

Books Reviewed

FIRST PRINCIPLES OF WORKING CLASS EDUCATION, by James Clunie, Glasgow.—Printed by The Socialist Labor Press, 50 Renfrew Street, 1920. 9/- post paid.

One of the greatest and most difficult tasks of the Socialist movement is to educate the working class to its class interests; which necessitates a knowledge of Economics, History, Sociology and Philosophy. The so-called abstract sciences, which the apologists of the present system dare not acknowledge as sciences, or if they do, in a pseudo vulgarized form, as a scientific knowledge of such shows them to be the robbers they are, and therefore means their destruction.

Credit is due to Karl Marx and his co-workers, Frederick Engels and Joseph Dietzgen for first placing the above subjects on a scientific basis, now known as Marxism, or Scientific Socialism.

Various attempts have been made to simplify or popularize Marxism, especially economics, to induce a greater number of workers to take up the study of these subjects. As a matter of fact all these attempts at popularizing Marxism are solely for the purpose of stimulating a desire in the worker for study by introducing him to the elementary principles of the subject matter itself.

Indeed, Marxism can hardly be made any simpler than the authors have made it themselves without losing its scientific character.

The above named work by Comrade Clunie, bids fair to be a very interesting and instructive method of introducing the workers to the more serious study of these subjects.

The book is intended as a text book for classes and individual readers. It contains thirteen chapters with an appendix. Each chapter is illustrated by simple objective diagrams, which have proved an invaluable method to make the study interesting.

The first chapter, which is divided into four sections, deals with the historical and sociological development of the human race from primitive savagery to future Communism. The others deal mainly with economics. The appendix contains useful data and information which can be used in illustrating the various chapters.

As the author says in his introduction: "The actual lessons I have made as elementary as possible, classifying the method and leaving a great deal of the evidence to be gained by the reader and the class tutors." And: "My book does not pretend to be a treatise on economics, sociology, history or philosophy, but a suggested method of study to show the place, nature and purpose of these great subjects. The irresistible processes of evolution are about to impose a duty upon the working class wherein a knowledge of the nature and life of society will be required. My sole motive in writing this work is to stimulate in the minds of my class a burning revolutionary desire for education, for the logic of socio-human development now decrees that it is the mission of the toiling masses to mould a Communistic future."

He lays great stress on the fact that the great achievement of Marxism is its method. When we understand the method we can apply it to modern events, and thereby make the teaching of Socialism more interesting and useful.

Knowledge does not drop like manna from heaven, but the acquiring of it requires hard work on the part of the wage-earner student, more especially when he is employed at hard manual labor. But once he gets an insight into real knowledge, he will soon acquire the taste for more.

Like our great philosopher, Joseph Dietzgen, the author of this work is a manual worker too, as John Maclean describes him in his foreword to the book. It shows what a working man can do even with so many difficulties; that are the general lot of the worker. That fact alone should be enough to awaken some of the latent genius in our ranks.

As an introduction to the Classical Works of

Scientific Socialism, this work of Comrade Clunie's can be well recommended to all those whose duty it is to acquire the knowledge which is so essential to destroy the present system of production for profit, and to build up a better world.

A. McKENZIE.

THE SKILLED LABORER: Longmans, Green & Co., London, England.

This companion volume to the books, "The Town Laborer," and the "Village Laborer," by J. L. and Barbara Hammond, is in every way worthy of being accorded a place in the library of students of real history. For this is a most stirring narrative of the lives of our fathers, based upon facts gleaned largely from Home Office records, and presents a more thrilling recital of wrongs endured, and struggles waged and lost, yet not in the larger sense, for out of them has grown the modern labor movement, than pen of author could contrive. At the outset we are told: "The history of England at the time discussed, reads like a history of civil war."

From the struggles of the coal miners to organize, through the fortunes of the slaves in the silk, cotton, and woollen trades we are taken to the famous Luddite riots.

There is such a wealth of material, that one hardly knows how to do justice to it in any review, nor yet what extracts to place before prospective readers.

We have the miserable spectacle of men and women driven down from a fairly comfortable living, in their various handicrafts, to the most degraded existence possible. We see how it was that the early English fortunes were made. Out of the utter wretchedness wherein men, women and little ones died of sheer starvation, rose on the one hand, the present English oligarchy, and on the other organized effort, that will yet result in the complete abolition of the damnable conditions we, the descendants of those sufferers, still endure. It is interesting to learn that at a striking collier's meeting in the Tyne district, in the summer of 1832, a proposal was made to form a big general union, that would spread through out the country. DeLeon did not show the "how" of this;—he was not yet born.

We also find in every strike that the sinister figure in the background was named Jacobinism, even as today all labor unrest is labelled Bolshevism. These masters learn nothing new.

Just as intelligent working-class leaders are persecuted and blacklisted in this enlightened age, so was Hepburn, the miners' leader, then. As the orderly strike of today gives concern to the boss, so did that of the spinners long ago. General Byng anxiously declared: "The peaceable demeanor of so many thousand unemployed men is not natural."

And so then, as now, we find the "stools" and agents busily stirring up trouble and disturbance, so the military could have an excuse for action.

Did the poor starve in meek humility and patience, they were congratulated by the king and the clergy. Wrote the Vicar of Blackburn about the hungry cotton workers on strike in 1826: "To their praise be it said, there have been no symptoms of discontent, disaffection, or sedition." They have trusted in Providence, and God's servants will not forsake them." But as the author, with fine irony remarks: "Their trust in Providence gave way before the end of the month, and they transgressed the bounds of propriety in a serious fashion." So long as the woollen and worsted workers sent petition after petition to parliament, Lord Brougham could complacently say: "The people were still sound at heart."

But when the shearmen began destroying the gig mills, that interfered with their livelihood, it was suggested that "these turbulent spirits be the object of the press gang's attention."

The King could state to the starving Spitalfields

silk weavers, "His royal belief that under all circumstances they will remain steady in their attachment to his person, and will continue to set that example of industriousness, and good order, for which they had always been conspicuous."

But whenever this good order conspicuously disappeared, and the distressed weavers struck work, broke windows, and cut silk, then "vigorous action" by the soldiers is taken against them.

These Spitalfields weavers, when well paid, were the cream of the working class of that day. The list of their intellectual pursuits is too extensive to give here, but it goes far to demonstrate what heights of culture can be attained by a well fed, clothed, and housed working class. Similar instances of care for better surroundings, when fairly well paid, are given of the cotton and woollen workers. Drunkenness and degradation only appears where misery and desperation are. The whole history of this period is a lament of the dying handicrafts. A struggle between progressive capitalists installing modern machinery, and a working class that clearly saw their independence going, child labor displacing men's, and the barracking in huge factories of a class of people who far more than the modern operatives strongly resented this drastic and degenerating change in their circumstances.

Considering their lack of scientific knowledge, they most certainly cannot be blamed for attempting the destruction of the hated new machinery. The chapters on the Luddite riots bring out marked cases of nobility and heroism on the part of these starving men and women. Think of £2,000 reward being offered in order to get information as to who took part in the Yorkshire riots! And in this countryside, where children literally died of sheer starvation, no takers could be found.

Take the attack on the Cartwright Mill, where two young workers in the attack were mortally wounded, left dying all night, in the bitter cold. Taken into the midst of their enemies for operation, later, and in the certainty of their dying, a man of God was kept on hand to incessantly torture them with beseechings and threatenings, to give away their companions. Think of brave young Booth when he felt his last moments near, beckoning to the eager clergyman to come closer. "Can you keep a secret?" gasped Booth. "Yes, yes," expectantly said his holiness. "So can I," answered the dying man. And both he and his fellow died without telling one single thing about the affair. The chapters on the Luddite riots are noteworthy also, because they show clearly that the instigators and leading spirits in the destruction, in Yorkshire and Lancashire at least, were spies and agents—provocateurs, detailed by the Home Office, or by local magistrates. Some amusing clashes took place too, between the spies working for different parties, unknown to each other.

Many brave but misguided enthusiasts were betrayed to the gallows or transported, on the evidence of these vermin.

Yet, in all the turmoil and agony, we note distinctly the rise of the unions, fighting Combination Acts, treachery, starvation, any thing but clear as to their real status in society, but inevitably destined to find out in the course of years. The process is slow. The genius for organization cannot be downed. The class instinct exists. What was needed then, and is needed most emphatically now, is what has come to be known as Marxian knowledge.

The outstanding fact in this book, to the mind of the writer, is this: While these working people were well aware that their masters were their enemies, and they could fight and hate them most heartily, yet, they were always willing (as they are today) to concede them a place in the scheme of things; they could not conceive of a society run

(Continued on page 8).