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Do Your Own THINKING!

A reprint of a pamphlet published by the Plebs League, London. An article on Working-class Education in Australia, by E. T. Asche, Secretary, Victorian Labor College. :: ::



(after "The Liberator")

This is the kind of Education the Employer favors.

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Working-Class Education in Australia

The immediate aim of working-class education is to give the workers a knowledge of those matters which will enable them to improve their material conditions and standard of life.

Until good living conditions are obtained, and security of livelihood is guaranteed to all who are willing and able to work, and to all who are incapacitated, it is unreasonable to expect any great advance in the educational standard of the mass of workers.

A knowledge of working-class economics will convince any intelligent person that the immense scientific progress of modern times and the enormous increase in the productive power of labor due to machine production would make it possible for all to secure comfortable living conditions and ample leisure, were it not for the fact that the present Capitalist system, which is based on the private ownership of the means of production, deprives the workers of the enjoyment of the fruits of their labor. The aim of working-class education is to equip the workers with the necessary knowledge to enable them to wage a vigorous struggle against the exploiting class, and to obtain control of the government and industry of the country, with a view to the abolition of Capitalism.

Education and Socialism.

In other words, the aim of working-class education in Australia is to equip the workers for intelligent participation in the every-day struggle, and to assist them to achieve the objective of the Australian Labor Party—the socialisation of industry, production, distribution, and exchange.

To effect this purpose, it is clearly essential to understand the way in which the Capitalist system works, and the principles on which the future social order will be based. It is necessary to make a scientific analysis of Capitalism, and to study the reasons why the change that will inevitably take place will assume

the form of Socialism. It is necessary to study scientific Socialism, and to discover how the lack of scientific organization in the present mode of production based on competition will be replaced by scientific organization of industry based on co-operation, and how private ownership with production for profit will be replaced by communal ownership with production for the benefit of all.

The Philosophic Basis of Working-class Education.

The philosophic basis on which working-class education rests is purely scientific. It rejects as superstitious falsehoods or speculative delusions any principles or ideas except those which have a basis in scientifically-proved fact. In other words, it rejects anything in the nature of the metaphysical, and accepts the materialist conception of life and history.

Ideas—moral, intellectual, or political—spring out of the material factors of man's existence.

Working-class education is thus based on materialism, but, further than this, it rests upon the fact that man lives in a constantly changing universe. Hence, just as his material surroundings are constantly changing, so his ideas—moral, intellectual, and political, which arise out of his material environment—must change also, becoming adapted to the new material conditions of life.

The consequence is that no principles are absolute or unchanging.

The Universal Law of Change.

All things, including our ideas of what is good or evil, are merely relative and changing.

Everything, including human nature itself, is in a constant process of change.

The material conditions which gave rise to Capitalism, and with it the Capitalist ideas of law and order, morality, politics, and education, have been succeeded by the changed material conditions of to-day, which have developed into their present form on account of the tremendous advance in the scientific methods which have been applied to industry, and the corresponding

increase in the productivity of labor. Hence, we claim that, since the material conditions on which the Capitalist order of society was based are passing away, the time has now arrived for the introduction of a new social order. Since the tendency in history has been for man's relations with his fellow-men to become increasingly social, it is clear that the new order of society will assume a Socialistic form.

Antiquated Education.

The education in vogue in our schools and universities is steeped in the shibboleths and dogmas of the order that is passing away. The teaching of history, law, philosophy, economics, sociology, and kindred subjects, has not kept pace with the latest scientific researches. In many respects these subjects do not even attempt to apply scientific methods of investigation, but still rely largely on speculative processes of thought, and theories derived from an unwarranted exercise of the imagination.

Philosophy has not yet disregarded metaphysics, and still wanders in imaginary realms of thought, where it revels in a species of mental gymnastics inherited from our more credulous and more dogmatic ancestors.

The theory of law, always of a more conservative nature than other subjects, still rests largely on antiquated ideas of the "sacred" right of avaricious landowners and rapacious Capitalists to make their possession of the wealth that should belong to the community the means of exploiting their fellow-men.

Sociology, which is the science of the evolution of human society, is the most dangerous (and to us consequently, the most useful) subject which the Capitalists have allowed to enter their universities. The result is that only a semi-scientific study of sociology is permitted in the universities controlled by the Capitalists, for the conclusions that must logically be drawn from a scientific study of the social development of human society, point to the inevitable disappearance in the future of the present Capitalist régime.

The Class Struggle.

A scientific analysis of the history of the class struggle indisputably points to the approaching supremacy of the working-class in every country in the world.

The aim of working-class education is to teach the history of the class struggle of the past in order that the workers may realize more clearly the nature of the class struggle that exists in modern society.

The recognition of the nature of the present class struggle will undoubtedly convince the working-class of the necessity of bringing about the abolition of classes, the real objective of Socialism. But it is clear that, since the working-class alone are interested in the abolition of classes, this aim can only be achieved by their first gaining political and industrial supremacy.

Superiority of the Working-class.

Working-class education will make the workers conscious of their superiority as a class over the leisured class, whose voluntary inactivity deprives them of any right to live, and of their superiority over the Capitalist class, whose activity is debased for the mercenary purpose of using their favored position in the social order and their control of the means of production to appropriate the results of the labor of others.

The aim of working-class economics is to teach the workers what is the true source of rent, interest, and profit. It demonstrates the fact that, under the Capitalist system, labor-power is a commodity that is bought and sold like ordinary merchandise, and in this way endeavours to get the workers to strive for their emancipation by the abolition of the commodity status of labor.

Employing-class Education.

The lack of interest taken by the working-class of Australia in education cannot be wondered at when we realize that the subjects that are taught in the schools and universities and the methods by which they are taught are permeated with ideas directed against the interests and aspirations of the workers.

The State platform of the Australian Labor Party recognises these defects in our educational institutions, and one of the most important reforms that could be made by a Labor Government would be to make a thorough change in the existing methods of teaching and the subject matter of education. Until this is done,

it is useless for the workers to look to the State for any education that will assist them to better their conditions.

The objections to institutions that receive financial support from the employing class or from the State controlled by a Capitalist Government are also apparent to all. It is quite futile for the workers to seek to obtain useful education on social and economic subjects from institutions that are imbued with employing-class ideas.

As long as the educational policy of the country is in the hands of the Capitalist class the workers will obtain useful education on these questions only from institutions which they themselves finance and support.

Internationalism and Education.

No attempt is made in the schools to teach an international outlook. On the other hand, every effort is made to inculcate a false feeling of national superiority over other races.

Instead of teaching an international outlook, based on the recognition of the common humanity of all races and the realization of the common interests of all peoples throughout the world, we find that the policy of those who control education at present is to teach a narrow and selfish Nationalism and a Capitalist Imperialism that inevitably breeds war.

History, as taught in the schools, is largely a disconnected jumble of the dates of battles and the characters of kings.

The true significance of the manners and customs of the past remains unnoticed, and the history of the struggles between the classes is ignored.

Free Education.

The Labor Party stands for free education in the schools and universities, but this will be of no avail unless it is accomplished by the thorough emancipation of our educational institutions from all Capitalist ideas and methods.

Unless education is freed from the shackles of Capitalist ideology, the result of giving free education to children of the working-class will only be in most cases

Why Working-Class Education? *

"The working-class has been in the habit of sending out its thinking. It's a bad habit. It has to learn to do its own."

THE shortest and simplest way of answering the question, "Why Independent Working-Class Education?" is by putting another question in reply—"Why an independent Labor Press?" Few intelligent workers at this time of day need to be convinced of the vital necessity of Labour having its own newspapers. And there is no single argument in favour of Labour looking after its own education. One may go further than that, and say with truth that the value and influence of a Labor Press must be very largely nullified as long as Labor leaves its education in the control of its enemies. Education and the Press are both vital weapons in the struggle. To make the most of either you must use both. To use only one means, not only that you weaken the effectiveness of that one, but that you leave your opponent doubly armed. Not only can his artillery reply to yours; but, in addition, you allow him, by his use of the educational weapon, to undermine your whole position.

The Workers' Point of View.

If we want to know what the workers' case is in any industrial dispute we don't go to a capitalist newspaper for it. We have learnt better. Why, then, should we expect to get, from an education controlled by the same master-class, the truth about the workers, their past struggles or the possibilities of their emancipation? We have seen, in the "reports" of happenings in revolu-

to render them more efficient servants of the Capitalist class, or to give a favored few the opportunity of themselves becoming capitalists. They will then despise their parents and the class from which they have sprung. There is no reason or justice in withholding the higher forms of education from the children of the working-class whose parents have not the means to support them during the period of their education. Unless free University and other higher forms of education are accompanied by the maintenance of the students by the State, it will only be available to those whose parents can afford to keep them whilst they are going through their course of study. The result would in general be that the working-class, who produce all the wealth of the community, would be making provision for the free education not of their own children, but of the children of the Capitalist class. If the opportunity to receive the full advantages of education is to be open to all, it is apparent that the maintenance of all those who are receiving education must be provided by the community.

Working-class Education— The Road to Freedom.

But it is useless and unprofitable to demand full educational opportunities for the workers and their children until our educational system has been completely cleansed of Capitalist ideas and methods, and adapted to the requirements of the social order of the future. Meanwhile, in the period before this radical change in education can be effected, in order to fit themselves for the ever-present struggle to keep up their standard of life, and in order to prepare themselves to achieve their freedom from Capitalist domination, the workers must devote themselves to the immediate and practical aims of working-class education.

—E. T. ASCHE.

*The following is an excellent study of Working-class Education, published under the title of "Do Your Own Thinking" by the Plebs League, England. The context is as applicable to conditions in Australia as to those in England.

tionary Russia, what the capitalist Press is capable of in the way of distortion, suppression, and deliberate falsehood. Is it any more likely that capitalist education will tell the truth about the revolutions of the past? For there is a working-class point of view in history and the social sciences, just as there is a working-class point of view in every important social problem of to-day. And schools and universities controlled by capitalists are as little likely to tell the truth about the one as capitalist newspapers are to tell the truth about the other.

The Workers' Aim.

The fundamental aim of capitalist education, as of the capitalist Press, is "the preservation of the existing order." Teachers and journalists are not always conscious of that aim; but they very quickly realise its all-importance if they chance to teach or write anything directly opposed to it. Now the very essence of the Working-Class Movement, the very reason for its existence, is a desire for a fundamental change in the existing social order. The very facts about that social order which capitalist education and the capitalist Press seek to hide, or at any rate to modify, are the facts which the workers desire to emphasise most. Capitalist educational institutions and capitalist newspapers are counsel for the defence; Labor, which is prosecuting, must provide its own counsel in the shape of educational facilities and newspapers of its own.

The Education the Workers Need.

But surely, some folks reply, Education (with a capital E) is not concerned with these sordid, debatable problems; it is concerned with higher things—is "above the battle," in short. To which we answer that the education which the Labor Movement, as a Labor Movement, requires is concerned first and foremost with precisely these "sordid" problems. It is quite true that in certain branches of study—in mathematics or the physical sciences, for instance,—there is no separate and distinct "capitalist point of view"; though even here, one may note, a capitalist point of view may very well find expression in the way in which those subjects are

taught. But in all those branches of study which deal with human beings in their relation to one another—i.e., in history and the social sciences—there is a capitalist point of view and a working-class point of view, as clearly differentiated as in the case of any social problem of the present day.

The Fact of the Class Struggle.

In other words, the antagonism of interests between the master-class and the working-class has given rise to a corresponding antagonism of ideas. That antagonism of interest is the central fundamental fact of present-day society. You may dislike that fact, but you cannot ignore it. It is because of that fact that you are compelled to have newspapers of your own, a political party of your own, and industrial organisations—Trade Unions—of your own. And it is because of that fact that you must look after your own education. "To overcome the enemy, we must understand the ground of battle, the position of the field on which the struggle has to be fought out. But obviously we cannot look to the enemy to give us this knowledge. If he fights against our cause, he must think against our cause. We must therefore develop our own knowledge, organise our own intelligence department. We must think as independently as we act on the industrial and political fields. There is no magic that can transform an industrial or political enemy into an educational friend."

Not "More," but "Different."

Note that this conception of working-class education goes a good deal further than the educational policy of many Labor men and women. These merely demand a bigger share of capitalist-class education for the workers—a "broad highway" from schools to universities and so forth. They do not criticise capitalist-class education; they want more of it. Whereas the workers, as we have seen, should aim, not "at extending the facilities of a bad education to greater numbers," but at "bringing into being a new educational machine." They want not merely more education, but a different education.

Independence is Essential.

They will have to supply it for themselves. The class which, through its newspapers, feeds them with lies about every current event—about "history in the making," that is—will not tell them the truth about past history, or about the nature of the social forces which shape man's life and decide his destiny. That class has fully realised the persuasive power of ideas—of ideas favourable to the maintenance of things as they are; and it uses those ideas to keep the worker in bondage. The workers must counter these by spreading other ideas, working-class ideas; by developing and using their own persuasive power; by Doing Their Own Thinking. In short, by looking after their own education.

"Even as we have a Platform or our own and a Press of our own, let us have Educational Institutions of our own. . . . The working-class must achieve its own emancipation. . . . Our aim must be the Education of the Workers in the Interests of the Workers."

What We Study—and Why.

Education is, and always must be, a means to an end. To some it means to personal satisfaction, to others a means to a living; to us it is a means to a Great End: the Emancipation of the Workers. What, above all else, we need to know is the nature and source of the social forces pointing towards that end, and the quantity and quality of the obstacles likely to arise. Thus Social Forces, their nature, origin and end, constitute the general subject of our studies.

As workers—as members, that is, of the organised working-class movement—we need a specialised education. We are not interested—we have not time to be interested—in culture for culture's sake. Our movement has certain definite aims. Therefore, the education we need is an education that will fit us to realise those aims; an education enabling us to assist, as effectively as possible, in the emancipation of our class. "The problems of the Labor Movement are social in their character—that is to say, they arise from the relations of men with other men, and from conditions

which men have made. What men have made, men can unmake. It is the task of the working-class of the 20th century to transform those existing relations which are the source of the oppression of the mass of mankind, and to establish a new form of human association. For this, a knowledge of the existing social system, and of the laws which govern its development, is indispensable."

In short, we need to study and to understand:—

What our present position is.

How and Why it came to be so.

How we can alter it.

We want to know at least the main facts about Human Society—what it is, what it has been, and, therefore, what it is likely to become. We must have a reliable working knowledge of social systems, and the way in which they are maintained; of social changes, and the way they come about. The groundwork of all our studies, then, must be History—History in its widest sense, as a record of man's life on the earth. The facts which History collects and presents to us are our raw material—the foundation on which we base our estimate of the possibilities of the present and of the future. What physical and chemical changes in matter are to the chemist or the physical scientist—the subject-matter of his investigation, and the basis for his theories—that the facts of history are to us whose concern is with the social sciences.

The Essential Facts.

We do not study history for history's sake—any more than we want education for education's sake. We study it in order to learn how we, in our time, can best make history—that is, bring about social changes. We need not try to make ourselves walking encyclopedias of historical facts. What we want to do is to get a grip of the main facts, and on them to base the ideas and the theories which are to govern our own actions. We have not merely to collect facts, but to find out what connects them.

The Physical Sciences.

"If we are to reduce the chaotic mass of facts recorded in the annals of mankind to an intelligible his-

tory, we must find some thing or things which persist all through the record of man's activities. Two such things stand out, plain and obvious—Man, and the Earth upon which he moves." We want to know something, then, of the evolution of Man, and the Earth (or "Nature"), and of the actual process by which that evolution has been brought about. For this, we must go to the physical sciences. We must learn something of the mechanism of organic life; something of Biology, the scientific study of the development of man as an organism. To put it simply, we want to know how man came to be the particular sort of animal he is; and what is the nature and capacity of that particular organ, the brain, which in him has developed to a higher degree than in any other animal.

Geography.

Our History, even though we want to avoid overloading it with unnecessary details, must begin at the beginning. And because of this, besides knowing something of the nature of Man himself, we must have some knowledge of the Earth on which he lives—"the earth from which he arose, and of whose total nature he forms a part." So we must have some idea of Geography; of the distribution of land and water, desert and fertile plain, mountain and forest, on the earth's surface, and of the way in which these phenomena have influenced the life of man. "Where man can live and at what cost in toil, trouble and effort, depends in the first instance upon soils, sites, climates, and general geographical conditions; where he may go, upon the restraints which these conditions provide." We shall find that the history of man is the history of his gradual conquest of these "natural" restraints and obstacles; the record of his development from a time when he was utterly dependent upon geographical conditions to a time when—relatively—he has brought them under control. And this fact will give us the clue to the understanding of history.

"If man is always dependent upon the earth (which is to-day, broadly speaking, what it was when man first appeared) why has there been historical development at all. What is the course of change in man's mass activities?" We find the answer in man's power of

consciously modifying natural conditions by his own increasing understanding and his own increasing skill in the invention and use of tools and processes to supplement his efforts. And the steady development of the tool has made man, who at the very beginning of history lived in groups, more and more a social animal; more and more dependent upon the other members of his "group." It has caused the group itself to become ever larger and more complex, with a greater number of interdependent specialised parts, until to-day the whole world is a great group, bound by economic ties, each part of it to an interesting extent dependent upon every other part.

Man's effort to secure greater and greater control over "nature," to become more and more "the master of his fate," has resulted in this steady improvement in tools and processes.

But—

This improvement, and the consequent subdivision of labor has had another result—a result which primarily concerns us as workers. It has resulted in two separate and distinct classes of men—tool-owners and tool-users; the first, a small class, exploiting the labor of the second. The tremendous progress in the development of tools—the instruments of wealth-production—has not resulted in greater prosperity for the mass of men, the tool-users. On the contrary, it is they who are poor—poor in spite of the fact that the art of producing wealth has reached a higher point than ever before in man's history. Why?

The Economics of Labor.

To discover why, we study Economics, the science which deals with the production and distribution of wealth. "A scientific view of economics"—as distinct from that of the "official" economists whose aim is but to defend the existing economic system—"discloses the fact that Labor is the beginning, middle, and end of economics, the substance of all value or capitalist wealth; that Wages are not the equivalent of the labor expended by the actual producers, but merely a part of the value produced by them, a part just sufficient to keep the working-man in working order from day to

day; that profit, interest, and rent are merely quantities of unpaid labor, the surplus of the value produced over the value returned to the producer as wages; that finally, 'capital' itself (instruments of production—ploughs, looms, steam-engines) is nothing but past unpaid labor, utilised by those who own and control it, for the purpose of appropriating more unpaid labor."

The Modern Working-Class Movement.

And bound up with our study of Economics is the study of the historical development of the working-class, and particularly its modern history as an organised movement aiming at freeing itself from this capitalist exploitation. "It is the task of the modern working-class to change society radically, to substitute the economics of planned associated production for the planless and oppressive economics of capitalism." Our historical studies have enabled us to see that only thus can the course of historical development be completed—by securing the use and benefit of the highly-developed tools of production to the mass of men, to all men, instead of a few; by ending the long struggle between the two classes of owners and workers, and putting in its place a class-less society based on common ownership and co-operative work.

A Means to an End.

This is a brief outline of our studies. In every branch of them it must be our aim to apply the knowledge they give us of the facts and problems of to-day. Thus, we shall apply our Psychology, our knowledge of man's mental processes, to the way in which men's instincts still react to their social and economic environment, and the way in which they attempt to reason about the facts of their lives; our Geography to those international problems which are becoming of ever-increasing importance, especially to the workers of the world; our Economics and our History to those actual problems of organisation, of policy, etc., which every day confront the working-class movement.

We shall test the value of all our studies by the simple question: Do they help to fit us to play a more useful part in the work immediately in front of us—the Liberation of our Class from oppression and exploitation?