

Imperialism is the basis for war as well as the imperative drive to force all countries to submit to the capitalist way of life in order to provide markets for capitalist expansion.

Throughout the entire work is the dialectical analysis of the constant struggle of conflicting forces highlighted by the class struggle. If the capitalist economy with its inhuman tyranny of man over man is to be broken, it can only be accomplished through its victims. And if the victims are to become victorious they must advance in strength through knowledge and understanding of how they are exploited as well as the alternative: the building of a world without exploitation in which everyone capable of work will become a useful producer, and in which useful producers will manage the productive process and secure the social value of their product. The overthrow of capitalism is the task of the working class, says Marx. The call to action permeates its pages.

Marx's "Capital" provides the means of acquiring the necessary knowledge. The book is a century old, but it is up to the minute in its analysis of capitalism.

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(Paper submitted by K. Carr, official of the Furniture Trade Union; student in history and economics at the Victorian Labor College. Presented on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Victorian Labor College at South Melbourne Town Hall, September 1, 1967.)

Victorian Labor College

Jubilee 1917-1967

Kept on Proceedings  
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## The Aims and Early History of the Victorian Labor College

Address by A. T. BRODNEY

### THE COLLEGE ESTABLISHED

The Victorian Labor College was established in July, 1917, to give effect to an idea—the belief that the advancement of the working-class and therewith of society generally required that the workers should become intellectually free from established ideas and beliefs.

It was not to be a trade school, for these already existed. It was not to be a political party. This, too, already existed. Nor was it to be the creature of a political party, even of the Australian Labor Party. Nor yet a branch of one or all unions. Yet it sought and finally received the support of the unions of Victoria by whose delegates it was controlled. The College had a very special purpose.

The College was intended to be an independent educational body. That is to say, independent of all existing educational bodies, both in control and outlook. It was to be independent of the main current of contemporary social thinking. This was and should be its prime justification and purpose.

As all know there had been—and there still are—extensions of university teaching, somewhat diluted, outside the walls of the universities, both in Britain and Australia. In both countries there had been adult educational schemes. In particular, there had been university type teaching designed especially for working men and for trade unions. The university and the workers were to be brought together.

There was a considerable history of this movement, both in Britain and Australia. In England a break with this movement led to the establishment there of Labor Colleges.

In Australia, there were both the university-sponsored movement and separate breakaways from it by trade unionists and socialists.

In one respect, the Victorian Labor College reflected this break with university teaching. Yet it was something more than this. It was an attempt to make a positive contribution to thought and action. It sought to fit workers to refuse to accommodate themselves to established ways of thinking, by subjecting these to rigorous criticism and to free people from the intellectual subjection they involved.

#### A FOUNDER SPEAKS

It is proper on this occasion, however, to let one of the founders speak from an undated leaflet, probably published after November in 1918. This leaflet contains what was almost certainly the "manifesto" adopted at the first meeting of the College, held at 70 Collins Street, Melbourne, on June 9, 1917. W. P. Earsman tells the story. With F. Sinclair, Maurice Blackburn and Guido Baracchi, he constituted the founders of the College. He was an active member of the old Amalgamated Society of Engineers (now A.E.U.) and the Secretary of its Melbourne District Committee. Sinclair was a university man, a lecturer in English language and literature and a radical parson.

Baracchi had been a student at Melbourne University whose teaching he had found unacceptable.

Blackburn's memory is still vivid and green with us and needs no description. Up to the time of his death in 1944, he gave up much of his leisure time for College work.

Earsman tells the story of Ruskin College at Oxford, its support by British unions, the strike of students of Ruskin, leading to the formation in 1909 of the Central Labour College of London.

Turning to Australia, Earsman wrote:

"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 Labor 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 labor had become contaminated with the supposed good fellowship of university dons. Four years went by, and in 1917 four enthusiasts decided to launch a Labor College, and named it the Victorian Labor 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 class struggle as their base, they set the wheels in motion . . . and the Victorian Labor College is well on the way to establish an institution which will stand 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 FIRST CLASSES

The first Committee meeting, already mentioned, approved a syllabus and fixed the first classes to start at Unity Hall on June 16, 1917. Unity Hall was owned by the Victorian Railways Union, a firm supporter of the College.

The four founders appear to have had frequent meetings, addressed numerous unions seeking support. They visited country centres. They visited Adelaide.

The first annual conference was held on January 28, 1918, at Unity Hall.

An early affiliation in 1918 was the Geelong Labor Council. Wonthaggi was early in having classes.

Conflict with the university-sponsored W.E.A. appeared early. Some unions were affiliated to that body and one delegate to the Victorian Labor College contemplated his being simultaneously a delegate of his union to the W.E.A. He asked the College to approve. It said "No."

Baracchi was in trouble over anti-war activity. He was gaoled and the College rather optimistically proposed a deputation to W. M. Hughes to secure his release.

Sinclair also was in trouble in Sydney because of anti-war activity, being charged with prejudicing recruiting.

A special conference of all trade unions on education was proposed for September, 1918, as a means of getting support.

The question was raised in September, 1918, of conducting the College from the Trades Hall. The Melbourne Trades Hall Council affiliated to the College in August, 1919, and paid five years' fees in advance. The 1920 conference was, in fact, held at the Trades Hall. All the founders of the College strongly desired the College to be centred at the Trades Hall. When later the Secretaryship fell vacant in

1920 and Baracchi was proposed for the position, he urged that an industrialist should hold it. This has continuously been the bias of the College.

### IN OTHER STATES

Early in 1919 requests for information were received from Adelaide and Brisbane.

In 1921 proposals were made to establish a College in Kalgoorlie.

Not only did Victoria help workers in other States but they in return helped the Victorian Labor College. Spencer Brodney, of the Queensland School, in 1920, addressed the Melbourne Trades Hall Council to induce it not merely to pay an affiliation fee but actively support the College. He also met and spoke to the College Board of Management.

In 1921 Earsman wrote and published a pamphlet entitled "The Proletariat and Education." After some absence from Melbourne he had resigned from the Secretaryship in January, 1920, and was active in establishing a College in Sydney.

There were two distinct attempts in the early period to establish a Labor College in Sydney. Each had a spectacular start but collapsed within a relatively short period. At a much later period a third and more successful attempt was made in Sydney to establish a Labor College.

In Brisbane, the Workers' School of Social Science was established in the tradition of the Labor College movement on March 30, 1919. The first annual conference was held in February, 1920. P. J. Gaffney, of Queensland Railways Union, was President and Spencer Brodney, Honorary Educational Director.

An interstate conference of various Colleges was proposed.

In 1921 the Queensland School conducted a competition for an essay on "What is Internationalism"—prize £5. Mr. E. G. Hart, member of the Printing Industry Union, was by unanimous decision awarded the prize. It makes excellent reading at the present time.

The Victorian College thus heard of Hart and, in 1927, the College was fortunate in securing him as class leader and Secretary. Undoubtedly this was a very fine period in the College history. It began for me a very satisfying and

lengthy personal association with Hart, especially in the preparation of class material. The Secretarial work was never better done. The union affiliations were never more numerous.

At that time the College had the generous support of W. J. Duggan as its President for 1927. In 1928 A. E. Monk was the President and it may be said that he, too, gave generously of his time to advance the College. No Secretary of the Trades Hall Council ever did more for the College.

At the All-Australian Trade Union Congress of 1927, Albert Monk and the late George Hayes (Bakers) moved and secured the support of the Congress for Labor Colleges.

The W.E.A. made a strong bid for union support in Brisbane. The departure of Spencer Brodney for New York, followed by the almost wilful dissipation of the Workers' School's forces and funds, led to the collapse of the School.

### THE WORKERS' EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

After its origin in Britain, the Workers' Education Association was established in Australia. There was strong opposition by many unionists to the W.E.A.

The Victorian Labor College was inevitably involved in this controversy over a long period. The W.E.A. in Victoria has long since abandoned the word "Worker" in its name and has ceased to play any part in workers' education. But in other parts of Australia it seems still to secure support from some misguided unionists.

In Brisbane, the W.E.A.'s attack took the form of bringing from Broken Hill a tutor whose views were acceptable. After the collapse of the Workers' School, W.E.A. teaching reverted to its former futility.

In Melbourne, the W.E.A. made two equally dishonest attempts to sabotage the College. Both were uncovered and defeated.

### FAILURE TO CAPTURE COLLEGE

There have been various attempts by factions operating within the unions to capture the College.

That such factions should have existed was, of course, an argument for the College.

A strenuous bid was made in the late '30's by politically minded people to capture the College. When this failed, the College was subjected to a hostile campaign. Its class leaders were described as supporters of Franco, Hitler and Trotsky, and of Jew baiting.

The Jew baiting charge was rather amusing. It arose from a play which was broadcast in a Labor Hour program. Our critics were unaware of the fact that the play had been produced by the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union of America, which had a very large Jewish membership.

Having failed to gain control, the factionalists campaigned to disrupt College activities and to induce unions to cancel affiliation. This explains why some unions are now unable to claim 50 years of unbroken affiliation.

The mission of the College in the educational field is to unite labor, to welcome and discuss working-class ideas. This is why factionalism and personal opportunism were completely out of place.

The College could only have survived by being able to reject the move by the outside propaganda group in the '20's and the outside political party 27 years ago.

Scars were inflicted in the struggles, however, in the loss of the affiliations of unions which themselves fell under the control or influence of the defeated faction in the College.

Class leaders over the years have been welcomed from a wide range of working-class schools of thought and gave excellent service, keeping to fundamental issues. Ralph Gibson, of the Communist Party, could be named at one extreme and Tom Brennan at the other. Both respected the College's policy against factionalism. Only two class leaders' services were discontinued for abusing this freedom.

### THE STUDENTS

Attendance at classes after a day's work is not always easy. Yet many unionists found the class more attractive than might be expected.

One student was a League football umpire. Another student who had been at a game asked the umpire why he had not reported a player. "Because," said the umpire, "I'd have to miss the class. The Tribunal sits tonight."

### WIDE RANGE OF COLLEGE CLASSES

The Victorian Labor College has had no organisational ambitions. Its tasks have been strictly limited to its own educational sphere, leaving to other Labor bodies their no less necessary duties.

The College has sought to show to workers the nature of human society and how it changes and how men can see to it that it changes in the right direction — that is, towards socialism.

Therefore, the College had a class in economics to show the "economic law of motion" of capitalist society — to adopt an expression of Marx. The history of industrial systems has been presented. Much has been learned from anthropology and the social life of the Australian aborigines was not neglected. In short, social theory and history in all their aspects have been examined.

The practical work of public speaking has been encouraged. It was hoped that students take part in the battle of ideas so that new thought may issue in new behavior and so lead to the new society.

### CONCLUSION

If I may refer to myself, I was appointed to conduct a College class in July, 1922. I continued a close association with the College until the end of 1955.

I now believe, as I believed in 1922, in the battle of ideas.

Until the community as a whole has been weaned from the ideas that are crystallised into the institutional behavior that supports the private ownership of the means of production and the incentive to private profit, not merely the working-class will continue to be where it now is but society at large will be in danger of dissolution.

Socialism is possible, but not inevitable. It is more urgently necessary in 1967 than in 1917.

It is thus the more necessary that independent education should be maintained and extended. It was to this end that the four men founded the College in 1917 and it is by success in doing this that the College will be judged.

**The Need For Independent Working Class Education  
Based on Marxist Theory on Alienation**

Presented by

E. TRIPP

Secretary Victorian Labor College

**THE IMPERATIVE NEED TO CONTINUE WITH  
THE WORK OF THE VICTORIAN LABOR COLLEGE  
IN INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS EDUCATION**

In a pamphlet published in 1920 by W. P. Earsman, "The Proletariat and Education," is stated: "In 1917 four enthusiasts decided to launch a Labor College and name it the Victorian Labor College. Rooms were granted by the Victorian Railways Union and with no money the founders set out on their task of creating an institution which would be controlled and owned by the workers, and which would assist them to bring about a saner state of society than the present." The movement spread to other States, Labor Colleges were set up in Brisbane and Sydney. However, in the course of time they apparently lapsed so that after fifty years the Victorian Labor College appears to be the one remaining institution based on the lines of independent working class education.

The reasons which inspired the four enthusiasts of fifty years ago still remain, though with a somewhat greater intensity for man since 1917 has become more sombre and brutal. In 1917 workers' education was seen to be of paramount importance due to the vast change that had taken place in the possession of knowledge since the early rise of commercialism. In those days scholars gathered in universities to pursue their studies in common and impart their knowledge to the community. Education was regarded as an **end in itself**, not, as in our day, a **means to an end**.

The steady rise of commercialism gathered momentum in greed for profit, emphasising the baser instincts with intense brutality within man's nature regardless of his

moral claims. In the early forties of last century a completely helpless and peaceful agrarian population of China was forced to match arms with the capitalist military technique of the European powers and as a consequence become subjected to periodical massacres in a vain attempt to resist the importation of the opium drug into their country. Finally, by the peace of Tientsin (1858) China was forced into opening her country for the importation of this dread drug which had already wrought such havoc to its population, for the purpose it served in the creation of huge profits for its capitalist producers.

The conquest of India was no less barbarous in its methods; in fact it was even more brutal than its previous heathen conquerors. The savage Mongol and Tartar hordes at least preserved the cultural life of the country, the communist village community. Only the advent of commercial conquest by Britain assured the destruction of this. It was imperative that it do so, because commercial conquest is based on the inherent necessity of reducing every country it conquers into the same way of life as its own in order that it becomes a market for expansion of the profit system. The forceful transformation of India's agrarian economy to that of the landowner and impoverished peasants by the British led to the first great famine in India exactly a century ago, "in which over a million people were killed in one district alone," writes Rosa Luxemburg in "The Accumulation of Capital."

From this glimpse into history it is easy to grasp how the steady rise of commercialism put an end to any idealic relations existing within the community. The brotherhood relationship existing within the guilds—which now exists in name only with the trade unions which grew out of them—were supplanted through the promotion of private ownership in production to what Marx termed a relationship of "naked cash value." With this development the class struggle became more revealing than ever before. Inheriting from the last century all the baser instincts of human nature through the rise of commercialism our own century, now more than half gone, has witnessed two global wars bringing us near to the Orwellian stage predicted for 1984 of perpetual war!

As already noticed by 1917 the impact of commercialism on education had destroyed any quest for knowledge in advancement of the cultural stage of man. More than ever, education became a matter of class interest, a method whereby to advance the interests of capitalism. Government grants were provided for universities where students no longer felt the necessity to impart their knowledge to the community, but to use it solely for their own individual advancement. Over the years, with the advance in technology to industry, this is more emphasised. Study now is not of a general nature but confined to subjects pertaining to the requirements of students for their position in society. The demands made on students through exams have driven many to drugs and many suffer from mind derangements. Due to specialisation, mass-produced doctors, mathematicians, lawyers and such-like come off the chain-belt system as within a factory. Many are the outcries from the scholarly concerning student illiteracy, which in its turn leads to inability to the clear expression of thought.

This harnessing of education to the necessities of commercialism and its effect on the thought structure of imprisoning it within the conventional forms of capitalism was not unnoticed by Marx. In his writings on Capitalism and Human Alienation, contained in his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, he remarks as follows:

"Alienation shows itself not merely in the result, but also in the process of production, within productive activity itself. . . .

"In what does this alienation of labor consist? First, that the work is external to the worker, that it is not a part of his nature, that consequently he does not fulfil himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery, not of well-being, does not develop freely a physical and mental energy, but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker therefore feels himself at home only during his leisure, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, forced labor. It is not the satisfaction of a need, but only a means for satisfying other needs. Its alien character is clearly shown by the fact that as soon as there is no physical or other compulsion it is avoided like the plague. Finally, the alienated

character of work for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his work but work for someone else, that in work he does not belong to himself but to another person."

In the so-called affluent age alienation becomes even more noticeable. Today in order that workers may become owners of their homes, motor cars and other luxuries produced in modern society, they must mortgage their future through hire purchase agreements with an addition of the payment of extortionate interest rates. This brings with it the compulsion to work long hours of overtime or failing this to look for a second job. In many cases the wife also is compelled into the work force that financial commitments may be met.

Thus the time spent in work for another is not decreased with this so-called progress in the modern age but increased. On top of this is the negative attitude towards struggle against this unnatural existence and the development of a general apathy to anything likely to bring about a collision with existing conditions through fear of getting too far behind in the time-payments. Thus more and more people are being reduced to thinking along the lines of that desired by capitalism.

In proof of this one has only to observe the period of 1917 and the opposition expressed to World War I through rejection of conscription even though enormous propaganda was brought to bear in an effort to show the war as a great human ideal for the ending of war altogether. Fifty years after, not only is support given to conscription for an undeclared war in Vietnam but also with the full understanding that it is a war against "communist aggression!" This implies that the majority now recognise it as the sacred duty to fight with capitalism against its greatest enemy, communism. For communism, another name for socialism, means an end to capitalism through the means of planned methods of production in the interests of all. It matters not that of course this is not the meaning for the war in Vietnam any more than World War I was the war to end all wars. What is important is that commercialism has so reduced the mind to the conventional lies of our

civilisation that men now quietly acquiesce to any vile methods being used to exterminate a philosophy which history records as the avowed teaching of the early Christians upon which capitalist morality is supposed to be based.

So inescapable is this deterioration of thought through alienation from the real meaning of life that the great satirist George Orwell's prediction for 1984 stands out with all its frightful warning. In that year Orwell presumes the world to be at perpetual war. Have we not entered the period of permanent war economy? Orwell has the Ministry of Truth with its three slogans: "War is Peace." "Freedom is Slavery," "Ignorance is Strength." Do we not today go to war in the interest of peace? Is not freedom the right to choose one's master! And is not ignorance the one remaining force that keeps capitalism alive?

It is upon this last slogan, "Ignorance is Strength," that the entire labor movement should concern itself. Eliminate ignorance through increasing knowledge to the working class through institutions like that of the Victorian Labor College. Only by this method can the thoughts of young men and women transcend the narrow limits of capitalist thought and the workers traverse the path historically destined by history, to the final goal of socialism. Knowledge is power. Labor Colleges, in this present age, are of ever greater importance if mankind is to be saved from barbarism.

(Introduced by E. Tripp, Secretary Victorian Labor College, on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the College, September 1, 1967.)