

A red x here means that you owe us some money. Even if you don't, you'd perhaps like to send us something. It's a tight squeeze to pay our way in these days of high prices, and every little helps, (as Ll.-G. said to the Labour men he found jobs for).



THE PLEBS MAGAZINE

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

Vol. IX.

June, 1917

No. 5

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A Letter to the I.L.P.

DEAR COMRADES,—For about a year I have been endeavouring to voice to you, in such a manner and by such a vehicle of expression as would ensure that the whole Party could hear it, my grave discontent and alarm at the message which has been given out in our name as the authoritative attitude of the largest Socialist section in this country towards War in particular and in general. My uneasiness was of earlier origin than that, but I did not wish to do or say anything which would embarrass those anxious to rally around us all the forces of opposition to Conscription and in favour of Peace. I realised that, at that time, it would not be practicable to launch out in a thorough going exposition of our Socialist fundamentals.

I hoped, and at one time almost believed, that our Press and publications would get to grips with realities and shew our new-found friends, who have been so eager to understand, what had

happened to their world, and why every cause in which they believed and every institution in which they reposed their trust were being steadily and relentlessly undermined. I expected that an attempt would be made to deal with causes as well as effects, and to analyse the origins of the War. I thought that those who speak for the Party, and who are not engrossed entirely in the specialised activities of the House of Commons, would show *why* Secret Diplomacy, Militarism, Armaments, Protection and all the measures of Reaction were being resorted to, not only in this country but in every capitalist country, belligerent or neutral. Instead of enquiring whether Britain was blameless, or how the War came, or restating the incidents of the years 1904-1914, or reviving the doctrines of *Laissez-faire* to develop a case against the New Protection, I thought that some life-long exponent of Socialism would go to the roots of the matter, and show how Capitalism, inevitably in its course of evolution, had plunged us all into the abyss. I wanted to see some expert, with years of experience and Socialist passion, some man whose name and whose reputation far transcended my own, show the Individualists and Radicals and Utopians who, one regrets to say, have set our pace, *what* lay back of all their sub-causes and *what alone* could save the world from despotism and destruction. I thought that our chosen leaders and our spokesmen would rise to the occasion and that the I.L.P. would set, and not merely keep, the pacifist pace. In that hope I was preparing, day after day, the shot and shell which was to feed the Big Guns of the Movement. But they never got the range!

Latterly, I have attempted to criticise. My letters have been clipped, mutilated, suppressed, ignored. Again and again I have tried to criticise the Bermondsey Resolution, but references to it have been deliberately excised—of course, owing to exigencies of space. I have tried to reply to Allen and Brockway, by stating the Socialist case for Alternative Service. Again, there was an excuse for not inserting it. Even my articles have been cut in such a way as to point the editorial moral. I found it useless to put the case against German Capitalism even though Liebknecht was denouncing it incessantly. It was equally vain to appeal to the editorial staff to assume a more Socialist attitude to the various topics of the hour. Now you know the reason for my apparent boycott of the Party organ.

Why I am addressing you, in this way and at this time, the letter quoted below will make evident. You will remember that in the issue of 19th April, an invitation was extended to open a discussion on I.L.P. classes. The letter over which this notice appeared referred to the W.E.A. I immediately accepted the invitation in the hope of starting that "interesting discussion." A fortnight later, May 3rd, the only reference to the matter, under the heading, "Some Belated Correspondents," was woven around a mangled

and *hopelessly contorted* quotation. My letter was despatched on April 21st, in time for the issue of April 26th, but the space was evidently needed for an article on "*War Office Censorship at Work.*" Here is my letter in full :—

TO THE EDITOR, THE LABOUR LEADER.

Sir, I am extremely glad to note that J. R. McPhie is calling the attention of the I.L.P. to the importance of Study Classes. It has long seemed to me that our Movement in this country has been sadly lacking in that it has not, hitherto, been able to maintain a vigorous educational system of a definitely Socialist character, worked as part of a carefully co-ordinated propaganda. I well remember with what interest, envy, and hope I looked upon the offices which the Belgian Socialist Party had opposite to the Maison du Peuple in Brussels; how eagerly I queried Liebknecht about the provision for education in Germany; and, latterly, how joyous I have been when I have found the publications of Charles Kerr on my comrades' bookshelves, more particularly in South Wales.

But I should have hoped that my comrade would, in speaking of I.L.P. Study Circles, have remembered that there is the nucleus of such an educational system of a definitely and avowedly Socialist character in the classes of the Central Labour College. Some of us have found new stimulus and inspiration in the magnificent work that is being done in South Wales, Northumberland, Durham and elsewhere by the little band of working men who, labouring against odds, have been developing the educational wing of our Movement.

This Central Labour College, temporarily closed owing to the operations of the Military Service Acts and the decision of the Board of Management, is supported by the N.U.R. and the S.W.M.F. Classes in conjunction with it, are being conducted up and down the country, whence, in normal times, chosen students are sent up to the College for a period of training. Thereafter, they are expected to return to their normal life and to help organize and conduct classes amongst their fellow workers. In this way, the working class is evolving its own educational plan and its own distinctive university, in the same way that, two generations ago, the middle class founded the New Universities, there to teach their own ideology.

The W.E.A. has, of course, no Socialist bias. The text-books and study courses are not Socialist. Its aim is not to make Socialists. It endeavours, quite honestly no doubt, to maintain the illusion that history and economics can be presented from an "impartial" stand point. It aims at education "for its own sake," and for the bringing of the knowledge and culture of the Universities—now rapidly becoming not only schools of Capitalist thought, but also hotbeds of Militarism and Reaction—to the working classes.

The Plebs League—which consists of members of Central Labour College classes and others who, like myself, wish "to further the interests of independent working class education as a partisan effort . . . to assist in the abolition of wage-slavery"—has an altogether different view of educational classes. We desire to build up a Socialist Educational Ladder. We wish to arm ourselves with as complete a knowledge as possible of Socialist theory and to work out, from our study of that theory and of economic, political and social development, the urgent problems of Socialist method. Only by such methods, by studying the classics of Socialism and the practice of Socialist parties, and by applying the Socialist critique to industry and politics, can the I.L.P. get clearly in its mind what it *can* get and what it *wants* to get.

I would make an appeal, therefore, to my comrades of the I.L.P. to support a Socialist effort, to form in their branch a class to study industrial history, economics, "Socialism and War," or some similar question, and to affiliate to the Central Labour College.

After the war, we are going to restore our International connexion with the Socialist Educational Unions abroad. Once more, we shall share with them our international literature and our common battle. We shall yet link the Socialist Sunday Schools in a chain of learning and fellowship to the Workers' University. We shall proclaim our revolutionary gospel and aim our ever more damning indictments and exposures at the chameleon antagonist—Capitalism!

For us and for you let the message be, in the words of Labriola,

Ethics and Idealism consist henceforth in this, to put the whole thought of Science at the service of the Proletariat!

Yours fraternally, J. T. W. N.

The editorial comment on this was almost too exquisite for words, with its jibe at "mere Socialist economics," and its reference to the "ethical as well as economic" basis of the I.L.P. When I am told that the basis of the I.L.P. is ethical, I want to know *what* is the basis of its ethics. I cannot for my life conceive how "the science of morals," ("that branch of philosophy which is concerned with human character and conduct") can be studied without first considering the material conditions of social life. An understanding, an acceptance of the historic verity, the Class Struggle, *must* precede any comprehension of Socialist ethics. To pretend that there is no Class Struggle is to strike at the very roots of Scientific Socialism.

The educational propaganda of the Central Labour College and the Plebs League has the blessing of Klara Zetkin, Karl Kautsky, and Karl Liebknecht as well as other "Minority" Socialists. It can, unlike that of the W.E.A., become a fraction of that future International Socialist Educational Union which was taking shape when war broke out. It is political as well as industrial, but its work is to express the *fundamentals* which determine Labour and Socialist practice.

Comrades, is it your desire to take your lead from an organization which has subsidies from the Capitalist Government and which warns its Socialist teachers to be "impartial," or to be affiliated to one which is in tune with the International? Will you prefer to look no deeper into the causes of War than you can by studying the works of Morel, to take your philosophy from Bertrand Russell, your economics from Pigou, and your ethics from *Common Sense*; or will you not rather go, in company with Liebknecht, Longuet, and Boudin to the masters of "mere Socialist economics?"

Yours fraternally, J. T. WALTON NEWBOLD.

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