

An Outline of Psychology

AN OUTLINE OF PSYCHOLOGY. Prepared by Textbook Committee, The Plebs League, 11a Penywern Road, Earl's Court, London, S.W.5. 178 pp. 2s 9d post pd.

ANYONE daring to introduce such an innovation as Psychology to the working class movement is liable to be looked upon as a heretic.

The history of human society amply demonstrates the fact that dogma, inertia of thought and dread of change commonly set in and develop in the organizations of the people just as they become fairly stabilized. The Plebs League, in publishing the "Outline," have taken this point into consideration as illustrated by the following passage:

"The great enemies of progress are those stolid, dull-witted, unimaginative persons who comprise so large a proportion of mankind. They dread change because change disturbs their established outlooks and habits, and because they lack the mental vision which could show them the potentialities of change. These are the constitutionally conservative people, those who fear change (neophobiacs), or hate novelties (nisonelists)." Page 102.

The authors of the "Outline" open their preface with a consideration of the place of Psychology in the education of the working class:—

"Doubtless some working class students will ask: 'Why Psychology?' They will say: 'Economics we know; Industrial history we know; but what has Psychology to do with independent working class education?' The answer is: 'Read this book and find out!'"

"The compilers of the 'Outline' are convinced that what Darwinism did for our knowledge of Biologic man, and what Marxism did for our knowledge of economic and social man, the new Psychology is doing for our knowledge of 'man's place in nature' as the thinking master of nature."

This book, then, is a first attempt to give the main facts and theories of contemporary Psychology from the proletarian outlook; to give them entirely freed from the taint of bourgeois ideology. It is a contribution to proletarian science, to a science formulated, understood, and expounded by revolutionary workers. A science competent to enable the working class to realize the nature of its own aims; a science which organizes forces for the destruction of a social order based upon hereditary wealth, economic inequality, and the exploitation of man by man.

"We proletarians have to understand the working of our own minds; so understand the working of our enemies' minds; to understand the working of the minds of those who will side either with us or against us as the efficiency of our own or our enemies' propaganda may determine. Such things can be learned through Psychology."

Beyond this expostulation in the preface of the book we expected that in the text the authors would define the scope and field of Psychology from the standpoint of working class educational needs, but it is not treated to any extent. Psychology as it is treated in the "Outline" refers to no experimental or laboratory work in the study, and as its scientific methods are not urged on the reader, one is liable to become an introvert (one who turns to mind). The relation of economic science and the social factors which correlate and determine the scope of Psychology have not to any extent been treated in the work.

Aversion to Psychology on the part not only of the working class but of others is not surprising; it has an instinctive basis. The phenomena of life and mind obey the law of forward motion, whereas the study of Psychology is a kind of "introversion," a mindward motion, and when a balance is not maintained while studying Psychology and introspecting, by following what Bergson "attention to life," that is, by constantly adjusting and adapting ourselves to objective reality, not only individuals but nations fall into a Psychological slough such as Europeans fell into for a thousand years during the dark ages, while the mental inertia of the Asiatic people has lasted longer and from which they are just emerging. The latter condition too, owes itself to the circumstance that the capitalism of the western countries demands that they line up with economic conditions or forfeit their existence.

The relative utility of the study of Psychology

in correlation with History and Economics should have been made clear in the book. The absence of such guidance in a shortcoming. Other shortcomings, from our reviewing standpoint, are that the authors have either perfunctorily treated or have altogether passed by some of the essentials of Psychology, and that the sources of their material are ill chosen. Take for example p. 12, s. 7 (Chapter: Consciousness and the Unconscious):—

"We do not know what consciousness is, and will not therefore waste time attempting to define it. We experience it as the sum total of our sensations, emotions, desires, memories, and other psychic phenomena."

Now we consider that the study of consciousness is vital in Psychology, particularly in working class Psychology, and that the definition should have been attempted. The problem of class consciousness, so central in the working class movement, together with that of social consciousness can not be sufficiently brought home to the student or the readers of the "Outline" when its authors say about consciousness "we will not therefore waste time attempting to define it." Because of the imperfect understanding of the authors about consciousness, or because of their neglect of duly treating this most essential element of mind, the whole work is further biased by references made in it to the unconscious.

Excepting a certain insignificant percentage of the sub-normal or the feeble-minded whose consciousness is liable to be "invaded" by the unconscious, resulting in obsessions, hysteria, hypersuggestibility or pathological conditions, human society has, constitutionally, a "normal consciousness" or, technically, a "normal consciousness standard." The characteristics of the average human mind possessing a normal consciousness standard, which underlies normal human behavior, constitute the science of Psychology proper. Any abnormalities viewed in a small number of human beings must be treated under the head of abnormal Psychology.

Scientific methods of observation, experimentation, generalization, verification, etc., are applied to Psychology, and it is built up by authorities like Baldwin, James, Stout, Sully, McDougall, Wundt, Kulpe, Pillsbury, Hunter, Angell, Titchener, etc., Our friends, the authors of the "Outline," instead of tapping these reliable sources have gone into works of Freud, Hart and Goddard, who, in the main, treat of abnormal or ultra normal Psychology; they have fallen short, in our opinion, of furnishing a text book of value for working class study in Psychology.

Can anyone conceive of an "Outline" of Psychology which does not treat of the elements of sensations and their qualities, which constitute the raw material of the human mind and on which is dependent the whole mental imagery, which latter the processes of mind like imagination, reasoning or association weave into mental products like percepts, concepts, etc.? Furthermore, the vital subject of "attention" is dropped. The treatment of "memory" is most scanty; nothing about retention, reproduction, recall and recognition—the very fundamentals of memory, nor about the laws governing these processes. Except under a general name of associative memory, perfunctorily treated, practical instruction on memory is entirely absent.

The essential factors of "imitation" and "sympathy" in social Psychology and the effects of their operation in shaping social and individual behavior have been given a bare mention. The subject of suggestion and suggestibility have attracted the attention of the authors, but the "Law of Suggestibility" is to consciousness what mass is in gravitation, and the question of consciousness has seemed to the authors so insignificant that it is a foregone conclusion the book can not contain any practical discussion on this head.

The "Outline" is meritorious, however. It is written by class conscious workers and is directed to

the interests of the working class. The authors have completely and unambiguously kept the book clear of the ideology of the bourgeoisie and their hangers-on. Not only this, but the book is teeming with well chosen, deeply considered and accurate expressions of the working class ideology and viewpoints. Let the reader, however, judge for himself.

H. RAHIM.

ECONOMICS FOR WORKERS.

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fact that the phenomenon which he was about to describe and examine was a part of an historical situation, and the result of an historical development.

All the nations, all the ages, all the stages of human development are subject to the laws they lay down.

Now contrast this with Karl Marx. He opens his great work "Capital" thus:

"The wealth of those societies, in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities."

With one mighty sweep of the pen (as Boudin says) all the limitations and conditions of the problem are given. The picture is set in its historical surroundings in that phraseology. (Read it again). No generalizations to suit everything in general and nothing in particular, but a real live situation with a definite burning problem. No wonder, instead of losing himself in generalities or wasting time in the definitions of conceptions and notions, Marx delves right into the subject and says:

"Its unit being a commodity our investigation must therefore begin with the analysis of a commodity."

(Introduction to be continued)

THE "WESTERN CLARION" APPEALS TO THE READER.

(Continued from page 4)

want you to rustle subs. to keep the "Clarion" going. No writer wields a more colorful pen than Comrade Ross, whose initial "R" has completed many a page of the "Clarion" during 1921, and few there be whose sense of perception is so keen as his. Ross is entering the gateway to a larger and wider understanding of capitalism.

While Comrade Stephenson is the only capable interpreter of Veblen, the greatest living Marxist today. Upon Stephenson rests the task of presenting in less ponderous language the conclusions of a writer, who must continue to become poorer on account of his greatness.

Leckie is attracting the attention of an audience more cosmopolitan than the rest of the "staff" on account of his "Economic Causes of War" and lessons on the Materialist Conception of History.

With the coming of spring and the laying aside of his many duties, Morgan ("Geordie") will be harnessed anew to the task of completing the "People's Marx."

The "Clarion" has for the past few years been the clearest organ of the working class in this country, and that too during a time when it would have paid to be obscure. Support of this paper by the workers is the only reliable gauge of the mental progress of the workers.

Now, Buddy, you must go after those subs. with a vigor you have not hitherto displayed. All returns must be in before the end of March, 1922. "The Positive Outcome of Philosophy" (Dietzgen) and the "Social Revolution" (Kautsky), will be given as a prize to the one with the highest number of subscribers. And the "Industrial History" (de Gibbins) to the next highest.

Buddy, go catch 'em!

R.K.

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MARXIAN SOCIALISM

BOOK I.—By H. RAHIM

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