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The
PLEBS
MAGAZINE



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at the same address.*

MONTHLY

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THE PLEBS MAGAZINE

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

Vol. XI.

June, 1919.

No. 5

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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.

Ireland in Revolution

I.

Any attempt at understanding the operation of the forces which have produced and moulded the British working-class is valueless if it fails to take account of the wrong done to the Irish peasantry by their exploiters, whether British or native in their origin. The Irish problem has been not only the skeleton at the feast of British politics, but the ever-present bane to the advancement of the British workers. The pity of the whole problem lies, moreover, in the success achieved by the enemies of both Irish and British workers in prejudicing their minds and inflaming their racial and religious passions against one another. The fate of the two peoples has been so much affected by the same influences and the same causes that it is one of the great tragedies of history that they should have been so skilfully pitted against each other and kept disputing over superficial antagonisms, whilst their common oppressors benefitted by their deception and disruption.

Now, when once again the political and social systems of the United Kingdom are about to go into the melting pot of a great change, it is in the highest degree essential that the workers of all the four countries should realise their identity of interest and draw together for joint action against their masters. And to bring them together, we must disabuse their minds of the insidious propaganda which has been used to confuse them. We must point out the facts of the case and show how their false friends or their recognised enemies have been one and the same, plundering the Irish people in order that these might do for them the dirty work of beating down the wages of the British workers whom they inflamed against these helpless tools of their own infamy.

We shall see, when we come to write of "Revolution in England," * how, from the 15th to the 19th Centuries, the common people were shut off from access to the soil, and hence compelled to resort to wage-labour, some in agriculture and more in industry. From the beginning of the Tudor Period, the landed proprietors and prosperous merchants of this country sought to increase their revenues by means of enclosures, rearing of sheep, make and vend of woollen yarn and woollen cloth, trade with overseas plantations, cultivation of produce in distant parts any and every possible means of augmenting the scanty surplus to be wrung from workers who, in a land like this, could make little value with the indifferent tools of the years before the Industrial Revolution. France and the French estates being definitely and finally lost, the Crown and the gentlemen of England made the most of what they could appropriate to private use at home, and then looked across the Irish Channel to the fertile island in the west. From early times there had been an import of coney (rabbit) skins and hides from Ireland into England. Now, when the craze for enclosure at home had somewhat satiated itself by the closing years of the 16th Century, English adventurers began to break in upon Ireland and to disturb the landed system of that country. During the reign of James I. the Irish land customs of tanistry and gavelkind were abolished. In old Ireland, under the Brehon laws there had been no recognition of separate absolute rights of property. The sept or the clan had vested in itself proprietorship of the soil, and though, in practice, "the lords of many cattle" had virtually dissolved the old communal economy and polity, yet, for all that, the soil was, in law, the inalienable property of the sept. The new English ordinance pushed aside the Irish law and substituted for it feudal tenure such as had long been customary in this country. Then, in the North, companies of English merchants acquired tracts of land confiscated from

* Two articles on "Scotland in Revolution" appeared in the *Plebs* for March and April last.

rebellious Irish chieftains, whose property, according to English ideas—very convenient ideas—was private, but according to Irish law was held in trust.

In 1641 the Irish people revolted against the detested invader, to be punished later by further immense confiscations. Prior to the revolt one-third of Ireland was in the possession of aliens and two-thirds in that of Irish or early Anglo-Irish settlers, though many of these were chiefs to whom Elizabeth had "granted" the tribal lands which were not hers to give or theirs to accept. After the revolt, two-thirds of Ireland was included in the confiscated area. Thus, step by step, the Irish as clansmen and then the Irish as rebels against the invader, were expropriated and driven off into the fastnesses of Donegal, Connemara and Kerry, whilst the civilising soldiery of England and Scotland settled down to enjoy the lands of "the wild Irishry." It was not long, however, before the common soldiers of Protestantism discovered, what the soldiers of Republican America found over a century later, that speculators and arm-chair warriors have a wondrous way of dispossessing simple soldiers and adding field to field to make great estates. By political intrigue and other jugglery, many of the English soldiers and their families found themselves in Ireland in little better plight than the natives, compelled to work for wages on the land they had been given "for services rendered."

Up to the "Glorious Revolution," however, the tenants on the filched estates could not be interfered with in the occupancy of their customary feudal tenures. True, they were, legally, landless, except on payment of a rent, but they could not be ejected as long as they paid that rent in accordance with custom. With the expulsion of James II. and the accession of William III., a change brought about in Ireland after a fierce and sanguinary struggle, came further confiscations of lands held by Catholics, and hard upon these the outrageous Act of 1695, an Act, however, no more brazen than laws that the same revolutionary class was passing in England and in Scotland at this time. Everywhere the merchant and landed classes were interpreting Liberty as the right to loot the estates of the Crown (theoretically held in trust for the people) or to steal—by law, of course—lands and properties to which their only titles were those that they themselves created.

This Act of William III., Session i., Chap. 12, said that

"All classes, estates, interests, freeholds on terms of years, or any uncertain interest of, into, or out of any messuage, manors, lands, tenements or hereditaments made and created by livery of seisin only or by parole and not putting into writing and signed by the parties so making and creating the same . . . shall have the force and effect of leases and estates at will only."

"The result of . . . the change of law and the confiscations," says Mr. Geo. O'Brien,* "was that, at the beginning of the 18th Century the greater part of the Irish land was owned by a class of alien landlords, and that numbers of the tenants were degraded to the position of mere tenants at will. The land, instead of being a property, the ownership of which entailed duties as well as rights, was looked upon simply as a source of revenue." In the whole of Ireland, outside of Ulster, the peasant became, for some two centuries, a tenant liable to be set adrift at any time, having no incentive to improve his land and every reason to hate his alien tormentor. In Ulster, things were different. There, customary tenures were recognised in law, thus making for that "spirit of improvement" which is supposed to characterise the Ulsterman in contra-distinction to the Irish people proper.

In these measures of expropriation, some sanctioned by the opinion of interested Irish lords, willing enough to betray the sept to profit themselves,

* *The Economic History of Ireland in the 18th Century* (Maunsell & Co. Ltd., Dublin). 10/6.

and others imposed by the rascal crew from whom are descended the Lansdownes, Londonderrys, Devonshires, Abercorns, Beresfords and others of our chivalrous, idealistic and scrupulously reputable Counter-Revolutionaries of the present day, we have the prime cause of Ireland's undoing, and the release of her millions of "spalpeens" (migrant labourers) to flood the labour market and swell the plunder of the British landlord and capitalist classes.

J. T. WALTON NEWBOLD.

(To be continued.)

The Collapse of Capitalism

Banking, as the Achilles heel of capitalism, is the main theme of Herman Cahn's latest book,* and a very imposing pile of data is presented, with the object of demonstrating the almost immediate break-down of private ownership.

The earlier part of the book deals with conditions existing just prior to and at the outbreak of the war, and much controversial matter results from the survey of international Socialist theories and activities. The author claims that Socialist economic theory, as developed by Marx from the material at hand in his day, has been considerably modified by subsequent events. "Modern imperialism, with its almost unlimited expansion of capitalism," raised certain obstacles to earlier conceived industrial evolution, including a changed ideology among certain elements of the proletariat, materially post-dating the revolution as predicted by Marx. Political control of backward countries, providing monopolistic markets for commodities to the national capitalists, appeared capable of almost boundless extension, while among the skilled and intellectual proletariat arose a caste-consciousness which sought material advantages at the expense of the unskilled and unorganized of their class—the old slogans of internationalism paled because capitalistic imperialism had set back the clock of Socialistic evolution.

But—*sursum corda*—"capitalism was born with the germ of a mortal disease which has been revealed only in the course of the last fifty years"; a disease that has become malignant during the war—a "fatal flaw." This fatal flaw of capitalism is located in the money commodity—gold. Gold has two money functions: (1) To serve as a measure of value; (2) to act as a medium of circulation—including the function of means of deferred payment or credit. In the first case, gold functions ideally; in the second, in substance, "hard cash" (e.g., a seller says these boots are worth £2, he gives his boots a gold value ideally, but it requires a buyer to give £2 for the boots before the "ideal" price is translated into hard cash). Marx did not perceive any latent contradiction in these two functions of gold, as money. But "concrete gold and abstract gold have reached a state of contradiction" which can be formulated as follows:—Gold can fulfil its function of measure of value although *insufficient* for the social need; but its very function of means of circulation, etc., is dependent on its quantity being thus *sufficient*. The normal development of capitalism has outstripped the supply of gold, causing national circulation to be almost entirely carried on with tokens, principally in the shape of bank notes and cheques, rendering it quite impossible to guarantee to the "uncontrolled private producers the social validity of their labour time" by the liquidating of tokens by concrete gold.

To realize fully this relationship between gold and paper money it is necessary to trace the development of book-keeping or bank money ("money of account" circulated by cheques) "an important development (since Marx's time) which has placed the bank money instead of the industrial capitalist in

* *The Collapse of Capitalism*. By H. Cahn (Kerr & Co., Chicago). (The Plebs cannot supply at present.)

the centre of the world's stage." "The real origin of the immense total of the world's bank money or money of account is twofold, producing two categories of such money": (1) "Money of account originated in profit; (2) Money of account originated in bank credit." In practice no separation of these is possible, but theoretically they may be isolated for examination of their life process.

Let us consider the first category, here treated as capitalist profits and ignoring workers' savings for reasons stated, consisting of bank capital and its clients' deposits.

Banks are the social monetary agents who are debtors and creditors for equal amounts; debtors to their stockholders and depositors and creditors to their borrowers. The former relationship is the most menacing to capitalism. The reason for this is that the bank lives by lending and must perforce limit idle deposits. Therefore an average reserve is fixed at the minimum of safety to cover daily withdrawal demands, plus an amount to cover exceptional calls. The latter is deposited for security with the central bank—in this country with the Bank of England—who proceed to use it as an ordinary deposit account, *i.e.*, to loan it out as banker's capital.

Normal banking increases (?) deposits by the following simple method. A deposit of £100 in the bank to-day is loaned out by the bank to-morrow: this leaves the original depositor with a title to £100 and creates a new deposit for £100 in this or some other bank—£100 is created out of nothing! The same identical process may be carried out almost indefinitely—as a bank deposit—while faith in the system lasts, but sooner or later a demand must arise for hard cash in lieu of paper notes and then—Socialism, says the author. From this growth (?) of capital as bank money, based on original cash deposits, to increases of credit based upon capitalization of excess cash reserves is an easy step. For example, if a cash deposit of £10,000 requires a cash reserve of £1,000, then an excess of reserve cash of £1,000 is equal to a loanable capital of £10,000—simple faith can produce mountains! Since "it is only the first step that costs" it is an easy transition to loans financed independent of deposits or excess of reserve cash, a process fully illustrated by our author in the matter of war finance. The war financing now threatens finally to abolish the money system, thus bringing about the insolvency of capitalism and the ushering in of socialism. The downfall of capitalism "will then be like an act of nature, and not dependent on the mental and moral preparation of the peoples of the world for a new form of society which must perforce, be social."

What is finally to bring the collapse of capitalism without question of "wills"? How is the Achilles' heel to be pierced? This should be "independent of states of mind," as promised by Cahn. But the "universal run on the banks," following the utmost depreciation of the paper currency and gilt-edged securities, is our author's only definite suggestion, the only incisive part of a very interesting analysis.

Incidentally it is interesting to note that what Cahn aims at showing as being brought about by the blind forces of capitalism is being worked out consciously in Russia, according to Press reports. The London *Daily Chronicle*, 23rd April, 1919, in the course of the report of an interview with Lenin, attributes to him the deliberate policy of choking the arteries of exchange with paper circulation.

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The Plebs position in a nutshell.

FROM SEC., PLEBS LEAGUE, 176 SPRINGVALE ROAD, SHEFFIELD,

The simplest way to exterminate the very spirit of capitalism is therefore to flood the country with notes of a high face value without financial guarantees of any sort. . . . Soon even the simplest peasant will realise that it is only a scrap of paper, not worth more than the rags from which it is manufactured . . . and the great illusion of the value and power of money, on which the capitalist State is based, will have been definitely destroyed. . . . But this simple process must, like all the measures of Bolshevism, be applied all the world over in order to render it effective. Fortunately, the frantic financial debauch in which all Governments have indulged during the war has paved the way everywhere for its application.

As a study of banking, Cahn's book will be helpful in following up the current financial returns, the "expert" inquiries into and discussions of credit problems now prevalent. In addition it should stimulate further study of the various sections of *Capital* which relate to the points here raised. A series of quotations from Marx, Cahn, and the experts aforementioned, would be far from unprofitable labour. "Repetition is the mother of study."

Events have demonstrated that the founders of scientific socialist theory were altogether too optimistic in their expectations as to the immanence of the breakdown of the capitalist system. The same applies with even more force to their followers. Of a truth this war has again shown us that there are more things on earth than are dreamed of in our philosophies—with, we hope, the result that we shall "scorn with cruel thoroughness the half measures, weaknesses, and meannesses of our earlier efforts" and aim at the heroic measures that evolution demands as a condition of our entering into our heritage.

In the matter of economic development of colonies and the conquest of undeveloped countries progress towards climax does not proceed with the "seven leagued boots" anticipated earlier, but takes, in comparison, a more or less leisurely course. Even in highly commercialized countries there seems to be no limit to the possibilities of industrial re-organization and the progress of the proletariat towards industrial solidarity and theoretical clarity has not been markedly pronounced. Capitalism has shown the proverbial vitality of the cat, and even the enormous demands made upon its resources by the war does not yet appear to have set an *economic* seal upon its further persistence, this notwithstanding the arguments of the book here discussed. But while that would appear true of the *economic* factors it would be a bold prophet who would argue that the *human* factor is not about to place a time limit upon private exploitation. Russia, *e.g.*, may yet prove that the limit of exploitation industrially is not the necessary pre-requisite for the transition of a country from capitalism to communal ownership production.

G.S.

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History of the Russian Revolution to Brest-Litovsk. By L. TROTSKY.
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The German Spartacists: Their Aims and Objects. (OFFICIAL DECLARATION
OF THE SPARTACUS UNION.) 2d. Post free, 2½d.

Read**THE CALL**

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST WEEKLY.

THURSDAYS

ONE PENNY.

British Socialist Party, 21a Maiden Lane, Strand, W.C. 2.

The Labour College

A month or two ago we expressed the hope that the Labour College would be ready for re-opening by May Day. We were too optimistic. The work of renovating and re-furnishing is not nearly completed—indeed, we believe we are right in stating that on May Day it had not even been begun. We can readily believe that a good deal of preparatory work, of various kinds, is necessary before the College can re-open its doors. But meantime the months go by, and with them golden opportunities of extending and consolidating the working-class educational movement.

The Plebs League has been deluged with inquiries as to the date of re-opening, particulars of scholarships, and—more particularly—the conditions of affiliation of provincial classes and possible arrangements concerning lectures. At its last meeting the League E.C. therefore passed a resolution instructing the Secretary to write to the Governors of the College, urging the desirability, in view of the large amount of work to be undertaken, of a Secretary to the College being appointed without delay, and plans prepared for next autumn and winter's activities—both inside and outside the College. W. W. Craik has been busy speaking and lecturing in various parts of the country. A necessary complement of his work is surely a Secretary, who, while the Sub-Warden "Agitates," will proceed to "Organize."

A paragraph in a recent issue of the *Socialist* stated that over 200 applications had been sent in for the eight scholarships offered by the S.W.M.F. If this fact is not enough to convince the Governors of the widespread interest in the College and the impatience with which its re-opening is awaited, we can only invite them to look over the Plebs' postbag on almost any day of the week. We are, we know, only voicing the feelings of hundreds of keen Trade Unionists in all parts of the country when we—quite respectfully—urge them to "Get a move on!"

Correspondence

THE RE-ORGANIZATION OF THE LEAGUE.

DEAR COMRADE,—I quite agree with Frank Jackson's letter in last month's *Plebs* as to the necessity of keeping League and classes distinct. The throwing together indiscriminately of both branches of activity, with a sort of loose affiliation to the central body of the Plebs League, does not, in my opinion, meet the case. What is required is a definite and separate organization of branches, on a divisional or district basis, as integral parts of the League.

No doubt, at the present time a great deal of overlapping exists, and steps should immediately be taken to straighten things out. Where classes exist (and even where no classes exist) a League branch should be formed, composed of members who have paid their affiliation fee. Would be Leaguers can enter the charmed circle by doing likewise. Being a member of the League, does not of course, prevent an individual being also a class student. On the contrary, it is desirable that Leaguers should also be class members, as their attendance at the classes will better enable them to play their part as policemen. The classes would therefore not be interfered with in any way by the formation of Plebs' branches. The linking up of these local branches by means of district or divisional committees (the divisions already suggested should do as well as any other) representative of the branches, together with the election of an E.C., should not present any insuperable difficulties, and the structure would be complete.

This, in my opinion, is the method we should adopt in order to make the League really effective, and enable it to play its proper part in the scheme of

Independent Working-Class Education. Also, with regard to the Annual Meet, might I suggest that the custom of holding this in London, while it may have certain advantages, is, on the whole, not so well adapted to serve the best interests of the League as a rotary system, which would give every Leaguer an equal opportunity of being present, and stimulate a greater interest in the League.

Yours fraternally,
WARRINGTON.

Yours fraternally,

J. H. POTTER.

SHOW YOUR COLOURS: A CONFESSION OF FAITH.

DEAR COMRADE,—We ask for space in which to give a brief exposition of the reasons that are leading us at this juncture to resign membership of the I.L.P. and the B.S.P. In so far as we have any personal feeling in the matter, it is one of profound regret at having to sever ourselves from organizations in which so many valued comrades remain at work. This said, let us confine ourselves to principles.

(1) Apart altogether from the question of Sovietist *v.* parliamentary tactic, we incline to the view that the purely political type of socialist organisation has outlived its usefulness. The political, social, and educative functions that have attached to such bodies in the past will (so we believe) in the future be branches of the activity of the new type of industrial organization. Upon the workers' committees and shop stewards' movement, therefore, we wish to concentrate such time as we can spare for public work. We would suggest further that the new periodicals issued by the various workers' committees afford an interesting indication of the growth of the new movement, and that these sheets are likely to replace, as means of effective revolutionary propaganda, the older and more sedate party and trade union official organs.

(2) We consider that the second International is not merely dead, but damned. We are convinced that the success of the working-class movement (or, in other words, the complete overthrow of capitalism) is inseparably connected with the success of the new Red or Moscow International. The I.L.P. supports the Berne International and cannot get further than "a refusal to condemn Lenin." The B.S.P., better advised, goes so far as to refer to the branches the question of admission to the Communist International. (Were this the sole issue, we should await the result of the referendum before withdrawing from the B.S.P.)

(3) The absolutely vital question, however, is that of affiliation to the Labour party. There is a hopeless divergence between those who expect to realise socialism through parliamentary democracy and those who expect to realise it through communist ergatocracy—the administration of the workers, by the workers, for the workers—with (as a preliminary stage) the dictatorship of the revolutionary proletariat, exercised through workers' committees or soviets. Here is the crux, and no pious resolutions of sympathy with our Russian comrades can veil the fact that, after the Easter conferences of 1919—four years after Zimmerwald, and eighteen months after the Bolshevist revolution—the I.L.P. and the B.S.P. remain affiliated to the Labour Party, and therefore remain committed to parliamentary methods.

To sum up:—The conferences at Huddersfield and Sheffield have shown that neither the I.L.P. nor the B.S.P. has adequately realised that the world stands at the threshold of a new era. Not merely do they fail to grasp the necessity of new tactics for the social revolution, but they even fail to perceive that the revolution for which we have so long been working is actually in progress. Half measures are no longer possible. The cry is: "Show your colours!" For the undersigned the only practicable, "socialist unity" is the unified activity of the revolutionary left wing.

Yours fraternally

EDEN and CEDAR PAUL.

HOW keen are YOU? (See our Appeal.)

ANOTHER CONFESSION OF FAITH.

SIR,—Allow me to discuss with Dan Griffiths the issues which he raises in the *May Plebs* and the inferences which he draws from my writings and actions.

He is quite correct as to my original position as an ardent admirer of the policy of the I.L.P. as interpreted by Ramsay Macdonald. But the conviction was borne in on me during 1916 that capitalism would have to be overthrown by some form of revolutionary procedure. First, by the Menshevik, Maisky, whom Koltchak has recently shot, then by Boudin's *Socialism and War*, and, more than all else, by the intellectual wrestling of W. H. Mainwaring, I was transformed into a Marxist and an Industrial Unionist. I need not detail the arguments with, and the persuasions of Paul, of Ablett, of Craik, and Fairchild, and many others, which have brought me to my present approximate location. I am not fixed in thought or action. My mind is receptive to new ideas, new judgments, new lessons. I hope it will ever remain so, though such a perpetual youth is improbable.

I call myself a Bolshevik. I believe in the general principles of Soviet Socialism, principles which must be applied to the conditions of the oldest bourgeois civilisation in Europe. I consider Parliament an institution for which there will be no place under Socialism, and I would use St. Stephen's to house Madame Tussaud's. The whole city of Westminster should be transformed into a Historical Museum for the amusement and instruction of posterity.

I believe in using parliamentary elections for purposes of Bolshevik propaganda. I fought Motherwell, as I told the local I.L.P. before they selected me, "for Soviet Socialism and nothing less." I quote from my address:—
"to solicit your support for a drastic programme of social and political reconstruction, having as its aim nothing less than the public ownership of land and all the other means of wealth production and their control and operation by the workers, both men and women, who alone make the entire wealth of the world. . . .

. . . a World Federation of Free Commonwealths wherein the whole industrial and political power must rest with those who, by hand and brain, contribute to the upkeep of society. They and they alone have any just claim to order the affairs of the world. For that reason my slogan is '*complete and unconditional surrender of Capital and all power to the Working Class*.' . . .

Finally, may I lay emphasis on my belief that it will be my duty, if elected, to speak and act rather as the Delegate of the Organized Workers of the Constituency than as a mere Representative, and for that reason I hope to be able to rely on their vigilant, whole-hearted, and active support to enforce the political mandate they have given me, if need be, by industrial action on railway and in shop, mine and forge."

I regard Parliament and Municipalities as bodies to be captured by Workers' Delegates whose power—as apart from their present legal sanction—must spring from Workers' Committees, militant Trades and Labour Councils, etc. These territorial institutions should be used—until by a Revolutionary majority, we can clear them away as so much antiquarian lumber—to register and give legal sanction to the resolute demands of the Organized Workers.

Once we approach attainment of the (theoretically) possible government "of the people, for the people, by the people," the ruling classes will attempt a *coup d'état* to establish a Bourgeois Dictatorship. Then the battle must be joined, and I would use any method calculated to attain its end, to smother them by the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

Only a class-conscious, well-organized proletariat can win the day. I mean to use every opportunity to rouse, to educate and to organize all the elements out of which that fighting force will require to be welded. Deeds as well as words! Yours fraternally, J. T. WALTON NEWBOLD.

Don't forget that postal order—we're collecting them.

Reviews

RUSSIA.

The History of the Russian Revolution to Brest-Litovsk. By L. TROTSKY. (2/3 post paid, from S.L. Press, 50 Renfrew Street, Glasgow, or B.S.P., 21a Maiden Lane, Strand, London, W.C. 2).

The Bolshevik Revolution: Its Rise and Meaning. By M. LITVINOFF (8d. post paid, from B.S.P., above address).

Space does not permit us in this issue to deal at length with these two intensely interesting and valuable books. We must content ourselves by quoting Litvinoff's opening words:—"The significance of the event (the Bolshevik Revolution) was not at first grasped even by those whom it concerned most closely—the Socialists and the working class of other countries. They who, for a generation and more, had cheered the "Social Revolution" at the close of every meeting . . . and had celebrated, year after year, the memory of the Paris Commune as the great pledge of the future—failed at first to perceive that that pledge had been realised under their very eyes on a scale incomparably larger than the Commune of Paris, and that the "Social Revolution" was actually upon them." These two books help one to realise



THE "ARMS" OF THE RUSSIAN SOCIALIST FEDERAL SOVIET REPUBLIC. THE MOTTO IN THE CENTRE IS "PROLETARIANS OF ALL LANDS, UNITE."

and—still more—to understand, the significance of what has been happening "under our very eyes." Every Pleb should, if he has not already done so, get them and study them closely, without delay. J.F.H.

A most important pamphlet by Lenin has recently been issued by the Workers' Socialist Federation, 400, Old Ford Road, E. 3 (Price 4d. post paid). It is entitled *The Chief Task of Our Times*, and deals with the present conditions of affairs in the Russian Soviet Republic. The popular conception of revolution gets a nasty jar as a result. Marx has stated in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* that bourgeois revolutions flare up most gorgeously and then fizzle out as a result of their own mean aims. Proletarian revolutions have no peculiar pomp in their outward setting, but the majesty of their aims give them a very real interest to all concerned with the progress of humanity.

It has been so in Russia. The Kerensky revolution, an out and out bourgeois one, flamed up, talked heroically and perished miserably. Why? Because, behind the grand words, there was no general appeal to the interests of the vast masses of Russian proletarians. They were not interested in the maintenance of the war: German militarism had no terrors for a people that had existed under the barbaric overlordship of a Czarist régime; if anything, German social institutions appeared as an immense progress towards better things. But centuries of a communistic form of society, even of the pastoral type, had been cemented by years of propagandist activity

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by a large body of devoted and self-sacrificing visionaries, and the common people aimed at "a new heaven and a new earth," very different from that visualized by the romantic disciples of capitalist imperialism.

Luckily, that revolutionary attitude found its spokesmen and guidance in as able, fearless and clear thinkers as our times have known, Lenin and Trotsky. All their efforts have shown a systematic prevision of the actual needs of the movement, and a refusal to be limited by narrow dogmatism as to methods, so long as the end in view could be achieved. Much courage has been required to pursue their ends and, so far, results have justified them.

In this pamphlet we have a translation of a speech of Lenin's to the Soviets in which he reviews the work accomplished, the forces of opposition, their tasks, and the means to their accomplishment. Bourgeois, Mensheviks, Revolutionaries and Communist parties in opposition to the new order are placed in the clear light of Marxian science. Then follows an exposition of the limited aims that must be kept in view by the Soviets in their present isolated activities. No external help is counted upon, no external dangers are disregarded, and yet out of it all Lenin can build his structure of a limited communism which has a strong appeal to the workers of Russia. On the one hand, a possibility worth a heroic struggle against the reactionary elements, internal and external; and on the other, a frank demand for hard discipline and longer vision on the part of its friends. To the latter Lenin says, in effect, "Our ideas of freedom are in the same backward state as our methods of production; both must be brought into line with the larger culture and more developed industrialism of our capitalist neighbours, destined in due course to become our communistic brethren. To accomplish these aims we must utilize the means at hand. Do we desire freedom for leisure we must adopt a personal discipline in unity with large collective production. We have not sufficient knowledge of big business methods in our own ranks, therefore we must engage our opponents' brains and training at commercial rates. Production must be modernised, even in agriculture. As radically as we have cut ourselves loose from the ideology of capitalism, so we must cut ourselves free from the equally enslaving dogmatics of the pure socialist doctrinaires. All available resources must be employed in the rebuilding of our new edifice if we would win to the larger freedom possible by the conquests of scientific production. Our only enemy is the loss of our own ideals and the weakening of our will to win?"

G.S.

PROPHETS AND PROFITS.

The Profits of Religion: An Essay in Economic Interpretation. By UPTON SINCLAIR. (Price, post paid, 50 cents. From the Author, Pasadena, California, U.S.A.)

This recently published volume is the first of a series of four volumes in which Upton Sinclair proposes to present "an economic interpretation of culture, under the general title of 'The Dead Hand.'" The title of the book itself indicates the limited scope of the author's treatment of the subject. No attempt is made at a genetic interpretation, according to the historico-materialist method, by means of which it can be shown that religion is a social product which at different stages of social evolution exhibits quite different characteristics. The author certainly enumerates the various phantasies of primitive religion and sees in them the serious attempts of ancient man at an explanation of the things which happened within the circle of his experience. With the question how primitive peoples represent themselves to their gods, the different attributes they attribute to their gods,

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how they conceive their relations to their gods, what they demand from their gods, etc., the author does not, however, concern himself. Had he done so his "economic interpretation" would not have remained limited to the factor of economic *interests*, which leads him frequently to the unhistorical habit of detaching the institutions of religious belief from the "entire seriousness" of the believers. Those institutions, offices, ceremonies, etc., are, according to him, nothing but a cunning invention of priests—"the Priestly Lie" (pp. 22-3).

When the history of religion is investigated and analysed objectively, one soon finds that the institutions of religion, the castes and the ceremonies, are inseparable from the peculiar conceptions of religion which men in a given stage of society hold; that the powers which they attribute to their priests are involved in the powers they attribute to their gods; that their need of a priest is originally as genuine as their need of a god, and that both find their common ground in those economic *conditions* of social life peculiar to a given time. The economic *interests* of a class without doubt constitute a powerful dynamic force, but only under certain economic *conditions*.

It is certain, also, that the genuinely believed idea can, and has, become hypocrisy; yet even hypocrisy is a historical product. When a religious institution or a priestly caste becomes a "source of income and a shield to privilege," that is but the outward sign that society is changing more or less rapidly, and that economic development is dissolving the hitherto existing social relations in which this religious institution found the genuine conditions of its existence. If to-day this hypocrisy manifests itself more visibly than in any previous period in history, if to-day, as Upton Sinclair abundantly shows, religious institutions, with a cynicism hitherto unsurpassed—especially in the States—serve as the shield and buckler of "Big Business" and the guardian of "Mammon"—that is, in the main, the consequence of the fact that historical evolution is on the point of bringing forth a society from which is excluded all forms of slavery, and, therefore, the need for the supernaturalism which sanctifies slavery; a society which has need of illusions no more.

If I have in this short review of a very readable book, ventured to go beyond what appears to me to be a limitation to a full comprehension of religion it is with a practical purpose in view. The task of the working-class movement is to remove the *cause* of exploitation—an economic cause. The more we direct men's intelligence and energies to this task, the more quickly will they abandon the "Priestly Lie." In saying this, however, I do not for a moment detract from the value of Upton Sinclair's contribution as an auxiliary help to our radically transforming work. In this volume the author presents to the reader a wide field of superstition-mongery. The big churches and the little sects, the very oldest and the very latest thing in "bootstrap lifting," are all critically scrutinised and the intimate connection between the arts of deceiving and the "big business" of defrauding exposed. "Religion is the opium of the people," wrote Marx. Upton Sinclair illustrates the truth of that saying in *The Profits of Religion* and finds the ground of this present drug-habit in the demoralising and desolating effects of capitalist society.

The volume is published by the author in order that, as he says, "it may be available at the lowest possible price." * I recommend this addition to the libraries of all Labour College students and *Plebs* readers.

W.W.C.

* Upton Sinclair writes to us that he has been unable to find any British publisher willing to undertake the issue of his book in this country.—ED., *Plebs*.

NEXT MONTH:—"Ireland in Revolution," II. By WALTON NEWBOLD.
"That Blessed Word—Democracy." By A. E. COOK.

Nominations for Executive Committee

At their last two meetings the E.C. of the League have discussed at length the question of the election of the Executive. Their views as to the present practicability of carrying out the resolution passed at last year's Meet were stated at length in the Secretary's letter published in the April Magazine, and in Frank Jackson's supplementary letter last month. No alternative suggestions having been received, they have decided that **an Executive Committee elected by Postal Ballot of subscribing members of the League is the most satisfactory method of election**; and that this should be carried out before the August Meet.

The Secretary was accordingly instructed to ask for nominations for an E.C. of seven members.

- (1) **Each nomination to be signed by not less than two (2) members the Plebs League.***
- (2) **Nominations to be sent in not later than June 15th.**
- (3) In case of provincial members being nominated, it should be understood that the League is not in a position to undertake responsibility for travelling expenses, etc. But if these can be met, by local subscription or otherwise, it is obviously desirable that provincial members should be included in the E.C. in order to make it as representative as is practicable.
- (4) Full list of nominations to be published in July *Plebs*. Ballot papers to be sent out at same time, and to be filled in and returned during July.

The present (provisional) E.C. consists of—Geo. Mason (N.U.R.); C. T. Pendrey (A.S.E.); Frank Jackson (lecturer, Woolwich Plebs classes); C. Terry (lecturer, London Plebs classes); B. S. Mackay (Coachmakers); J. T. Walton Newbold (lecturer, Plebs Classes in S. Wales, Lancashire, Durham, etc.); and T. Quelch (B.S.P.); all of whom are eligible for nomination. Nomination papers must be addressed to the Sec., Plebs League, 176 Springvale Road, Sheffield. *Note final date—June 15th.*

News of the Movement

MANCHESTER has been successful in establishing a Labour College in the centre of the city convenient for all, whether by train or tram, writes the Sec., J. McGee. The premises are at 32 Dale Street, Piccadilly, and the opening ceremony took place on May 3rd. The place was crowded before Tom Bell, of Glasgow, took the chair. Students from the classes in the district (a radius of about seven miles) were present, as well as representatives from trade unions. Great interest in the experiment was expressed, and all present agreed that the College was just what was wanted in the Manchester area to arouse and to focus interest and support. A letter of congratulation from the E.C. of the Plebs League was much appreciated. After an address by the chairman on the need for and the objects of a Labour College, Harold Kershaw (Rochdale) gave an outline of the subjects to be taught. A musical evening followed the speeches, and the success of the launching ceremony was complete. All Plebs, and everyone interested in working-class education in the district are asked to give their support; an ounce of help now will

* A member of the Plebs League is one who has paid his or her annual subscription of 1/-. If you are doubtful whether you have paid or not, send your bob along with your nominations, and make sure.

be worth a good deal of pity later on. The Sec. appeals for help from all who are capable of taking classes, and those who are not he asks to work through their trade unions for fees. Many classes (Elementary Economics, Mathematics, Grammar, and Industrial History) have already started. All information from the College (address above) open daily from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

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MANSFIELD (Notts)—quite a new Plebs district—is going ahead by leaps and bounds. The Sec. reports that the local comrades had a Labour College banner in the May Day celebrations, and requests for information as to classes come from all round. Walton Newbold and C. Watkins have lately spoken in the district and it is hoped that W. W. Craik will pay a visit in the near future. Two new classes are in process of formation.

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ABERDARE miners rounded off the winter's work by inviting W. Paul down to give a week's course of lectures. The venture was brilliantly successful both as regards the quality of the lectures and the size of the audiences. Night after night the hall was packed, and Com. Paul's treatment of his subjects—"Independent Working-Class Education," "Economics and Genius," "Function of Socialization in Evolution," and "Economic Basis of Reformation"—aroused much enthusiasm.

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The London District Council of the N.U.R. has requested the Government of the Labour College to place upon the agenda at their next meeting the question of opening classes in the London District next autumn. The Council suggest that the Governors should take the initiative by calling a Conference of T.U. committees, London Trades Council, London Labour Party, etc.; and they are of opinion that the secretarial duties in connection with the classes should be undertaken at the earliest possible date by one of the College staff.

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The Newcastle Conference convened by the North of England Labour College League (May 17th) was a huge success. Close on 200 delegates attended, representing 142 organisations. Ebby Edwards was in the chair, and the speakers included W. W. Craik, W. Lawther, T. Ethell, and T. Gillender. Craik also addressed meetings at Chopwell, Annfield Plain, Prudhoe, Leadgate, Greenside, Ashington, and Pegswood. . . . The North of Englanders are arranging an Essay Competition, with book prizes value £3, £2, and £1, full particulars of which can be obtained by *Plebs* readers from T. Ethell, James Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

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We have received another letter from our Australian comrades at the Victorian Labour College. The Sec. writes:—"The College is well established now and our annual conference was a great success. All classes are free now, and we hope to do a great work this year. We have branches established in Geelong, Ballarat, Adelaide, and Sydney. Brisbane is to take up the work. The W.E.A. is a dead letter as far as the workers are concerned, being now purely a middle-class women's show! We hope to be able to start a resident college very soon. . . . All good wishes to our comrades everywhere in their endeavours; we shall soon have to start an International Federation of Labour Colleges—with travelling scholarships!"

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We have had several inquiries lately about a Plebs badge. What do our readers think of the idea? And have they any suggestions to make as to the design thereof? We can't undertake the job of providing one unless it will pay for itself; that is, unless a sufficient number of Plebeians want one. Send your suggestions—and guarantees—along. W.H.

We're passing the hat round—don't look the other way.