

The Labor College, London

By James Griffiths, South Wales Miners Federation Student.

EDITORS NOTE.—The following description of the nature and origin of the London Labor College has been sent by Comrade Griffiths in response to a request made to him with that end in view. The curriculum as outlined hereunder should prove interesting to those who are interested in the systematic education of the working-class.

Its Origin.

STRIKES have played a very significant role in the development of the British working class movement. Though they often fail to achieve their immediate objective, the experience gained from those failures has been productive of much good.

Thus out of an obscure strike of compositors in London was born our only Labor daily paper, "The Daily Herald." The nearest approach we have to an industrial union, the National Union of Railwaymen, is the result of the bitter experience gained by the railway workers in the strike of 1911.

It seems, therefore, fitting that the Labor College should have been born in a strike, as well as being indicative of the mission and character of the College. In order to understand the why and wherefore of the college, it will be an advantage to know something of Ruskin College, the parent that the child (The Labor College) has disowned.

Ruskin College was founded by two Americans, Mr. Walter Vrooman and Dr. Charles Beard at Oxford in 1899.

At the inaugural meeting Mr. Vrooman thus expressed the purpose of the college:

"We shall take young men who have been merely condemning our social institutions and will teach them how to transform those institutions."

Ruskin College came to be looked upon as a Labor College; the bulk of the scholarships were provided by the trade unions, but the trade unions did not control it. The trade union students desired that Ruskin College should not only be looked upon by the labor movement as its own college, but that the movement should also control it. The efforts of the university to draw the college into its bourgeois arms spurred them to form a Plebs League with the avowed object of securing that end, viz., control by the labor movement. The then Principal, Mr. Dennis Hird, associated himself with the league and its object. This brought down on his head the wrath of the authorities of the college, and ultimately he was dismissed.

This was the signal for action on the part of the students, and they went on strike. The outcome of the strike was the founding in 1909 of the Labor College. The objects of the new college were set forth as being to "train men and women for the industrial, social and political work of the labor movement."

The college has had a very stormy career. The students, and other friends of the cause of independent working-class education, have fought valiantly for it. They carried on a persistent propaganda to get the trade unions to realize the need for such an institution as an integral part of their activity. In 1914 their efforts met with partial success when the South Wales Miners' Federation and the National Union of Railwaymen decided to jointly own and control the college. Efforts are now being made to get other trade unions to join in the ownership and control of the institution—with every hope of success.

What Kind of Education Does It Impart?

In conformity with the objects of the college, the curriculum is confined to those subjects that are of vital importance to the labor movement in its work. Those objects are officially set forth as "To teach trade unionists the sciences which afford a penetrating insight into the deepest foundations of society, which disclose the processes by means of which social structures arise and function, and which, therefore, provide the enlightening knowledge of those ways and means to be adopted by the labor movement for the accomplishment of its historical task."

Labor's problems being social problems, the college concentrates upon those social sciences that serve as a key to the understanding of those problems.

The history taught is the history of labor, a study of the development of social institutions, of the means of production at different stages in the evolution of industry, leading up to a study of the modern working class movement.

In economics it is decidedly Marxian. It does not ignore other schools, for the curriculum includes a course on the history of Economic Theory. It is important to know the opposing point of view. It is far more important to have a thorough knowledge of our own. So, aided by Marx's monumental "Das Capital," it concentrates on the task of unravelling the mysteries of the economic structure of capitalism.

Other important subjects are given careful attention. The Science of Understanding (based on the works of Joseph Dietzgen), Evolution, Sociology, Economic Geography. Political and municipal questions are all included, while auxiliary subjects such as English grammar, foreign languages and elocution find a place in its work.

How the Work is Accomplished.

The two chief methods by which the work is done are residential tuition at the college itself in London, and social science classes in the provinces.

A—Residential Tuition.

The college is situated at Earls Court, in the south western district of London. There are at present twenty-seven students in residence. There is an efficient staff at the head of which is the Principal, Mr. W. W. Craik. It is a tribute to the efficiency of the college that two members of the staff, including the Principal, are products of its training.

The method followed is that of lectures, followed by questions and discussion. These are followed up with private study and essay writing.

The scholarships are provided by the trade unions, generally for a two years' course. The fee is £100 for board and tuition.

B—Provincial Classes.

There has been a remarkable development of this branch of the college activity within recent years. It is computed that there are over 6,000 students attending these classes during this present winter. The subjects taken are mainly, Industrial History and Economics. Most of the tutors are old students of the college. It would be impossible to estimate the influence of these classes upon the labor movement in this country. From them are recruited the advanced section, the left wing that forms the dynamic force of our trade unions and labor and Socialist organizations.

Such is a brief outline of the work that is being carried on by the college. There is a remarkable awakening of interest in independent working class education in this country.

The tasks that confront the labor movement are many and difficult. The greatest need is education. The college exists to meet that need; and it is fulfilling it right worthily.

TRUSTS AND THE LAW OF VALUE

BETWEEN the cannibalistic Fuegians of South America (who also in hard winters as related by Darwin, killed and ate their old women, when they spared their more useful dogs' lives), and civilized man, how vast, in command over Nature, is the difference! It is our perfected Tools and Organization of Production and Distribution that makes most of this difference for, without the Tool, man is *Nature's Slave*, and as the tool becomes perfected the Slavery declines. But, the tool or organization having come into existence, they who have none, or own tools of antiquated and imperfect nature, become the slaves of those who own the best tools and organizations....Now, the **TRUST** is that best and most efficient Tool and Organization. But until the nation owns the trust, the nation will remain the slave of the trust. The "**Law of Value**" shows that goods are exchanged according to the amount of labor-power embodied in them and socially necessary for their production. Now the goods, made and distributed by the operator of Superior Capital, being more numerous and turned out with Less Expenditure of Labor-Power than the goods turned out and distributed by the operator of Inferior Capital, are cheaper. They, therefore, drive the small, inefficient man's goods out of the market. An outcry arises because the Big Capitalists seek to monopolize the trust for their own exclusive benefit. The small, inefficient, reactionary capitalists, who are being ground to powder by the

trust's Superior Competition, want to tie up and hamper the trust, thereby throwing back Civilization. But it is only the Working-Class and those intelligent enough to support that Class, who aim to administer and control the whole of the machinery of wealth-production, so that its benefits may be enjoyed by all.—"Progress."

The Odd Trick

(Concluded from last issue)

The introspective moralists, Christian, Positivist, or what not, are therefore right when they insist on the satisfaction of material wants not being regarded as the final end of human life. They are only wrong in not seeing that until obtained they must necessarily seem such to the vast majority of men. The signal failure in history of the doctrine of repression, whether it take the form of the "holiness" of the Christian, or the more plausible "ascetic" discipline of the Positivist, after a reign of two thousand years ought, one would think, to give these good people pause as to whether repression is, after all, so conducive to the higher life of man as satisfaction.

The true telos of human life, the "rational activity" of Aristotle, "the beautiful, the good, the true" of the young man who is taking to literary composition, may be compared, not to speak it profanely, to the odd trick in whist, which, though it is the object of the hand to win, yet presupposes the winning of six other tricks. Now the amateur of the "goody-goody" morality—the perfectionist of individual character—thinks to make the odd trick without having completed his regulation half-dozen. The Socialist is rather concerned that the human race as a whole should each and all "make" the first six tricks, called respectively, good and sufficient food and drink, good housing, good clothing, fuel, untaxed locomotion, adequate sexual satisfaction, knowing that before these are secured the "odd," which is the final purpose of the "deal," will be impossible. With bad and insufficient food, with small and squalid dwellings, with scanty and shoddy clothing, with insufficient firing in cold weather, and the lack of change, and with inadequate satisfaction of a sexual kind, man may exist; but he (i.e., the average man) will see nothing but these things in front of him, his ideal will still be them and nothing else but them. When once he possesses them they become a part of his ordinary life, and he ceases to think about them. His horizon is then extended. He sees the final purpose of his life in things of which before he had never dreamed.

Once more, I repeat, let us make no mistake, all asceticism, all privation, is in itself an unmitigated evil. It is doubtless true that there are occasions when it is our duty, living in a period of struggle, to deprive ourselves, to sacrifice ourselves, for a better society. But even this deprivation, this sacrifice, is in itself an evil. It only becomes a good if it is undergone with the purpose of putting an end to the sempiternal privation and sacrifice which civilization imposes on the majority of our fellow-creatures. One can well appreciate the sacrifice of ourselves, the men of this generation, when necessary for the future, in all the respects named; but I confess that did I, like the Christians, the Positivists, and the sentimental Socialists, such as I understand Count Tolstoi to represent, believe privation and sacrifice (even "ascetic discipline") be it in the most groveling of material matters, to be the permanent lot of Humanity, my ardor in the cause of progress would be considerably damped.

One can scarcely conceive the nobler life which will result from generations of satisfied (rather than repressed) animal desires, once they are the lot not of this or that class, but of all. With food, drink, and other creature comforts to be had for the asking, they will cease to occupy the attention of human beings to an extent previously unknown in the world's history. Then for the first time will the higher aspirations and faculties of man have free play, the "something more," the "odd" trick, which is the real goal of human life, will assume a new character and be pursued with an energy rivaling that hitherto devoted to personal gain, ambition or glory, since the path to these things at least in the old sense, will have been closed forever.