

CORRESPONDENCE.

Education and the Workers.

Sir,—In your last issue, "Ivan the Fool" writes upon the subject of workers' education, and touches upon the aims of those philanthropists of the University who are offering themselves as intellectual leaders of the working class. It is quite true that education, as understood by these people, is a means of making us workers imperialists, conscriptionists, and tame wage-slaves. Two quotations from University men who want to educate us will prove this. After the first conscription Referendum Mr. Frank Tate, Director of Education in Victoria, said that he attributed the "Yes" vote in this State largely to the good work done by the School Paper. In the "Herald" of Tuesday, March 19, Mr. Archibald Strong, of Melbourne University, writing of the second Referendum, said: "One of the main causes, perhaps the main cause of all, which wrecked conscription in Australia, was lack of education." Later, in the same article, Mr. Strong says: "Personally, I believe that in the supreme matter of our present duty, as in many other matters, the welfare of Australia depends absolutely upon education."

If lack of education saved Australia from conscription, what will education do for us?—Yours, etc.,

ANOTHER FOOL.

LABOUR COLLEGES.

At the present time one of the most important questions under discussion is education. The universities are bestirring themselves, and appear to be really anxious about the welfare of the worker, and are attempting to organise classes for his benefit. We have also the Chamber of Commerce crying aloud for more education, and last of all, but by no means least, we find workers themselves talking of education. But the latter have already decided that the present institutions do not fill the bill, and have resolved they must do something for themselves. Therefore, Labour Colleges.

The first Labour College was founded in the year 1899, when two Americans, Mr. Walter Vrooman and Dr. Beard, established Ruskin College, at Oxford, with Mr. Dennis Hird as principal. The object and aims of this institution will be seen in the words of the founders: "We shall take men who have been merely condemning our social institution, and we will teach them how, instead, to transform those institutions, so that instead of talking against the world, they will begin methodically and scientifically to possess the world."

But the founders of "Ruskin" were not permitted to enjoy the company of their baby long, because shortly afterwards they were called to America to attend to their domestic affairs. But "Ruskin" held on, and gradually passed into the hands of the trade unions, who contributed liberally towards the College funds; and some of them granted scholarships to their members to attend the classes. For seven years all went well, when at the end of that period discontent was very marked among many of the senior students, who accused the College authorities of drifting towards the University by tampering with the original teaching of the College, and they demanded a more revolutionary curriculum. The rebels had a very sympathetic friend in Mr. Dennis Hird, their principal, who agreed with those in revolt, giving them every assistance, and supporting their claims on the Managing Committee.

The first act of mutiny took place when the authorities attempted to place a check on the teaching of Mr. Hird by changing his subjects from Sociology and Logic to Literature and Temperance. This created no little commotion among the rebels, who quite definitely informed the executive they would put up with no more of this side-tracking business. Things went on more quietly after this, though the discontent still smouldered, and at intervals showed itself. No open rupture, however, took place until the end of 1908, when the labour world was astonished to hear that a number of students at "Ruskin" had gone on strike. They refused to attend the lectures, and actually appointed lecturers from among themselves. They had the active co-operation of many former students, and they formed an organisation called the "Plebs League," whose object was to stop the trend of "Ruskin" towards the University, and to completely isolate it as a Labour College.

A long list of complaints was drawn up by the revolting section, and one amongst them charged the governing committee with having side-tracked the original object of the College, and with having introduced a new spirit which was foreign to the exclusive interests of a militant labour movement. The chief complaint was that the authorities were attempting to make the College a mere appanage of the University, by appointing University lecturers, who had no sympathy with working class aspirations.

The formation of the Plebs League, and open rebellion, brought matters to a head, and the "Ruskin" authorities forced Mr. Hird, who they thought represented the head and front of the rebellion, to resign. The malcontents absolutely refused to conform to this attitude, and they decided to follow the man who had stood by them all through, and seceded.

Then followed the founding of what is now known as the Central Labour College of London in the year 1909. The difference between these colleges is quite marked, "Ruskin" believing in Social Reform, while the C.L.C. stands boldly out for nothing short of Social Revolution; naturally it follows that the subjects taught are approached from different standpoints. The Central Labour College holds that "Ruskin," by linking itself with the University, and by engaging University lecturers, cannot be a vigorous exponent

of working class ideals. It also contends that the student who goes to the "Ruskin" with the opportunity to win a University diploma, cannot be blamed if he uses his opportunity to work himself out of the class to which he belongs, instead of using his knowledge for the benefit of his class as a whole, and helping to bring about their emancipation.

Looking back to those riotous days, we must admit that the revolting students were correct in their premises of the situation, for whereas the C.L.C. has turned out rebels of the first order, the "Ruskin's" influence has been mainly found among those who were quite satisfied to compromise here and compromise there, and anxious that the old order should continue without interruption.

The Central Labour College started off in London, but for many months it had a rough time, because no sooner would it be settled in a home than it would get notice to quit; and later it was found that the reason was that the University had used its influence to have the College "moved on." But at last they found a refuge in their present home at Earls Court. Since then the Central Labour College has gone ahead, and to-day it has branches throughout the United Kingdom, with something like fourteen organisers conducting classes and rallying the workers to the different meetings, at which they are assisted in carrying out the work of taking charge of their own educational institutions. Students have come from all parts of the British Isles, from Iceland and Northern Europe, from India and the East, all eager and enthusiastic, to gain a mental training for the war with society as at present constituted. They believe their cause to be a just one, and that it is only by an understanding of the basis of society that the workers can hope to control and administer it for the benefit of all instead of the few.

The essential difference between a true Labour College and the University is that the former believes that the knowledge obtained should be used to emancipate the workers who are in the grip of the class that stands in the way of emancipation, and which holds its positions, not by ability, but through the ignorance of the class that serves it. On the other hand, the University is also a class institution, which is used for the purpose of bolstering up the system that exists, and as a recruiting ground to obtain more officers for the capitalists. Some people may object to this, but if we examine the position to-day we shall find that the only difference between the Technical Colleges and the Universities is that the one turns out manual workers—engineers, blacksmiths, etc.—and the other mental workers—lawyers and doctors. Or again, has the modern University contributed towards thought in any direction? If you answer this question honestly you have to say "No!" emphatically. In fact, we find that any University authority who dares step off the beaten track with new ideas finds he is minus his job—sacked!

The Labour Colleges have no idea of turning out doctors and lawyers to further exploit the world, but "doctors" who will eradicate the disease of capitalism, and "lawyers" who will deal with justice between man and man, and not act on precedents made by Queen Anne; who will say in the words of the Bolshevik who was appointed Chief Justice, "I know nothing about law, but I do know something of justice, and that is my business."

The foregoing sketch shows the situation in Britain, but let us come nearer home. In 1913 it was found, on examination, that the situation here was similar to that in the old world, and a few people decided that a Labour College should be set up here. An effort was made, but it failed, through no fault of the founders, but because some of the leaders of organised labour had become contaminated with the supposed good-fellowship of University dons. However, it was seen it would only be a matter of time when these slave leaders would again have their feet on the ground, and those who were rebuked for their welfare in the workers decided to pocket the rebuff and wait. Four years went by, and in 1917 four enthusiasts decided to launch a Labour College, and named it the Victorian Labour College. Rooms were granted by the Victorian Railways Union, and with no money the founders set out on the task of creating an institution which would be owned and controlled by the workers, and which would be the means of assisting them to bring about a saner state of society than the present. With the recognition of the class struggle as their base, they set the wheels in motion amid a storm of bullets and shells; but they had faith in their armour to withstand all attacks, and it has proved to be bullet and shell-proof. The trenches to be stormed were deep and well barricaded, but the strongest have gone down before the onslaught, and the V.L.C. is well on the way to establish an institution which will stand out as an omen for the future. It stands for the obliteration of the slave culture, which seems to dominate society, and desires to implant a revolutionary culture in the minds of those it seeks to serve. The slave leaders, who were so carried away by the intellectual satellites of capitalism, have come home, and though one or two still remain with those time-servers, it is believed that even they will be saved in spite of themselves.

The V.L.C. has still a long way to travel, but the faith of the unions who have taken up this work is such that they believe the future is theirs, and that they will have a true working-class College, with its influence spreading to the four corners of this country, and that the men and women coming from it will go out into the highways and byways, telling the old, old story, that the workers have a world to gain, and nothing but chains to lose.