

FIRST No. OF A NEW VOLUME

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THE PLEBS MAGAZINE

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

Vol. X.

January, 1918.

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Socialists and the State

ANYONE who goes around the country delivering lectures to branches of widely different schools of socialist thought soon becomes aware at the present time of the ferment of ideas about the nature of the State; and its utility to the workers, and also of the ever-growing influence upon the rank and file of the literature of the S.L.P. The National Guilds League may be securing the ear of the great majority of middle-class socialists, who are naturally attracted by its sympathetic programme and its recognition of the position of the consumers, consumers who, in this case, find it very difficult to conceive of themselves as fitting into any great organization of producers, and there being able to exert the influence which they have grown accustomed to regard as

Socialism after the War. J. Ramsay McDonald. National Labour Press, Ltd. 1/-.
The State: Its Origin and Function. S. Paul, S.L. Press. Paper, 1/3; Cloth, 2/6.

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Mr. Hobson on Socialism*

MR. J. A. HOBSON is the cleverest non-socialist critic of Capitalism. He has never sought to use his undoubted knowledge of the chicanery of the ruling class as a means of imposing himself upon the working class movement. His analysis of Capitalism is much wiser and more scientific than that of any of the hot-air specialists of emotional Labourism who have written superficial books wherein they attempt to put Marx in his "proper place." Mr. Hobson's knowledge is as great as their ignorance.

The greatest fault we have to find with him is that he is unable to interpret the wonderful material which he always presents to us in his writings. That material, however, could only be adequately handled by a Marxian. Mr. Hobson's weakness, therefore, lies in his not being a Marxian; this, indeed, is his greatest misfortune—and grievously he has to answer for it. In his latest work,

* *Democracy After the War.* By J. A. Hobson. (Geo. Allen & Unwin, 4/6^{net}).

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The End of the Chartist Movement

THE Chartist agitation began to decline after the Convention of 1848 had failed to realise expectations. The failure experienced on that occasion had a tremendous effect upon the mass of the workers, whose trust and confidence in the Chartist leaders was shaken. The workers—and not only they, but the whole of England—had been expecting a determined and decisive assault. Instead of which, when the critical moment arrived the leaders lost their heads completely. When they should have issued a call to the revolutionary workers of the north (where lay their chief strength) to march upon London, and thus with one blow create a revolutionary army and take possession of the capital they yielded to the orders of the Government, and the Conference, from which so much was expected, broke up in confusion.

Of the situation thus created, the Government made full use, and quickly arrested nearly 500 of the leaders, threw them into prison, and finally transported a large number. The masses were

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Vision and Re-vision

A FEW weeks ago we were talking to an Italian comrade who was in London for the Inter-allied Socialist Conference. He had been on pilgrimage to Highgate, and was inclined to deplore the British lack of ancestor-worship. Marx's tomb, he thought, might have been made more of as a shrine.

Meditations among the Tombs.

We have no personal acquaintance with the burial places of most of the saints and sages of the earth. But it is more than twenty years since a visit to the sepulchre of a great conqueror and great statesman, Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the last dynasty of Shoguns in Japan, left an abiding impression

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The Class-Struggle in South Wales

This is the first of a series of articles. South Wales has been considered to be from the beginning the special preserve of the *Plebs*, so that they are singularly appropriate. It may come as a surprise to many Plebeians to know that our actual circulation in South Wales is—well! very little compared to the interest aroused, to the knowledge of our movement and, shall we add, to our power.

This series should provoke keen interest in South Wales, and also in all industrial areas where our propaganda permeates, and should add not only to the reputation of the author, but also to our circulation.—Ed.)

I.

Of all the industrial areas, that of Glamorgan, Caermarthen and Monmouth is the youngest, and whilst it shows a most vigorous growth of capitalist production and a considerable development of class consciousness amongst the working population, it has comparatively slender traditions, and presents conditions of a much simpler nature than the Clyde, South Lancashire, and the West Riding of Yorkshire. To all intents and purposes

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The Class-Struggle in South Wales

II.

WE have already described succinctly the evolution of industry in Glamorgan and Monmouthshire as it proceeded up to the close of the first quarter of the 19th century and even later, and have, at some length, delineated the social characteristics and economic interests of the capitalist class in that region. We have shown these springing up, both system and class, on a soil unencumbered by any earlier industrial formations and types in what was, virtually, a great wilderness of hills and dales. "What," said Crawshay Bailey, the iron-master of Nantyglo, at an Anti-Chartist meeting in Coalbrookvale in May, 1839, "was the state of this valley 50 years ago? Nothing could be heard from Brynmawr to Aberbeg, but the solitary sound of a blacksmith's hammer, with some two hundred inhabitants, but now may be heard the sound of machinery, employed in converting

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The Class-Struggle in South Wales

III.

THE MAKING OF MERTHYR.

In the preceding article we endeavoured to convey some adequate idea of the conditions which determined the social and religious life of the Welsh proletariat at the period of its migration from the land to the settlements around the forges and the mines. This movement eastwards, like the Wandering of the Barbarians, was by no means a systematic invasion or an immigration compressed into a few years. It extended over several generations and in the Rhondda and Cymore Valleys it was continuing until quite recently. But the environment into which these late arrivals have come bears no comparison with that which received and grew up with the original proletariat of Merthyr and the Monmouthshire Valleys. The condition of those primitive industrial settlements of the late 18th and early 19th Centuries was that of some backwoods lumber-camp without its romance and with a squalor all its own. It savoured somewhat of the serfdom of the Middle Ages, so utter was the dependence and degradation of the workers and so brutal the cynicism of the masters,

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The Annual Meet

THE TENTH ANNUAL MEET of the Plebs League was held Monday, August 5th, at the Labour College (by kind permission of the Governors), If not so representative as previous gatherings, it was very well attended and was characterised by a spirit of comradeship which was an inspiration to all.

THE MAGAZINE has paid for itself during the whole of the year, a notable BEN MAC KAY in the chair welcomed the friends present.

THE SECRETARY read the following report of the year's work and presented the balance sheet (see pages).

"The Report falls roughly into three parts—The Magazine, the Classes, and the Publications' Department.

achievement considering our difficulties. The circulation maintains itself at a steady 5,000 per month (6,000 for the May issue), a considerable increase upon last year. The Government decree, "No returns," did not affect us, as we have always worked upon the advance order plan. We should be flourishing if it was not for abnormal conditions and paper restrictions, which will increase our difficulties during the next year.

We regret that during the year the Editor had to leave for service abroad, but the Secretary, who had been taking over the work, continued to do so. A private subscription fund was raised to pay the Secretary, as it was realised that this had now become full time work. We can safely say that with a little encouragement in the way of donations to keep its spirits up the Magazine can now earn its own living.

THE CLASSES—Full reports have appeared from time to time, so that it is only necessary to give a general survey. Conferences have been held at London, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Halifax, Glasgow and Durham,

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New Tactics for the Social Revolution

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

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An Outline Economics Course

The following syllabus was specially prepared for S. Wales, but its usefulness to general students and teachers is so apparent that we are pleased to print it, together with a short introduction that will also help. Letters to Noah Ablett should be addressed c/o Editor, Plebs Magazine.

INTRODUCTION.

If there is one criticism I would level against our methods of teaching (I am equally guilty with the rest) it is that we strain for over-elaboration instead of striving for a greater simplicity. In this syllabus I have striven for the utmost simplicity I am capable of. It is *elementary* economics, and I would forbid any teacher teaching from *Capital* in an elementary course. It is too forbidding for a first attempt. I have tried to place every salient and important fact in my syllabus. Armed with these a student could then tackle *Capital* with some knowledge of the method and the object of the study. There are only thirteen lectures, and would only take three months' when an advanced course could be taken in the first session, and when the interest of the student is already awakened, which I think is a great advantage, as he has not to wait for a year to get some view of the object of his study. I have not placed headings to my lectures, through sheer lack of time. That can easily be got over. I have given the lectures in a summarised form (some work for a rusty student) deliberately and for this important reason. With the usual skeleton syllabus all sorts of varieties of teaching may creep in, as I have experienced, but with the summarised form the salient and vital points cannot fail to be made in the same way all over S. Wales. I regard this as of immense importance.

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Three Books on Textile Capitalism

Sir Charles Macara, by W. Haslam Mills. (Sherratt & Hughes, Manchester. Remained. 2/6).

The Making of Modern Yorkshire, by J. S. Fletcher. (G. Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 7/6.)

Cotton as a World Power, by Jas. A. B. Seherer. (Frederick A. Stokes Co., New York. 12/6).

WHAT most conspicuously differentiates the modern industrial system from that which prevailed before the Industrial Revolution is the fabrication and manipulation of products by means of machinery. The whole of modern society is upborne on a solid framework of iron and steel, and interlaced across land and sea by the same means. These materials are required at once for the creation of wealth and then for its conveyance in the guise of commodities from one place to another. For the arts of peace and the conduct of war the machine, whether stationary or movable, is indispensable. Hence, the all-importance of understanding the structural development of those industries which are concerned with the production of the means of production and of transit. Coal and iron may be said to be the basic factors in modern industry and commerce, and for that reason the education and organization of the workers engaged in their handling to be our most urgent task.

But in order more clearly to grasp the full meaning of the statement that this is the age of coal and iron it is necessary to know how and why these two industries have attained to this pre-eminence, and to trace their con-

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On Words and Phrases.

Socialists have been accused of clouding the brains of the workers with a fog of words. That there is some truth in the charge one need not deny, for the decidedly cloudy utterances of many who should know better often confuse the issue—and the older generation are not, perhaps, alone guilty. Many of us, as someone recently remarked of Herve, "say what we think, but don't always think."

That there is magic in words none can question, and "England expects" or "Up, Larkin!" are a source of inspiration or disgust as the case may be. To-day, when government by newspapers is the established order, phrases—headlines—have become of paramount importance. At the moment we are to be roused or terrorised, according to our several points of view, by the sinister phrase—"The Dictatorship of the Proletariat." The word Bolshevik, since Mr. Lloyd George applied it to the Labour Party, has lost its terrors. It should have been reserved, if it were to rouse the unthinking to righteous fury, for unmistakable miscreants and villains; and not wasted on obviously respectable, though may be wrong-headed, British Labour M.P.'s. So the Man in the Street must be hypnotised by a new phrase; and "the dictatorship of the proletariat" is accordingly trotted out to make him shudder. Maybe he will take "proletariat" on trust, as he took "Bolshevik," and assume it to imply villainy of the deepest dye. Or he may look up the word in the dictionary, and in that case he will surely pause to think. For he will discover that a proletarian is "one belonging to the poorest labouring class, having little or no property; plebeian; vulgar. (From the Latin *proletarius*—in ancient Rome a citizen of the sixth and lowest class who served the State not with his property, but with his children; *proles*, offspring.)" Will he then grasp the full awfulness of the words, "The dictatorship of the proletariat"?