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# The PILEBS

Organ of the National  
Council of Labour Colleges

Monthly 4<sup>d</sup>

Published on the 15th of each month,

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1928

## RATIONALISATION?



J.F.H.

DEC 5 1928

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Grandma!"

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# THE PLEBS

*Organ of the National Council of Labour Colleges*

VOL. XX.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1928.

No. 11

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

**R**ATIONALISATION—what exactly does it mean? Is it such another "blessed word" as "Reconstruction" was during the years immediately following the War? Is it merely another name for Industrial Peace? Does it involve working-class surrender? So far as certain industries at any rate are concerned must we face it as an inevitability?

These and similar questions are being discussed by Trade Unionists everywhere to-day. And since *The PLEBS* stands for the application of workers' education to working-class problems we are publishing this month three articles on the subject of Rationalisation which we hope will provoke discussion—and elicit correspondence—from our readers.

S. B. M. Potter, the editor of "The Miner," deals with the subject more particularly from the angle of the British coal industry. Ellen Wilkinson quotes significant facts about "Rationalisierung" in Germany. H. B. Bull touches among other things on certain modifications of Trade Union structure which may be essential if the plans of the "Rationalisers" are realised.

We ask all our readers to pass this issue around, and to bring it to the notice of their friends.

There are other items of controversial interest in this issue—e.g., A. A. Purcell's article on "India," and T. A. Jackson's review of the Diffusionist theories about the origins of civilisation. If you're interested—join in the discussion.

# RATIONALISATION

## *and the Workers*

By S. B. M. POTTER

**N**OT the least of the advantages of the rationalisation controversy is that it has led to an analysis of phrases which have too long passed unchallenged and uninterpreted. The terminological division into "reformists" and "revolutionaries" is misleading. Not only are there almost infinite variations of Leftism and Rightism, but a cross-section will reveal most curious interminglings of strata. There are revolutionaries, who, on this issue, are "defeatists" and "reactionaries"; others, because they try and keep clear heads amidst the pro and anti-rationalisation clamour, are "reformists" when they seem to me to be the real revolutionaries.

### The Workers Pay.

Rationalisation is the prime issue of the moment. Britain stands to-day in straitened economic circumstances because of the changing balance of forces within a competitive capitalist world society; it is the workers who are called on to make sacrifices which the competitive struggle entails, sacrifices which now involve the sheltered as well as the unsheltered industries.

Under this increasing pressure the workers have done two things. They have affirmed with increasing conviction that public ownership and control is not only a social principle, but an essential expedient if relief is to be secured. Secondly, they have urged measures of social and industrial reconstruction ("reformism" if you will) to ease our position (meaning us *and* the capitalists), arguing that these will not delay, but will actually facilitate the transition to Socialism.

In practically all the letters I receive attacking rationalisation, two misconceptions persistently recur. First, that it is rationalisation in the British coalfields which is responsible for unemployment,

wage-cutting, and the intensification of physical toil. Second, that rationalisation is a repudiation of nationalisation. Let us examine these assertions.

### The Position in Yorkshire.

The rising figures of unemployment in the Yorkshire coalfield concurrently with the development of the Five Counties Scheme have been held up as a bitter example of rationalisation in practice. This is mistaken. Nothing could be further removed from a genuinely rational organisation of industry (even for capitalist profit) than a scheme which is conceived and executed in terms of raw coal and takes the form of restricting output in great ultra-modern and enormously expensively equipped pits, meaning, since the overheads of a pit are little less when 1,000 men are at work than 2,000, that costs of production, so far from being reduced, are, on the diminished tonnage, actually increased.

The revival of coal-extracting enterprises can be achieved either by raising the price of coal or by reducing the cost. The first is impossible without international agreement and the obstacles to such an agreement come, paradoxically enough, from those who are suffering from the lack of it, *i.e.*, the British coal exporters. There is, of course, method in their madness; they are unwilling to enter into any negotiations with competitive coal producers for the rationing of the export trade until they have won back their pre-war proportion, when their negotiating power (when the fixation of the quotas comes up for discussion) would be proportionately strengthened. In the second, therefore—the lowering of production costs—lies their only hope. The coalowners have devoted all their attention to reducing the heaviest charge to which coal extraction is liable, *i.e.*, labour. The results are known.

### The Alternatives.

The present impasse leaves us confronted with two alternatives. We can wash our hands of everything appertaining to the conduct of the industry and concentrate our attention on the achievement of nationalisation, or we can exercise all the pressure possible to secure the restoration of the industry to economic health irrespective of the question of ownership. Melchett intends, of course, that the reconstructed property shall remain privately owned. The Labour Movement intends the opposite. But that is a separate issue.

This is not the place to discuss the technical measures which industrial reconstruction involves. So far as the mining industry is concerned they are pretty clearly known. Controversy should not lie, it seems to me, in whether or not those steps shall be taken, but in the emphasis placed on the various forms of that reconstruction and how the resultant benefits shall be distributed. The Left Wing has, however (mistakenly, I think) committed itself to opposition to rationalisation. In so doing they repudiate, in the case of the coal industry, all the constructive proposals which the movement has urged so vehemently ever since the war. Indeed, we repudiate a thousand resolutions on a thousand subjects carried during the past quarter of a century, wherein we have called upon Government or employers to do this, that and the other. We commit ourselves, in fact, to one of two things, either of which seems to me indefensible. Either we stand aside and passively watch industrial developments—a manifestation of futility unlikely to enhance our prestige in the eyes of the working masses—or else we set ourselves, like a modern Canute, athwart the whole tide of scientific development—re-enact, in a word, the folly of the Luddites.

### Divert—or Subvert.

On the broad issue of rationalisation, therefore, our attitude must either be one of approval, sharply tempered by a determination to ensure that the maximum proportion of the benefits is diverted into working-class channels; or, alternatively, opposition to any economic reconstruction under capital-



SICK INDEED!

(An American Cartoon.)

ism, and a rigid concentration on nationalisation. In a phrase, either divert or subvert.

I shall be told that these are not the only alternatives; that there is a third—the organisation of the workers for the industrial and political struggle against capitalism, with a view to overthrowing it and substituting therefor the workers' state.

Here the argument links up with the second misconception of the anti-rationalisers—that rationalisation is a repudiation of nationalisation. The policy of the revolutionary trade unionists seems to me to be utterly divorced from realities. I speak with diffidence, for I work in London and many of the exponents of this policy live in the industrial areas and share the workers' daily struggles. But surely the possibilities of effective industrial action at this of all times, are, saving in a few especial and mainly local circumstances, negligible? The Dodds and Plender Awards were excuse enough for a stoppage in the North-Eastern counties. The charge that the leaders sabotaged the strike movement cannot conceal the fact that nobody, from Cook downwards, could have secured an effective stoppage. The Featherstone dispute was widely thought to justify strike action. Bu

could even Herbert Smith and Joseph Jones, with all their undoubted influence, have done it? A man has just been victimised in Somerset in an especially indefensible manner which once would have brought the pit to a standstill the next day. But wages are too poor, work too hard to get, and unemployment too widespread nowadays for men lightly to engage in strike action.

### The Difficulties of Strike Action.

If we cannot then get the men to resort to industrial action to defend their wages against enormous cuts, to check the continuous encroachment on price lists and local customs, to prevent undisguised intimidation, what hope is there of getting them to strike for the purpose of overthrowing the entire system? The possibility is surely too remote to merit consideration.

Admittedly there is something to be said for talking "big," or at least for not parading our industrial disabilities too openly. Unhappily enough that is what our syndicalists cause when they clamour for strikes and yet more strikes at such a time. Strategically it is comparable with the folly of the Kerensky-Brussilov offensive.

There is a far greater likelihood of revival of industrial action within a rationalised coal mining industry, if production is related to demand and the pressure of the competitive struggle eased with the buoying up of the industry by the swelling of its proceeds by coal treatment, and the part-absorption and part-dispersal of the unemployed. Miners with work more secure and stomachs better filled may develop an effective militancy in place of the cowed and smouldering resentment of to-day. It is, I believe, a complete fallacy that the workers are more militant under the lash of impoverishment than they are when trade is on the upgrade and improved conditions can be fought for without our coming up against the blank wall of "economic facts," and the "quart out of the pint jug" argument. Surely a comparison of the war and the post-war years teaches this lesson?

### The Issue.

My conclusions are, therefore, that rationalisation is inevitable whether we support, oppose or ignore; if we ignore all the changes which are bound up in the application of science to industry, we confess to futility and weaken our hold on the masses; if we oppose, it is certain that eventually rationalisation will be achieved in spite of us and in so far as we succeed in delaying its advent we condemn the workers to a continuance of the poverty which the competitive struggle inevitably entails; if we support, we can get certain concessions from the capitalist class (for rationalisation is a tricky job and we could make things awkward for them during the transition). Moreover, rationalisation connotes an improvement of the competitive position of Britain (so long as world society is ordered on a competitive basis) and increases the margin between proceeds and costs from which the wherewithal for improved conditions could be wrested.

Material prosperity will not, in my judgment, cause the workers to become smug, complacent, satisfied and reactionary. It leads to improved physique, to greater mental alertness, to enhanced self-respect, both individually and as a class, to the dissipation of apathy and the emergence of a strong, competent and disciplined determination. Surely these qualities are not compatible with the abandonment of the Socialist principle, but are, on the contrary, the most reassuring guarantee of its translation into reality.

If, then, rationalisation has got to be effected, if even a socialised industry is to survive, and if the absence of rationalisation means continued poverty while its achievement holds the hope of better wages, less unemployment and shorter hours, and, incidentally a better fed, more hopeful, active militant working class, and therefore a better chance of Socialism, what does the opposition to the scientific organisation of industry boil down to—but sheer reactionary obscurantism?

---

**IS THE PLEBS ON SALE AT THE MEETINGS YOU ATTEND ?**

# WHO IS TO TAKE THE PROFITS ?

By ELLEN WILKINSON, M.P.

**W**HEN German capitalists, up against the mess left by the War, the occupation of the Ruhr, reparations, Dawes and the rest, got together and said, "We must cut out competition among ourselves. Only so can we compete with our conquerors"—certain German theorists called this an entirely new gospel, and gave it a long name "*Rationalisierung*"; forgetful of the fact that Socialists had been pointing out the waste of competition for the last half-century. Socialists must watch with keen eyes this capitalist move to put a new night-cap on the old wolf "Exploitation."\*

The Germans had a far more difficult task to face after the War than the English owners, who could think of nothing but lower wages and longer hours. Their social insurance payments are heavier, they were weighted with reparation debts, their industries had been utterly demoralised by a war of attrition as well as by the French occupation of their main industrial areas.

## The German Coal Industry.

A huge syndicate of most of the coal companies was formed. Uneconomic mines were closed, and plant (even quite up-to-date machines) scrapped in favour of the latest labour-saving devices. Mechanical aid for each hundred hewers rose from four to nearly fifteen horse-power for machines, and increased five-fold for hand implements. Every mine left in production became a large coal-using factory as well as a coal-getting undertaking. Surplus gas was supplied to towns within 100 miles radius at 7d. per unit cheaper than the isolated gas plants could produce it. Leak-proof pipes supplied central heating to hos-

\* Walter Meakin's book *The New Industrial Revolution* (Gollancz, 9/-) should be carefully studied for the facts it gives about Rationalisation in Germany. It is sufficiently impartial for sound conclusions to be formed from the data given.



THE SPECTRE.  
(*Loco. Engineers' Journal, U.S.A.*)

pitals, office buildings and other large institutions. As the Coal Utilisation Company, the syndicate is concentrating upon securing their main profits less from producing than from the extension of the scientific use of coal and the utilisation of all the products that have been wasted.

## Steel.

The Steel Trust—with Krupps co-operating though not forming an actual part of the combine—started the same process in the iron and steel industry in May, 1926, after negotiations lasting about ten months. It controls 70 per cent. of the production of semi-finished goods in the German in-

dustry. Short time working adds too much to the cost of steel production for a rationed output to be profitable. The Trust, therefore, concentrated production in the least possible number of works, arranged all movement of material from a central office, standardised plant and equipment, shared out contracts so that firms did not have to make continued readjustments for small orders, and very significantly, achieved enormous economies through the bulk purchase of all their materials.

In order to avoid the difficulties of over-centralisation, they formed definite productive units, each with their special tasks allotted and with considerable internal autonomy in the performing of them.

### Labour Displaced.

The immediate effect in the coal industry was a large displacement of labour, and some provision was made for the men by the State. The stimulation of industry by the reorganisation, not only in coal and iron, but in chemicals, electricity, and the other heavy industries, led to the absorption of a good many workers fairly speedily. In the iron and steel industry there were numerous dismissals at first, but the tide soon turned. In two years the total number of workers increased by one-seventh, but be it also noted the average daily output of steel per worker increased by 36 per cent.

### The Trade Union Attitude.

The German trade unions have been willing to co-operate to a certain extent in the rationalising process, but their fears are twofold. They dread the enormous increase in the power of these great companies. This has led to certain cities controlled by the Social Democrats putting obstacles in the way of receiving heat and power from the Trust. They also object to the bulk of the savings going to the capitalist shareholders. The Ministry of Labour has recently awarded fairly substantial increases both to the miners and the iron and steel workers. The Coal Trust has agreed with much grumbling to pay, but the steel magnates are preparing to fight.\*

\* See reports in *Daily Herald* recently of the big lock-out in the Rhineland.

For Socialists the moral is pretty clear. The capitalists are putting into practice for their own advantage much that Socialists have preached. They admit now our case against individualism. It doesn't pay any longer. They themselves are showing how large-scale production can cheapen the costs of production, how the linking up of various related industries into great national concerns gives unprecedented economy and efficiency. All this is familiar enough to Socialist propagandists. We want to say "We told you so." In Britain one is inclined to think that almost anything would be better than the muddle and waste of what is called "British sturdy individualism," but which is in fact sheer stupidity.

### Danger Ahead.

But there are dangers in a too early enthusiasm about rationalisation even as a means of capitalist reconstruction. If rationalisation is regarded simply as a means of speeding-up labour with no conception of the need for a reduction in prices, or an increase in wages to encourage consumption, then it will only lead to an intensification of the under-consumption crisis because of the large numbers of workers displaced.

Rationalisation in German industry can, however, be used as an invaluable object lesson in the scientific reorganisation of industry which is a vital part of the modern Socialist creed.

### The Vital Question.

The difference between Lord Melchett, who in the British chemical industry has applied the German lessons, and the Socialists, is not whether Socialisation will work, but who is to pocket the profits. If the savings go to the community the displaced miners could be adequately pensioned until they found new employment in the general stimulation of trade, wages could be increased to a human level, new garden towns could arise with cheap power, heat, and light, and Britain might flourish again. We lost our chance in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Can we now rouse the workers and demand a controlling share in the benefits of this New Industrial Revolution?



# THE PATH TO POWER

## —or to Peonage

By H. B. BULL

**T**HE serious student will not go into hysterics over the ratification by the Trade Union Congress of the General Council's part in the "Mond" Peace Discussions. He will realise that policies are only the reaction of leaders to immediate conditions, and such indications as they give of a possible future. Should a mistake have been made, modification or reversal is always possible, given clear-sighted leadership. There is nothing to prevent an alternative policy being prepared during the operation of the original policy. Prejudgment should always give place to expediency.

### The Case for Industrial Peace.

The General Council's case may be summed up as saying:—

First, that the discussions are non-committal.

Second, that at the moment the T.U. movement is not in a position openly to challenge the existing order.

Third, that certain important developments indicate that the immediate future will be occupied with or without the consent of the organised workers, in a process of industrial reorganisation, known as Rationalisation.

Lastly, that only a rehabilitated Trades Unionism, having a leadership enjoying authority and prestige, can effectively safeguard the interests of the workers in such a reorganised system; and that the way to such rehabilitation lay in accepting the invitation of Sir A. Mond (now Lord Melchett) and his influential associates to a joint conference on the problems fronting modern industry.

It remains to examine the validity of this case, and to indicate briefly certain dangers inherent in the policy. Obviously in such a review, one must avoid comment of such a character as would undermine public con-

fidence in the good faith of the leaders responsible.

### Newspaper Optimism.

Point number one may be dismissed with the observation that ultimately non-committal discussions are futile. The second compels reserved assent. Number three is highly debatable, since it seems possible that the London Press in particular is seeking to foster in its petty middle-class public an artificial optimism, based upon dubiously real activity in certain branches of quite secondary economic importance. Sugar Beet, Artificial Silk and Light Car Production are the three main fields. Rationalisation proceeds, now as before, in



HOBBLLED!  
(Loco. Engineers' Journal, U.S.A.)

all branches where theory sees ahead of current practice, and as hitherto, ownership and control of the means of production will carry with it the major portion of the profits of progress.

The General Council might better have enhanced its prestige by insisting upon official status for the employers' group from the first, instead of awaiting the belated and patronising blessing of the F.B.I.

The reflected glory of Sir A. Mond's elevation to the peerage we can only assume to be adventitious and unforeseen. As against any gain in this direction, we have to set the damaging effect on the authority of the leaders among the rank and file, which has been deliberately induced by the tone of comments in the Yellow Press upon their "good sense." Praise from such a quarter is notoriously poisonous. Failing any other result, the conferences will have served the purpose of certain groups if they have been successfully used in still further alienating the leadership from the rank and file, and producing that widespread feeling of helpless and hopeless futility which is the prime condition of a working class prepared to accept an indefinite extension of its period of slavery.

### **Bigger Profits Overseas.**

The editor of the *Observer* has repeatedly stated that the prime need of British capitalism is a surplus of wealth for investment abroad, mainly, of course, in what he benevolently calls the "undeveloped areas." In spite of press enthusiasm home industries mean very little to the modern financier. One is driven to wonder whether the powerful employers are not asking for a decade of industrial stability at home in order to build up the necessary reserves.

The pacific policy of the 'fifties and 'sixties of last century has found its historical justification in the existence of a well-organised and disciplined T.U. movement, some of the potentialities of which were indicated in 1926. At this stage of capitalist evolution, a pacific policy too long protracted might place the working class under a world-organised Iron Heel, having at its disposal weapons of which Jack London never dreamed.

### **Where the T.U. Bill Comes In.**

Very closely related to this aspect are certain suggestions placed before the Trade Union Congress involving changes in structure designed to meet the powerful new combines covering several branches of industrial activity. Obviously the purely industrial union has limitations in this connection; something analogous to the works committee, with considerably increased powers and responsibilities seems essential. But in carrying through those vital changes in structure and strategy, we must be careful not to initiate something which may develop into the Company Union on the American model. That the T.U.C. has considered the advisability of increasing the powers of General Council may serve as some guarantee against this, though the Government has anticipated any such development in certain damaging provisions of the T.U. and Trades Disputes Bill, which render illegal any really effective co-ordination. However, in times of crisis legality is not always the final arbiter, and the really important point is that we should have an efficient machine capable of functioning when and as needed.

The interim report confines itself to a statement of the problems discussed, ranging from T.U. recognition to Rationalisation and financial policy of the State; with certain guarded recommendations. It is just possible that the employers in their whole-hearted assent to the claim to recognition will feel under an obligation to determine so far as lies in their power, the executive personnel of the Unions. Such is broadly hinted to be the intention behind the virulent campaign at present being conducted in the Notts. coalfield against the N.M.A.

However, fears for the employers' peace of mind on this score should not be allowed to develop too far, since certain executives have manifested a willingness to relieve them of any such anxiety.

### **Responsible Partnership—or Taylorism?**

In so far as responsible participation in a consciously organised Rationalisation can foster the Will to Power in the organised workers, it will be justified. If the leaders

are merely to assent in the application of a glorified Taylorism, under the auspices of works managers and industrial psychologists, then industrial democracy will cease to have even the inspiring force of a shibboleth. Experience seems to prove that where "Welfare" schemes are in most successful operation, there the workers tend to become willless, soulless drudges of the mechanism of production. This is not to suggest that technicians and organisers are the enemies of social progress. On the contrary their co-operation will be as useful to us as at the moment it is to the employer.

To sum up and conclude; the policy ratified by the T.U.C. has certain advantages as a tactic. It has also certain dangers, some of which have been indicated. Nothing has been said respecting its relationship to certain dangerous tendencies in the political field, or to any hopes of the political situation which may develop in the next six months.

Further conditions will decide future action. Rightly or wrongly, some of us have read into the history of the working class movement a mission greater than that contained in its published aims. Whether that mission is in the near future to be fulfilled, or indefinitely abandoned, may depend upon clear and rapid thinking in some crisis. The decision will not be taken by popular acclamation, but its pragmatic test will be the response of the masses. Behind all this shifting of forces, and manoeuvring for position, the real work of education and organisation must proceed.

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324 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

## THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS and RATIONALISATION

By A.W.

"CARTELS and Trusts and Their Development," by Professor Paul de Rousiers (League of Nations, 1/3) is an illuminating instance of rationalisation about rationalisation.

When we want to hold an opinion and then look for ways of justifying this opinion to our own intelligence by plausible reasons, that is called "rationalisation." The other "rationalisation" is the elimination of all overlapping in production and the limiting of the material produced to the amount which will sell at a profit. The latter is the child of the Trusts, and the former is the child of the old principle, "The man that pays the piper calls the tune." This booklet bears quite distinctly the evidence of the latter principle and in it Professor Rousiers seems to endeavour to make two points:—

- (1) That trusts, though at one time threatening public interest, are now great agencies of public well-being.
- (2) That the only harmful trustification is when the State interferes and makes a State monopoly or restricts the freedom of the Trusts.

### Dangerous Ideas.

This "rationalising" propaganda—it cannot be called reasoning—in favour of trusts is extremely dangerous, for it counteracts the two great tendencies towards human emancipation whereby public power will only be exercised by public bodies and war will be abolished. Free Trusts with their enormous powers mean slave peoples, and the Professor ignores altogether the tendencies of his Trusts to plunge the nations into war. The booklet on its propaganda side is not scientifically analytical and its conclusions are quite anti-social.

That the Professor is capable of better reasoning is shown by the fine way he de-

scribes the material factors which bring about trustification, and Plebs students and N.C.L.C. tutors will find much useful matter to illustrate economic history.

As a general description of the growth of Trusts it is the most readable book since Miss Hirst's *Story of the Trusts*, and is well worth buying if the conclusions are read critically as having the unfortunate—and maybe unconscious—tendency of university economic books to please Capitalist paymasters.

## "G.L."

By FRANCIS MEYNELL

**G**EORGE Lansbury's *Life* is fascinating, even though it is not, and cannot be, as fascinating as George Lansbury's life. He hurries us through 70 years in 280 pages. Four pages to a year!—only four pages to each crowded year of one of the most active and eager men of our times.

But G.L. has the mysterious art of the natural but untrained writer. He doesn't stifle his narrative with the professional formulae. His paragraphs rush the reader along—backwards as well as forwards, but always keeping him on the move. His words, judged paragraph by paragraph, sometimes seem uneconomical, disproportionately used; but the general effect, chapter by chapter, and the book as a whole, is indeed a moving piece of work.

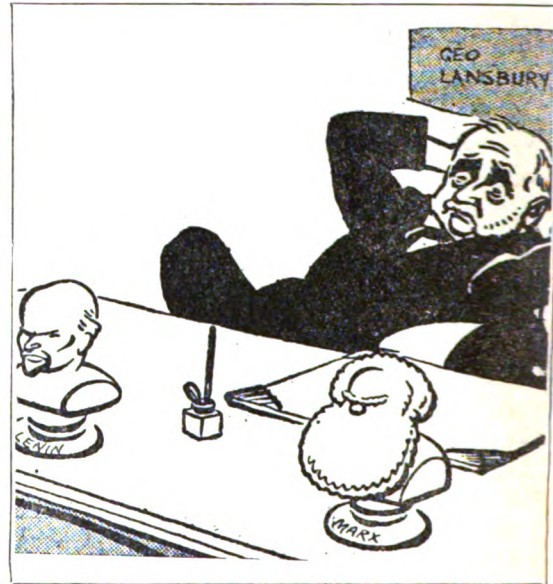
G.L. signs all his letters "Always, G. Lansbury." He is always G. Lansbury. Take this paragraph from his preface:—

I confess that when I first learned about St. Francis and his life, and read the teaching of Tolstoy, I wished to live like them. I can be as happy in a tiny room as in a mansion. If I found myself doomed to sweep the roads, and live what is described as a hard, penurious life, this also would be taken in the day's work, because bread, butter and cheese are as sweet as the finest cooked food in the world when hunger is the sauce. But as I married quite young, and we raised a big family, life was more difficult and complex than for the saint. I owed them a responsibility. St. Francis never married, so his responsibility ended with himself.

This is of a piece with the directness, the incontestability, of his dealing with the

young chaplain who rebuked him when he was hunger-striking in prison, "saying I was defiling the temple of the Holy Ghost—my body."

I asked this young spark whether he was a Protestant. He said "Yes," so I replied: "You



(From a cartoon by Low in the "Evening Standard.")

are able to come here and insult me because two men named Latimer and Ridley allowed the temple of the Holy Ghost to be destroyed by fire because they would not submit to the laws of the land, just as I will not submit to the law of the land as to what I shall say in regard to a political agitation." The young man cleared away without saying another word.

And again the dramatic directness of this:—

Years ago I went over a splendidly administered workhouse with the late Lord George Hamilton. His lordship was loud in his praise of the place . . . and said, "Well, Lansbury, this is all right. No complaints here. You can say nothing against this. It is delightfully clean and comfortable." I replied, "Oh, yes, my lord, it is too damned clean, too well regulated. Get up with a bell, breakfast with a bell, dinner and supper likewise, then bed with a bell, and at the end, heaven or hell with a bell. You, Lord George, would not live here an hour."

It would be easy to fill these columns with similar examples of G.L.'s straight thought and attitude expressing itself in this straight and effective way.

Those who do not know him intimately have sometimes mistaken G.L. for a "sen-

timental" man. I had the privilege and the pleasure of working closely with him day by day for several years. (I have to use a conventional phrase, but I cannot think of those days without deep emotions of admiration, affection, gratitude.) If by sentimental is meant the capacity of sympathy, of imaginative association with the fears, hopes, pleasures, and pains of others, then indeed G.L. has that noble gift. If it means an incapacity to see and deal with reality, a lessening of effective effort for a species of masochistic pleasure, it is the silliest nonsense ever spoken of any man.

For G.L. is the most capable and practical of men; more, when it is necessary, one of the most ruthless. The history of "Poplarism," the history of the *Daily Herald* in "the old days," to those who know them intimately, are ample proof of this. The end to be achieved has never been lost to his sight; personal appeals, the claims of "consistency," the reproaches of his associates, could not de-rail G.L. He knew where he was going; and there he went, until he was too tired to go any further. At that, he out-distanced the youngsters.

With a wonderful capacity to inspire loyal devotion amongst the "young men" who found in him a prophet and a friend, he combined an even more remarkable capacity to listen to their views, and even to learn something from them. With what assurance would we callow, ignorant and assertive young fellows jump to a conclusion and proclaim it to G.L.! But not even that would put him off, if there was "something in it."

His book is full of acknowledgments to his friends and helpers; but if only he had been helped as he has helped, G.L. could have made a Labour Party worthy of the work, the enthusiasm, the idealism, the rough beauty which is ardent in almost every page of this book.

"Always G. Lansbury." I wish it could be true!

## THE BOOKSHELF

By J. F. HERRABIN

**M**OST I.W.C.Ers probably associate the name of Ruskin rather more readily with a certain educational institution than with the man after whom that institution was named. And despite G.B.S.'s recent declaration that Ruskin (the man) has influenced the movement of the Left in England more than Marx, I suppose that few Plebs are familiar with any of his writings. What G.B.S. says may be true of middle-class Socialists; but almost the only thing with which I profoundly disagree in Mrs. Williams-Ellis's *The Tragedy of John Ruskin* (Cape, 12/6—put it on your Free Library list) is her remark in the preface that, though Ruskin's fame has suffered something like eclipse, he yet

lives on obscurely in the memory of the people. Visit an English manufacturing town, and you may quite likely find that the Labour Club is called Ruskin Hall. . . He is held in the memory of poor people who have only a vague impression of somebody with a high cravat and whiskers, who came down notably on their side. Fame so vague is almost indestructible.

Whereas William Morris (she says) "lives chiefly in the minds of people who have read something that he wrote, or who at any rate know something about him."

Now—if by "the people" Mrs. Williams-Ellis means the working-class movement—I should have said the position was precisely the reverse; that while Ruskin is remembered only by a special few, Morris is regarded by thousands who have never read a line he wrote as "one of themselves." And this precisely because Morris, apart from his other varied activities, did definitely take a part in the actual working-class movement, while Ruskin to the end remained aloof, lecturing it from the outside, but never in any way whatsoever getting into direct contact with it.

---

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That, perhaps, is the biggest tragedy of Ruskin's life—that while he came to see so clearly the evils of capitalism he entirely failed to realise the only way in which the evil thing itself could be ended, and to put himself, humbly, at the service of the class whose mission it was to build a new social order. He could never rid himself of bourgeois prejudices sufficiently to admit that the downtrodden and oppressed, whose sufferings he felt so keenly and wrote about so eloquently, "themselves must strike the blow." Or may be it was not so much "bourgeois prejudice" as his own inordinate vanity as teacher and lecturer. Mrs. Williams-Ellis attempts—very interestingly—to explain Ruskin's peculiar mental make-up by the facts of his own upbringing and later life. With that explanation we are not concerned here; but merely with the fact that he was entirely divorced from working-class realities. Like Owen, Ruskin was prepared to lead the working-class into the Promised Land if (1) they would let him plan that Land according to his own ideas of what was good for working-people, and (2) accept him as Dictator on the journey thither. So, not unnaturally, the workers' movement went its own way, leaving Ruskin "a voice crying in the wilderness."

His approach to the problem of capitalism was entirely ethical. He seems never to have had the remotest conception of its actual historical basis and development—or of the history of the workers' movement either. Nobody could see more clearly, or expose more mercilessly, the evil results of capitalism; yet no one was ever more pathetically ineffectual when it came to suggesting remedies. This ineffectuality seems to have been in the very bones of him. Take this extract from a letter of his—which might almost be described as "essence of Ruskin":—

Some day when I've quite made up my mind what to fight for, or whom to fight, I shall do well enough, if I live, but I haven't made up my mind what to fight for—whether, for in-

stance, people ought to live in Swiss cottages and sit on three-legged or one-legged stools; whether people ought to dress well or ill; whether ladies ought to tie their hair in beautiful knots; whether Commerce or Business of any kind be an invention of the Devil or not; whether Art is a Crime or only an Absurdity; whether Clergymen ought to be multiplied, or exterminated by arsenic, like rats; whether in general we are getting on, and if so where we are going to; whether it is worth while to ascertain any of these things; whether one's tongue was ever made to talk with or only to taste with.

He never did quite make up his mind what to fight for, or whom to fight—though practically all his political writings date from a later period than this letter.

### The Working Man's College.

Maybe his actual contacts with workers were unfortunate. He only seems to have got into touch with individuals or groups who encouraged his feudal-philanthropic attitude towards them. Mrs. Williams-Ellis tells the story of the Working Men's College, founded by F. D. Maurice in the 1850's, at which Ruskin took classes for some time. Why, Maurice had asked himself,

should not young gentlemen newly down from the university impart some of their new knowledge to their less fortunate brothers? 'Thus a connecting bond between the universities and the mass of the people might be formed. . .'

So the College was founded, with a proper spirit of condescension on the one side and of respectful gratitude on the other. No nonsense about working-class independence!

If a further and amusing proof is needed of the School's mild Liberalism, it is to be found in the expulsion from it of two astonished French Socialist refugees, who had begun to teach there, but had later revealed their adhesion to that set of 'mad and wicked doctrines' which had raised the barricades in '48.

"Perhaps," as Mrs. Williams-Ellis remarks, "if the tone of the school had been less condescending, a real fellowship might have been evolved. Ruskin might have come out of his shell and found the outside criticism that he needed so much."

**Goodwill and Muddle.**

Then there was Thomas Dixon, the Sunderland cork-cutter, whose correspondence with Ruskin led to the writing of *Time and Tide*. Ruskin's official biographer says of Dixon that he had "the ingenuity and simplicity of a child, and the tender, sympathetic heart of a woman." He seems in fact, is Mrs. Williams-Ellis's comment—

to have been in every respect the ideal and pattern of what Frederic Maurice felt that a working man should be, and the letters with which he meekly and charmingly responded to Ruskin show evidence of the greatest eagerness, goodwill, and muddle.

The muddle, one feels, was not all on Dixon's side.

Yet what a pamphleteer Ruskin would have been, had his talents been harnessed to a movement instead of just left to let off his own steam! Here is his analysis (in *Fors Clavigera*) of the orthodox Prof. Fawcett's defence of interest on capital as (i.) reward for abstinence; (ii.) compensation for the risk of loss; (iii.) wages for the labour of superintendence:—

I have at this moment £15,000 of Bank Stock, and receive £1,200 odd a year from the Bank, but I have never received the slightest intimation from the directors that they wished for my assistance in the superintendence of that establishment. . .

And so far from receiving my dividend as compensation for risk, I put my money into the bank because I thought it exactly the safest place to put it in. . .

The third, or first, of the Professor's reasons is this, that my £1,200 are given me as "the reward for abstinences." It strikes me upon this that if I had not my £15,000 of Bank Stock I should be a good deal more abstinent than I am, and that nobody would then talk of rewarding me for it. . .

No wonder Carlyle wrote of Ruskin "going down through those unfortunate dismal-science people like a triple X of senna, Glauber and aloes"!

But, big man though he undoubtedly was, Ruskin was not big enough to see the most significant fact of his own time: the steady advance towards consciousness of the workers as a class, with all that that implied. Had he seen that, and been content to be a comrade in a great cause, his fame would have been surer.

# THE NEW BATTLE OF THE NILE

## *A Discussion of Diffusionist Theories*

By T. A. JACKSON

**H**O! all ye that be Marxists, come into court! Here be matters and things doing!

Before us lie three samples\* of a new series appearing under the general title of "The Origin of Things." The general editor is Prof. G. Elliot Smith and the object of the series is nothing less than the founding of an entirely new school of sociology. Anything here following notwithstanding, every Plebs should clamour at the local library until the whole series is included.

\* *In the Beginning*, by G. Elliot Smith; *Corn From Egypt*, by M. Gompertz; *The Golden Age*, by H. J. Massingham (Gerald Howe, 2/6 net each).

### What "Diffusionism" Means.

The central canon of this new school is the "Diffusion of Culture"—the theory (to put it proletarianwise) that man never moves until he is shoved. Its central "hate" is correspondingly the theory of Inevitable Progress.

An integral part of the Diffusionist concept is that civilisation involves just as much Degeneration—(mental, moral and social)—as it does progress. Essential to this school is the view that the Cave Man conception of our primordial ancestors is absolutely wrong. Instead of modern savages with their superstition, their sacrifices, and their

avidity for slaughter representing the type from which we have all sprung, they represent only the degeneration begotten by contact with successive civilisations—each of which has begotten progressively envy, greed, terror, bloodthirstiness and war.

Thirdly, and chiefly, the school holds that *all* civilisation originated in the Nile valley as a result of the invention of agriculture—being “diffused” from that starting point by a succession of search parties wandering by land and sea in the quest of metals and materials, and in their wanderings forming temporary or permanent colonies wherein they taught agriculture to new peoples with the inevitable consequences.

The claim extends to specific contentions:—That agriculture was invented in the Nile Valley in approximately 4000 B.C., and that all the main crafts—pottery, wood-working, weaving, metal working, etc., were the by-products of this and of the aggregation of population thus resulting; that out of the same circumstances arose both kingship and religion; that wherever these things are to be found can be traced a connection immediate or remote with Ancient Egypt and its agricultural innovation.

### Food for Thought!

Now, frankly, this is the most promising dish ever set before any company of case-hardened controversialists. The propagandists of the school, too, adopt such a challenging method of presentation (not omitting a side-lick at Marxism) that the discussion of the issues raised must perforce be lively. Hence, while final conclusions at this stage (especially before the whole series has been inspected) would be folly—whether for or against—we are forced to attempt here a few tentative criticisms.

First of all and in general. The contention that civilisation is begotten by external circumstances and not by any mysterious inner urge is one Marxism has made since it was founded. That civilisation was impossible prior to agriculture is again a Marxist concept. That envy, slavery, strife, bloodshed, and war are all the pro-

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ducts not of any ineradicable vileness in human nature, but of private property and the institutions erected to safeguard it, is even more bone of the bone of the most fundamental Marxism.

### Poor Marx-manship.

Why, therefore, Mr. Massingham in his fascinating little volume should sweep aside Marxism as simply the apotheosis of the State—and as such diametrically hostile to his view (indicated in the paragraph next above this one) passes the wit of man to understand—until one remembers that it is customary in academic circles to repudiate Marxism with a violence exactly proportioned to one's ignorance of it.

(Mr. Massingham, who spends pages of a small book in eloquent and justifiable praise of Rousseau, should compare notes with Professors Laski and Lindsay, who agree that Marx was an incurable Rousseauite !)

Marxists, therefore, will be predisposed in favour of this new school. But is it



possible to follow it without drastic reservations?

It is a splendid score for the school to establish as they seem to have done that the Cro-Magnon men were no isolated group of amiable artistic "freaks" in a world of strong (but not silent) Cave-Men—thick in club and head and sharp only in teeth and claw. If it can be established that this was the normal type of "human nature" as it emerged from the ape stage, not only will an inexplicably isolated phenomenon be brought into comprehensible correlation but a big buttress supplied to the hitherto neglected researches of Lewis Henry Morgan.

### Morgan's Work.

It was Morgan, remember, who first of the moderns emphasised the splendid "liberty, equality and fraternity" of the ancient gens—and the essential pacifism of even the partly contaminated Red Indians. On this point the Diffusionists have but rediscovered Morgan's contention—which Marx and Engels applauded. But can we follow them in their tracing of every basic craft to Egypt? Can we even accept their conclusions that Egypt first saw agriculture invented?

It seems on the evidence available totally incredible. That Egypt gave exceptional facilities for the development of agriculture goes without saying. That it gave exceptional opportunities for the use (and probably therefore got the invention of) the plough, we can agree. But is it not conceivable that in the semi-arboreal stage of human existence simple observation would have led to little experimental plantings?—to the invention of the digging stick and the hoe? Were no animals domesticated before Egypt showed it could be done?

To imagine, as do the Diffusionists (if I read them right) that agriculture leaped into existence out of nothing seems to relapse into worse *a priori*-ism than the schools they confute.

### Factors Left Unmentioned.

The weakness of the school appears in the fact that all the time they are talking about "civilisation" they are really mean-

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ing the "State." As only rarely and quite incidentally do they lay stress upon the function of private property—and never at all upon class-struggles—as a factor in social development the fear is roused that this new and ultra-revolutionary school may turn out before long to be a worse reaction than ever.

Marxists not only share Mr. Massingham's ideal (upon which Elliot Smith is significantly silent) of a society so spontaneously self-governing that the State will have withered away, but they can "give a reason for the faith that is in them."

The Diffusionists on the other hand by their very insistence upon man's natural inertia in the absence of external impulsion open the door to a new and worse variety of the old and reactionary "Great Man" Theory. Note particularly that the school seems unanimous on the point that agricul-

ture was the invention of one man who in consequence became the first king, the first god and the founder of all the kingships and all the theologies that have developed with the diffusion of the culture he so founded.

"One fears the Greeks bringing gifts"—one suspects the universities when they bring "revolutionary" theories of sociology; especially when those theories lay emphasis upon the unprogressiveness of the natural Man and the enormous power of the "cultured" person.

But this may be unjust. The whole subject is as fascinating as it is perplexing. And while there are many claims made by the Diffusionists which seem at the moment gorgeously fantastic, there is much that is brilliantly convincing.

Certainly it is matter for prime Marxist concern.

## LETTERS

### IS SHAW RIGHT ABOUT THE BANKS?

Dear Sirs,—With reference to my letter in your October/November issue, I have carefully reread this, and can quite honestly say I fail to see anything abusive in it. However, Jobane thinks otherwise and so I hereby tender him my sincere apologies. And now to the things that really matter.

I still maintain that Shaw is right and Jobane wrong. Let us examine the example given this month by Jobane to justify his case. "A" deposits £100 with his bankers and the result is shown correctly:—

Liabilities.		Assets.	
A's deposit ...	£100	Cash .....	£100

"B" gets a loan from his banker (lucky man) of £900 and is therefore debited (*not* credited as Jobane says) with £900; but the bank does not balance the transaction by opening a loan account. When Jobane writes "the banker notes in his loan account" he is writing about something which does not exist outside his imagination. The loan is recorded in "B's" personal account. Suppose "B" wanted the loan in cash (quite a reasonable supposition; he may for instance be a builder and require the money for wages) the £900 must be taken from the banker's cash in hand and so his assets assume a different form in the balance sheet. If on the other hand "B" does not draw the money, but gives "C" a cheque, which "C" pays

into the bank, this cheque is entered as a deposit belonging to "C" and is a direct liability of the bank to "C" quite apart from the possibility that "B" may default in whole or part and not repay his loan. Sooner or later "C" will withdraw this amount and as he depletes the bankers' cash by £900 the nett result is the same as if "B" had withdrawn the money himself. Let us see how this would appear in the various balance sheets, using my own figures for the purpose. "Balance Sheet No. 1" (before the loan is made):—

Liabilities.		Assets.	
A's deposit ...	£1,000	Cash .....	£1,000

No. 2 (when the money has been withdrawn by "B"):

Liabilities.		Assets.	
A's deposit ...	£1,000	Cash .....	£100
		Loan to "B" ...	£900

No. 3 (when "B's" cheque is deposited by "C"):

Liabilities.		Assets.	
A's deposit ...	£1,000	Cash .....	£1,000
C's do.	£900	Loan to B .....	£900
	£1,900		£1,900

As soon as "C" commences to draw on his deposit both it and the bankers' cash decrease by the same amount.

Now let us examine the figures given by Jobane in his second balance sheet this month:—

Liabilities.		Assets.	
A's deposit ...	£100	Cash .....	£100
B's do. ...	£900	Loan to B ...	£900
	<hr/> £1,000		<hr/> £1,000

When "B" repays his loan, I suppose the £900 item will disappear from both sides of the balance sheet (although I do not follow Jobane's book-keeping, we will agree that this should be the result). But suppose "B" repays his loan in cash we are left with the extraordinary result, that the bankers' £100 has become £1,000 (for the cash cannot disappear) and there seems to be nothing else to do but transfer the £900 surplus to the credit of profit and loss account. If the loan had been for one year the rate of interest would be 100 per cent.; if for one day thousands per cent.; and as that is so obviously absurd it needs no further comment from me to show that this is not correct.

If we look at this balance sheet in another way, we get an equally extraordinary result:—

Liabilities.		Assets.	
A's deposit ...	£100	Cash .....	£100
B's do. ...	£900	Loan to B ...	£900
	<hr/> £1,000		<hr/> £1,000

According to this the liability of "B" to the bank for the loan is cancelled by the liability of the bank to "B" for the deposit and therefore "B" has not had a loan at all.

Jobane's initial error in saying "B" is credited with £900 when he gets the loan is responsible for his faulty analysis of bank balance sheets and therefore for his faulty theory which lead him to attack Shaw.

In conclusion might I ask Jobane one question: How could a bank with £100 in cash make a loan to "B" of £900 if "B" wanted the loan in cash? It couldn't be done. This, I think, is sufficient to show that Jobane is wrong.

Yours faithfully,  
HENRY NORTON.

Jobane replies: I have neither the time, space or inclination to teach Com. Norton the rudiments of book-keeping, and if he is prepared to learn and stop being "funny" about my imagination, can only refer him to our standard work on the subject, e.g., L. C. Cropper's *Book-keeping and Accountancy*, where he will find on page 522 of the tenth edition that Loan Accounts do exist in fact and loans are credited to the customer's Current Account.

A reply here to Com. Norton's final question will, I hope, clear up a misunderstanding which is reflected in his second point. I quite agree that a bank could not lend £900 in cash if it held only £100; but as I made quite clear the banker can lend so much only because from experience he knows that only about 10 per cent. will be called for in cash; not in any particular case, perhaps, but certainly on the average of all transactions. Com. Norton has assumed one position. I also am entitled to make the whole thing fantastic by sug-

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gesting a case where no cash is called for and stating that with that assumption the bankers' power to lend is infinite. These two extremes do not fit the average case, which is shown by the bankers' returns, i.e., that 10 per cent. is called on and nine times the amount can be lent.

The possibility of "B" not paying up is another side to the bankers' business and does not enter here.

Com. Norton has missed a step in his series of balance sheets. He confuses himself by introducing a new factor of £900 cash. However, the point will be cleared if we spell out all the steps.

(1) Before loan:—

Liabilities.		Assets.	
A deposits ...	£100	Cash .....	£100

(2) "B" arranges loan:—

Liabilities.		Assets.	
A's deposit ...	£100	Cash .....	£100
B's Fictitious deposit .....	£900	Loan (of Fict. Dep.) .....	£900

(3) "B" pays "C" £900 by cheque—assume "C" has account with same bank—or run all the bank balance sheets together and get the same result:—

Liabilities.		Assets.	
A's deposit ...	£100	Cash .....	£100
B's F.D. paid to C. nil in hand		Loan .....	£900
C's deposit ...	£900		
	<hr/> £1,000		<hr/> £1,000

(4) "B" collects £900 in cash from (say) trade in the country (he must get it somewhere since it was not in the bank before) and pays it into his account:—

Liabilities.		Assets.	
A's deposit ...	£100	Cash A's .....	£100
B's deposit ...	£900	+ B's .....	£900
C's deposit ...	£900	Loan .....	£900
	<hr/>		<hr/>
	£1,900		£1,900

(5) "B" arranges with banker to cancel indebtedness by paying the £900 deposited:—

Liabilities.		Assets.	
A's deposit ...	£100	Cash .....	£1,000
C's deposit ...	£900		
	<hr/>		<hr/>
	£1,000		£1,000

Com. Norton need not now stand aghast at 1,000's per cent. profit since all the banker gets out of it is the interest he charged "B." His second extraordinary result is painfully obvious (see (2) above) where "B" has not operated his account—and has not incurred any liability to the banker.

My "initial error" is no error (see Cropper). Com. Norton's question is answered. Shaw does not meet the facts.

\* \* \*

THE NEW INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION.

Dear Comrade,—Aaron Director's review of Phillips Price's new book, *The Economic Problems of Europe*, makes one wish that Comrade Price could be induced to give us an article or series of articles summarising his point of view. For practical purposes all that we can gather from the review is that there are theoretical differences between Director and Price. To some of us, at any rate, who feel that such questions as the "New Industrial Revolution" and the possibilities of international agreement over colonies have not hitherto received sufficient attention from our Movement, it would be most helpful to know more about the material which Price has accumulated and the inferences he draws therefrom. It is very important that those who cannot afford to buy Price's book should get to grips with the questions he raises.

Fraternally yours,  
W. T. COLYER.

\* \* \*

THE N.C.L.C. AND S.A.T.

Dear Comrade,—P.S.K.'s letter in the last issue of *The Plebs* merits a reply. *Plebs* since 1921 has supported Esperanto by giving it publicity and S.A.T. and its books have been regularly mentioned. *Petro* as a matter of fact is being used in N.C.L.C. classes and specimens from it, with details of the weekly *Sennaciulo* are given in the N.C.L.C. Elementary and Advanced Correspondence Courses in the subject. Not every teacher, however, can use a direct method primer and so, until the Brita Lab.-Esp.-Asocio is strong enough to publish its own special text-book (as the French

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workers have done), some teachers will use, say, *The Esperanto Teacher*, published by the B.E.A., but written incidentally by the veteran Socialist, Helen Fryer. S.A.T. itself does not exclude members who also happen for general propaganda purposes to be members of the "neutral" B.E.A. Why should the N.C.L.C. make such exclusions? If P.S.K. reads the S.A.T. journal, he should know that the N.C.L.C. was represented at the recent Goteborg Conference. If all this is being "unconcerned," that word has reversed its meaning!

Frate via

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## IS THE LEAGUE DEAD?

**N**O! The report of its demise has been greatly exaggerated. As already reported in these columns the Manchester District Plebs League and Students' Association is publishing a monthly bulletin, as well as organising various other activities. Other districts are getting busy. London falls into line with a Social and Dance, to be held on December 8th (for particulars, see "N.C.L.C. Notes" this month—Division 1 report). If you're in town that weekend make a point of coming along.

Will all Groups send us word of their doings? We want to keep as full a record as possible.

W.H.

# AMONG THE BOOKS

By

## "PLEBS" REVIEWERS

*The Russian Revolution* (Allen & Unwin, 21/-) by Professor James Mavor, of Toronto University, is intended to be a concluding volume of the author's admirable and detailed two-volume *Economic History of Russia*. To anyone who knows the earlier two volumes, which constitute an invaluable reference work, in parts definitely Marxist in treatment, this third volume must be a grave disappointment. Posthumously published, it lacks form and continuity, and gives one the impression of scattered notes hastily thrown together. A mere chronicle of events, interspersed with anecdotes and quotations, it completely lacks any sense of cause and effect in the stupendous historical events of the last ten years in Russia. The mystification and weary disappointment which mark the 400 odd pages of the book betray the outlook of an aged professor, far away in space and in spirit from modern Russia, far away even from the working class movement of his own country. Even in detailed judgments about the biographies and characters of the Russian leaders the author shows no better understanding than the leader-writers of *The Daily Telegraph* or *The Times*. It would have been much better for the reputation of the author, one-time an associate of William Morris in the Socialist League, if this final volume had never been published. At the same time we must be grateful to his untiring industry for a great deal of new and useful information, mainly culled from "White" sources, on the Kerensky period and the civil wars. Of economic events since 1921, however, the author shows no knowledge, and in his list of sources the current literature of Soviet Russia is almost entirely lacking. M.H.D.

"Boda lay in Freddy Norlott's arms. Her husband was downstairs." When we read these opening words of Mr. O'Leary's new novel (*This Delicate Creature*, by Con O'Leary, Constable & Co., 7/6) we realise that we are in High Society. The workers are too moral for such goings-on, and lower middle-class establishments are not sufficiently elaborate to permit of a *pas-de-trois* on the grand scale. It is only the rich who can commit adultery in their own houses in comfort. Mr. O'Leary seems to know all about them, and he pictures very brightly (somewhat in the manner of Michael Arlen) Boda, Lady Cahalboyne, and her friends in their natural surroundings; and then quite suddenly, by an ingenious device, puts the selfish parasitic baggage in the place of various creatures she has injured, and makes her see herself through their eyes. A magic drug does the

trick, and in one night of exceedingly unpleasant dreams Boda passes through incarnations as a labourer's wife, an under-parlourmaid, a saleswoman, a hare, a racehorse, and so on. Some of these virtually independent short stories are excellent, but when Mr. O'Leary has to wake Boda up and bring her back to her own personality, he seems a little lost to avoid an anti-climax. His bright idea goes wrong at the end, and he can only wind up with the rather unconvincing picture of a reformed Boda making friends with her complacent husband and consenting to have a baby and be good ever after. E.J.

*The Workers' Passport*, by W. T. Colyer (L.R.D., 3/6) fills a gap in the literature of exposure. Rich rogues have been known to have as many as forty different passports, forged by skilful hands. A well-dressed crook was able for some time actually to "get by" with a woman's passport because apologetic examiners only cursorily looked at his documents. But the worker, forced to leave the land of his birth because of victimisation, unemployment or fear of Fascist torture, is in another position. Foreign capitalists want servile alien labour to keep down the value of labour-power; they do not want, however, those who have "dangerous thoughts."

There was a time when England and other countries extended shelter to political refugees, but everywhere the tendency is to stiffen up the regu-

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lations so that expulsion can be effected at any time. Mr. Colyer might well add to his cases that of McQueen, described by H. G. Wells (*Future in America*, 1906). We can also furnish him with the case of an Esperantist weaver in the North of England who, after naming many places for endorsement on his passport, was visited by the police for an explanation of his intentions. The book itself must be read to understand fully the tangled problems of mixed and missing nationality and the complex and diverse regulations governing immigration. Labour in the Foreign Office might well issue passports and endorsements for a nominal fee and offer to all countries an exchange of free visas to encourage the personal intermixing of the people now discriminated against by passport regulations. Documents asking for declarations denying that one is an "anarchist, a polygamist" or a person suffering from "a constitutional psychopathic inferiority," are fit only for the museum. M.S.

*Tom Mann's Memoirs* (Special price 2/- from the N.C.L.C.) is a most revealing account of the tremendous energy of Tom Mann and of his connection with working-class problems and events during the past forty years or so. The book, however, has not been improved by the obvious editing on the part of a "superior" hand. This literary pruning has robbed it of that breezy and tonic-giving atmosphere which the physical presence of Tom Mann always creates and which one looked for in the book as a matter of course. It is, however, a book that ought to be on every worker's bookshelf—it is cheap and is a most useful help in the study of working-class history of the last four decades.

G.P.

By means of *The Diary of a Communist Schoolboy* (Gollancz, 7/6) N. Ogniov leads us into the "labs." and corridors of a Russian Secondary School of 1923-24. The author, about 38 years' old, a journalist who, in earlier days, had had to cross frontiers with forged or borrowed passports, and who served in the Red trenches in 1917, has admirably caught the style of a schoolboy of 15 or 16. Post-revolutionary Russia has taught this schoolboy and his boy and girl pals to accept nothing as static, to test every institution and every custom, and to question all authority both outside and inside school. As is to be expected, this process of forming independent and unbiassed opinions is a rather harassing job for adolescent minds, and in the opening weeks of the session the "skworkers" experience some difficulty in "co-operating" with the pupils in trying to set the Dalton Plan going, and the "pu-council" has to meet frequently to settle questions of principle. (Young Russia has even less time than other school children for three and four-syllabled words, so schoolworkers become skworkers, committees, coms, pupils' councils, pu-councils, etc.)

As the session advances the ultra-revolutionary urge of the more precocious and self-opinionated children works itself off with experience, and by

the end of the year, life, though still very earnest, is not so often interrupted by upheavals originating, as often as not, in trifles such as whether skworkers should be permitted to address their scholars as "children."

The Diary mirrors young Russia's serious determination to tackle its educational and social problems wholeheartedly, yet, throughout, Ogniov, with quiet amusement, lets us into the secret of many ludicrous mistakes and laughs with us at the naivetés of over-confident youth and the mental composites of middle age.

The book is full of kindly "digs" at various types. The phrase-bound comrades whom we have all met are represented by a character who, in reply to every difficult question, says "quantitatively it proves the abundance of the epoch; and qualitatively it stands beyond good and evil."

C.D.M.

The Labour Research Dept. sends us a copy of a finely printed illustrated journal, the *Workers' Pictorial*, containing many striking photographs of the Soviet Relief Expedition which went to the rescue of the ill-fated Italian explorers in the Arctic recently. Copies are obtainable from the L.R.D., price 3d. each, special rates for quantities.

Why do we dance? In these days mostly for pleasure (except in the case of those who lead such sedentary lives, that they dance to get a minimum of exercise.) But dancing originally was part of a religious ritual, and this explains some of the movements in the Folk dances that have survived. In *Here We Go Round* (Gerald Howe, Ltd., 2/6) Evelyn Sharp shows how widespread are these dance movements, beginning with primitive man in the palæolithic caves of Southern France. It will give to those who consider Folk dancing a cult of a few cranks, a very different point of view. L.T.

*Freedom of Association*, Vols. I. and II. (2/- and 5/-, respectively, P. S. King & Sons) deals with Trade Unionism. Volume I. concerns itself with the problems of association and their origin, and also with the law of trade unions and the activities of trade combinations in the various countries. Volume II. treats of trade unions in Great Britain, the Irish Free State, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, and is a study of trade union legislation and relevant legal decisions in these countries. E.R.

*"Jim" Connolly and Irish Freedom*. By G. Schuller. (*Daily Worker* Publishing Co., Chicago, 10 cents.)

The booklet considers Connolly "a revolutionist of the new type," a Marxist and "a true Leninist before that word was coined in the British language." It is written to explain Connolly's part in the insurrection of 1916 in Ireland, and to show why a Marxist sought an alliance with the petty bourgeois nationalists and went out with a mere handful of armed men "... to get slaughtered." A.E.

## RATIONALISATION IN AUSTRIA

A committee appointed by the Federation of Austrian Industrial Employees has issued a publication from which we take the following instances of rationalisation. In a metal factory there were in 1913 1,480 workers, who produced about three million units of a particular commodity; in 1927 357 workers produce 5,800,000 of that same commodity. The output of a large wood-working factory was in 1923 3,600 units of production; in 1927, after years of rationalisation, the output of the same factory was 8,900. A chemical factory reduced its workers by 10 to 15 per cent. in the period 1922-1928, and its production in the same period has risen by 75 per cent. There was no improvement in the machinery, the increased output being due solely to intensive management. Another chemical factory which did improve its machinery raised its output in the period 1922-1927 by 119 per cent., while at the same time reducing its workers by 15 per cent. A soda factory which turned out 29,964 tons of soda in 1922 turned out 40,117 tons in 1927, while employing 452 instead of 784 workers, this being a rise of production of 132 per cent. A boot and shoe factory set up a moving conveyor, and was then able to increase its workers from 130 to 170, but its output was increased by 60 per cent.

The general conclusions are as follows: The same thing is happening almost everywhere — a tremendous increase in the intensity of labour, while the share of wages in the total costs of production usually falls, and there is invariably an increase in profits. Everywhere, too, rationalisation is accompanied by a dismissal of the older workers, but in many cases, more salaried employees are taken on. Like so many others, this enquiry goes to show that capitalistic rationalisation brings with it greater exploitation of the workers.

I.F.T.U.

## BOOKS FOR YOUR FREE LIBRARY LIST

*The Reign of the House of Rothschild.* By Count Corti (Gollancz, 25/-). The second and concluding volume of the history reviewed in "Bookshelf" in our June-July number.

*My Life.* By George Lansbury (Constable, 10/6). When the cheaper edition appears you'll want a copy for your own shelves.

*The Art of the Cave-Dwellers.* By Baldwin Brown (Murray, 18/-). For all students interested in the doings of pre-historic man.

*The Tragedy of John Ruskin.* By A. Williams-Ellis (Cape, 12/6). See "Bookshelf" this month.

*The Most Ancient East.* By V. Gordon Childe (Kegan Paul, 7/6).

*A Guide to the Best Historical Novels and Tales.* By J. Nield (Elkin Matthews and Marrot, 15/-).

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# WHAT'S DOING

## *The N.C.L.C. at Work*

**T**HE new edition of the N.C.L.C.'s booklet, *Education for Emancipation*, is now ready. Particulars of the booklet are advertised on PLEBS cover. Every college committee is asked to see that a supply is ordered.

The Divisional Organisers are requested to see whether each college takes a regular supply of PLEBS for sale to the students and others. The question of the PLEBS circulation is a matter that should be brought before the next Divisional Council Meeting.

**N.C.L.C. CORRESPONDENCE COURSES:** The attention of College Committees and officials is drawn to the important part played by the Correspondence Courses so far as the Union Schemes are concerned. It will be a great help if College Secretaries and tutors and others will keep the Courses continually before the members of Unions with N.C.L.C. schemes.

**NEW LOCAL AFFILIATIONS:** The following is a list of the new (not renewal) affiliations obtained in October:—Glasgow, 7; London, 4; Ipswich, 4; Mansfield, 3; Aberdeen, 2; Liverpool, 1; Belfast, 1; North Lancs., 1. What about your College?

### DIVISION 1.

The Women's Committee held a good conference at Friars Hall. New classes have been fixed up at Clapham, Holborn, Croydon, Colliers Wood, Putney, Tottenham and Mile End. At the last-named place Miss C. Cook, of Brookwood College, New York, is giving a series of lectures on American Labour. Balham and East Hill Women's Co-operative Guilds are running classes on Modern Working-Class History. Highgate A.E.U. is having lectures on Imperialism. Southall N.U.R. has arranged a course on Finance and on Rationalisation. W. T. Colyer, at our October Council Meeting, gave a very interesting account of his impressions of the Belgian Summer School. At the November meeting Geo. Phippen opens a discussion on "The Rôle of Bias in Social Science." The London Tutors' Council is still tackling some important problems of classwork. The Co-operative organisations of London continue to give us very much support. Several dozen Guilds are affiliated to us and run a number of N.C.L.C. classes.

The Plebs League and Students' Association have fixed Saturday, December 8th, for their first winter Social. It will be held at Swinton House (4th floor), 324 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1 (near King's Cross), from 6.30 to 11. Talk, refreshments, dancing, drama, etc. Let's make it a real Plebs Meet. Tickets, 1/-, from class leaders, or from the Organiser, 71 Prebend Gardens, Stamford Brook, W.6; also from League Secretary, Mrs. W. Horrabin, 6 Mecklenburgh Square, W.C.1.

### DIVISION 2.

It is very gratifying to note the number of new students introduced by old students. The two

youngest classes—Moordown and Bishopstoke—have enrolled over 60 students between them. All the classes that have been pushful enough to secure the services of A. A. Purcell, M.P., to lecture on India have secured the co-operation of the trades councils. A few classes have had lantern lectures and speak very highly of their educational value. The fund that has been started to secure the lantern is progressing and is nearing the desired amount. Subscriptions sent from Salisbury, Oxford, Guildford are to be supplemented by donations from Portland, Bishopstoke, Totton, Bournemouth and Swanage. Will all those secretaries who have not had the matter discussed at the class please consider it as urgent? We need films also which will be an additional cost. Southampton arranged a debate between two of the students on "Is the Cook-Maxton manifesto worth while?" Another class that is arranging lectures besides the course is Guildford, with comrades Godfrey and Elliott as leaders. Miss Arnold is specially keen on securing regular and punctual attendance and is after all those unions which have not affiliated.

### DIVISION 3.

Mark Starr has now left for the States carrying the good wishes of the division. His successor is R. J. Lewis, "Kilminster," Staveley Road, Chiswick, London, who hopes to meet all our supporters in Division 3 and to have their help.

### DIVISION 4.

We have opened our session with 31 classes, and hope to get more going at an early date. West Wales L.C., with Nun Nicholas as tutor, is running six classes and is considering having a series of Lantern Lectures. Swansea opened the session with a Lantern Lecture on the Russian Revolution. Cardiff L.C., with Comrade Allen Pope at the helm, assisted by Comrade Trevor David, has got three classes under way. The N.U.R. in the Cardiff area is taking a keen interest in the work; lantern lectures and branch talks have been arranged. Newport D.C., with the assistance of Comrade Richards and the Organiser, has two classes going and arrangements have been made for branch lectures. Abertillery L.C. has induced our old comrade, Len Roberts, to take up class work again, and a splendid class is now running. Merthyr L.C. is beating all records—seven classes are now going strong, and lantern lectures figure strongly in the winter programme. Rhondda L.C. is limping badly. The shortage of tutors is retarding the work in the area. To date eight classes are set up and a tutorial class is to be organised. D. Lewis, who for years has been one of our most active workers in the area, is leaving to take up the duties or Organiser in Division 3. He carries with him the best wishes of the Rhondda L.C., and Division 4. Monmouth Divisional L.P. is asking for the co-operation of the N.C.L.C. for the purpose of running a series of branch classes on Working-



Class History and Public Speaking, with a view to equipping its members. The Divisional E.C. is very anxious to build up a South Wales group of the Students' Association and appeals to all PLEBS readers to join up immediately. Full particulars can be obtained from the Divisional Organiser, Waengron, Blaina, Mon.

#### DIVISION 5.

The class in Cheltenham has started well this session and Comrade Quelch, the local secretary, has rendered invaluable assistance. A meeting of the I.W.C.E. supporters was held in Gloucester this month and it was decided to start a class immediately with one of the local comrades as tutor. It is hoped that all the old members of the classes will give Miss Stoddart their full co-operation. The class in Torquay is doing well. The members—most of whom are Correspondence Students—are very enthusiastic, and local newspaper correspondence has given the movement good publicity. Following an address from the Organiser, the college secretary reports that the Torquay Trades Council has decided to affiliate. New classes have been started in Swindon and Chippenham. During the month the Organiser has addressed meetings of the Trades Councils at Bath and Plymouth and of E.T.U., G. and M.W. and A.S.W.

#### DIVISION 6.

The Birmingham College is fortunate in having been able to get Comrade J. H. Roche as its new Secretary, and his services as a tutor are already being highly appreciated. The West Bromwich Trades Council is backing a class for us, and 36 students are taking a course on Economics. We have 12 classes running under the Birmingham College. Organiser Barr had a debate with a representative of the W.E.A., and the I.L.P., under whose auspices it was held, has decided to have a class under the N.C.L.C. Nuneaton College is doing well, and a Burns' night has been arranged. The College held a successful social last month.

#### DIVISION 7.

The residential scholarship of the Amalgamated Dyers to the London Labour College was won by Comrade Corrina of the Halifax College. The Division wishes him every success. The Divisional E.C. has now to hand for college use the new film lantern, suitable for rooms to hold up to 500. Colleges are invited to make the best use of this lantern at trade union branch meetings or to interest possible students by having open nights at their usual classes and having the lantern in use. We have films that can be used for most subjects. Dietzgen and Esperanto, however, have not as yet got their special film! A new class has been started at Cottingham (Hull), and from reports to hand appears to be a very strong class. The Hull University has started a class upon "Marxism" and people have been invited to attend this class, "as it is an N.C.L.C. class." This misleading attempt by the W.E.A. received prompt attention. The Organiser will start a class at Bentley, Doncaster, on November 4th, Comrade Howell Morgan (London Labour College) having left the district.

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The Barnsley Class is doing exceedingly well with L. Royle of Sheffield as tutor. Comrade Lygo, the Sheffield college secretary, is taking a class for the Transport Workers.

#### DIVISION 8.

S.E. LANCS. : We have established a class at the Labour Club, Irlam. The Eccles Day School, with J. A. Brewin as lecturer, was a success. The Manchester Students' Association are celebrating the Dietzgen Centenary on Sunday evening, December 9th, with Fred Casey as lecturer. Look out for announcement of meeting-place, etc. Due to various reasons we have been deprived of the services of quite a few tutors. No class exists in Bury, and we have failed to win a line from the Trades Council. Some Bury comrade may tell us why. Correspondence connected with S.E. Lancs. activities should be sent to E. Redfern, 1 Langdale Avenue, N. Reddish, Stockport.

#### DIVISION 9.

The North-Eastern College is arranging a conference in each of the six areas. Instructions have been given by the College E.C. that these conferences have to be held before the end of this year. Attempts are also to be made to get the further support of the Women's Sections of the Labour movement through conferences of women. The Darlington District College is showing some progress. There is now a class at Brotton in Cleveland. With the assistance of Comrade Thorne (Labour Party Agent) a conference is being arranged for the Cleveland area. A few of the active supporters of the North East have gone into the Darlington area to work, which should mean further assistance for the Darlington College. The Durham District College classes are going well. Such new classes as Coundon and Houghton-le-Spring are taking up the work keenly.

## WE HAVE NO OBJECTIONS to receiving letters such as this

*"In forwarding you a small contribution to the funds of the College, I should like to take this opportunity of expressing my appreciation of the help I am receiving in the two Correspondence Courses I am taking, English and Public Speaking. Grammar is not exactly a subject one would enthuse about, but the Course is put so simply and interestingly that one forgets the bitterness of the pill in the sweetness of the jam. Public Speaking I find much more difficult, and if it had not been for the encouragement I have received from the examiner I should have given it up. My warmest thanks are, in fact, due to both examiners. Hoping to send you a small donation at the conclusion of the Course."*

The "small" donation enclosed by this student (R. Davis, London) was £1.

## To Parcel Agents

*Credit for unsold copies of PLEBS can only be allowed if the claim is made within two months of the date of issue.*

#### DIVISION 10.

This Division is now well into its winter work. Glasgow and Western area, under its new Organiser, Councillor Ritchie, has now quite a number of classes running, and arrangements are already in hand for the second session. There are about 20 voluntary tutors already on the list, and an endeavour will be made to utilise all the service. Edinburgh and South-Eastern area, under C. L. Gibbons, has its usual quota of classes running successfully. Two afternoon women's classes have both proved successful and a class under A. Woodburn on Labour's Problems is creating considerable interest and discussion. John S. Clarke is due to commence a series of public lectures, and arrangements are in hand for a large-scale Burns' night. Aberdeen, under D. J. Williams, has several classes started, and a subscription is in good way for raising funds. This College has great hopes of improving its position this year.

#### DIVISION 11 (IRELAND).

The N.C.L.C. Annual Conference held in Belfast was attended by 113 delegates representing Trade Union Branches, Trades Councils, Labour Parties and Co-op. Guilds. The public demonstration was attended by a large crowd, every seat in the Gaiety Theatre, Belfast, being occupied and many had to stand. Ellen Wilkinson, M.P., and J. F. Horrabin were in great form at the conference and the demonstration. Mr. Brown is conducting our English and Article Writing Class in Belfast. We are indebted to him for readily consenting to conduct the class at short notice. Mr. McEllgunn is busy with elementary and advanced Esperanto classes. The Organiser gave a public lantern lecture under the auspices of the Londonderry Labour Party to open their winter campaign. A series of lantern lectures has been arranged in conjunction with the I.L.P. in Belfast.

#### DIVISION 12.

Efforts are being made to organise an N.C.L.C. Class in Kettering. This boot and shoe town ought to fall in line with Wellingborough and Northampton. The Mansfield Class is to be congratulated on the success of its social gathering. Some of our groups do not make as much use of the social side as they ought to do. Arrangements are in hand to recommence our classes in Grantham. The Organiser is to visit the Trades Council, which is taking the initiative in connection with the new class. Leicester is making a big push this autumn, and it is hoped that success will reward the efforts of the loyal comrades who have the task in hand. In Nottingham classes are exceptionally well attended.

# THE PLEBS

*What it is and what it stands for*

**T**HE PLEBS" is a monthly magazine published to advocate the principles of Independent Working-Class Education: that is, of "education towards class-consciousness." It holds the view that Workers' Education should consciously aim at equipping the workers to achieve their own emancipation from Capitalism. By providing a review for worker-students in whose pages historical, theoretical, and current questions of importance to Labour are discussed from the workers' point of view, it plays an active part in the educational work carried on under the auspices of the National Council of Labour Colleges, and is now that organisation's monthly magazine.

"THE PLEBS" was founded in February, 1909, and has appeared regularly, without a break, ever since. During the nineteen years of its existence its circulation has steadily increased. It now claims to be the brightest of the Labour monthlies.

Its contributors include many of the best known names in the British Labour Movement—men and women belonging to various working-class organisations, political or industrial, but united in their recognition of Labour's need of an education based on the workers' point of view. The fact, indeed, that "THE PLEBS" is neither attached to, nor subsidised by, any of the working-class political parties gives it a special value as an organ of working-class opinion.

It publishes on the 15th of every month articles on economic and industrial questions on working-class history, international affairs, and Labour happenings at home and abroad. It reviews books of interest to working-class students, and records the development of the movement for Independent Working-Class Education in Britain and elsewhere. Its pages include illustrations—cartoons, maps, etc—and its correspondence columns are an "open forum" for the discussion of Labour problems.

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