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THE PLEBS MAGAZINE

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

Vol. XI.

February, 1919.

No. 1

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Ourselfs—Past, Present and Future

Ten years have gone by since the little group of "malcontents" and "young men in a hurry"—how the press of to-day would rush to label them Bolsheviks!—at Ruskin College, decided to publish a monthly magazine which would voice their disrespectful ingratitude towards their *alma mater*, and explain the implications of their new slogan, "Independence in Working-Class Education." No. 1, Vol. I. of the *Plebs Magazine*, appeared in February, 1909, and with the present issue we begin our Eleventh Volume. The time is appropriate for a brief consideration of past history, present circumstances, and future possibilities.

The past need not keep us long—though many things have happened during that decade. From seeking to bring about the Redemption of Ruskin, the Plebs had soon to turn to heralding the advent and pleading the cause of the newly-established Central Labour College; and when, at long last, two powerful Trade Unions made themselves responsible for the future development of the College, the immediate function of the *Magazine* was to serve as a link between the classes which were springing up all over the country. But throughout those ten years the principles the *Plebs* has stood for have remained the same as those which were the basis of the "rebels'" action at Oxford. We do not need to enlarge on these principles here; by this time they are well enough known and nowadays are being more and more widely discussed. Nevertheless, the day has certainly not yet arrived when a "Journal of Independent Working-Class Education" is no longer necessary. To-day, when impetuous industrialists on the one hand and political opportunists on the other repeat the old, false antithesis between "Action" and

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Franz Mehring

DIED JANUARY 30TH, 1919.

Fate has been cruel to us. But a few weeks ago a foul murder, crying to heaven, but still unavenged, put a violent end to the lives of two of our noblest and greatest—Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg. And now death has carried off Franz Mehring, than whom no one, except Klara Zetkin, stood closer to them politically and personally. For Mehring was the third in the original Spartacus group of four, formed in 1916, and only Klara Zetkin remains, ill and heartbroken, to hold the torch for the younger men and women who will yet one day triumph in the German Republic.

Mehring was an old man of 73—but how young in heart and mind! None could ever surpass him in intellectual alertness, in quickness of temperament, in enthusiasm for the great ideals of Socialism, in glow and lucidity of revolutionary thought. A scholar of rare attainments, even in scholarly Germany, he yet was a *fighter* to the tips of his fingers; and though he was a historian of whom his bourgeois countrymen were proud, he was also a publicist whose masterly analyses of current events in the daily and weekly Party Press constituted for many years the intellectual food of countless readers all the world over. For he was essentially a man of flesh and blood, for whom the past was always subordinate to the present, and it was just his treatment of

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The Goose that lays the Golden Eggs

The fable of Æsop is well known. Just as well known is its application, or, rather, misapplication, by the defenders of the present economic system. It is only one of the many illustrations of the perverted judgment of private interests. In a society where the many are sacrificed to the few, everything concerning society appears inverted in the outlook of the few. The semblance is mistaken for reality. The pyramid appears to stand on its apex. It is the capitalist, with his wonderful and bountiful directive ability, who provides for the needs of his ungrateful labourers. "Paul may plant and Apollos may water," Jones may hew and James may haul, but Capital "giveth the increase." Capital is the "goose that lays the golden eggs."

There were many warnings uttered the other day at a sitting of the Coal Commission, warnings intended, of course, for the reflection of the Miners' representatives, about the grave risk of "killing the goose." Each of the three witnesses who cackled about this piece of "frightfulness" finally drew from the unaffected and irrepressible President of the M.F.G.B. the observation: "We shall roast the goose before we have finished." It was what "Tommy" would call "giving them the bird."

I hope that there will be an extensive circulation of the Report of the Coal Commission among the working class. It contains not only the case against the coal owner, but against private ownership in general. It provides a liberal education in political economy. The facts disclosed are a triumphant vindication of what the Labour College has taught and teaches concerning

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Reason and Force

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

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

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

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

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"S.O.S."



"Hearty congratulations on having kept going right through the war." That's the sort of message we're constantly getting. Many thanks, you Plebs. But, just now, we want something more substantial than congratulations. We want postal orders, in fact. We want to form a really handsome collection of 'em—quickly. A sixpenny one from every one of our readers will put us right out of our misery. (But shilling ones are even prettier.)

You will observe that we are trying to be good-humoured, even facetious, about it. But we are really in deadly earnest. We've pulled through the war; but only at a cost. And it's that cost we want to wipe out straight away—as a sort of Peace Celebration. We're in debt to the tune of £100 or so. And having wiped out one debt—a bigger one—*during* the war, and paid our way for a considerable period thereafter; and having quite got to like the feeling of being free from debt; and being weary of going round with the hat; etc., etc.; we want to raise this hundred, and start off—24 pages—with a clean slate.

It's up to you, therefore, dear reader. If you owe us any money for back numbers, will you remit at once? If your account is square, will you send us a small subscription? We can shift that debt before the July number comes out if you'll all get busy quickly. Paper prices have come down at last, and as soon as this debt is cleared we go up to 24 pages—as a first step. (48 pages is our aim, as soon as may be.)

Now please think over what you can do for us, and do it quickly. Get a pal or two to join you—it'll be cheaper when you buy the postal order. This debt is hampering us badly. A small subscrip^{ti}oin from every one of our readers will, as we have said, set us free. The Movement—OUR Movement—is growing stronger everywhere, every day. *Now* is our chance to go in and *do* things. Help us to take it. Yours fraternally, (for the E.C.) J.F.H.

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Educate ! Educate ! Educate !

The Russian Revolution, and its gradual development since 1917, has made itself felt universally, undermining established theories, shattering many pre-conceived notions, and challenging both in policy and tactic, every progressive movement in every country in the world. Particularly sharp has this challenge been to the Socialist movement in Great Britain, with a consequence which, whatever merits it may have for immediate purposes, might prove disastrous just at that moment when mistakes would be most fatal. The consequence I have in mind lies in the fact that the Socialist response in this country to the above-mentioned challenge was to turn almost all its studious minds on to the task of policy-divining, and tactic-defining, to the neglect of what is proving the salvation of the Russian Revolution itself. I refer to Socialist and Working-class Education.

LOOK TO YOUR SOCIALIST EDUCATION ! ! !

Let us be careful lest our intense concentration on immediate possibilities should warp and narrow our vision. In revolutionary situations a comprehensive knowledge of policy and tactics certainly enables us to grasp passing opportunities wisely, and thus make revolution possible. But the *staying-power* of the revolution, its very maintenance, will be determined by the amount of real groundwork prepared, in the shape of Socialist and Working-class education. To-day in Russia it is this which is the most telling factor in upholding the Revolution. And why? Because revolutionary changes are stabilised by the actual amount of real *constructive* work done, by the *actual progress* made in *building up* the new system ! ! ! And to build *effectively* presupposes knowledge of what we are going to build.

It presupposes, first, that our constructive work will be upon the basis of economic freedom and social equality ; second, that our structure will allow

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OUR PLANS

BY THE EDITOR.

WITH this issue, as the discerning reader will have noted for himself, we are initiating sundry changes in the “make-up” and general appearance of THE PLEBS. Those changes—small as yet, but, we trust, agreeable—are intended as little reminders of other changes which we have in view for the near future. In carrying out our plans we shall need the active interest and support of all our friends; of all those men and women, that is, who believe in Independent Working-Class Education as a vital weapon in the fight for the abolition of capitalism.

Our movement is growing by leaps and bounds. (Elsewhere in this issue recent happenings and developments are referred to and commented upon.) The fact that it is growing means that it is being discussed; and the fact that it is being discussed makes all the more essential a constant restatement and redefinition (we do *not* mean “revision”) of its meaning and its aims. “Working-class Education” means a dozen different things in the mouths of a dozen different “reformers.” We of THE PLEBS are out, in William Morris’s phrase, for “Education towards Revolution.” And, as Arthur McManus wrote in these pages last month, “The *slaying-power* of revolution, its very maintenance, will be determined by the amount of real ground-work achieved in the shape of Socialist and Working-class Education.”

There are a score of different ways in which a journal primarily devoted to educational propaganda can be vitally useful to the working-class educational movement. Reviews of new books, articles on historical and contemporary movements, syllabuses of lecture or study courses, discussions of theoretical questions—all these, besides the more obvious usefulness of serving as a link between classes and a record of their doings, are needed by the keen student. THE PLEBS, we hope, is going to supply them. We have the men. Look over our yearly volumes and tell us whether we cannot get together a group of contributors capable of producing a live, “worth-

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WANTED: PARTISAN EDUCATION

ONE of the characteristic weaknesses of our working-class movement is the unquestioning acceptance of things as they are—a belief, if we may say so, in the eternal structural arrangement of present-day institutions. It matters not whether it is a question of morals or ethics, social decorum, politics, or industrialism, we are up against the indolent unwillingness of the average worker to break, or countenance the breaking, of fresh ground. Hence the conservatism, apathy and indifference which are the bane of the pioneers' life. It is just here, perhaps, that the work of the educationalist will prove of most service to the labour movement, since, in the measure that he administers jolts to the accepted opinions of the laity—even where he does not actually convince—he renders the minds of the workers more receptive to new ideas, and thus paves the way for an awakened consciousness.

The artificial and perverted character of our present-day scholastic education is not understood by the mass of the workers. They do not appreciate the fact that, in the schools, the ideas they are taught are coloured by standards set by the ruling class. Being unconsciously assimilated, what appears to be more in keeping with common sense than that these ideas are “natural”?

Nevertheless this unconscious acceptance of current ideas does not prevent the contradictions between beliefs and practice that manifest themselves periodically in our movement. Witness, for instance, the systematic strikes that took place during the war, at a time when patriotic feeling was running high. Here, indeed, was a study for the psychologist to dwell on, viz., the reconciliation of opinions with

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MACDONALD AND OURSELVES

HAS Ramsay Macdonald ever understood, will he ever understand, what the Plebs League stands for? In 1912, in his *Syndicalism*, he spoke about "an intellectual Eurasianism" which was—

... the inevitable product of an attempt to send to breathe the atmosphere of Oxford a body of young workmen, able and ambitious, but not sufficiently prepared for the work given them to do.

These young men, who expressed themselves in

a little journal called the PLEBS... finding no hospitable welcome either in the world of culture or in that of democracy, must brood over revolution and be attracted to superficial and grandiloquent theorising. Some of them were strong enough to keep their heads, but Syndicalism became for others a pleasant path to fame and notoriety. They were not happy in themselves and in their prospects. They would declare war upon the world.

I feel sure Mr. Macdonald would not write that paragraph now. Indeed, especially as regards its references to Parliament and industrial action and organisation, the whole book could be interestingly compared with *Socialism after the War*, despite the regrettable brevity and vagueness of the latter. Those "young men" have grown up. Their influence is felt in the organised labour movement in the industrial, and the political, field. The independent teaching of the social science classes is everywhere breaking new ground, and the need for independent working-class education is now winning increasing recognition. What it is going to mean in the future time only can tell.

It seems strange that a man, who has spent a large portion of his life in urging the

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A SOCIALIST ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

AMONG the numerous educational and scientific institutions established under the Soviet regime in Russia the most interesting is the Socialist Academy of Social Science, which has for its aim the encouragement of original research in socialist theory and the study of the social sciences from the Marxist point of view. It was Lenin himself, a practical revolutionary as well as a revolutionary theorist and thinker, who suggested the idea, with which he coupled a plan for using the Academy for teaching purposes. This double scheme was embodied in the Decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, which is printed below. The reader will note that this is the first endowment, out of State funds, of Socialist science and Socialist teaching. The Academy has now been in existence a year and, according to reports, is doing extremely valuable work. Professor Pokrovsky, the eminent historian, was President of the Academic Council during the first year, and Lenin himself was member of it. Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring were among its Fellows abroad, while Karl Radek is both Fellow and Professor. The Academy also has members in other countries, including Great Britain.

The Academy was opened on October 1 by the Assistant Commissary for Education, Pokrovsky. It was announced that lectures for the first term would be grouped under three heads: historical, politico-juridical, financial-economic. The following courses of lectures were announced:—

Social Psychology. Professor BERGGERK
History of Socialist Doctrine. Professor YOLGIN
Political Economy in Connection with Economic History. . . . Professor SKVORTSOV
History of Internal Politics and Imperialism. KARL RADEK
Communist Socialism. KRIVNOV
Foundations of the Theory of Law and the State. Professor REISNER

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WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

WE need make no apology for concerning ourselves so largely in this issue with our own affairs. Three weeks ago the Annual Meet of the Plebs League was held, and the matters discussed were, we make bold to maintain, of sufficient importance to justify adequate report and comment in these pages. If you were present at the Meet you may care to refresh your memory by glancing over the Report on page 196. If you were not—and the chances are that you were not, since the Meet, though a good one, represented only a small fraction of our friends and supporters—please turn to the Report and give it your serious attention and consideration before proceeding with this heart-to-heart talk

Having paused while you do this we put the question to you straight—"What are you going to do about it?"

You are probably replying—"What do you want me to do about it?" The aim of this conversation being nothing if not strictly utilitarian, we propose to indicate one or two of the things we hope you will do. And though we can't afford to enclose a stamped addressed envelope in every copy of the PLEBS, we do hope you will continue the conversation, so to speak, by writing us at once and letting us know just how—and how much—you feel about it.

You have read the Report, and are, therefore, fairly well-informed as to just how things stand, both in regard to the League, and the Magazine. Let us take the League first.

You are interested in Independent Working-Class Education, or you wouldn't trouble to read the PLEBS. Are you a member of the Plebs League? The Plebs League is the pioneer propagandist organisation in that field. It is, moreover, the only