

Study Classes in Political Economy

SOME SUGGESTIONS IN METHOD AND PROCEDURE

By "GEORDIE."

(From "The Red Flag," October 4, 1919)

There is, at the present time, a very noticeable increase in the number of classes and in the interest displayed in the study of economics. This is the more gratifying, as it has always been recognized in well-informed Socialist circles that the systematic study of Political Economy and kindred subjects was the most effective, if not the most attractive method of propaganda.

Now, this being the time of year when classes are in process of formation it has occurred to the writer, who has had some little experience in this matter, that it would be well, for the guidance of classes forming for the first time, to give here some of the results of that experience. I am the more impelled to do this because I am strongly of opinion that the method of study is of as great, if not greater, importance than the subject matter, so far as beginners are concerned. That is to say, that one of the main objects to be attained is the development of a certain attitude of mind—the scientific method. Possessing this attitude of mind, believing nothing, questioning all things, insisting on clear and accurate definitions, testing every statement by an appeal to facts, the student is in a position to securely pick his way through the mess of lies, misrepresentation and clogged nonsense which is modern popular literature.

The matter of class-organization and methods may, I take it, be left to the commonsense of the class itself, but the procedure will, in general, consist of reading in turn from the text book, followed by questions and comment by the members. As to the text-book, "Wage-labor and Capital" will probably be the best for a start, but, if this book is used, it will be well to get a sufficient number of the revised edition recently issued by the S. P. of C., as most editions of this book are very defective. For advanced students, the first nine chapters of "Capital" could be studied. "Value, Price and Profit," starting at the sixth chapter, is also very good. Other standard works ought to be at hand and the class should possess a really good dictionary. Every word has, and every statement ought to have, a meaning, and it is the business of this class to find it. No portion read from the text-book ought to be passed up unsifted and the chairman should, so far as possible, see that every member of the class is satisfied before proceeding. Many controversies and most arguments will be found at the bottom to consist of a question of definition. Many words and terms in general use have so wide an application or may mean so many different things that for the purpose of scientific statement they must be limited to invariably indicate one thing or category of things. Such words as "Wealth," "Commodity," "Value," are of this nature, and will often be found used to indicate very different things by different Economists. Where the consensus of authorities has given any term a definite significance that meaning should be ascertained and the term used in that way but in any case some definite meaning should be attached to it and the word or phrase used invariably in that sense. While this method may be followed in the case of a word, the case is very different when we come to a statement of fact. The statement or proposition is true or it is not true, that is to say, it agrees with the facts or it does not, and no amount of authority will help it in any case.

It is customary to quote strings of authorities in support of this, that or the other proposition, and it is a weakness with many Socialists to quote a tag from say, "Capital," and to imagine that the question is thereby finally settled. The opinion of an accurate observer and painstaking investigator such as Darwin or Marx has, of course, due weight, but should always be accepted with the reservation that an appeal to the facts is the only proof of which any proposition is susceptible.

No statement is worth considering that can not be expressed in good, plain, simple English, and the class should be encouraged to use this mode of expression rather than the cryptic and exotic terminology so much affected by many members of the Marxian School.

The selection of a chairman is rather important. It is his business to see that the discussion does not wander from the matter in hand; that no one, including himself, monopolizes the time of the class; to encourage timid, bashful members to take part and see that the discussions are carried on courteously and in regular form. I do not, for one, approve of the appointment of a teacher or instructor, but the class would be as well to have a director whose function it would be to be responsible for the work done. It would be his business to look up in advance the matter liable to come up, to verify the definitions, etc., and be prepared to initiate and carry on the discussion. This office may be combined with that of chairman, or if there is no one willing to act permanently, individual students should be made responsible for the proceedings at each meeting of the class. That is to say, that the work of each meeting should be laid out in advance and some one member made responsible for it.

It has been my experience that classes of this kind are liable to be infested with a variety of freaks and cranks of one kind and another. These people, of course, should have a courteous hearing in discussion, but should not be allowed to monopolize the time of the class and, if necessary, should be firmly suppressed; a little verbal brutality will do them no harm and will be helpful if they are any good. Such people are generally interested in the propagation of certain political or religious theories, and it should be remembered that the object of the class is the study of Political Economy, that is to say, the science of the production and distribution of wealth under Capitalism, and not to draw plans for the New Jerusalem.

THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

(Continued from Page 1)

class philosophy, whose business—and interest—is to protect class privilege. No other will be nominated and elected to that position. And whatever stray members from the slave class succeed to that "honor" are either revisionists (or worse), or are so hopelessly outnumbered as to be negligible.

Like everything else, parliament is the result of a long evolutionary process. It has its roots deep in unfamiliar and forgotten ages. It was the council of tribal communities—a council of equals. It became the "moot" of the communal middle ages, and developed into the representation of the third estate—the commoners, i.e., the rising merchant and trading classes of the early capitalist period. And now, with the completed development of capitalist society, it is no more than a name. It lives on the prestige of its ancient traditions. It is stripped of all real authority: it has been shorn of its privileges; its functions have passed into the higher control of the modern cabinet, and its powers are but the mockery of "sanctioning" what the cabinet decrees. Because, just as the tribal commune was more and more invaded, and dominated by the flourishing process of exchange, and grew gradually into chattel slavery, so the council of equals lost its original character of equality and became obsolete. Just as the accumulating merchant of the middle ages broke up the natural economy of the feudal fiefs, so the communal village moot lost its pristine nature and significance. And just as the nation of manufacturers and traders has progressed into the all-absorbing commercial empire, so the young parliament of the commoners has disappeared in the overshadowing might of the Imperial Cabinet. That is why the "will of the people" is but an empty name, the shadow of a substance, distant by thousands of years.

Political "representation" is economic interest. Nothing more. And so long as it remains in existence, so must slavery endure. For it is but the expression of that slavery. Slavery is exploitation, and today, exploitation is accomplished through

wages. Therefore, the one interest of the slave class is the abolition of the wages system, that is to say, of capitalist society. And that abolition must be entirely effected by ourselves, the new developed medium of social progress. Master class and slave class interests are diametrically opposite, and no wise scheme or glamoring reform can ever abrogate their opposition. There can be only common interest when there is a common class, i.e., when there is Socialist society. Then with economic freedom, we shall be equals, with the privileges of equals—with the guarantee of everything that this highest of human societies can encompass and achieve. There is no other issue. R.

TO THE WORKING CLASS OF CANADA

Fellow Workers,—A few weeks ago Russia sent out a cry for help. The workers of the Russian Soviet Republic are appealing to the workers of the world for aid in the terrible calamity that has overthrown their nation. Decimated by seven years of incessant warfare, deprived of food and clothing, of medicines and drugs, of agricultural implements and industrial machinery by the capitalist powers of Europe, weakened by the internal struggles that follow in the wake of every revolutionary upheaval, Russia now stands helpless and unprepared to face the destruction of its harvest in the Volga district. The great granary of the Russian nation. A terrible drought, no rain, from March until August, has burnt up every vestige of vegetation for hundreds of miles. Land that in other years brought forth food for thousands of hungry workers lies blackened and charred under the blistering sun. Great herds of cattle upon which millions of children depend for their food have had to be slaughtered because there is no grass to feed them. Eleven million men, women and children are starving. Cholera, that dreadful disease that stalks in the wake of starvation is wiping out entire townships. Babies are sobbing at their mothers' breasts and there is no milk. Boys and girls are pleading for food, and there is no bread. Thousands are dying from preventable, curable diseases, and there are no medicines. Cleanliness could check the spread of contagious diseases, and there is no soap. Even the next harvest is in danger, for the seed corn has been used to assuage the hunger that is eating out the vitals of the nation.

We know why Russia has had to suffer, why war against Russia went on long after hostilities in other countries has ceased. We know why Russia was forced to keep her workingmen at the front while fields lay fallow and the factories stood idle. Russia has sacrificed year after year, her men, her industries, everything, the very lifeblood of the nation, that its spirit might live, the spirit of Working Class brotherhood of working class internationalism. Russia has been attacked by the great powers of Europe, and by America, it has been slandered and vilified, fought with fair means and foul. The capitalists of the world, the men who live in wealth and luxury because you and your fellow workers live in want, hate Russia because she carries the message of working class freedom from capitalist oppression to the world, because she has fought your nation, brought inspiration and hope to you in your struggles.

All over Canada committees have sprung up for the purpose of helping Soviet Russia. By their very number they are defeating their purposes; they are duplicating their effort and there is practically no co-ordination. The American Federated Famine Relief Committee is endeavoring to unify the work of collecting funds for the famine stricken and the "Canadian Famine Relief Committee for the Drought Stricken in Soviet Russia" is directly affiliated with that committee.

\$220,000,000 must be raised. It is the most vital task that you have ever undertaken. Workers of Canada, your Russian brothers are calling for your assistance.

Will you desert them now?

We must get together for one great drive for funds.

Address all moneys to—Canadian Famine Relief Committee, P.O. Box 3591, Sta. B., Winnipeg, Man.