

## 16      The Proletariat and Education

said by some of the intellectuals that the working-class only want Economics and Industrial History, and have no real desire for knowledge as such, but the history of the College, short as it has been, has disproved that statement and proved that the working-class appreciates and knows the value of the knowledge of other subjects as well. It is expected that in the near future Newcastle and the North will follow Sydney's example.

One of the features of the Labor College of Sydney has been the putting into practice the principles which the industrial movement stands for—Control on the Job. The students are consulted on all matters affecting them in the institution, and what they say is the moving spirit in the carrying into effect those matters. This at first was not an altogether welcome practice to some people, but a few practical illustrations by the students soon put that right.

We have now only to look to Adelaide and Western Australia to take the matter up, which we are hoping will very soon be done. The time has arrived when one of the States should take the initiative and call an Interstate Conference, which would be of assistance to all the States, and which would be the means of deciding the policy of the future. A Resident College will very soon be necessary, and with the united action of the industrial movement that would soon be accomplished.

The Labor College movement of Australia is on the eve of being firmly established, and with a Resident Labor College as a true working-class institution, and with its influence spreading to the four corners of the country, 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.

# THE PROLETARIAT AND EDUCATION

The Necessity for Labor Colleges

BY

**W. P. EARSMAN**

The Founder of the Labor College  
Movement in Australia



**ANDRADE'S**

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## The PROLETARIAT and EDUCATION

"I can promise to be candid, but not impartial."

Education at the present time ranks with that blessed word "Reconstruction." They both mean nothing on the lips of the capitalist or his servants. Uttered by a class-conscious member of the working-class they do stand for something, and something very definite. But let us examine the position as it appears to us, the members of the working-class.

We find that historically the spread of education was begun by means of those wandering priests known as the friars, of whom in England Wycliff was the head. They went into the highways and byways of city and countryside teaching the people and assisting them with elementary education. Later the universities of Oxford and Cambridge were established as seats of learning. Scholars from the whole of England gathered there to pursue their studies in common and to give to the community the benefit of those studies. To acquire knowledge for the love of knowledge was their desire. They regarded knowledge as an end in itself, not a means to an end, as in our day. These were the days when commerce was in its infancy, and the race for commercial success had not yet begun. With the ending of Feudalism and the beginnings of Capitalism the spirit changed, not only in the people, but in the institutions of the country. Feudalism, whatever may be said of it otherwise, was at least based on a personal relationship: capitalism, on the other hand, is a relationship of things. The difference in the two is vast; and the difference in the outlook engendered in the community is also vast.

With the changing of the economic system the composition of society became more definite. There

## NOTE.

In writing this pamphlet I wish to show two things. First, I wish to point out the dead-end to which the present educational system is leading, viewed from the point of view of the working-class, and second, I want to show one way out by which the working-class may have and hold education, if they wish.

Personally, I believe the Labor College Movement to be a way out. Up to the present I think nothing better has shown itself for the working-class. At the present moment I think that it is an instrument which the working-class may develop for the acquiring of knowledge and intellectual training to make us more fit not only for the bringing about of the Industrial Revolution, but also for the more efficient working of Revolutionary society when we have won.

Melbourne, January, 1920.

W.P.E.

were ranged on the one side all those who owned the tools of production, and on the other those who used them. Two camps were formed which ultimately became armed camps. The analysis of this system found what is now accepted by all as the class struggle.

#### THE CLASS STRUGGLE.

*Abundant  
Material*  
This is the composition of present day society. This is the natural order of the damnable and sordid economic system in which we live. This is the order which will remain until it is altered by one of these classes, and the class which will make the alteration will be the working-class or slave class. That is its mission. With the proper understanding of the economic system, the workers will soon find means to end that system, and to raise on its ruins a development of society having for its goal the benefit of the whole, instead of a part, of the community.

The class struggle is that ceaseless struggle which goes on from day to day in every country and between the same combatants. The struggle on all occasions is over some advantage which the one seeks to obtain over the other. It may take the form of more wages or shorter hours or the alteration of some workshop practice; but the particular point really does not matter, the opposing forces are always the same—the master class and the working class.

As Society is to-day, it is like a huge market where two commodity possessors come to sell their goods. The capitalist brings his commodity—gold, and the worker his commodity—labor power. The worker sells his labor power in exchange for gold which is the commodity that will bring him the subsistence of life. But it must be remembered that the commodity of labor power is free, that is to say, that the worker has no personal ties like the feudal slaves. He can either sell his labor power or withhold it; but his well-being depends on materials, things he must eat and drink. The capitalist has

accumulated these necessities which he sells by means of gold, consequently the free laborer with his empty stomach is forced to sell his labor power in return for the commodities without which he cannot live. The wage laborer therefore is in the grip of a system that beats him down to the lowest—that is to say, to a bare subsistence. The supporters of the system are those who have gained control of it or control of the means of production, those whose interests are bound up in it. The system is Capitalism, and those who control it are Capitalists. To manage it effectively and to their interests they must have a group of people to assist them, and to operate the machinery. The section or class who assist must be subject to their controllers or, in other words, must be slaves. In return for their slavery they receive only sufficient of the gold commodity to enable them to continue operating the machinery from day to day, and to perpetuate their class. It would be a catastrophe to the capitalist system if slaves did not breed more slaves.

From this picture we see that for any material advantage one class must take from the other class. This attempt to take, the one from the other, goes on all over the world, day in and day out. It is like a tug of war. There is a long rope—if you can imagine your bread and butter in the form of a rope—with the capitalists at one end and the workers at the other. The more of the rope that is won, the more material comfort is acquired.

This, then, is the Class Struggle.

If these premises are accepted it must be patent to all that there are two points of view. If there are two points of view there will be two schools of thought to develop and aid those views. Therefore Labor Colleges as well as Universities.

#### THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF CAPITALISM.

As I have pointed out, the old universities or schools of learning were places where students met

to pursue their studies, purely for the love of knowledge and with the desire of passing on to the community the store of knowledge which they had gained. These were feudal times. Under Capitalism are those seats of learning still the same? We call them universities, but what are the universities of to-day? Can they be honestly called seats of learning? Let us examine the position; not the position in England or Germany, but the position here in our own country. In each capital city we have a university which is supported mainly by government grants. In other words, the people are compelled to contribute towards its upkeep. When a person contributes or supports an institution, presumably he does it for some reason; either because of the worth of the work of the institution or because of its value to the community, or because he has something to gain from it. What advantage or benefit do the working-class of this country receive from the universities? Do the students who pass through a course of instruction there enter the service of the community and give back a little for what they have received? By no means. They use the institution for their own welfare. Or again, do the sons of the working-class go to the university after finishing their course at the primary schools? We know how few do, and that those who do, manage only because of some scholarship they have gained, that is because of exceptional ability. And do those who win these scholarships, after their course of instruction at the university—do they return to their class, the working-class, to assist it by imparting the knowledge they have gained? By no means. They, too, use it for their own ends, either a comfortable living in the service of the capitalist, or by entering one of the professions, an entry into the ranks of the middle class. And so in later years we find them fighting and denying the class they once belonged to. Thus the university is no more and no less than a training ground for servants to enter the service of the capitalist.

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*university is not a place used by the working class to work for any but material ends.*

Let us look at the position from another point of view. The students appear to enter the universities to-day less with the altruistic motives of those students at the old universities, than from a desire of acquiring a training by which they may get an easy living through life. If this supposition is true, then the institution has undergone a change extending through all its departments. A prominent scholar of this country admitted to me the other day that this change had spread through the whole of the university life, and acknowledged with regret that even the Arts course had become commercialised. If we analyse the position of the university to-day, we find that it ranks with our working men's college. The one trains mental workers, and the other manual workers for the service of the capitalist.

We reach then the conclusion that the education of the university is not impartial and non-partisan, but very much partial and biased. The same can be said of our public schools.

Again, let us turn to an institution of so-called education with which most of us have come into contact—the State school. When we send our boys and girls to school it is in the first place because it is compulsory, and in the second place because we wish them to pick up as much education as possible to help them through life. But how many of us have stopped to consider in what that education consists. Were we taught or given knowledge to assist us through life? Was it impartial? Did our teachers treat the subject matter from an impartial point of view? In history did we have portrayed before us the truth, or was it only the doings of the kings and lords? Were we not told of the glories of war and the great sacrifices made by our rulers? Have our children in the last four years been told the truth? If they had been we would have no fear for the future. But we all know how they have been handled—taught to worship kings and flags which stood for oppression instead of freedom.

*Large, fine  
but not quite  
the root of  
the problem  
Capitalism  
is a system  
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*to compare people who go to universities  
- work and labour by hand training -  
from learning of university itself.*

If we turn back to the time when the first compulsory education act was passed, we find that the capitalists of England fought these acts with all their might, but that they soon withdrew their opposition and supported them. For the employers recognised that though the children would know a little more, the amount could be so restricted that the result would only be to make them better wage slaves, knowing no more of freedom than what we have known and experienced of it. Evidence of this is furnished by the report of the Commission of 1865, which was appointed to inquire into the employment of children. To this commission a silk manufacturer stated, "I am quite sure that the true secret of producing sufficient work people is to be found in uniting education and labor from a period of childhood. Of course the occupation must not be unhealthy. But of the advantage of the union I have no doubt." No class conscious member of the working-class has any doubt either of the advantage to the capitalist of the union of education and labor. Did not some high priest say, "Give me the child until he is eight years old, and you can have him for the rest of his life." That the capitalist also knows, but when will the working-class know it?"

Therefore we find that from our childhood we are in the grip of those who control society to-day. If we leave school and go into the workshop we are right in the system. If we go on to the higher schools and on to the university we become deeper and deeper involved, so involved that we can see no way out and must just go on. The only conclusion we can come to is that there is no educational institution to-day which is impartial and non-partisan in its teaching.

But in recent years we find history in the educational world repeating itself. The universities of to-day, like the early capitalists, are recognising that too long have they kept aloof from the working-class, and so they now are cooing in the ear of labor

to come and get educated. The universities have become alive to the danger of labor. They see it marching on and upward, and are anxious to be in the good grace of the ever-advancing army. Consequently they have approached with the suggestion of giving assistance in adult education. They are willing to form classes on any subject the workers desire, and will provide teachers, class rooms, books, etc., at a very small fee. They are even willing that the classes should be jointly controlled. AND they declare that all subjects will be dealt with in an impartial and non-partisan manner. If you turn to the report of the Industrial Unrest Commissioners for Wales you will read, "That the university is the proper medium for the education of the adult, and that university tutorial classes should be established in every centre of industry in Wales in which political economy, industrial history and such other subjects as bear upon the conditions and interests of the workers, can be studied impartially under the guidance of skilled and recognised authorities; classes in which subjects of general human interest may be studied in an impartial and systematic manner under expert guidance, whereby the relations of industry to the community, and the desirability of a broad and sympathetic outlook upon the complex factors of modern society may be adequately realised."

Wage Slaves! Think of it! The time has come when even university professors are willing to stand by and hold your hand and assist you across the stream. That stream which has appeared so far off is coming nearer—the abolition of the wage system. The question is whether we shall be able to force the bridge or whether we shall have to wade across. But we must beware of traps and pitfalls on the way, and there are many. We do not suggest for a moment that the university is laying a trap for us, but we do think it is peculiar that after all these years of aloofness these university dons should suddenly become friendly. This doubt

has been intensified for us by one of the bourgeois economists, ex-Professor H. Stanley Jevons, who wrote in the "Daily Chronicle" of March 25th, 1912:—

"For six years I lectured on political theory as Professor of Economics and Political Science in the University College, Cardiff. Much that I now write contradicts what I taught in College. What is the reason? Simply that I came gradually into contact with actual facts and real life. Whisperings of miners' grievances came to me through my students. I began to inquire for myself, and was shocked beyond all bearing when I learned the truth. I resigned my Chair, as I felt I must now begin to learn, not teach."

This is sufficient comment on the action of the university authorities. For to say that they will assist us impartially and in a non-partisan spirit, and yet day in, day out they act partially, is not likely to convince us of their sincerity or honesty. Surely we have the right to be suspicious! Have they befriended us in the past? Have they been on our side in our struggles? Have they ever been impartial in any matter in which the community was taking sides? We know they have not. Then why should we be delayed and waste our time? Labor has a mission and nothing should be allowed to rob or distract it from its mission.

If we want education, let us have it and manage it for ourselves. We have had to do most things, why not this also? We found it necessary to have independent unions and an independent labor political party, why not an independent educational institution?

We now come to the history of that independent educational institution.

#### LABOR COLLEGES.

The first Labor College was founded in 1899, when two Americans, Mr. Walter Vrooman and

Dr. Beard established Ruskin College at Oxford, with Mr. Denis Hird as Principal. The object and aims of this institution will be seen in the words of its 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 recalled to America to attend to their domestic affairs. But Ruskin College still held on, and gradually passed into the hands of the trade unions, who contributed liberally towards the College funds; some of them granting scholarships to their members to attend the classes. For seven years all went well. 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, gave them every assistance and supported 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 that 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 till the end of 1908, when the Labor world was astonished to hear that a number of students at Ruskin College 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, the object of which was to stop the trend of Ruskin College towards the University, and to completely isolate it as a Labor 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 labor 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 the 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 mal-contents absolutely refused to conform to this attitude and, deciding to follow the man who had stood by them all through, seceded.

Then followed the founding of what is known as the Central Labor College of London in 1909. The difference between these two colleges is quite marked, Ruskin believing in social reform and the Central Labor College standing out boldly for nothing short of social revolution: naturally it follows that the subjects taught are approached from different standpoints. The Central Labor 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 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 on these riotous days we must admit that the revolting students were correct in their analysis of the situation, for whereas the Central Labor College has turned out rebels of the first order, the influence of Ruskin has been mainly amongst those who were quite satisfied to compromise here and compromise there, anxious that the old order should continue without interruption.

The Central Labor 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 University had used its influence to have the College "moved on." But at last they found a refuge in their present home at Earl's Court. Since then the Labor 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.

In August, 1917, another resident college was opened at Glasgow.

The essential difference between a true Labor 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 a 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 for obtaining more officers for the capitalists.

Or again, has the modern University contributed towards thought in any direction? If you answer this question honestly you will have to say No emphatically. In fact, we find that any University authority who dares to step off the beaten track with new ideas finds himself in trouble and often sacked.

The Labor 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 about justice and that is my business."

This 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 Labor College should be set up here. An effort was made in Melbourne, but it failed through no fault of the founders, but because some of the leaders of organised labor had become tainted with the supposed good fellowship of University dons. However, it was seen that it would be only a matter of time when these slave leaders would again have their feet on the ground, and those who were rebuked for their efforts in the cause of the workers decided to pocket the rebuff and wait. Four years went by and 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

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the workers, and which would assist them to bring about a saner state of society than the present. With the recognition of the class struggle as their basis, they set the wheels in motion amid a storm of bullets and shells, 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 Victorian Labor College 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 they will be saved in spite of themselves. The Victorian Labor College has 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 over the whole State.

Since then it is pleasing to add that Brisbane has followed in the footsteps of the Victorian unionists, and classes have been established on similar lines. They are in a healthy condition, and promise well for the future.

In Sydney a College has also been started under the auspices of the Trades and Labor Council. Four classes have been formed in Marxian Economics, two in Grammar, one in Literature, and one in Industrial History. The number of students is such that one is forced to stop and consider what would have been the position if the working-class of this country had had an educational institution of their own earlier. The manner in which the rank and file of the labor movement have rushed to support this Labor College has been one of the events of the year in Labor circles. It has been