


THE LIBRARY TABLE

LABOUR IN THE CHANGING WORLD

BY R. M. MACIVER. Toronto: J. M.
Dent and Sons.

WO years ago I sat behind a row of Toronto labour leaders listening to Prof. MacIver lecture before the Canadian Institute on "Capital and Labour". I wondered what was happening to their cherished conviction of political science faculties as apologists for the "predatory rich".

The labour men said nothing, but allowed an opinionated young Marxian Socialist to tell the audience how little the Professor knew of the subject he had been called across the Atlantic to teach, but later on they asked that the lecture be repeated in the Labour Temple.

This invitation marked a bridging of the chasm which separated students of economics within the labour movement and the University, till, to-day, in various parts of Toronto Trades Unions and university men in classes of the Workers Educational Association are together studying the problems of reconstruction.

This new sympathy partly explains why Ontario has achieved a veritable political revolution without justifying the alarmist prognostications of those journals which accepted Queen's Park agitated oratory as representative of labour's soberer mind.

By his close association with these classes as well as his experience as vice-chairman of the Dominion Labour Commission, Prof. MacIver has had opportunities shared by few economists of feeling the pulse of labour, which gives him the right to write with authority.

Since the "economic foundations are laid in the heart of humanity" Prof. MacIver is not alarmed by the shaking of the superstructure, provided society can be persuaded that we are in an era of reconstruction not re-action and are framing a new industrial organization to house the new life to which the recent cataclysm has given birth.

Beginning with the axioms of the scientific economist, that all wealth is produced by human labour and is meaningless save as a contribution to human welfare, Prof. MacIver criticizes the wastefulness of the present wage system. This system, by its division of interest between owner and wage-earner, treats labour as a commodity rather than a capacity and the worker as an instrument rather than a partner in a process of whose completion he can have no intelligent comprehension, and it really has increased enormously the cost of production by leaving undeveloped the native ability and initiative of the worker, killing all the old craftsman joy in achievement and replacing it by the modern worker's chronic "hatred of his job". This has led to the direct waste of the enormous labour turnover quite apart from strikes and lockouts caused by discontent with wages or industrial environment so demoralizing to production.

Last of all there is the most tragic of all wastes caused by the materialistic standards of a plutocracy in which rich and poor alike squander life for "that which profiteth not".

Marxian Socialism is criticized for failing to reach through class consciousness to community consciousness and aiming to replace the control of one order by another. I. W. W. and other extreme revolutionary move-