PLEBS

The Organ of the Labour Colleges

OCTOBER 1927
FOURPENCE

Among the subjects discussed in this issue are:—

THE REVOLUTION IN CHINA

WORKERS' EDUCATION IN AMERICA

UPTON SINCLAIR'S NEW NOVEL

THE PASSING OF DEMOCRACY

&c., &c.

J.F.H.

HE CALLS HIMSELF A PLEB !!

OH, yes—he's been associated with the I.W.C.E. movement for years — is quite keen about it, in fact.

But he's never bought, let alone read, half the books the PLEBS has published.

He's convinced—theoretically—of the value of workers' education. But somehow or other it never struck him that the least he could do to help forward the movement was to buy, as they were issued, each one of its publications. Or perhaps he always *meant* to get them all, but kept on putting off sending in his order.

Of course, it isn't too late for him to remedy this now. He can glance over his bookshelf, make a note of any gaps in the row of PLEBS publications, and send a postal order (or call round at his local literature stall) without further delay. He'll then have the pleasure of feeling that he's done his bit towards helping on one of the most important branches of I.W.C.E. activity — as well as getting good value for his money.

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162a Buckingham Palace Rd., London
S.W.1

THE PLEBS

The Organ of the National Council of Labour Colleges

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The Pleb Point of View

THE Trades Union Congress of 1927 will not, we think, be regarded by future historians as providing a particularly thrilling page of working-class history. We have no intention here of discussing the pros and cons of various decisions taken by Congress. But the single fact that so many of them called forth such hearty commendation from the capitalist press is surely sufficient to make every class-conscious worker pause and wonder whether all is well with the British Trade Union movement. One may make all due allowances for the deliberate distortion which that press always practises where working-class news is concerned. The fact remains that the voice of capitalism expressed itself as well-pleased with what took place at Edinburgh; and it is not the business of the workers' movement to cause pleasure in such quarters.

But recognition of this fact—and its implications—need not blind us to another; which is, that the impressive majorities given in favour of some of the policies which pleased capitalism most were not quite an accurate reflection of the spirit of the Congress—let alone of the wider Trade Union movement. As everybody knows, the votes of a union at Congress are cast solidly one way or the other, even though there may have been very considerable difference of opinion within its delegation on the question at issue, and a very narrow majority within that delegation in favour of a particular decision. And we have good grounds for saying that there was never a Congress at which there was keener discussion and closer voting within the various delegations than at this last one. We know of one union, for instance, with nine delegates at Congress, in which the voting was never more than five to four in favour of certain of the General Council's proposals; and even that majority of one was never secured without long and occasionally bitter discussion.

* * *

We are not stressing this point in order to indulge ourselves in cheap optimism or to justify shutting our eyes to tragically important facts. But we do feel it is important to remember it lest, in a movement like our own, we are tempted to lose heart by the magnitude of the task ahead of us.

On with the Fight!!

Militant working-class consciousness is not nearly so dead as one might think after studying a bare report of the Edinburgh

Congress's decisions. In every union throughout the movement there is an increasing number of men who are using their heads, and thinking out working-class problems for themselves. When we assert that Independent Working-Class Education is already bearing fruit we are not identifying our movement with any particular group or policy. What we are most concerned about is that workers should be vitally interested in, and be keenly discussing, the problems of their class. And it is a cheering sign that though many of the debates at Edinburgh were only moderately inspiring affairs, this was due at least in part to the fact that the keen discussions had already taken place behind the scenes, within the separate delegations.

* * *

New Readers?

With October here, we I.W.C.Ers are settling down once more to the serious business of the year. Classes are re-starting, and the voice of the tutor is once more heard in the land. We want—once more— to urge every tutor, class-secretary and student to do his best to push the magazine and our other publications throughout this winter. We have not for a very long time been in so serious a position financially as we are at present. That position could be materially altered within a month if our friends everywhere put their backs into the job.

The magazine this month contains sufficiently varied fare to appeal to all sorts of readers. David's Naylor's study of the main social forces and tendencies at work in China to-day is of real value to every student of world problems. D. J. Williams' article on "The Passing of Democracy" is an acute analysis of the present political situation in Britain, and a forceful statement of what in the writer's view are the essential facts of that situation as they concern the workers. In his study of the workers' educational movement in the U.S., Mark Starr gives us an interesting survey of the various organisations at work, and a balanced estimate of their significance from the I.W.C.E. point of view. Ellen Wilkinson sings the praises of Upton Sinclair's new novel—and this particular song is echoed in the "Bookshelf." R. W. Postgate replies to Prof. Collinson on the virtues or defects of Esperanto, and Mark Starr replies to R.W.P.

We make bold to assert, in short, that there is no "dead meat" within these pages. So help us—now, when we badly need your help—by capturing a few more live readers for us. Moreover, as our next number is going to be an extra special number to celebrate an important landmark in contemporary history, start "boosting" it now!

HAVE YOU GOT US A NEW READER FOR THE PLEBS?

WORKERS' EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

This is the first of a series of articles on Workers' Education in various countries which we hope to publish this winter. They will be by various hands, and will aim not only at giving the main facts about actual organisations and activities, but at estimating their general character and importance from the point of view of the class struggle.

FROM the 17th to the 20th century the unwanted, the persecuted, the religious and the political rebels of Europe found a home in the United States. In that vast, richly-endowed country, unhindered by feudal castes or guild restrictions, capitalism enjoyed an expansion from the Atlantic to the Pacific shore. Every man could go west and find land for the asking. In industry, new machinery and new methods were easily introduced. The mixing of many races hampered joint organisation amongst the workers. (Even now as many as six languages are used in some miners' meetings, and the total number of languages used by the Trade Unions is twenty-five.) Class divisions were thus somewhat obscured. At the present time the U.S. capitalists enjoy the privileges which the British enjoyed in the 1850's. The first fruits of Imperialism are in their hands and the full bill of costs is not yet rendered. In some industries the much-advertised high nominal wages of Fordism are paid, and the "model" craft unions have considerable power in others.

Out of a total of about twenty-five million wage-workers the American Federation of Labour has only 2,813,910 members compared with over four millions in 1920. The separate railwaymen's and other unions add only another half-million to the present total. The employers boast that their 814 "company unions" had in 1924 as many as 1,777,037 members. Even the leaders of the A.F. of L. believe that the workers' way out is for them to become capitalist themselves by Labour Banks or by the purchase of shares in the firm for which they work. Capital is not to be destroyed but "democratised." Some of those same leaders oppose any agitation for an independent workers' political party and believe that the dwellers beneath the Stars and Stripes are too individualistic to accept Socialism. Why talk of *workers'* education when it is claimed that 65 per cent. of the U.S. youth participate in some form of extended education in colleges and technical schools, and when, for example, 80 per cent. of the locomotive men send their sons and daughters to college. Further, in addition to "company unions," there are "company universities"; such concerns as Goodyear

Rubber and the U.S. Steel Corporation have their own classes and colleges.

Such is the background of workers' education. This at present consists of over 150 experiments very mixed in their character and without any defined and accepted aim. Its short history begins with the women workers and the Jewish clothing workers in the east of New York. Inspired by the efforts of Mary Macarthur in Britain, there was founded the Women's T.U. League (1903). The lack of suitable organisers necessitated in 1907 preparatory courses and teaching manuals, and from these grew a special school founded in Chicago seven years later. This remains, however, very small, with only accommodation for five women students. Courses of twelve months' duration deal with Industrial History, History of Women in Industry, Women's Trade Unionism, Law and Judicial Decisions Affecting Trade Unions, and similar topics. It is dependent financially upon rich individuals who are asked to support training for "sane" trade union leadership, and some unions have granted scholarships.

New York saw several interesting attempts before the International Ladies' Garment Workers officially set up in 1914 the classes which still remain the most important among trade union educational activity in the U.S. The Rand School of Social Science (1906) had been previously set up by the Socialist Party. The students pay low fees or are sent by their unions. The forty teachers are progressive teachers from the orthodox schools and colleges. According to the figures, attendance has grown from 250 students in 1906 to 1,500 in 1916, and to 2,000 in 1918. The programme of classes is being extended and correspondence courses included.

These experiments in Chicago and New York were until 1918 all that workers' education in the vast U.S. had to show. By 1921 the existence of more than sixty colleges and workers' class centres with 20,000 students participating was claimed; in 1924 the registered students at 200 classes had increased to 25,000. These figures were made available by the Workers' Education Bureau, (W.E.B.), which since 1921 has acted as a centre for information and advice. It received last year (1926) the affiliation of 530 educational bodies and reported 300 educational centres with over 35,000 students.

In comparison with the British movement there is a great lack of centralisation owing to the remarkable diversity in the widely-separated sections of organised Labour in the U.S. Usually the District Federation of the Unions looks after the classes by means of a whole-time director. There are now twelve such paid educational directors. In the States and districts of Pennsylvania, California, Colorado, Ohio, Massachusets, Wyoming, Arkansas, Illinois and Oklahama, classes are run—some of them in co-operation

with the bourgeois universities. For example, Cincinnati Labour Council reports six courses for 1924 under the care of the local university professors.

Residential Colleges.

There are at present three residential colleges—Brookwood (Katonah, N.Y.), Commonwealth (Mena, Arkansas), Workers' College (I.W.W. at Duluth). Brookwood, the most important, began October, 1921. It has now in residence forty-four students of eleven nationalities and out of eighteen industries. Its principal is A. J. Muste, who, like the late Dennis Hird, is an ex-clergyman. The confessed aim of the college is to prepare organisers, statisticians, journalists and teachers for the Labour movement in view of the necessity of a new social order. Some of the unions provide scholarships and donations, and recently a campaign to collect $2,000,000 has been started. It is hoped thus to extend the accommodation sufficiently for 100 students. The men and women study together, and the cost of a year's tuition is $200, and all are expected to do work in the garden and in house-cleaning. The school year is from October to June, and the complete course covers two years. For the first year the subjects are English, History of Civilisation, Social Psychology, Industrial and Financial Procedure, Social Problems and History of the Working-class. In the second year application of the knowledge gained to current problems of the trade unions and a study of the evolution and organisation of the workers of other countries are made. Journalism and publicity methods are also taught and a voluntary dramatic group presents workers' plays.

Commonwealth College stands upon its own tract of 400 acres owned by the six pioneer members of the College Association. According to its own official statement it is

> "the only institution for higher education where both teachers and students earn their maintenance by part-time labour while engaged in academic work."

It remains to be seen whether is is practical. The fortnightly journal has very lively descriptions of the building and crop-raising work, but there is a significant remark about the necessity of rich friends to support the college until its farm and factories make the colony-college self-sufficing.

Every student must be at least eighteen years of age, and the fee for the school year (thirty weeks, October—April) is $100. There is, according to the *College Fortnightly,* only one Marxist, and that a wobbly one, on the staff, and the Principal "flays and flouts" both the Marxian theory of value and the class struggle. Classes with usually not more than twelve members are held on six mornings of the week. Co-education is adopted as at Brookwood. When necessary the student must take preparatory courses in general knowledge

during two years which are followed by an ambitious programme of three years as follows :—

Freshman Year: Principles of Economics, General Psychology, Modern Poetry, American History and Government, Extemporaneous Speaking, Advanced Composition, Accountancy, Elementary Law, Principles of Economics, General Psychology, Modern Drama, American History and Government, Extemporaneous Speaking and Parliamentary Drill, Advanced Composition, Accountancy, Business Law.

Junior Year: Money and Banking, Principles of Statistics, Labour History, Educational Psychology, Development of English Literature, Oral Interpretation, Labour Journalism, Advanced Law, Economics of Current Events, Statistics in Labour Disputes, Labour Problems, Social Psychology, Development of English Literature, Play Production, Labour Journalism, Advanced Law.

Senior Year: Advanced Economic Theory, Social Origins, Social Reconstruction, Political Science, History of the Modern World, World Classics, Philosophical Theory, Persuasion and Argumentation, Co-operative Methods, Advanced Law, History of Economic Thought, Social Problems, Social Reconstruction, Modern Governments, History of the Modern World, Contemporary Letters, History of Philosophy, Types of Public Address, Co-operative Method, Advanced Law.

German and Spanish classes were announced for the year 1926-27, with classes in *French and Esperanto* to be given if there were sufficient demand. Even if one remembers that seasonal work makes it possible for a student to earn wages between periods of study, it is obvious that active workers in the Labour movement could not be absent for such a period, and for these a short Labour course of one to three years is available. To quote the official programme : "The subjects grouped below are taken from the regular curriculum and are so arranged that a student may choose from them according to his preparation, experience, and plans. There are no formal educational requirements for admission to the Short Labour Course ; each application will be considered on its own merits.

Oral and Written Expression: English Composition, Business English, Labour Journalism, Extemporaneous Speaking and Parliamentary Drill, Persuasion, Argumentation, and Types of Public Address.

Social Studies and Psychology: Economic Geography and History, General History, Principles of Economics, Labour History and Problems, General Psychology.

Technical Courses: Stenography and Typewriting, Labour Accounting, Principles of Statistics and Statistics in Labour Disputes, Elementary and Labour Law, Co-operative Methods.

The teachers, under Director W. E. Zeuch, for the most part have had experience in orthodox university work from which they have resigned or been dismissed.

Information about the I.W.W. College at Duluth is difficult to obtain. Its purpose is to prepare its leaders and educate its members for the control of industry. There is accommodation for sixty students, and the Social Sciences are studied from the Marxist standpoint. The present divisions and weakness of the I.W.W. must have affected it adversely.

Education Centres.

Apparently the Right Wing tendency of the above-mentioned

Rand School led to the foundation in 1924 of the Workers' School, also in New York, which is run in conjunction with the Workers' (Communist) Party. Its confessed aim is to prepare the workers to participate more effectively in the class struggle. The classes begin at 8 p.m. and the session is two periods of three months. In the summer, day classes are run during two or four weeks. The attendance of 700 students is reported for 1925-26. H. Dana, Michael Gold, Sol de Leon and Scott Nearing are amongst the lecturers under the directorship of B. D. Wolfe. The most recent syllabus contains 37 courses, some of which coincide with those listed above. Marxist Philosophy, the Social Interpretation of Literature, Leninism and training courses for trade union membership and C.P. and Y.C.L. membership are distinctive features.

Boston Labour College began in 1921 with the help of friendly professors, and in 1924 had 400 students. In Washington, Passaic, Philadelphia, Denver and Portland there are autonomous Labour Colleges the character of which varies according to the local unions. The most important college, the Philadelphia, with 700 students, is largely dependent upon the Pennsylvania University for its teachers; while judging from its irregularly appearing little paper, the San Francisco College is strictly Marxian.

The pioneering clothing workers of New York chiefly in the I.L.G.W.U. and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union, maintain considerable activity. The I.L.G.W.U. spends yearly $17,500 in its educational department. Its work is threefold: (*a*) Unity Centres where its members attend classes in English and Labour topics; (*b*) the Workers' University in New York where eighteen courses are available to the students who have been through (*a*); (*c*) extension work in which there are courses at different places mixed with general lectures (on health, physical culture and current topics), dances, concerts, cinemas, etc. Its official report states that 195,650 students attended its courses in 1922-24, but 162,400 of them were students in English, for which subject the union gets State grants.*

The Bryn Mawr Summer School, of which we hear sometimes this side, is arranged by the University every year for women worker-students. Eighty-two of them take courses during two months. The aim is somewhat nebulous, being to offer the students "a fuller education in order that they may widen their influence in the industrial world, help in the coming social reconstruction and increase the happiness and usefulness of their own lives."

Methods.

There is little difference in the methods used in the U.S. in comparison with our own. Their difficulty, as ours, is to find a point of

* Kenneth Lindsay, of the W.E.A., criticised this body for its "lack of civic sense."

interest with the apathetic or disinterested worker. The teacher is given a few minutes at the end of a concert to deal with a current topic or explain the work of the union. They have used the film to advocate the limitation of the working day. In a special I.L.G.W.U. women's school the "problem" (project) method is used: What is the position of women in society? The biologist comes in to explain the women's functions from his angle; the psychologist treats the mental problem of the modern woman; the history teacher shows the place of the woman in various social epochs; the economist sums up the result of women's entry into industry; and, finally, the literature teacher shows the ideas of the great writers concerning women. Wherever possible every student is given a typed résumé of each lecture.

Conclusion.

It is of interest to notice that the idea of workers' education, based on a recognition of the class struggle and aiming at the workers' emancipation, is increasingly heard at conferences. Naturally the W.E.B. prefers to talk about education as the averter of revolution and about "progress by the formation of thinking" and other vague phrases capable of such interpretation that neither the reactionary A.F. of L. leaders nor the Carnegie Corporation will be frightened. At present the co-operation between some of the universities and the workers' unions in workers' education reflects the temporary community of interest in some industries between worker and capitalist. Significantly, in Minnesota, when the classes were being conducted by a militant trade union leader, the local University refused to co-operate even to the loaning of a room. In spite of the difficulties, the greatness of the country and the variety of races and tongues, the present diversified efforts without a common centre or aim will become a real education movement and a vital aid to the workers' struggles in the U.S. and elsewhere.

MARK STARR.

THE PASSING OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

FOR generations the historians and political philosophers of capitalism have been glorifying what they call "British representative institutions." The British constitution has been held up as a model to the rest of the world. It has been idealised as "the highest manifestation of the inherent genius of the British race." The keystone of this mighty structure is, according to the text-books, Democracy, a product, like the constitution itself, of the political propensities of Britishers—as opposed, of course, to foreigners. The theory goes that Democracy begins in these shores with the Magna Charta. It was seriously endangered more than once after that, but it was finally consolidated by the "Glorious Revolution." After that it is an idyllic tale of "freedom slowly broadening down"—but not too far down.

Democracy has always been an intoxicating kind of word for the political philosopher and the ardent social reformer. It has been elevated in theory to the dignity of things holy, the highest category of the political verities. But what is democracy in practice? Historically, democracy was the political tactic of the bourgeoisie in its struggle against the political absolutism of the Church, the Crown and the landed aristocracy. In this struggle the bourgeoisie demanded political representation, civic rights, and, later, political control. They fought their battle in the name and under the guise of democracy. Democracy to them, however, represented not an "inherent principle," but a tactic, not an end but a means, not a permanent, universal need of all peoples, but the local and temporary need of a class. It was not the realisation of the "inherent genius of a people," but a weapon in the hands of a class struggling for power. In the hands of the philosophers, however, carried away by the phraseology of the conflict, democracy was presented as a *ding an sich,* a kind of natural law existing and operating independently of historical circumstances.

Contemporary social conditions in Britain gave, it must be admitted, a certain justification to this view. By the middle of the nineteenth century the new industrial system had been definitely consolidated. Britain had become the workshop of the world, and enjoyed a monopoly of the world market. The new industrial capitalists were reaping the harvest of democracy as they understood it, and had already secured control of the State machine. Democracy had proved its usefulness as a first-class political tactic.

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of golden prosperity for British capitalism. Britain occupied a unique position in the new world economy. Her earlier start on the path of industrialism had given her a splendid opportunity to exploit to her advantage the new situation and its almost unlimited possibilities. One thing only was necessary to enable her to do this successfully—contented workers. The British capitalists were in a specially favourable position to ensure these. Part of the profits of their world monopoly and of the super-profits of colonial exploitation was used to buy off the discontent of the British working class. Real wages rose. The standard of life of the workers improved perceptibly. Capitalist administration was "humanised." Trade Unionism was accepted as an inevitable necessity, and was granted certain limited rights and privileges. The franchise was extended to male workers. Freedom was certainly "broadening down." Democracy was in the air. The dreams of the philosophers were coming true earlier than most people expected. In this atmosphere, Revisionism, Fabianism and "Biological Socialism" raised their heads and declared, in the phraseology of a pseudo-science, that capitalism was peacefully evolving into Socialism, and that democracy was the lever of the transition. The picture drawn by the political philosophers was completed.

Even before the end of the nineteenth century, however, a change was coming over the situation, though it did not make itself felt immediately. Towards the 'eighties new international competitors began to emerge and seriously challenged Britain's monopoly of the world market. International competition became more and more acute. Monopoly profits were no longer possible. Britain had still many advantages on her side, but she could not continue to grant the same concessions to the workers at home. For a time relief was sought in colonial expansion. For the last two decades of the nineteenth century colonial profits more than made up what the British capitalists had lost through the disappearance of Britain's world monopoly. This was possible so long as the geographical basis of capitalism could be extended. But by the beginning of the twentieth century the partitioning of the earth amongst the Powers was complete. The world was discovered to be a very small place, and the Powers jostled one another for elbow room. Colonial possessions had to be protected not only against insubordinate natives, but much more against hostile Powers who cast covetous eyes on Britain's overseas possessions. The burden of armaments increased almost in geometrical ratio. So far from being in a position to grant further concessions to the workers, the British capitalists were forced to withdraw concessions already given. Attacks on wages commenced, and the rights given to working-class organisations began to be

challenged. The workers, whose appetites had been whetted by the concessions already given, became insistent in their demands for more—demands which the capitalists could no longer satisfy. Relations between capital and labour became ever more strained. Strikes became more frequent. It was no longer possible to avert strikes at home by granting concessions, the substance of which had been extorted from coolie labour in the colonies. But if strikes could not be avoided, the strikers had to be intimidated. So the State machine was called in, if not actually to suppress the strikes, at least to threaten and control those who took part in them. The cloak of democracy was becoming somewhat threadbare.

This process had commenced before the war—as early in fact as the beginning of the twentieth century. The war hastened it considerably, and since the end of the war it has come to a head with amazing clearness. For the last six years British capitalism has been in the grip of the convulsions of an acute decline. Its basic industries have declined. It has lost its markets. Its earlier financial prestige has been shattered. Its overseas possessions are torn with internal dissensions. Britain's one-time world supremacy has been usurped by the U.S.A. On the other hand, the burden of armaments has continued to grow. Taxation has increased enormously. Desperate attempts have been made to stabilise the system—at the expense, of course, of the working class. Concessions to the workers can no longer be afforded. On the contrary, the economic concessions granted to the workers during an earlier period of prosperity have been withdrawn in their entirety. The last six years have seen unprecedented attacks on wages, and wide inroads have been made into the standard of life of the British working class.

But the capitalist offensive is not and cannot be confined to wages and economic conditions. It is extended to the social and political privileges won by the workers in the past. British capitalism has arrived at the stage when it must not only impoverish the workers in an impossible attempt at stabilisation. It must disarm them by depriving them of their means of defence. The aim of the capitalist to-day is not a contented working class—that is impossible—but a repressed working class. Side by side with the attacks on workers' wages are proceeding attacks on their legal working day, their Trade Union rights, their political privileges. The whole weight of the State apparatus is being concentrated on the task of repealing the legislative and political concessions granted to the workers during the period of capitalist prosperity. The miners' Eight Hour Bill, the attack on the Trade Unions, the Lords' Reform, the supersession of working-class local representatives are all typical examples of this policy. We shall be living in a fools' paradise if we regard these things as merely the "machinations of an unscrupulous

Government." They are part of the capitalist offensive against the working class, the political counterpart of the attacks on wages and the workers' standard of life.

In all this even the formal pretensions of democracy are absent. In practice democracy is as dead as the dodo—even the limited and partial democracy that once existed. This is quite in accordance with our view of bourgeois Parliamentary democracy. To-day democracy is no longer necessary to the capitalists, either as a "principle" or as a political tactic. They accordingly abandon it both inside and outside Parliament. The cloak of Parliamentary democracy has served its purpose, and is now cast aside.

It may be argued against this that the present flagrant violation of our most "cherished constitutional principles" is but a temporary aberration, a deviation, so to speak, from the normal—the product not of a social system in decline but of the base motives of arrogant Tory legislators. The argument goes that Labour, when it gets power, will remove this "disgraceful smirch" from the statute book, and will firmly establish once and for all the inherent democratic principles of the British constitution.

But can Labour capture power? So much of the political thinking of the British Labour movement has been based on the assumption that it can and will, that it might appear a heresy to ask the question. The usual theory is that Labour can become the Government as soon as it can capture the rural vote. Put that way the problem appears easy—too easy in fact for the solution of the great historic issue of capital and labour, a solution which is certainly not reducible to the mathematics of the polling booth.

We have to distinguish very carefully between getting a Parliamentary majority—the mechanical counting of heads at an election—and the capturing of power—the securing of control of the State apparatus by the working class. The first sounds comparatively easy; the second is evidently a little more difficult. On closer analysis, however, it becomes clear that there are several big obstacles even to obtaining a Parliamentary majority. There is, first, the enormous power of the Press, which, in itself, however, is not insuperable. A more formidable obstacle is the ease with with the official bureaucracy, in conjunction with the Press and at the instigation and with the connivance of the Government, can create a panic amongst the electorate through scares of the Red Letter type. It would be childish to imagine that the lesson of the Zinovieff letter has been lost on the ruling class, and—granting the continuance of constitutional procedure—it is not likely that we have witnessed the last forgery Government.

The greatest obstacle of all, however, is, for want of a better term, the peculiar social composition of present-day British capi-

talism. For some generations now the propaganda of Socialism in this country has been based on the assumption that the great bulk of the population are producers, whilst a mere handful are idle parasites. That was doubtless true fifty years ago. But is it true to-day? There are some startling figures in this connection in the last census of production. During the last two or three decades the productivity of labour has increased so enormously that one productive worker to-day is able to maintain out of the proceeds of his labour a host of non-producers. These non-productive elements consist not only of the usual accoutrements of capitalism—lackeys, flunkeys, domestic servants, priests, prostitutes, police, soldiers, etc.—greatly increased in numbers. They consist also in an army of people engaged in non-productive distributive and administrative occupations, people who distribute and administer the distribution of surplus value—shop assistants, clerks, commercial travellers, insurance agents, civil servants, etc., etc. These types have no organic connection with industry and therefore with the life of the proletariat as a proletariat. Whilst it is true to say that some of them are wage workers and most of them are recruited from the social strata to which the industrial proletariat belongs, socially they stand opposed to the proletariat because they live on the unpaid labour of the productive workers. In politics they are mere appendages of Big Business. (The fact that some of these types are prominent Socialists does not invalidate this conclusion : the politics of these so-called "Socialists" is anything but proletarian politics.) They are the "citizens" so beloved of the capitalist politician and the hack cartoonist of the capitalist press. In the mass—because they are certainly not a class—they cannot be induced to accept the economic programme of the Labour Party, not, as is commonly supposed, because of the "revolutionary" tone of that programme, but because of their remoteness from, and their apparent lack of connection with, the productive forces of modern society. Social reform is anathema to them, partly because of their social proximity to the bourgeoisie, receiving, as many of them do, "crumbs from the rich man's table," and partly because social reform costs money and therefore increases local and national taxation. To them there is no industrial problem. All the problems of the productive workers centre around industry, and any political party representing the proletariat must lay special stress on industrial questions. These facts make one seriously wonder whether Labour has not already registered its maximum strength at the polls.

Even assuming the possibility that all these difficulties can be overcome, we have yet to face the basic issue of whether Labour can capture power by Parliamentary methods. Supposing, through some freakish turn of the electoral machine, Labour obtains a

majority at the next election. What then? The usual answer to this is that the Labour Government will proceed to legislate in the interests of the workers. In case of a counter-revolutionary coup by the capitalists and their hangers-on, Labour will use the State machine to suppress the insubordinates. This, to say the least, takes a great deal for granted. It assumes that the coup, Fascist or other, will come *after* Labour has got its hands on the State machine, which either hopelessly under-estimates the sagacity of the capitalists or displays an amazing lack of thought on the matter. The capitalists are not likely to be so foolish. They will not give up without a struggle, and they will certainly not give up the weapons of the struggle—the State forces—beforehand. When the capitalists decide on a coup, they will carry it through while the State power is still in their hands. They will abandon democracy, as they have abandoned it before, when their needs as a class demand such a step.

Any working-class programme that ignores this is simply courting disaster. Any working-class programme based on the traditional illusion of democracy is foredoomed to failure. The day of political shadow-fighting is past. The "big battalions" of the Trade Unions are the only strength of the working class.

D. J. WILLIAMS.

BANNED BY BOSTON

THERE is a peculiar place called Boston, Mass. So intense is its passion for social righteousness that it keeps men under sentence of death for seven years, then plays an elaborate game of cat and mouse with them before finally electrocuting them. It is the self-appointed guardian of Capitalist Culture. It has a Vigilance Committee which must pass judgment on any book that seems to be critical of the economic system or the moral code that Boston stands for. *Moral* code . . . Boston!

So that intelligent Americans—and, since the Sacco-Vanzetti case, intelligent inhabitants of all civilised countries—ask about any new work, "Has the book been banned by Boston?" Obviously, if it has it is worth reading. Upton Sinclair's new novel* has duly received the recommendation of Boston's condemnation.

Apart from *Singing Jailbirds,* which, in the teeth of two continents, I maintain in his masterpiece, *Oil* is the finest thing Sinclair has done. (It is assuredly the biggest, in the literal sense —it runs to 250,000 words; so that its sheer bulk justifies its price.) It is first a thoroughly good story. You get completely absorbed in the lives and doings of Paul the Communist and the Bunny-Rabbit

* *Oil!* By Upton Sinclair (Werner Laurie, 10/6).

millionaire boy. Everyone of its dozens of characters lives and breathes—hard-faced political "bosses," bored boys and girls of the millionaire class, Hollywood ladies, Jewish garment workers, University professors concealing their political beliefs in order to hang on to their jobs, oil men, union organisers, ex-soldiers. They are all *people*—not abstractions representing some idea or other, or some argument in a controversy about sex or socialism, or prohibition. And their doings hold your interest to the very last of the 500 odd closely printed pages.

Sinclair, in fact, has taken American contemporary life as his subject-matter. He shows us America as the cinema portrays it—film artists, oil millionaires, fashionable society hunting for new ways of killing time and spending money ; and then America as the cinema does NOT show it—the police-spy system, with its agents in every college and every union local ; the deliberate throttling of every voice raised against its corrupt barbarism, the torturing of prisoners and the killing of agitators. Here is all the dark background to the Sacco-Vanzetti tragedy—no wonder Boston decided that the book was unfit for general circulation.

He gives us, too, with a wealth of interesting detail, the real "romance" of the oil industry—the prospecting, the road-building, the boring and derrick-building and pumping. You hold your breath with excitement, along with the men working on the job—boss, engineers, and ordinary labourers—as the moment draws near when the mighty upward rush of crude petroleum from 2,000 feet down crowns the dogged labour of weeks or months.

And he gives us some amazing pictures of Bible-punchers and dealers in new religions in a country thirsting for new sensations of any sort. The story of the unbelieving oil millionaire, deliberately using religious phraseology in order to get the best of a bargain when buying land, and finding that all unwittingly he had founded a new church, is a masterpiece of irony.

There is less direct "propaganda" in this book than in most of Sinclair's work. But the attack on capitalism is all the more deadly because he makes his capitalists human beings—helpless in the system, even as are the men and women they exploit. He tells the story of the Harding administration, of the oil scandals, and the corruption of this get-rich-quick society. Those in the capitalist ranks who protest are either bankrupted, killed, or driven to suicide. You are left to draw your own moral. *Oil* ! is not from the forge of *The Iron Heel*. It is one of the "cinematographic" novels of which *Jew Süss* was a brilliant example.

All the same, Boston, if it wishes to remain Boston, was very wise to ban it.

ELLEN WILKINSON.

THE REVOLUTION IN CHINA

IN an attempt to gain an understanding of the forces at work behind the Chinese revolution, the average person tends to be bewildered by the complexity of the social movements taking place. This complexity arises from the fact that China is at the moment the scene of many social developments which have already occurred in Western Europe, as well as some of which Europe knows little. But whilst in Europe these social movements have generally taken place at different times, in China they are occurring simultaneously. Therefore, if we are to attempt to gain a clear picture of what is taking place it is necessary to classify the various social forces into groups which can easily be grasped at a glance.

The *first* and predominating element in the revolution is its anti-imperialist nature; *i.e.*, it is a revolution directed against exploitation by foreign capital, whether this takes the form of a scramble for raw materials, a profitable market for capital, or both.

The *second* element is that it is a nationalist revolution; a struggle for national unity taking place in a semi-colonial country under the domination of foreign capital.

The *third* element is that the revolution is a struggle of the bourgeoisie against the old feudal order.

The *fourth* element is the fact that China is passing through an industrial revolution, stimulated by contact with the West and the import of foreign capital.

Fifth; this industrialisation has prepared the way for a proletarian revolution by creating a class of wage-earners.

Last, and least understood, yet perhaps the most decisive factor; an agrarian revolution is taking place.

Bearing this analysis in mind, it is a fascinating study to trace the development of the revolution. First, take the efforts of the nationalist intelligentsia to rouse the workers from their apathy. The formation of the Kuomintang including all social classes united only by their anti-imperialist and nationalist outlook. Gradually this mixed organisation began to split up along class lines as the revolution developed. The first split took place when in 1924 the Liberal bourgeois element refused to co-operate with the Communists within the Kuomintang, and formed a separate party at Shanghai. Then in March, 1927, the big bourgeoisie, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, formed themselves into a separate government at Nanking and suppressed the Trade Unions, leaving the Radical petit bourgeoisie and Communists to form a government at Hankow. Then, finally, the third stage, the Hankow government, representing the petit bourgeoisie, drove out the Communists. Thus the present situation leaves us with the Kuomintang

split into three bodies representing different classes—the bourgeois at Nanking, the petit bourgeois at Hankow, and the workers and peasants led by the Communist Party. The two bourgeois governments will eventually come together, although this process may be slow owing to the lack of class differentiation between the petit bourgeois and the proletariat. If and when the bourgeois unite they will find themselves between two fires, on the one hand the "militants" supported by foreign capital, and on the other hand the revolutionary workers and peasants' party. Who will dare to predict the outcome?

It is perhaps hardly necessary to add the caution that in China class differentiation has not that acute significance which it has developed in the West, and therefore that when a "class" is mentioned it does not mean a clearly-defined group but rather a centre round which various, often opposing, forces gather together.

An excellent analysis of the Chinese revolution upon these lines is given in Bukharin's new pamphlet.* A considerable portion of this pamphlet is devoted to a controversial discussion as to whether the Chinese revolution can be considered a bourgeois revolution again feudalism. Radek maintains (according to Bukharin) that feudalism has ceased to exist in China and yet that a bourgeois revolution is taking place. "How," asks Bukharin, "can a bourgeois revolution be taking place if feudalism has ceased to exist?" We will not waste time going into the details of such a barren controversy, yet it is worth while spending a moment in consideration of the extent to which feudalism is dominant in China, for this fact will determine the attitude of the all-important peasant towards the social revolution.

In a recent discussion in these pages of the peasant problem,† it was clearly shown that up to a given point in the development of the social revolution the interests of both the peasants and proletariat were the same. But as soon as the peasant's "land hunger" is satisfied he at once tends to become a counter-revolutionary force. The whole problem, therefore, rests upon the condition of the peasant. If an agrarian revolution has already taken place, then the revolution is bound to suffer defeat and China will become a reactionary peasant State, as H.C.S. predicted. If, on the other hand, feudalism can still be said to exist, then the agrarian revolution will assist the proletariat in their task, as occurred in Russia.

In China an agrarian revolution has been achieved in the past many times and the results partly annulled by reaction. This opinion is supported by the fact that roughly 53 per cent. of the population own their own land, *i.e.*, are freeholders. In spite of this fact, however, the peasant is still the subject of many feudal abuses, such

* *Problems of the Chinese Revolution.* N. Bukharin. C.P.G.B. Price 6d.

† Cf. article by H.C.S. PLEBS, September, 1927.

as compulsory labour, customary payments or forced "gifts" on numerous occasions. In addition, as often as not his land is held in mortgage by a moneylender, so that it is in name only that he may be termed a freeholder. The truth is that an agrarian revolution has already partially been accomplished, but that during the last twenty years the "war lords" have sought to reimpose the old system of feudal organisation. The situation is excellently summed up in Comrade Stevens' phrase, "An agrarian revolution has already largely been achieved, but its effects are completely nullified by onerous economic burdens." If this were our final conclusion there would be little hope of the peasant supporting the revolution once his economic burdens had been removed. There are, however, some important factors which we have hitherto overlooked.

In general the Chinese peasant has a far greater proletarian sympathy than can usually be assumed, for the following reasons:

First, although half the peasants may be said to be freeholders, many of their holdings are of such a small size that it is impossible for them to live by agriculture alone. Hence the peasant handicraft industry plays a large part in the struggle for existence. This is intensified by the fact that the density of the population in some provinces approaches that of an industrialised country,* making it quite impossible for the population to live upon the produce of the land only. Thus there is a large "floating population," which is only partly agricultural and which drifts backwards and forwards from agriculture to semi-industrial occupations or into the armies. This social group, which is neither strictly peasant nor proletarian, forms a link between the two and may be a decisive factor in preventing the peasants from developing into an independent reactionary force. Secondly, the peasant handicraft industry has suffered severely along with other native industries from the encroachments of foreign competition in the early stages, and later from the development of Chinese bourgeois industry, particularly in the substitution of cheap cotton goods for native cloth. Thus the peasant has a further interest in common with the proletariat in his antagonism to both the foreign and Chinese capitalist.

We have, therefore, reasonable ground for saying that there is no immediate possibility of the peasant developing a counter-revolutionary mentality; and, further, that there is less chance than in Russia of peasant antagonism should the proletarian revolution be consolidated.

The peasant organisations are taking the form of village, district and provincial committees. These organisations, known as Peasant Leagues, claim a membership of close on a million. In conjunction

*Chekiang, 463 persons per sq. mile. Shantung, 528 persons per sq. mile.
England, 492 ,, ,, ,, ,, Russia, 17·5 ,, ,, ,, ,,

with the Kuomintang they have set up a training centre for peasant propagandists and publish numerous pamphlets and periodicals. An age-old organisation known as the "Red Spears" has been adapted to modern conditions and is becoming a peasant army which is engaged in suppressing any counter-revolutionary activities of the land-owners. In many districts these Peasant Leagues are already fulfilling the function of Soviets, dispensing justice, taking control of the large estates and organising the peasants' demands for reductions of rent, etc., into a definite programme. Needless to say, the Communists have a large influence in these organisations.

Among Socialists one occasionally meets with the old "economist" opinion that nationalist or peasant questions are not the business of workers, and it is argued that the Socialist should simply concentrate upon the Trade Unions in an attempt to rouse political consciousness from within. The Chinese revolution has given an excellent demonstration of the futility of this view.

Lenin, in an article upon the question,* says, "However much we may labour at the task of giving a political character to the economic struggle (the struggle between the worker and employer), we shall never succeed in developing the political consciousness of the worker within the limits of this task, *for these limits themselves are too narrow* (Lenin's italics). Class consciousness can only be imported . . . from outside the economic struggle. In order to import political education to the workers the social democrat must go to *all classes of the people* (Lenin's italics), to the State and government." If, as some advocated, the Communist Party had withdrawn from the Kuomintang at an early stage of the revolution and refused to co-operate with the various nationalist elements, the proletariat would never have gained a knowledge of their true place in the struggle. By co-operation with the Kuomintang they gained the sympathy of large numbers from other classes, and by keeping their own organisation intact did not lose touch with the proletariat. It is only now that the value of this policy is becoming apparent, when, deserted by both sections of the bourgeoisie, the workers find themselves in close contact with the peasants, at a time when such contact is most urgently needed.

The Chinese revolution has now entered upon an important phase when class distinctions have become clear-cut. The Chinese Communist Party has successfully passed through the difficult ordeal of co-operation within the Kuomintang and its path is now clear. The social revolution stands or falls with the action of the peasants, and it is to this task of organising the peasants that Chinese Socialists must devote themselves.

DAVID NAYLOR.

* N. Lenin in *Labour Monthly*, June, 1927.

SOLOMON EAGLE LASKI

A Review of "Communism" by a Communist.

IT is written that while the Great Plague raged a portentous figure stalked stark naked through the streets of London. This was, it appeared, no less than a prophet—one Solomon Eagle—calling upon all hearers to repent, to cast aside the sinful lusts of the flesh (including their garments) and to join him in prayer to avert the imminent and awful wrath of God.

Professor Laski* does not, it it true, cast aside any garments—since we cannot dignify by that title the fig-leaves of self-righteous complacency with which your mere MacDonaldite shelters himself from the charge of "Communism." These Laski tosses from him with more than contempt.

Not for him is salvation to be found in pious adoration of "constitutional procedure." "Inevitable gradualness" gives him small peace, and the bald antitheses of Democracy *versus* Dictatorship, and Parliamentary Rectitude *versus* Sinful Violence leave him as it found him.

He admits, even to the beating of the breast, that the Communists have a case, and a coherent one. Hence his tears ; for—as must be obvious to every cultivated person—Communism cannot possibly be right, since even a plain man can understand it . . .

Solomon Eagle rushed naked into the streets with a torch to cry, above the groanings of the stricken, into the ears of the terrified a warning that the End of All Things was at hand. Professor Laski, too respectable to strip, too sophisticated to rush, and too academically discreet to express himself quite so categorically as all that, none the less comes substantially to the same conclusion.

With, of course, a qualifying proviso—that the calamity may be averted by the proper authorities if only they will adopt a correct procedure (details of which may be had on application to Professor Laski after office hours).

Professor Laski's method, while not entirely original, is borrowed from a thoroughly respectable exemplar.

Among the most enjoyable by-products of the Socialist Revival of the 1880's was a novel by an American Catholic Priest, a most diverting spirit, Ignatius Donnelly. In this novel he depicts the culmination of the revolutionary proletarian class struggle, then forcing itself into general notice.

Bellamy had done much the same in his *Looking Backward* and its sequel, *Equality*. Morris did it, too, in his *News from Nowhere*. Others had done it and were to do it, notably Jack London in *The*

* *Communism*, by Harold J. Laski (Home University Library; Williams and Norgate, 2s. net).

Iron Heel. But these were all works by Socialists to show the possibility and desirability of Socialism.

Father Donnelly countered them in his *Cæsar's Column,* in which the revolution takes place all right (and is so far proved to be possible), but ends in failure because, the priests being driven out and the Church dethroned, there was no power left to prevent the heart of man becoming "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked."

With the superior intelligentsia substituted for the Church and Eccleston Square in the place of the Pope, this becomes the (implied) Gospel according to Professor Laski. He does not detail a case against capitalism ; he takes so much for granted. He implies that it is capable of permanent prolongation, but at the same time he has no doubt that it is a thoroughly and increasingly abominable system, one constantly provoking the proletarians to do things which a really right-minded person could not approve but must condone.

Moreover, the Marxian-Communist view of history is "as a general doctrine undeniable" ; its concept of class-struggle is (to the shame of the uncultivated bourgeoisie) "in broad outline . . . . unanswerable" ; its theory of the State "has so much of justice on its side that the proof of its wrongness lies, above all, in the demonstration that its ideals can be realised by alternative means."

In a word the Communists are much more right than they have any right to be, and unless they are headed off will do an intolerable deal of mischief by reason of their natural proletarian incompetence defeating a morally justifiable cause.

It is not to the purpose to note that this is the traditional dogma of the Fabian intellectual. The real point is that it begs the whole question in exactly the way it was begged by Ignatius Donnelly.

No Communist living or dead ever chose to work for bloody revolution in preference to other and equally available alternatives. The Communist case is that in real life the alternatives available in theory are one by one eliminated until a revolutionary crisis becomes inescapable—and should therefore be prepared for.

The Communist does not say that the victory of the proletariat is guaranteed in advance ; or that the day after that victory the New Era will emerge (like Athene from the brain of Zeus) fully grown, clothed and armed. On the contrary, the whole thought of Marx, of Lenin, and of the Communist International turns upon the point that only after prolonged struggles ,and many defeats, will the proletariat be consolidated sufficiently to take full advantage of the ever-recurring and intensifying social-crises.

This fact renders worthless all homilies such as these which Professor Laski has bobbed, shingled, and brought up to date. It is a waste of words and patience to tell us through whole chapters

that the actual revolutionary conquest of power will be a big and a dangerous job, and one virtually impossible if the armed forces of the State remain loyal to the capitalist hierarchy. Any Communist would have told Professor Laski so much and more; he would go on to show that the whole of Communist strategy and tactics is built upon just this very fact.

It helps nothing (except to pacify old women of both sexes) to raise conundrums about the food supply in Britain three weeks after the revolution. Such questions envisage the whole problem in a false perspective. They conceive the Communist revolution "secretly" armed and prepared suddenly smuggled on to the stage of history, in complete contradiction to its normal course and process. They are thus as much Utopian and Romantic as the imaginary conceptions they are designed to refute.

Professor Laski in fact tries to deny the Communists in practice what he concedes them in theory—a knowledge and understanding of the historic process.

It is there that the crux of the matter lies, and there for the time we must leave the argument. Professor Laski is driven to a half-hearted and involved attempt to refute the whole Marxian economics. He concedes the "general truth" of the method by which the conclusion is reached (that capitalism can only escape from one crisis by preparing the grounds for one still more drastic), but he boggles at the conclusion itself. It is "too simple"!

At bottom that is the chief grievance the "intellectual" has with every proletarianism—it lacks "complexity." Your intellectual suffers from the complex-complex to a high degree. Of the proletariat, with its love for the simple and straightforward, he has a great and real fear. The bourgeoisie, it is true, has not treated these, its academic high priests, any too well; but the proletariat, they fear, would deal with them considerably worse.

Out of the desire to avoid the admitted difficulties and dangers of a proletarian revolution is born the will to believe in a possible road of escape. And when the proletarian revolutionary retorts that any attempt at "re-forming" that which from its nature can only be re-formed by revolution is playing into the hands of Reaction—the intellectual is confirmed in his suspicions and retires to compose sermons on the bad manners of the Bolsheviks.

The Communist challenge has yet to be met. Is there conceivably any available and stable compromise between the alternatives of capitalist and proletarian dictatorship? Professor Laski, full of a sense of the utter inadequacy of the proletariat for any high "constructive" purpose, shudders at both. He can only turn to faith and trust that capitalism will repent in time and cease to drive the proletariat to attempt extreme measures.

There are no plague-carts at the door (as yet) and no voices crying out, "Bring out your dead." Yet the sense of imminent and awful doom is as strong upon Professor Laski as upon Solomon Eagle. The Professor does not cry, "Woe ! woe !" but he does (what comes to the same thing) warn the capitalist class and his fellow intellectuals that the present system cannot continue without change and that the grievances that make men Communists must be removed or the worst may befall.

And for that, I suppose, remembering his rank and dignity, we ought to be truly grateful to Professor Laski.

THOMAS A. JACKSON.

ESPERANTO.

Dear Comrade,—Professor Collinson makes a serious attempt to face one or two of the questions I raised "concerning the defects of Esperanto," for which I am thankful. But I cannot see why he should say I am attempting to "crab" Esperanto : unless he has an uneasy conscience he ought surely to be glad of the chance for advertising Esperanto. And he begs the question so often that I must ask to be allowed to reply. He is entirely wrong in saying that no Esperantists argue in the way that I described. I have heard them myself, and their anti-Ido literature contains the most intemperate statements. Esperantists would be more than human if some of their propagandists did not talk nonsense : Mr. Collinson must not ask us to believe that. And to say that the objection to "horrible noises" should be "left to the comic press" is a most unworthy insult to the founder of Ido (which I have not defended) De Beaufront, whom I quoted, and who, whatever his errors, was a scholar of languages for whom even an Honorary Lecturer in Philology to the University of Liverpool should have some respect.

Mr. Collinson jeers at my comment on the *practical* difficulty of the accentuated letters in Esperanto. He says they *can* be used on the mono. and lino. Of course they *can*—and on a typewriter, if you scrap your old one and buy a new one, which, of course, every worker can do. I know it is quite easy to use them on the mono., and the mono. is a fine machine, but it is so much more expensive and difficult to run that *only one* London daily (the *Times*) is printed on it. He asks triumphantly whether the accentuated letters gave any trouble in the printing of my article in THE PLEBS. Here he grasps the dirty end of the stick in a firm professorial grasp. For just precisely because of the nuisance and inconvenience of those types the article was so delayed that the editor had to ask me to waive seeing a proof and let what misprints there might be go through. I daresay there are "nineteen accentuated letters in Lithuanian" and that is a good reason why Lithuanian is no good as a candidate for an international language.

Mr. Collinson's remarks on vocabulary seem to be very absentminded indeed. Surely he must be aware that Klein- (which I did not say was Esperanto) is a very common Greek word. What I said, and repeat, is this : With a single Romance (or other) origin for your vocabulary for your inter-language, you know at once what a given root will mean. If you pick freehandedly from all sorts of language-families, you don't ; and, what is more, the introduction of isolated Slav, Greek, etc., roots does not effectively help Slavs or others (because the body of the language is and must be foreign) : it merely imports so many snags for others.

I hold no brief for Interlingua, and I do not wish to slight the Indian and Mongol languages — but Professor Collinson is grossly inaccurate in cal-

ling it a West-European language. It is easily and quickly intelligible to all speakers of English, Roumanian, Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese: this means, strictly, Roumania, all Europe west of the Rhine and South of the Alps, all North and South America, Australasia, and all the natives of South and Central Africa who are civilised enough to have one language in addition to their native dialect. Even in India one of these languages is habitually used for communication between various groups of Nationalists.

The fact that I found Interlingua *immediately* intelligible I thought might be due to the fact that I know Latin. Consequently, I tested it on a colleague who knows not a word of it, and gave her totally unselected texts in Interlingua and Esperanto, without warning, to read. She read the first easily and could make nothing at all of the second: there is indeed little doubt that Interlingua *is* "intelligible at first sight." (Of course, this is by no means *all* that is required of an inter-language—Interlingua causes other doubts which I am not now discussing).

Mr. Collinson's defence of the complex conjugations and declensions of Esperanto I can only take as a joke. Professor Guérard, that distinguished supporter of Esperanto, has dealt with them so crushingly that I need only refer to his book, *A History of the International Language Movement.*

Yrs. frat., R.W.P.

Dear Comrade,—R.W.P., like Hyndman and the Pope, does not apparently like Esperanto. It is a pity he did not stand at Zamenhof's elbow. Having pulled the beards of Dietzgen and Marx and goaded C.P.ers to fury by his pen pricks, R.W.P. looks round for new victims in the supporters of the international language. However, when the last shot has been fired in the argument about linguistic points—and the Collinson battery seems effective—there is still more shot in the locker. That is the practical point of view of the usefulness of Esperanto now to the workers which will secure its adoption when the learned ones are still embodying their own particular fads and fancies in new inventions theoretically perfect within their study walls. In short, life is the determinant of language, and it is strange that this viewpoint has not been noticed by a professed Marxist.

R.W.P. does not like the super-signs and *kaj*, and there are sounds *he* finds difficult to pronounce. Well what of it? When he says certain sounds and signs cannot be pronounced or printed, he is, to those of us who have used Esperanto, like the old woman in the Zoo, poking the hippo with her umbrella and declaring "there ain't no sich animal."

R.W.P. learnt Greek across his father's knee. The need for an international language is not urgent to him because of his early educational start and later opportunities. When he surveys the problem he does it as a linguist, not as a labourer. It is for him still an affair of comparing proposals made in books and noting down what seem weak spots and difficulties. Apparently the "furious attachment" of Esperantists is not based on experience in practical use, but just wrong-headedness to be scorned by the superior person. If only the *Fundamento* had been unearthed by R.W.P. in the British Museum, say in the year 1950, how he would have made it live in a vivid story of how Esperanto came into its own in the practical service of the workers, while the savants still pointed out its weaknesses and leisurely devised new schemes.

It was just because Volapuk could not stand the strain of use in conferences and in other practical ways that in three years it disappeared. For forty years Esperanto has stood that test, and as Prof. Guérard, not an Esperantist, says in his *Short History of the International Language Movement,* the case for an international language now stands or falls with that proposal.

Let R.W.P. adopt another angle of approach and ask himself: Which is the language now most widely used internationally by the workers? What other language will help me to get direct contact with the rank and file workers of other countries? What language is in use by a special Workers' International working with its weekly paper en la servo de la proletaro? What is the language which is being increasingly used by proletarian writers for their original poems and books? If only he could be once persuaded to put Esperanto to the test of use, he would come inside the Workers' Esperanto Movement. — Yours, etc., M.S.

(Other letters have had to be held over until next month).

The N.C.L.C. at Work

(Reports for this page should be sent to J. P. M. Millar, General Secretary, National Council of Labour Colleges, 62 Hanover Street, Edinburgh.)

NEW LOCAL AFFILIATIONS: The following is a list of the new affiliations obtained in August by the local Colleges:—Liverpool, 2; London, 2; Belfast, 1; Glasgow, 1; South-East Lancs., 1. Make October a record month! Now is the time to get new local affiliations providing free access to classes.

T.U.C. SCHOLARSHIPS: The following were the successful candidates for the Labour College, London:—Mr. H. C. Batstone, Wellington, Somerset (Transport and General Workers' Union); Mr. T. Campbell, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire (Boot and Shoe Operatives); Mr. E. C. Cannon, New Tredegar (National Union of Railwaymen). The scholarships are tenable for one College year.

SCOTTISH UNION OF BAKERS AND CONFECTIONERS: It is a pleasure to announce that this Union has arranged the usual N.C.L.C. Educational Scheme providing free access to classes, free correspondence courses, etc.

N.C.L.C. SCHEMES GENERALLY: By the time THE PLEBS has been issued all branches of Unions with N.C.L.C. Schemes should have had particulars of the winter classes circulated to them. N.C.L.C. officials are urged to see that the members take every opportunity of the educational facilities and that no opportunity is lost of addressing branch meetings with a view to attracting new students both for classes and correspondence courses. As members of the N.U.D.A.W. and Shop Assistants' Union leave work later than the average worker, it is essential that College Committees, as far as possible, arrange the class opening times to give members in distributive trades an opportunity of attending.

OPENING OF CLASSES: At the opening of a class steps should be taken to see that every member fills up the enrolment slip and that where fees are due, the fees are collected and a receipt given. A class secretary should be appointed and provided with a class register, which must be marked at every class session. College Secretaries will see that literature is on sale at all classes, and tutors should be requested to draw attention to the literature and encourage students to purchase and read the publications on sale. THE PLEBS magazine should be specially recommended. It is undesirable for literature to be sold on credit, both from the College and the students' point of view. Students should be encouraged to bring their friends. A word or two from the tutor will go a long way.

LIBRARY: Attention is drawn to the importance of utilising the N.C.L.C. Library.

NEW APPOINTMENT: W. Coldrick (Labour College, London) has been appointed by the National E.C. Organiser for Division 5. Best wishes to him.

WHAT THE DIVISIONS ARE DOING.

Division 1: Classes are now running in most parts of London. Hanwell is going strong with three classes, but is beaten by Stepney with four. One of the Hanwell classes is run by the local Women's Section and is conducted by Mrs. Colyer. Bethnal Green continues with its Monday evening public lectures. With the help of Com. Archer new ground has been opened up at S. Woodford, where a class on Economic Geography is run by Owen Morgan. H. Short is conducting a class on Industrial History at Becontree—another new district. Com. Pendry, another of the "pioneers," has a class on Economics at Catford. The Sheerness class has resumed with a course on Imperialism. The organiser started a class in Sittingbourne on Industrial History. Many women's meetings were addressed in September. The Forest Gate, Cann Hall, and West Hampstead Women's Co-op. Guilds have arranged classes. Branch classes and lectures will be as pronounced a feature as usual this winter. London North E.T.U., with W. T. Colyer, is carrying on a fortnightly class on Modern Problems.

Division 2: A new subject—Current International Problems—is expected to appeal to those unions who are withholding support, believing that workers' education is only of academic importance. Congratulations to Comrade Lloyd of Aldershot on the success of the conference on September 3rd. Delegates from all over the area came to hear the case for Independence in Education put by the organiser and H. S. Redgrove. Aldershot and Camberley should be busy centres for I.W.C.E. after this event. Visits have been made to Trades Councils at Weymouth, Bournemouth and Southampton. Belief in impartial education is weakening. The Southampton College is convening a big delegate conference, with H. S. Redgrove as the principal speaker. Special efforts will be made to increase the sale of literature and to dwarf previous records.

Division 3: Eighteen classes begin in the first week of October and arrangements are being completed for five others. Economics and Esperanto (tell it not to Postgate!) are the most popular subjects. Further special lectures have been given to the N.A.F.T.A. and the A.E.U. Branches at High Wycombe and Grays. Peterborough and March greatly appreciated the visit of Com. Shi. His stories drawn from actual experience of peasants so poor that they mistook a Chinese dollar (2/-) for a portrait of the father of the donor, and of factory hands known only by the numbers on their work-overalls, made a vivid impression, and the press report which appeared passed on his lecture to a wider audience. At Peterborough, B. Woolf and F. Drake are on alternate Sundays taking Biology and Economic Geography and a week-night class in the international language is in formation. At March, H. F. Turner—to whom and to his wife we offer hearty if belated congratulations—is again in charge of the class on Modern European History. Woking, as its last activity under Div. 3, has arranged a debate on the Anti-Trade Union Bill. Comrade Feder (Southend) got into the final batch for the T.U.C. Scholarships, but was ruled out because of his youth—a complaint of which every day will cure for him. The Women's Section of the Labour Party have been officially approached and afternoon meetings arranged. The Ipswich Branch of the Shop Assistants received a special talk and initial meetings for classes were held at Cambridge, Grays and Staines. K. Starr reported on the A.G.M. to Southend College and addressed the Women's Co-op. Guild. The Divisional E.C. at its last meeting directed the attention of Colleges to the two sets of slides owned by the Division and available for use without cost.

Division 4: Our Class Directory shows thirty-two classes organised and others being arranged. Under the auspices of the Swansea Valley College a very successful Conference was organised with Nun Nicholas and the Divisional organiser as speakers. Arrangements were made to set up two classes in Swansea and revive the College organisation. Thirty delegates were present, representing fourteen Unions. With the co-operation of Mrs. Starr a very successful Women's Conference was held at Porth, under the auspices of the Rhondda College. One section affiliated and four others have promised to. Special classes

are being arranged for women with the co-operation of Mrs. Gwen Evans. The Divisional Tutorial Class is expected to produce at least ten elementary tutors. Following an address to the Rhymney Trades Council by the Divisional Organiser and with the co-operation of Ray Roberts, a new class group has been set up in Rhymney. St. Thomas Ward, Swansea, the Women's Section and the A.S.W. have agreed to affiliate. Merthyr L.C. reports a successful educational Conference at Dowlais. A class will be immediately set up. Our appeal is meeting with encouraging support from branches and officials of the Shop Assistants' Union.

Division 5: W. A. Strawbridge, of the National E.C., introduced the new Organiser, W. Coldrick, to the Divisional Council which decided to give the new Organiser every possible assistance. The Gloucester College is enthusiastically tackling the work of the winter session. Miss Foreman proves to be an efficient secretary and with a good band of workers is setting about the task of breaking records in the Gloucester area. It has been decided to run five classes at the Labour Club, Barton Street. Lydney is getting ready for work and B. Knight, ex-student of the Labour College, London, has kindly volunteered his services for class work. Torquay is endeavouring to get a bigger class movement this year with Com. Parsons as the new College secretary. Bath Labour Party held a day school on September 18th, when Doctor Datta lectured on Imperialism. It is hoped that some classes will emerge from this effort. Bristol College with Com. Evans as secretary, has projected a number of classes.

Division 6: Birmingham College has arranged nine classes; Walsall College four (Walsall, Brownhills, Walsall Wood, Aldridge); Nuneaton College four (Nuneaton, Stockingford, Foleshill, Rugby); Wolverhampton one, and Stoke-on-Trent one. Arrangements are in hand for work in Dudley, Willenhall, Stafford and Smethurst. Harold Butler, who was our student at the Training Centre, is now back amongst us and promises to be a tower of strength in his area.

Division 7: The Divisional week-end school at Heathmount Hall was very successful. A number of visitors from Bradford and Leeds attended the lectures on the Sunday. J. Hamilton gave an address on the future of the N.C.L.C., which provoked much discussion. D. Barnett (N.U.R.) lectured upon his visit to Russia in 1926. Arrangements are in hand for Com. Barnett to visit both Bradford and Halifax. This lecture ought to be more widely known in N.C.L.C. circles. During the afternoon a discussion was held upon tutorial training, H. Burbey opening the subject by a report upon the recent Tutorial Training Centre. Halifax College opened their winter session with a social evening. A new college has been established at Skipton. Roland Hill will be the tutor for the class there, Secretary B. Stowe, 23 Devonshire Street, Skipton. Arrangements are in hand for the formation of a class group at Beverley, near Hull. The Huddersfield College will commence the winter work with a public demonstration on the Sunday prior to the opening of the classes. W. Paul, Editor *Sunday Worker*, will be the chief speaker. The demonstration will be held in the Victoria Hall on October 2nd. Arrangements have been completed for thirty-five classes. It is expected to equal last winter's record. Many inquiries are coming in from members of the Shop Assistants.

Division 8: The Day School at Widnes, which was quite of an experimental character, was encouraging. There is a good deal of opposition in this town emanating from such bodies as the Economic League. The class on Local Government, held under the auspices of the Liverpool T.C. and L.P., was so successful that it has been unanimously decided to hold a class under the same auspices during the winter—subject, Industrial History. Several of the lectures will be illustrated with lantern slides. It is hoped to extend the Nelson Weavers' Scheme to provide for free Correspondence Courses. The classes so far arranged for all parts of the Division indicate that this winter's work will show an advance.

The Blackburn College Day School at Ribble Valley was a great success. R. Pickersgill and A. L. Williams lectured to about fifty students. In North Lancs. Area fifteen classes have been arranged for the winter session and others are in course of formation. This shows an increase on last year. Coun. P. L. Taylor

is to give a course of six lantern lectures on the Cotton Industry at Padiham in connection with the Padiham Weavers' Scheme. We hope to hold our Annual Delegate Conference in October or November, with George Hicks as the main speaker.

During July successful week-end schools were held at Greenfield and Altrincham, with J. Hamilton, J. F. Horrabin and E. Redfern as lecturers. The Manchester Plebs Players gave a good show at Altrincham. The S.E. Lancs. Area Annual Conference was attended by over one hundred delegates. J. Hamilton and M. F. Titterington addressed the Conference and H. Ingle gave the report of work done.

Division 9: The North-Eastern College Annual Meeting will consider the question of changes in organisation. Carlisle College has overcome the difficulty of tutors. Sid. Evans and J. Kelsall have consented to take classes. Darlington College has this winter the services of R. and Mrs. Berriff, who were previously connected with the Leeds Labour College. A Conference is to be held at Middlesbro' on Saturday, October 15th—speakers, Ellen Wilkinson, M.P., and J. F. Horrabin. Jas. Gibson, of the N.U.G. & M.W., will be in the chair. Darlington College hopes to have the assistance of W. Moran, late of Edinburgh.

Division 10 (*Scotland*): A. McCluskie has been appointed full-time tutor-organiser for the Ayrshire College. Best wishes to him for a successful winter's work. Edinburgh is beginning to organise the borders. Glasgow, Ayrshire, Edinburgh and Lanarkshire have recently had a number of day and week-end schools. We should like to hear more from Stirlingshire. Aberdeen has re-appointed its tutor and expects to do more work this winter. A number of Colleges are sending out their class lists only a fortnight before classes open, which is too late for many union branches. Colleges are urged to pay more attention to the unions with N.C.L.C. Schemes and to send in to Head Office copies of the circulars, etc., they issue.

Division 11 (*Ireland*): Belfast College has arranged classes on Esperanto, Economic and Social History of Ireland, Economic Theory, Public Speaking and Discussion. Arrangements have been made for Mr. George Hicks, of the A.U.B.T.W. and the T.U.C. General Council, to address a meeting in Belfast on Friday, September 30th, and a Conference on Sat., Oct. 1st. It is hoped that Newry and Londonderry Colleges will have record sessions.

Division 12: The Annual Meeting of the Nottingham College was most encouraging. Comrade Mace is to be congratulated on the thoroughness with which he does his work and development should proceed apace in Nottingham and district. Mansfield College is also getting busy now that its new secretary is getting into his stride, though things are difficult in these mining areas. To be associated with any aspect of the Labour Movement is enough to ensure some form of victimisation in any mining village. Miss Astwood has an uphill fight in Chesterfield and district. It won't do to get obsessed with the idea often expressed by Chesterfield comrades that everything there is "crooked" like the spire of its famous church. Labour College classes can assist in making the crooked straight. The organiser is going to make an effort in the town itself, commencing on Oct. 11th. Leicester, Lincoln, Wellingborough, Northampton, have all made their preliminary arrangements for classes.

The PLEBS Bookshelf

ALTHOUGH it is reviewed on another page this month, I am going to start off with a word about Upton Sinclair's *Oil*. I want to try and keep my head about it. So let me say to begin with that I don't think the last 100 pages or so are quite up to the level of the first 400; they give one the impression that Sinclair was getting a bit tired, or else that he was desperately trying to work in all sorts and kinds of notes, materials, and incidents "left over" from the earlier part of the book. He seems to me to get a bit breathless; whereas previously he was magnificently, masterfully, "on top" of his story. Having said that—just to show how calm and critical I am—I proceed to say that *Oil* is one of the most satisfying books I've read for many a long day, a book which every Socialist must possess (there'll doubtless be a cheaper edition in God's good time), and one which quite definitely places its writer in the very front rank of those authors who take the life of their own time as their subject-matter.

I observe that the literary critic of a certain Labour weekly declares, somewhat pompously, that Sinclair's "style" is not above criticism, and that in "construction" he fails to observe certain of the rules laid down by eminent French novelists of the late nineteenth century. This is academic bunk. Sinclair's style is perfectly suited to his story, and to his way of telling that story. And you can't praise a style more highly than that. As for "construction," and the rules enunciated by the eminent French practitioners, the only reply is that Sinclair is far too big an artist, and far too much in touch with the raw material of art, life itself, to worry about rules. Shakespeare broke all the rules governing the art of the dramatist. So did—or does—Shaw. The breakage is amply justified by the results. And so it is in Sinclair's case.

* * *

A lot of the stuff talked—and the judgments passed—about "form" and "construction" seem to me to be based simply on a far too narrow view of the art of writing. The people who talk thus appear to regard the technical side of writing simply as a matter of words, and the arrangement of words; and they think that the words should be arranged prettily. Now I'm not going to say in reply to this that ideas count, because we're discussing the technical side of the business, writing as an art; and good ideas don't make a man a good artist. But there are other factors in the technical equipment of a writer which the "style" and "form" people seem to ignore altogether. There is, for example, the question of dramatic sense, the ability to choose, and use, the most effective of half-a-hundred ways of describing a particular incident, or a particular person. And in this sense a man

may be a very great artist, although it be quite impossible to detach from its context a single sentence or paragraph and quote it as a model of fine or beautiful writing.

Take as an example the method Sinclair adopts to get across to the reader a picture of a little bunch of rather poor people—small tradesmen, artisans, poor farmers—each of them the owner of two or three acres of land on which oil has been located. They meet to discuss the terms on which they shall sell or lease their land to the oil company. And the prospect of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice turns them into half-mad fanatics, intent only on getting the better of one another, ready to cheat or lie or sell their neighbours for a chance of a better bargain. How does Sinclair "dramatise" this? Well, he lets you see it through the eyes of a small boy, who only partially understands what is going on, but who is simply and naturally surprised at the exhibition of greed and rage and all uncharitableness. The contrast between the young onlooker and the half-demented grown-ups around him is the way in which a capable artist conveys the essentials of the scene to you; and it is infinitely more effective than yards of "fine writing" about the ugliness of the lust for money. You are made to *feel* certain things, instead of being *told* them.

Let me take another example, from a book very different from Sinclair's—H. M. Tomlinson's just-published first novel, *Galleon's Reach*. Tomlinson can handle words beautifully. You could quote a hundred separate sentences from his book as examples of memorable prose. But—in my view, at least—he is a big writer because he can do other and more important things than this. There is, in the middle of *Galleon's Reach*, an account of a storm in the Indian Ocean (an even more vivid account, I think, than that in Conrad's *Typhoon*). How does Tomlinson get this across to you? The obvious way, of course, would be to describe the storm—the seas mountain-high, the black sky, the roaring of the wind and so on—and then let the characters comment on these things. But the mark of a great artist—a much truer mark than whether or not he observes rules laid down by eminent Frenchmen—is that he does not take the obvious way. He makes you see the storm, and feel it, through the eyes and feelings of his characters. Tomlinson's hero, during the worst of the storm, is sitting down below in a cabin, trying to work on the ship's papers. And it is through him and his sensations—the odd noises he hears overhead, the chance goings and comings of other men, his effort to keep quiet in the midst of chaos—that one gets an intensely vivid feeling of the awful nightmare outside. Writing of this sort seems to me to be work for men, men with imaginations. Whereas, word polishing. . . . .

To sum up. Sinclair shows on nearly every page of this book that he is a first-rate artist. And folks who can't see that have mistaken Bloomsbury-culture for art.

By the way, on one of the 500 odd pages the scene changes from California to London. And on that page THE PLEBS gets a mention! I'm proud we're in so fine a book.

* * *

I don't know whether any other reader noticed it, but *The Mills of Man*, the novel of factory life by a French author which Jack Hamilton was recommend-

ing in our review pages last month, was "discovered" and commended in equally enthusiastic terms by Ellen Wilkinson in THE PLEBS about a year ago. After two such testimonials it ought to find some readers amongst I.W.C.ers. I've just borrowed it. It looks good.

* * *

I see that R. H. Mottram, who put himself in the front rank by his fine trilogy of stories about the war—*The Spanish Farm*—has now written a novel on an ordinary peace-time subject. This, it appears, is the story of a bank and a succession of Quaker bankers in an East Anglican cathedral town. It begins in the early nineteenth century and comes down to our day, and it certainly sounds as though it would be particularly interesting to students of social history. The *Manchester Guardian* reviewer—no less a critic than "A.N.M."—found that one impression he got from the book was that "the business world has declined from 'an older and surer philosophy,' and that cleverness has been substituted for character." He calls this "a disquieting suggestion"! One feels like asking where some of these ultra-cultured people on the *Manchester Guardian* hide themselves, since such obvious facts about the world we live in are discovered by them with such pained surprise. Is the *M.G.* office situated in some secluded cloister into which no noise from the outer world ever penetrates? Or is the pained surprise a pose?

I'm personally a bit interested in the point, because some months back, when the *Plebs Atlas* was published, the *M.G.* discussed it in a leading article, and expressed just the same sort of pained surprise at my map of post-war Europe, in which certain so-called "independent" countries were shown as possessions, or dependencies, of Britain or France. On what possible grounds, it asked, could any such marking be justified? Now one could have understood a critic objecting to the allocation of this or that particular country; but that at this time of day anybody should profess surprise that such a classification should be attempted. . . well, I ask again, is the *M.G.* office situated in a cloister? And if its inhabitants are really as innocent as all this about the world of business or of international affairs, why don't they call in their colleagues of the *M.G. Commercial* to put them wise to a few things?

After writing that paragraph I sat down to do a little reading. And here is one of the very first things I happened across—from a review of a book entitled *Italy's International Economic Position*, by C. McGuire:—

> The plain fact is that Italy, considered as an independent proposition in a Europe nationalistically organised, is not a "going concern" . . . The result is that the country finds itself in the position of a corporation which mortgages itself a little more each year, hoping by increasing volume of business to postpone indefinitely the day of foreclosure. . . . Perhaps Germany, perhaps France, perhaps England may, one or other or all together, find it to their advantage to take over the bill. . . Mussolini promises that a sufficient surplus can be in time created to make Italy a really great power *instead of just a shadow boxer in an empty ring or a process-server for the British Foreign Office.* (Italics mine.)

And this, Oh, recluses of Manchester, was not penned by some Socialist "crank," but by a writer in the *New York Herald Tribune.*

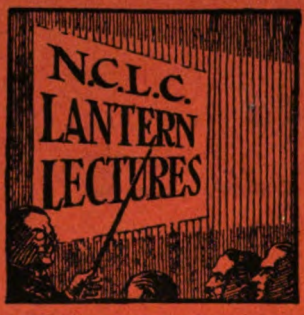
* * *

The Sacco-Vanzetti case gives a special interest to W. T. Colyer's *Americanism*, now available in a 2/6 edition (Labour Publishing Company). This book ought to be "featured" on our literature stalls. J. F. H.

MANCHESTER PLEBS.

Comrade H. Lees (46 Mountain St., Moss Side, Manchester) asks us to state that the old Plebs League Manchester group has re-formed itself as the N.C.L.C. Students' Association (Manchester Dist.). The new organisation will seek to include Plebs Leaguers and past and present N.C.L.C. students; and six groups (1) Propaganda, (2) Literature, (3) Research, (4) Educational, (5) Dramatic, and (6) Social and Financial have been formed.

This sounds like business. But we would ask Plebs in Manchester and elsewhere not to come to too rigid and definite decisions until the joint committee of N.C.L.C. and Plebs League representatives has issued its recommendations as to the best ways and means of adapting the machinery of the League to new conditions.



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