*) for a re-discussion of Socialist aims and methods in the light of recent events in various parts of Europe. We doubt the possibility of "Mensheviks" and "Bolsheviks" achieving unity through any Conference—though our correspondent appears to be sanguine on that point. But it would certainly be a step forward if we were divided only into two, instead of two-and-twenty, camps; and some measure of amalgamation, or federation, would appear to be desirable on the political, or 'propaganda,' field.—ED., *Plebs*.]

The Socialist Movement is at the cross roads. We need a restatement of policy, a new Communist Manifesto. The theories now in actual warfare in Russia and Germany are in virtual warfare in every industrial country in the world. We may be agreed upon the need, even the urgent need, for a social revolution, but we are certainly not agreed upon the method or methods to be employed in achieving that revolution. We may be agreed upon our ultimate object, but we are certainly not agreed upon the "next step." We are divided into "voters" and "strikers"—and "voters-and-strikers." Our movement has become a Babel of contending voices and a maze of conflicting roads and paths, and our diversity of "means" is jeopardising our unity of "end."

The Fabian quietly ignores our war of theories and proceeds with his research studies and his "permeation." The Labour Party preaches a nebulous "evolutionary" Socialism (omitting the name) which would begin with a National Minimum and end with a Labour Government. The I.L.P. proclaims an avowed Socialism which it would achieve through the conquest of political power by the workers, but is charged with being "State" or "Collectivist" because it is practically silent on the question of "control." The B.S.P. proclaims a similar Socialism, with a louder and sterner voice, but is equally vague as to how it would achieve the Revolution, and how it would organize life and industry afterwards. The S.L.P. would combine revolutionary industrial action with revolutionary political action, but leaves many blanks to fill concerning ultimate and intermediate issues. The "pure" Industrial Unionist eschews parliamentary action altogether and would strike and sabotage his way to the Promised Land—which may or may not contain a "State." The Syndicalist is an Industrial Unionist in method only. He aims at the complete ownership of industry by the workers and has no room for any "State" or "Government." The Guild Socialist would allow a transformed "State" of consumers to *own* the means of life and fifteen large Guilds of producers to *control* those means, but he says very little about the road to that heaven. The Anarchist Communist would destroy every form of Government, even the Socialist kind, but he has not told us how he would run the railways or manage the mercantile marine.

And as with parties, so with persons. Are we out for a speedy cataclysmic revolution, or a slow and "evolutionary" process? Do we or do we not believe in the use of "force"? Do we believe that economic power *precedes*, or *accompanies*, political power? Shall we use political action or industrial action—or both? Do we want a Soviet or a National Assembly?

Mr. Ramsay MacDonald has long since left the old "pure" Collectivist position by admitting the necessity for "control." In his Editorial in a recent issue of *The Socialist Review* he goes still further, and states that=

The general strike, if properly used, is no mean weapon against a parliament elected by fraud. . . . There must be means found for challenging the abuse of its power by such a parliament. . . . The utter rubbish that is talked and thought in this country about the Soviets prevents what would otherwise be a profitable and interesting discussion upon them, involving such questions as whether the territorial constitu-

ency is now antiquated, whether there should be a service test imposed on electors, whether representation should provide for trade and industry, and such topics—every one of which is becoming important to people who are watching changes and reflecting upon them and their consequences. The kind of Parliament we have to-day and the conditions under which it was elected, have added considerably to the strength of the anti-Parliamentary movement. . . . The Socialist mind must always be open to new truths and be influenced by new experiences. . . .

Mr. Philip Snowden is definitely on the side of Parliamentary and constitutional action. In a recent issue of the *Labour Leader* he says that—

Unless the Labour Party makes the best use of its opportunities, the movement among the rank and file for unofficial, direct action will grow; but an effective Opposition in the House of Commons will give hope and encouragement to Labour in the country, and will convince the revolutionary element that Parliament can be used as a potent instrument for constitutional revolution.

Mr. J. T. Walton Newbold began his Socialist life as a strict I.L.P.-er, but for the past four or five years he has preached and advocated a species of Industrial Unionism. From his writings in the *Socialist*, the *Call*, and the *Plebs*, one inferred that he had turned his back on Parliament as "an effete institution" and "the executive committee of the capitalist class," but his latest attitude in standing as a parliamentary candidate and in polling so respectably at Motherwell seems to indicate that he has returned to the political fold. The same criticism applies to Messrs. John Maclean, W. Paul and A. McManus, of the S.L.P., all Parliamentary candidates; and to Mr. Noah Ablett, who has publicly debated against the use of the parliamentary weapon, but who recently committed the pardonable sin of assisting Mr. Winstone in his Merthyr contest!

As with leaders, so with the rank and file. The trouble is everywhere. Practically every I.L.P. branch in the country has its Bolshevik or Spartacus group and its Menshevik or Political Socialists, whose presence means disagreement and dissension and, sometimes, disruption. We know of several branches that have broken up and completely disappeared on account of the friction engendered by conflicting views on Socialist philosophy. It is imperative that a common policy and programme be at once formulated and agreed upon. As a first step towards unity we would suggest the calling of a Conference or Convention of delegates from the various Socialist bodies. The Conference should discuss and thrash out our main articles of difference and endeavour to come to a practical agreement. We would *sub poena* Fabians and Shop Stewards, Guildsmen and S.L.P.-ers, B.S.P.-ers, I.L.P.-ers, Herald Leaguers—all the "jarring sects," in short, of the Movement.

The present writer is not yet convinced that the workers of this country have tried to use Parliament in their own interest, and is certainly not disposed to excuse people who vote Coalowners, Shipowners and Jingoists to Parliament one day and "down tools" against them the next. We believe that the only revolutionary *industrial* action possible is that which aims at securing *ownership*, and that in a country whose electorate is overwhelmingly proletarian the obvious way to secure ownership is through parliamentary action. Industrial action feeds the spirit of unrest and revolt, and is great propaganda, but in British circumstances it is nothing more. It may even win nominal "concessions" and bring Governments to their knees and coal owners to Royal Commissions—but it "settles" nothing. Even a general strike would not solve the problem. The economic power of the Capitalists lies in their legal ownership of the means of life, and their legal ownership consists of parliamentary sanction, which, in turn, means the support, when necessary, of the "forces"—military, naval and police. To wrest the means of life from their present owners the workers of this country must either build up their own organization of Soviets and wean the military and the police from their loyalty to the present State, or capture and control the present imperfect parliamentary machine. Which is it to be?

DAN GRIFFITHS.

A Note on the Enclosures

Recently there fell into my hands a two-volume work, *History of the English Landed Interest*, by Russell M. Garnier. I know nothing of the author, but his book is crammed with interesting facts and figures. Mr. Garnier hardly writes from the *Plebs'* point of view, but at least he has glimmerings of light, and recent events in the agricultural districts show that at last the labourer is waking up, and that it is quite safe to predict some interesting events in the near future.

It is natural that there should exist a keener class-consciousness in the industrial districts, but it must be granted that the land worker has been wronged just as grievously as the factory worker; and no one will deny that Socialist writers and historians have very largely overlooked his grievances and failed to make it plain that here, in the country—that place, as you picture it, of green lanes and pleasant fields—one of the greatest wrongs in the history of humanity has been perpetrated.

Early agricultural conditions are excellently dealt with by Mark Starr, and by Gibbins in his *Industrial History of England*. To appreciate fully the iniquity of some of the things that happened later it is necessary to realise the comparatively high standard of life reached by the land worker at an early date. It is also well to remember that landless men formed only a small percentage of the community in those days.

Bearing in mind these two things it is interesting to read some of the excuses and alleged advantages that were to come from the enclosure of land. One writer in 1534 declared that enclosures would enable a farmer to treat his land more generously and use it all the year instead of only during those short periods when it was not common pasturage. Cattle, too, would flourish better under the shelter of the new hedges! Even the wood in the hedgerows would be a source of profit, and there would be the saving of the wages of the herdsmen who would no longer be necessary under the new system. After saying all this, the old writer began to get nervous—Kett's rebellion had happened not so very long before—so he throws labour a crumb by descanting upon the work which would be provided in the making and the tending of the hedges!

After noticing such plausible reasons from an enclosure advocate in the early days of enclosures, it is interesting to read Garnier's testimony to their unpopularity later on. Writing of the position in the 18th century he makes the interesting admission:—

Had, however, the political franchise about a century back been extended to the lower classes of agriculturists as widely as it has been since, the new economy would never have been allowed to exist; and a parliamentary candidate of the Georgian period who staked his seat on the advocacy of the enclosure system would have had no chance whatever of being elected. But the Acts of 9 Anne c. 5 and 33 Geo. II. c. 26 had for a time artificially prolonged the political supremacy of the country gentleman. From 1760 seats in Parliament were sold almost like any other transferable property and since by the first of the two acts just mentioned every member of the Commons, those of the Universities alone excepted, was required to possess, as a qualification for his seat, a landed estate, above all encumbrances, of £300 per annum, it is evident that what the country squires wished soon became the law of the land.

In the 19th century the climax was reached. As Garnier records, the General Enclosure Act of 1845 wrested from the labouring poor some 320,855 acres of unstinted common rights, for which they were to have received compensation under the allotment system. Twenty years later, however, out of the immense amount enclosed only 2,119 acres had been allotted to the cottager.

To-day local public authorities are slowly buying back at enormous prices the lands which often quite recently were deliberately stolen from the people.

Popular indignation has found expression in the following snatch of verse:

A sin it is in man or woman
To steal a goose from off a common;
But he doth sin without excuse
Who steals the common from the goose.

This article has necessarily only been a note, and a very hasty and incomplete note, upon the iniquitous enclosures. It is a subject, however, that will well repay research. Vast fields of action lie before the Plebs League in the agricultural districts of England. The labourer, years behind other sections of the proletariat, is at length organising and arming to the dismay of the farmer, who sees heaven and earth passing away in front of his eyes. In his battle the labourer will be handicapped if he is not furnished with the means of clear thinking. These the Plebs League can supply, and it behoves members in industrial centres to think very seriously of how the work can be extended to link in the rural worker who is one of the most important cogs in the communal machine.

Writing in the heart of a purely agricultural district, I can affirm that here is a splendid field for fresh effort. The existing Trade Unions are busy enough, but they need a little of the tonic of Plebs ideas to enable them to tackle the situation as it should be tackled. To use another metaphor, the inflammable material is all ready, and only needs the application of the torch, which from its recurrence on the front page of the *Plebs* I take to be the symbol of the League. Who will apply it?

T.D.C.

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News of the Movement

MANCHESTER.—A Labour College (non-residential) at which classes in Marxian Economics, Industrial History, Social Science, etc., are to be held, will be opened at 33a Dale Street, near Piccadilly, Manchester, on Saturday, May 3rd. Comrades Paul and McLaine will speak on the aims of the College. Further particulars from J. McGee (Sec., Manchester Plebs League), Woodlands Lodge, Crescent Road, Crumpsall.

LANCASHIRE.—A Meet of all Plebs and C.L.C. Class students, sympathisers and friends, in the Lancashire area, will be held on Whit-Monday, June 9th, at Southport. All particulars from J. Hamilton, W.B.I.U. Club, 52 Byrom Street, Liverpool, who writes:—"We hope to have a good day; informal chats as to propaganda, a *Lancs.* tea, and the fellowship!" Walton Newbold has been in the cotton fields during the past week or two—Liverpool, Birkenhead, Wigan, Leigh, Bury, Fleetwood, and St. Helen's.

When paper prices go down and we are able to enlarge the *Plebs*, LIVERPOOL will surely want a whole page or more to itself in which to report its many activities; as it is, space does not allow us to print in full their very interesting balance sheet, as we promised last month. The income of £72 16s. 7½d., derived from students' fees, conference fees, affiliations from local societies, donations and sales of *Plebs*, etc., is more than half of it devoted to speakers and lecturers' fees and printing; after the rent of the meeting places has been deducted, a generous collection devoted to the *Plebs*, and office material paid for, there is a balance in hand of £2 7s. 5d. A note from the Secretary states that Literature Sales not included in this audit have exceeded £20. Force of circumstance has made me feel a brotherly interest in all balance sheet makers! And congratulations are due to the Liverpool comrades for the way in which they have managed the financial side of their activities. Some discussion has arisen over the resolution to link up the Lancashire classes into a Plebs League District Council. Once again the subject of the Constitution and reorganization of the League is to the front, and all suggestions and criticism will be welcome. The response to the letter on this subject in last month's magazine has been disappointing, and we would remind all members that their active co-operation is essential. It is no use having opinions on this subject if you don't communicate them to us. Please sit down and write what you think NOW.

A meeting to form a branch of the Plebs League in BRADFORD will be held on Sunday, May 11th, at 2.30 p.m. in the Textile Workers' rooms, 3 Westgate (over Scarr's shop). All members and friends interested are invited to attend.

LEEDS has run a very successful class during the winter, with that indefatigable worker in the cause of working-class education, F. Jackson, as lecturer. W. Paul's *The State* was the text-book, and at the end of the session Comrade Jackson gave six lectures on Philosophy, which were much appreciated. The average attendance was 25, and when the lecturer was absent Lew Davies or the Sec., J. T. Ashurst, took his place. In connection with this class the Toolmakers ran a study circle, and a small but enthusiastic group are awaking interest amongst the Rothwell miners. After a fortnight's vacation eight lectures on Economics by J. T. Ashurst are to be given, and it is hoped that in the near future a conference of trade union and labour organizations will be called in order to form a permanent committee. All members in Leeds and district are asked to rally to the class. The balance-sheet is highly creditable to all concerned. Leeds could be the nucleus of a splendid Yorkshire District. Play up, Bradford and Sheffield!

The North of England Branch of the Labour College is calling a Conference at NEWCASTLE for Saturday, May 17th, in the Central Hall, Westgate Road, at 2.30 p.m. Speakers, Will W. Craik and James Winstone; chair to be taken by Ebby Edwards. Particulars from Will Lawther, at 76 James Street,

The custom of endowing scholarships, professional chairs, etc., as memorials to distinguished sons is a historic one at our ancient seats of learning. CHOPWELL (Durham) miners see no reason why this particular custom should not be followed in the Labour movement, and recently adopted the following resolution:—"That it be an instruction to our agents and Executive Committee to take the necessary steps to found, as a memorial to the late Mr. John Wilson, Ald. W. House, and Mr. J. Johnstone, three scholarships at the Labour College, London, to be known as the John Wilson, William House, and John Johnstone Scholarships; these to be open for members of the Association, in order that they may be fitted with an education to further develop the work of our Association that Messrs. Wilson, House and Johnstone helped so nobly to build."

We are deeply sorry to have to report the death of one of our Rochdale stalwarts, Comrade Horsfield, who for years interested himself in the *Plebs* and the working-class educational movement. Our sympathy goes out to his widow and children. All Plebeians who would like to make a material expression of sympathy are asked to forward donations towards a fund opened on their behalf, to Secretary, A. Fletcher, 31 Rowland Street, Rochdale.
W.H.

Correspondence

THE RE-ORGANIZATION OF THE LEAGUE.

DEAR COMRADE,—In the April issue our secretary presented an able statement of the difficulties with which the provisional E.C. of the Plebs League is confronted in its attempts at "re-construction"; difficulties due, it appears to me, in part to the over-lapping of organizations, and in part to varying interpretations of the clause in our constitution headed "Methods."

The real reason for the confusion which exists is our failure to distinguish between two separate things—a Plebs League *branch* and a C.L.C. (or Plebs) *class*. For these are, and in my opinion should remain, quite distinct and separate bodies.

The method adopted in the formation of most provincial classes was, at the outset, for a few comrades to get together and form a class among themselves for the study of social science from the working-class point of view. Nourished by this refreshing diet, their next step was to approach the local Trades Council and T.U. branches, with a view to convincing them of the need for such classes, and inviting their affiliation and support. The class once "adopted" by the local working-class movement, it became the duty of the original founders to watch over its interests, to defend it against any attempt at "modifying" the teaching, etc., and, further, to look around for opportunities of developing the work—by the formation of new classes, or any other extensions of activity.

Now this, I take it, is the business of the Plebs League—to propagate the gospel of Independent Working-class Education, to get classes formed, and then to see to it that those classes—and the College itself—stick to the straight and narrow path! The League is not, primarily, an organization for maintaining and controlling the classes. That is the business of the working-class movement. Our job is to agitate, in T.U. branches and wherever else practicable, on behalf of real working-class education. We readily admit that we are not the only organization—nor were we the first—advocating and

teaching social science from the Marxian standpoint. But we can claim to have specialised successfully in getting this educational work undertaken by the Labour movement.

This being our work, we want Plebs League *branches* forming wherever a class exists, or wherever there is a possibility of one being formed. The branch may consist of only a couple of members; it may meet seldom or often. The point is that, jointly and severally, its members do their utmost to further the cause. They will, if a class is in being, in all probability be class-students. But all the class-students will not necessarily be Plebs Leaguers—though it is our aim to make them keen enough to become so.

It is these *branches*, finally, who must be represented on, or must elect, the E.C. If we decide to proceed with the scheme for election on a divisional or district basis, it is obviously these subscribing members of the League, and not the students of the classes, as such, who must be represented. Plebs League members (see our constitution) pay the exorbitant sum of one shilling per annum to the central body. So now, you Plebs, send that bob along and start a branch.

FRANK JACKSON.

[Also—"you Plebs"—send a p.c. to the Secretary, indicating agreement or otherwise, with the arguments put forward in last month's article and in the above letter. We want to know what you think about it.—Ed., *Plebs*.]

PROPAGANDA—A SUGGESTION.

DEAR COMRADE,—The unrest at present prevailing amongst the workers is the measure of the need for Independent Working-class Education. The hope of the workers lies not in any Messiah, nor in any leaders, but in themselves, and their own understanding of their position in society. We *must* get new students—and new classes.

I merely want to make a suggestion as to the best way to recruit for students. Simply to make an appeal at a branch meeting is not the most effective way. What is needed is something in the nature of the leaflets issued two or three years ago by the London District Council of the N.U.R., which gave briefly, but in telling fashion, some of the reasons why Trade Unionists should become students. Cannot the *Plebs* issue some such leaflets—or reprint those mentioned? Or would other District Councils of the N.U.R. undertake such work—seeing that their Union is now responsible for the Labour College, and that it is up to them to arouse the interest of their members in working-class education?

Yours fraternally,

ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE.

W. PICKLES.

[We agree with our correspondent that the leaflets in question are well worth reprinting. But—like everything else we want to do—it's a question of cash!—Ed., *Plebs*.]

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The Plebs Bookshelf

We hope to be able to make an announcement shortly regarding an increase in the size of the Magazine. And we should be very glad to hear from our agents and organizers everywhere, and from literature secretaries generally, their opinion as to the relative desirability of, say, a return to our previous size—24 pages, with no change in price; or a further enlargement of the Magazine to 36 or 48 pages, and an increase in price. Now that many of our old contributors are once more available, we feel that, with an enlarged magazine, we could publish monthly a great deal of matter of value to students. That is to say, we might print, month by month, outlines of lectures and study courses for the use of the classes; as well as articles of more general interest, reviews, etc. But any decision on such a point must be based on the judgment of our friends in all parts of the country who have made themselves responsible for pushing and selling the Magazine. What do they feel about it? Will they send us a line to let us know their opinion? The sooner the better, because we are anxious to get our plans into shape, and to go ahead before 1919 gets any older.

Hearty congratulations to the S.L. Press and the B.S.P. on their fine lists of recent publications (see advts. in this issue). I have not yet seen either the Lenin or the Trotsky volumes, but am looking forward to a chance of reading both soon. I also want to see W. Paul's *Hands off Russia* pamphlet; the inclusion therein of an "economic" map should make it particularly interesting. A good map makes many things clear. . . . In which connection, I think the *Plebs* is entitled to congratulate itself on the publication, two years ago, of Walton Newbold's article on the Lorraine iron mines and the Saar coalfield, together with a map which showed just what the vultures in Paris have of late been squabbling over. We might have done worse than reprint both article and map just now, but—well, it is the old, old story of limited space.

We are indebted to the Labour News Service for the following paragraph, on which we need only comment that other people appear at last to be realising what the founders of the Labour College discovered and proclaimed some years ago:—

The latest instance of the conditions of university education under capitalism comes from Montana. The dominant enterprise in Montana is the Anaconda Copper Mining Co. It appears to be one of the little peculiarities of Montana politics that for the purposes of taxation the Anaconda Copper Mining Co. gets off with an assessed valuation of about one quarter of its true valuation. This fact, says the *New Republic*, which tells the story, was common knowledge to any well-informed citizen of the State.

Now it happened that a professor of Montana State University, Dr. Louis Levine, a "scholar of unimpeachable reputation," was producing a monograph under the auspices of the university on the Taxation of Mines in Montana, in the course of which those facts came to light. The President of the university, in alarm, and the State Board of Education, decided that the study had better not be published. Dr. Levine, however, being obsessed with absurd notions of the dignity of learning, published all the same. He has, in consequence, been suspended from his professorship of economics.

It is hoped that this lesson will effectually enforce upon all professors of economics that the first principle of their science must be the sacredness of the Anaconda Mining Co. and its fellows.

Similar events—and further developments—have been taking place elsewhere in those United States. A recent article in the *Cambridge Magazine*

referred to "the recent controversy on the subject of Academic Freedom at Columbia University, in which some of the most distinguished thinkers of the University resigned their posts by way of protest against the dismissal of their offending colleagues." The latest development, says the *C.M.*, is a secessionist School for Independent Social Research, with Professor Beard as a moving spirit, to be opened in October of this year. The promoters state that the aim of the School is "to meet the needs of intelligent men and women interested in the grave social, political, economic and educational problems of the day . . . with a view of preparing those who desire to enter the fields of journalism, municipal administration, labour organization, and the teaching of social sciences." A preliminary programme of lectures include "The Industrial Transition from the 18th century to the 20th," by Dr. Veblen, in which an endeavour is to be made "to show the relation of these industrial changes to current questions of peace and of the self-determination of nations." Professor Beard will deal with "Problems of American Government"; Mr. Harold Laski with "New Theories of Representative Government"; and Dr. Robinson with "The Relation of Education to Social Progress." This latter course will review "the great additions to our knowledge of man made during the past quarter of a century, a matter which receives but slight attention in our colleges and universities, and account will be taken of the extraordinary revolution which has during the same period taken place in our social environment, since this, even if there had been no great increase in our knowledge of man, would have rendered a fundamental revision of our educational system essential." I am not sure what exactly is implied by the "great increase in our knowledge of man" so emphasised; whether it refers to knowledge of his ancestry, his psychology, or his contemporary social arrangements. The School, in fact, would appear to be a somewhat mild-mannered, cultured Fabian sort of institution, with the training of efficient civil servants, administrators, and welfare workers as its most probable result. But the secession is a significant enough fact in itself; and perhaps a little later some of the moving spirits will secede a little further and discover that the half-way house of Social Reform is no satisfactory abiding place, and that our "educational system" is not the only one which demands "fundamental revision."

Clutton Brock, writing in the *Manchester Guardian* of April 12th, made some remarks which suggested that he, too, has been making discoveries. The well-to-do, he declared—

get their political economy, if they have any, from books written by their own class. The more a working man thinks, the more he lives in his own world, with his own prophets and heroes, his own aims and values. . . . If the upper classes are well disposed towards Labour, they think it ought to be instructed so that it may know what they know. But meanwhile Labour, at least the more intelligent part of it, has been instructing itself in another school altogether. . . . Labour has no desire to be instructed by the "educated" classes, because it thinks they are not educated. They talk about the perpetual struggle between the haves and the have-nots, or say that capital and labour are necessary to each other. The working man is past that proposition; he is asking whether the capitalist is necessary to him. . . . As for the political economy which you learned, or didn't learn, in your youth, it is nothing to him. He has a political economy of his own, which he probably knows better than you know yours.

At a time when Messrs. Ashley, Cannan, Harold Cox, and the other "eminent" economists are busy defending Private Property before the Coal Commission, it is appropriate to recall the happy phrase of the *New Statesman* reviewer who, a year or two ago, described the orthodox preachers of capitalist economics as "chaplains to the pirate ship."

Lancelot Hogben's review of Bertrand Russell's *Roads to Freedom* in the *Workers' Dreadnought* (April 12th) was a refreshingly vigorous piece of criticism. As some Plebeians may have missed it, I must find room for one quotation here. Mr. Russell's first chapter is entitled, "Marx and Socialist Doctrine," and his critical method would hardly appear to be as a shining light to Marxists who are so lacking in this respect (*cf. Herald* review of Ablett's book). Mr. Russell, says Hogben :—

is sufficiently acquainted with scientific method to know that it is mere journalism to dispose of a whole body of doctrine by pointing out detailed mistakes on the part of those who formulate it. . . . Until Marx's time history was studied with open casuistry, intellectual aimlessness, and total failure to correlate the phenomena with which it dealt. It may be that Marx made mistakes; a genuine Marxian has certainly too little faith in hero-worship to deny it. But the value of the materialist conception of history no more stands or falls with two paragraphs of Marx's errors than does the Periodic Law in chemistry, because two of the elements do not fit into Mendeljeff's Tables. At least it might be hoped that one who is in a position to appreciate the complete failure of the orthodox historians to reduce their study to an exact science, would in justice to the memory of a bold and original thinker, recognise that, while the academic sociologists of our time are wallowing in animistic habits of thought and blinded by social bias, Marx more than half a century ago conceived the study of human institutions as a science rather than a cult.

A hearty welcome to John Bryan on his reappearance in the columns of the *Call*; and the same to the very latest of Labour journals, *The Forces*, issued monthly by the Sailors' and Soldiers' and Airmen's Union (henceforward to be known more briefly as the S.S.A.U.). Service and ex-Service men are invited to join right away. (Write Gen. Sec., 2 Gough Square, London, E.C. 4). Clause 4 in the "Immediate Objects" should recommend the Union to the organized Labour movement :—"To prevent service men being used as strike breakers."

J.F.H.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED.

- Syndicalism and Philosophical Realism.* A Study in the Correlation of Tendencies. By J. W. Scott, Lecturer in Moral Philosophy in the University of Glasgow. (A. & C. Black. 10/- net.)
- Guilds in the Middle Ages.* By GEORGES RENARD. With an Introduction by G. D. H. COLE. (G. Bell & Sons. 2/6 net.)
- Housing and the Workers' Revolution.* By SYLVIA PANKHURST. (6d). *Rebel Ireland.* By SYLVIA PANKHURST, PATRICIA LYNCH and MAY O'CALLAGHAN. (3d.) *Hands off Russia.* Speech by ISRAEL ZANGWILL. (2d.) All published by the Workers' Socialist Federation, 400 Old Ford Road London, E. 3.
- Russia and the Allies.* An Account of British Policy towards Russia. By JOSEPH KING. (Reformers' Bookstall, 224 Buchanan Street, Glasgow. 3d.)

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