

# Suggestions for Conducting of Study Classes

[For the benefit of educational classes, either now running or in course of formation, we have "swiped" the following from the November "Proletarian." Readers should preserve this article for future guidance.—Edit. Indicator.]

**N**OW that the study of Socialism by the class method is becoming fairly general, the need for systematic and perfected methods has made itself felt. It will probably be obvious to instructors generally that a perfect system can not be devised at once but must be built up by experiment and experience. It would seem advisable, therefore, for each instructor to study this problem on his own account and not depend entirely upon any given program which may be offered to him. Nevertheless, a few helpful hints may be given, which are the result of the experiences of those who have undertaken such work thus far, and the following is offered with that idea in mind.

## Organization.

Not the least important work in connection with class study is the organization of the class. In localities where the idea is new it may be necessary to "talk up" or advertise the project for some time before an actual start can be made. The promoters should, however, not wait for a large gathering, but be willing to begin in a very humble way, say, with two or three students, if necessary.

## Texts.

The matter of texts is highly important. Many attempts have been made to "simplify" the works of Marx and Engels, as they are thought to be too difficult. Up to the present, however, no satisfactory texts of this character have been brought to light. In most cases such text books are no simpler than the standard works and frequently contain important errors, which render them wholly undesirable. The following are suggested as comprising a fairly comprehensive line of study, arranged in the logical order of treatment, and taken together, form a course of study:

- "Wage Labor and Capital."
- "Communist Manifesto."
- "Value, Price and Profit."
- Socialism, Utopian and Scientific."
- "Capital," Vol. I, Chapters I to IX, inclusive, and Chapter XXXII.

This may be varied from, if desired, say, for example, by omitting "Value, Price and Profit." It will be noted in this arrangement that the first text-book deals with economics, the second with general principles, and the third reverts to economics. The object of this is to alternate the phases of study. By so doing, the student is saved from getting into a rut from studying too long on one phase, and thereby becoming one-sided or losing interest. In putting "Wage-labor and Capital" before the "Communist Manifesto," we are simply recognizing the fact that it is economic conditions which first bring the workers to take an interest in Socialism and that the subject matter can be illustrated by every-day conditions and events, which the student can appreciate by actual experience, while the "Manifesto" is largely a historical document with many

references to historical conditions with which the worker is unfamiliar and consequently it is not so good a text to start with.

## Preparation.

By all means, the instructor should prepare in advance, not only for the session, but for each session thereafter. He should plan how much of the text is to be covered and map that out as a distinct lesson, endeavoring to have the lesson stop at a convenient point. He should read over the text, note which are the essential points in each paragraph which are to be explained; plan in his own mind what illustrations he will use, and brush up on any points in connection with which his own knowledge is weak, by reference to his own library. It is in order to remark here that a competent instructor must possess a much wider range of knowledge of socialism and science in general than is implied by a study of the texts as outlined above. If he has not such knowledge, he should set about getting it at once.

## The First Session.

The preparation for, and conduct of, the first session will be somewhat different from that of succeeding ones. Assuming that the majority of the students are about to have their first experience in class work and that their enthusiasm for such study must be aroused by the efforts of the instructor himself, he will find it necessary to use all the skill and tact he possesses to conduct the first session so as to leave a good impression upon the students, even though these be few in number.

To begin with, he should have his equipment in good order, otherwise he will be as useless as a carpenter without a saw and hammer. The least equipment with which a class should be started will consist of a table, the necessary chairs, arranged in proper order and a sufficient supply of text books for the students. Never allow the students to sit in the class without the opportunity of supplying themselves with text books. Other remarks on equipment will be made later.

It is not desirable that the text should be immediately plunged into. A few preliminaries are necessary. The instructor should obtain the names and addresses of the students for record. If not already acquainted with the students he should become so as soon as possible by always calling them by name instead of indicating them as "this comrade" or "that comrade." This will make for a more home-like feeling and diminish backwardness in discussion. Try to get everybody acquainted with everybody else.

With the class assembled, the next thing in order is to make some preliminary remarks regarding the objects of class study, the methods to be employed in the class, what is expected of the students, etc. The remainder of the first session may, perhaps, be profitably employed in a general treatment of the text in hand, according to the judgment of the instructor.

## General Methods.

After the preliminaries, the class will settle down to the regular study. The plan here suggested is based upon the methods of successful classes,

but may be varied according to circumstances.

The instructor calls upon the student at his extreme left to stand and read the first paragraph, the others following from their own books. If the paragraph contains more than one "essential" point, as referred to under "Preparation," the instructor proceeds to re-read the portion covering the first point and then asks the student who read to explain his understanding of that point. The instructor will then call upon any other student he may select to explain his idea of it, and so on until he has obtained several students ideas. Or he may call upon any student who thinks he can explain it, to do so. The instructor then proceeds to give his own explanation, using such illustrations as he has prepared. In doing so, he will point out to each student wherein his explanation was erroneous and also recognize any good points scored by any student. He will then ask if any doubtful points remain in the students minds and explain further in connection with such. He will then proceed to the second point of the paragraph, always calling upon the student who read the paragraph to explain first. When the first paragraph is thus exhausted, the instructor will review it as a whole. The second student will then read and so on.

Students should stand while reading; they should not be allowed to interrupt each other; they should be given a fair opportunity to complete their remarks but should not be allowed to occupy the floor for an unseemly length of time nor to ramble away from the subject. They should not be urged to give an explanation of a point when it is apparent that they are incapable of doing so. Ideas must be put into men's minds before they can come out. They must be required to express themselves in their own words. Mere repetition of the phraseology of the text is worse than useless and should not be tolerated. They should gradually be taught to give illustrations of their own composition.

## Definitions.

Students should be instructed to ask the definition of any word or term which they do not understand. This applies both to ordinary words appearing in general literature and to terms peculiar to socialist literature. On the first presentation of terms such as bourgeois and proletarian, it will be necessary to define them carefully and thereafter watch to see that these definitions are retained in the students' minds.

## English and Reading.

It will be found that students require a great deal of correction in the pronunciation of words and in their English generally. Also in the manner of reading. But it should be remembered that the human mind can not undertake a number of new tasks at once. The instructor should, therefore, be patient with these matters at first. The main object of classes is not the teaching of English; rather is it incidental, although, of course, necessary. As time goes on and the students become accustomed to reading, become more familiar with difficult terms and more readily catch the meaning of the text,

they will be able to devote more of their attention to good form in reading and should be expected to improve steadily. They should be taught to read in a clear voice, pronounce words distinctly, and emphasize properly. The speed should be moderate, rather slow than fast, but not draggy. The instructor must set the example.

## The Instructor.

Much depends upon the personality of the instructor. It is hardly to be expected that many instructors possessing the right combination of qualities will be found ready-made. Every instructor should, therefore, endeavor to perfect himself in his task. We can not cover the whole subject of teaching here but suggest the following.

In the first place, the instructor must at all times and particularly at the beginning, get in close touch with his students. He should not set himself upon a pedestal as an oracle, but on the other hand, he should display enough self-confidence to command the respectful attention of the class. He should constantly endeavor to appreciate accurately the mental attitude of each individual student and not deal with them after a mechanical fashion as if they were blocks of wood to be turned into a given form. He should note carefully the progression made by each one and gauge his questions accordingly.

The instructor should display energy and enthusiasm. Listlessness on the instructor's part means an early and painless death for the class. Start the class exactly at the appointed time even if only a few are in attendance. Waiting for the class to begin is discouraging to those who come early. If the class gets the habit of starting an hour late it will presently not start at all. It may be taken as an axiom that any organization must be well managed to retain its vitality.

## Examination and Review.

At periodic intervals, the length of which will be decided by the instructor, some kind of an examination should be made to ascertain how much knowledge has been absorbed up to that point. Probably the best method is to require the students to write answers to questions written on a blackboard, without consulting their books. This, of course, requires a complete session to be set aside for that purpose.

## Equipment.

In addition to the equipment previously mentioned, a blackboard can be used for pointing rather than a lead pencil or finger. It is preferable to have the blackboard placed upon an easel. This equipment may be supplemented with special charts painted upon canvas or paper and attached to the blackboard, for special illustrations such as the law of value, etc., and sometimes maps are useful to illustrate points of history or geography.

## Illustrations.

The matter of illustrations should have the earnest study of every instructor. The illustration, pictured or oral, is the key which unlocks the brain of the student and sets it in motion along the desired channel. As far as possible the illustration should refer to something concrete, especially at first. For instance, in illustrating the law of value, a table and

(Continued on Page Seven)