

In Australia

By J. A. McDonald

It is scarcely necessary to state that any particular country is on the "bum" these days. They all seem to have reached the same degree of normalcy in this respect. Australia is no different than the others. Industrial conditions are terrible, and there are no prospects of anything better in the immediate future. All States in the Commonwealth report the same state of affairs, regardless of their varying shades of political complexion. Some have Labor governments; some have National; and some Liberal. They are all disgustingly similar in their administrative functions.

Here, in New South Wales, we enjoy, or rather endure, a Labor Government. The opposition is composed of two factions—Nationalists and Progressives. I have attended several of the parliamentary sittings and listened to lengthy contributions from the representatives of all shades. One of the most radical of the Labor members was endeavoring to prove the necessity for governmental interference in order to curb the prehensile proclivities of the profiteers. One of the Nationalists answered to the effect that we live in a competitive system, where no monopoly is possible, and competition will keep the prices down to their proper level. At the present session the chief item of social legislation is the "Motherhood Endowment Act." The benefits to be derived from this Act, as one of its ardent supporters stated, is that "it will ensure that all children come into the world properly clothed." Those who consider that there is any advantage to be gained from the election of Labor members, no matter how radical they may be, can have their delusions dispersed by examining results in Australia.

In the revolutionary movement much work is being done. The opportunities for carrying on propaganda in the open air are greater than they are in Canada and the U. S. The Domains, the city streets, and the suburbs offer a splendid field for the

soap-boxer. This is apparently the one advantage accruing from Labor administrations.

As usual, the movement is badly split up. The S. L. P., almost as featureless and functionless as it is elsewhere, holds Sunday night meetings on a small scale, and also participates in the Domain gabfest on Sunday afternoons. They have an official organ which is published twice a month.

There are two Communist parties. Both have endorsed the twenty-one commandments, but neither has been officially recognized by the Council at Moscow, who insist on "unity" at all costs. From my own observations I should judge that there are no grounds for unity. The two factions are totally different, and a passive submission to the Mater Moscovia, on the question of unity, would have no effect in bridging the chasm that exists between them.

One of these parties is fashioned along S. P. of C. lines. The general standard of Socialist knowledge is not so high as in the Canadian movement, but the methods adopted are much the same. Excellent work in this Party, was accomplished by Moses Baritz during his sojourn in Australia, and the lessons he drove home on Socialist policy have been accepted, and made good use of, by the Party members. The official organ of this Party is the "International Communist," which is the nearest approach to a Socialist paper that can be found in Australia. The members are very active. Every Sunday afternoon on the Domain they have four or five speakers. On Sunday evening, between seven and eight o'clock, there are two street meetings conducted, and at night a meeting in the hall, where six or seven hundred workers attend. On Friday nights they have five street meetings, either in the city, or in some of the many-suburbs. About a dozen members can be seen on the street corners, and the Domain all day Sunday, selling papers, and nearly 3,000 copies are disposed of in this way during each week end.

The other "Communist Party" has strong indus-

trial leanings, and is largely composed of ex-"wobblies," anarchists, and the more ambitious of the trades union element. The propaganda is of the Utopian-anarchist-inflammatory type. There are no Marxian students among them, although lengthy passages from Marx and Engels are quoted to substantiate absurdities. Their chief work, at present, is in the capacity of advisers to the unemployed. Meetings are held outside the parliament buildings to awaken the government to a sense of duty, with the hope of receiving the basic wage whether they work or not. Raids on restaurants, the abolition of late shopping, and self-determination for Ireland are other outstanding features of their "revolutionary" programme. They have branches in all the large cities, and publish a weekly paper—"The Communist," which has a circulation of about 2,000 copies per issue.

Apart from these there are other small groups of a political or industrial nature. The Socialist Party of Victoria is the important group in Melbourne. A glance at their paper, "The Socialist," suffices to show what a mixture they are. An attempt was made to establish the O. B. U. some time ago, but was evidently abortive as nothing resembling an O. B. U. exists today. At one time the W. I. I. U. was active, but so was Vesuvius. The last act of the I. W. W. was an attempt to abolish paper currency by the circulation of counterfeit five pound notes. The paper notes are still with us, but the I. W. W. has left.

All in all, the revolutionary atmosphere is fairly good in Australia and, with greater attention paid to real Socialist education, there need be no fear of the future. The average wage-slave is easy to talk to, and those who have once got started on the right road show a keen desire for further study. Our classes during the past three months were well attended, and a good interest was displayed.

History of the Art of Writing

IN THREE PARTS—PART III.

By Katherine Smith

THE immediate parentage of our English alphabet is not hard to determine, as our Roman capitals are practically identical with letters employed in the third century B.C.

It has been found that the primitive alphabet of Rome was derived from the Greek alphabet prevailing in Boeotia and Euboea about the sixth century B.C. This Euboean alphabet is thought to have been introduced into Italy by means of colonies from Chalcis which were established in Sicily and also central Italy. The Chalcidian alphabet was a variety of the archaic alphabet of Greece, judging from the numerous inscriptions, the earliest of which may probably belong to the eighth or ninth century B.C.

The classical writers agree in attributing the invention of letters to the Phoenicians, from whose trading posts in the Aegean they were obtained by the Greeks. An examination of the alphabet gives evidence through the names, numbers, order and form that they are Semitic in origin. The very word alphabet is derived from alpha and beth, which stand at the head of the Greek alphabet, and are plainly identical with alpha and beth borne by corresponding Semitic characters. In Greek these names mean nothing but they are significant Semitic words, alpha denoting an "ox" and beth a "house."

Down to very recent times the classical tradition was very generally discarded, and the origin of the alphabet was thought to be by the highest authorities an unsolved problem. Now scholars agree not only as to the source of the Semitic alphabet but also to the special place, mode and period in which it

must have originated.

A French Egyptologist, Emanuel de Rouge, in 1839 was first to formulate a theory of the origin of the alphabet. M. de Rouge refers the origination of the Semitic alphabet to the period of five or six centuries during which a race of Semitic kings ruled in Delta. His method of investigation began by determining the oldest forms of the Semitic letters. For comparison with these he selected such of the Egyptian hieratic characters as were used at the time the Semitic people occupied Delta, and as a result he found that the primitive form of almost every Semitic character can easily be traced from the form of its normal hieratic prototype. The secret of his success in solving this problem lay in the fact that he sought for the immediate prototype of the Semitic letters not in the Egyptian hieroglyphics, as so many before had done, but among the cursive characters which the Egyptians had developed out of their hieroglyphics and which had been employed for literary and business purposes. He says that the origin of the alphabet has been placed between the 23rd and the 17th centuries, probably the 19th century B. C.

Recent investigations in Crete reported by Sir Arthur Evans seem to establish the fact that Greece is far older than has been thought and that a flourishing civilization existed in the Aegean at least 3000 B. C. with centers in Crete and probably later in Mycenae; also that there was close intercourse between this civilization and that of Egypt about 2500 B. C. The Aegean script accordingly seems to have been in use long before Phoenicia existed and as Phoenician history only goes back to about 1600 B. C. Phoenicia's chance for commercial importance seems to have come with the fall of Mycean civiliza-

tion. However this may be, we know that Phoenicia was dominant in the Mediterranean and probably took for business purposes the alphabet material that was found and to it added a more practical form.

Latin Alphabet—This is by far the most important alphabet derived from the Chalcidian type of the Hellenic; as explained before, the date of the introduction of the Greek alphabet into Italy has been established as being about the eighth century B. C. The ultimate dominance of the Latins brought the abolition of every other alphabet than their own, which, becoming the alphabet of the Roman Empire and then of Christendom secured an everlasting supremacy. Through it the Greek and Roman culture was conveyed to Western Europe and it is now the vehicle of culture of the progressive races of the world.

The Romans used two sets of characters, capitals and cursive, in the early Empire. The capitals were square shaped and used for inscriptions and other writings demanding prominence, as we use capitals now, borrowing the old Roman forms. The cursive or running characters are the originals of our type and were used for correspondence and other purposes where other writing was the object.

To the student of historical materialism it is simple to see the relation existing between the development of the tools of production and the evolution of writings. It was those nations which had developed sufficiently far as trading nations under slave production which were forced to acquire a phonetic alphabet. They either did so by developing more primitive methods or they adopted that of a more forward race.