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**FROM THE MARTYRS TO THE
MASSES.**

PAGES IN THE HISTORY OF TRADE UNIONISM

By

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VI.—THE WORKERS ARE HUNGRY.

Socialism did not come as quickly or as easily as the Bellamyites and Lane-planners had anticipated. Liberalism won its greatest reforms of old age pensions and industrial arbitration under the influence of the Labour Party. Poverty did not disappear, though business crises did—for a while. Workers were not emancipated from the major ills the existence of which had supplied the motive for the building of the Labour Party. Instead, Labour leaders were elected to Parliament, became Ministers of the Crown, and were promoted to guide anti-Labour Cabinets. Odd groups of Socialists kept alive the hopes of quick changes, but their main function was to help their tired and disillusioned agitators find retirement in the A.L.P. Sanatoria. Then came the War. The depression brought great changes. The War scoured the Labour stream of its stagnant growth; the depression broke through the dams of the Little Australians; the Russian Revolution shone over the ocean towards which Australian Labour was trickling. This is not the place to trace the history of the Working-Class Movement in the depression. Since, instead, it is an attempt to see at work the simple ideals of working men, we must try to capture the outlook of the worker, then and now.

Do you recognise yourselves? A century ago, beneath the trees on the village green in the early hours of the morning the workers of Tolpuddle were in earnest consultation. Out of the wage of about eight shillings a week, George Loveless had scraped together enough money to acquire a small collection of books, and had so educated himself that he became the spokesman of the Tolpuddle Labourers. In a cold garret at midnight a shop assistant, called Robert Owen, was sitting studying to become a successful manufacturer; a few years later he was spending his great riches as "benevolent Mr. Owen," the friend of the workers of England.

A man rides round England writing, agitating, pamphleteering—"Bill" Cobbett—he was the avalanche of social power of those days—trying to revive village sports

in order to cure crime, but failing in the face of social despair. He spent twenty years of his life in the effort to save the labourers from degradation and ruin—in an effort to rouse them politically and stir them culturally. Robert Detroisier performed chemical experiments in the pulpits of Dissenting Chapels, spent bitter years of unemployment in learning Latin, French, Physics and Mathematics; and then passed on his knowledge to the masses under such title as "The Benefits of General Knowledge, more especially the Sciences of Mineralogy, Geology, Botany, and Entomology." . . . Thomas Lovett, Chartist, co-operator, social reformer, wrote in prison a comprehensive plan for the education of the population of Great Britain. . . . Workers studied in clubs called "Hampden Clubs"; reading such journals as "Doubts as to the Correctness of some Opinions Generally Entertained on the Subject of Political Economy." They read history, too ("those of them who were politicians believed that the history of the world began with the French Revolution"), and preserved their independence of thinking by setting up their own classes and colleges. They listened to lectures in the winter at 6.30 in the morning in a class room—a "ghostly, white-washed, unplastered garret, not fitted up with the necessities much less the conveniences of study."

The adventure in quest of adult education and working class activity began together with the industrial revolution. Old ways of life were disturbed. Men were cast adrift into an unknown sea. Men were as lost at the dawn of the machine system as they are to-day at its sunset. They were as anxious to set up signposts as were those first European sailors who crawled so slowly and painfully down the west coast of Africa. Hundreds of theories contended for supremacy, but little help was given to the workers by the educated men and women of the day. The President of the Royal Society said, "Education would teach the labouring classes to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in those laborious employment to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory . . . and

insolent to their superiors." A large employer gave this recipe of an ideal workman to Detrioisier: "I don't want one of your intellectuals; I want a man that will work and take his glass of ale; I'll think for him." The workers, helped by enlightened Liberals, produced their own teacher-propagandists, their own purposeful educationists.

The London Corresponding Society aimed at extending "useful knowledge from town to village, and from village to town, until the whole nation be sufficiently enlightened." Groups of four or five met in one another's houses. "The Rights of Man" was sold at sixpence a copy. William Blake found a ready response in the minds of these men, who believed that "nothing but ignorance in the people could suffer the natural rights of every freeman to be thus violated." Naval Lieutenant Hodgskin, traveller and lecturer, a founder of the Mechanics' Institute, forerunner of Marxian ideas and exponent of independent education, wrote thus of the educational interests of the workers: "They may care nothing about the curious researches of the geologist or the elaborate classification of the botanist, but they will assuredly ascertain why they only, of all classes of society, have always been involved in poverty and distress." To-day Professor Peers, in a new book, "Adult Education in Practice," has summed up the inspiration provided by the desire for social change, thus: "It is from this tradition of discontent with existing social arrangements and the recognition of the importance of education as an essential means of improvement that the modern Adult Educational Movement chiefly derives." We drink deep of the tireless inspiration that can be derived from those enthusiasts who were for the first time in history giving the masses an understanding of social forces. We need the drink, because there is a desert before us.

Early in the "fifties" the drapers' assistants of Sydney formed an Association having for its objects the moral and intellectual advancement of its members. The Australian pioneers of the Eight-Hour Movement had attended classes in London while engaged on building the Houses of Parliament, and for a time in Australia con-

tinued the tradition of the skilled artisans of London. Education found a place on the agenda of the first Australian Intercolonial Trade Union Congress. Labour Governments have been enlightened in extending the facilities of education to all classes of society, but neither in the sphere of child nor of adult education has there been a recognition of the need for using education consciously and planfully for the development of Labour's social ideals.

The worker is trying to discover the truth by as wasteful and disillusioning a way as that of outback men calling "Paper, paper!" to the travellers in passing trains. A Labour College in West Australia lasted only long enough to allow Katherine Pritchard to deliver and publish an address on the "Materialist Conception of History." A Sydney experiment was killed as much by the jealousy of the Labour leaders as in the apathy of the masses. Queensland had a Labour College for a year and a day. Propagandist groups closely connected with parties try to fill the menacing gap by calling themselves educationists. Only in Victoria has a Labour College, financed by the Unions, continued to scratch the service. Its main work, however, has been to give Trade Unions an excuse for leaving the Workers' Educational Association to the middle class and the purposeless. The W.E.A. in all States retains affiliations from Trade Unions, but nowhere has struck its roots into the masses, and nowhere shows signs of being able to continue without State assistance. Yet its workshop classes in Victoria and New South Wales, its lectures and conferences on working-class problems and its working-class plays are doing more than official Labour to develop Labour thought on Labour problems and to provide a clearing house for the thoughts of the masses. Communist groups struggle manfully per media of classes and art clubs. No educational organisation has yet met the needs of the people.

While Trade Unions may rationalise their opposition to and lack of interest in the W.E.A. on the grounds of its close connection with the University, experience has shown that more freedom is allowed to dissenters by the University than by Labour.

Labour's failure to develop an Educational Movement of its own indicates that the explanation lies elsewhere. Partly the Workers' Movement has not been able to escape the stifling Australian attitude to things of the mind; partly reformism wants quick results, and education cannot provide simple interpretations of social problems nor summarised solutions; partly dull leaders, fighting for party supremacy, are jealous of all attempts to arouse the masses to thought; partly the energy demanded by routine work in Unions and party, and the civil service mind produced by the daily industrial business, leave little inclination or energy for thinking on fundamental issues. More important still, education requires leisure and ease, and the Australian worker has been unable to resist the temptation to find compensations for work in sport and film. Nor can the mass of the workers this side of the Socialist State be expected to discover the treasures in scholarships and the necessity for linking working-class activity with individual educational responsibility. Education will always be a necessity that is never appreciated by large masses.

The tide is turning as far as the workers are concerned. Never since Lane roused the Queensland workers in the "nineties" have there been such signs as to-day that the worker wants educational guidance and real leadership. Official Labour is uncertain of the future; rank and file Labour is asking questions. Labour is swinging in the breeze. Labour needs the stabilising influence of the knowledge of its own theories. Theory is to Labour what vote-catching is to the politician—a guide to its own actions; an interpretation of the manifold confusions of the contemporary world. The politician drags the trusting worker from Australia to Sweden, from Japan to U.S.A., from Sydney to Guernsey, in a hopeless attempt to reconcile the winning of votes and the understanding of the collapse of Capitalism. The worker asks for the stone of interpretation, and is given the jellyfish handshake of a politician.

Between the hopes of the rank and file of the Labour Movement, and the translation of those hopes into clear policies and united action, there lies a world of difference.

Disunity intensifies the earlier disillusionment produced by electoral and parliamentary failures. The more disunity appears, the more difficult it is for any one sect to persuade the masses that it alone is free from the taint of corruption and office seeking. Group loyalty holds together a few enthusiasts, but the hope of office as dole inspectors or as members of Parliament will soon be the only effective spur to action inside the Movement. Union meetings lapse for want of a quorum. The rank and file views with suspicion any member who is energetic and enthusiastic—for the rank and file has seen so many lose their idealism and enthusiasm that it begins to doubt the possibility of social sacrifice. Official Labour is divided and seems to be disintegrating. But outside the dull and poorly attended meetings, beyond the control of the redtape of Trade Unionism, and out of touch with the official leaders, there are a restlessness, a craving for action and a renewed search for beliefs.

The restlessness may express itself in an apparently nagging criticism of officials. The craving for action may find satisfaction in apparently unwise strikes. The search for beliefs may pause for a moment contented with a slogan, "The Socialisation of Credit," but there is a genuine revival of activity among the masses, and there is a readiness by the most disillusioned and weary to respond to a call for thought and action. Factory papers, workshop committees and strikes are signs of the quickening forth of a spring of discontent that may swell into a tempestuous river of destruction—or reconstruction. If official Labour tries to guide this stream into the overgrown channels of conventional activity, if bureaucrats try to float their way to Parliament on its ever-increasing torrents, or if sects try to mark off their oyster-beds on its sides, then the stream will burst through all controls and destroy leaders and critics alike.

If this analysis of the mood of the alert workers is correct, then there is an opportunity for the adult education movement to renew its faith and activity in the growing creativeness of the workers. Working-class education can cut across existing sectaries and partisan catch-

cries with an account of the philosophy and social purpose of the Labour Movement as an instrument of progress to be used by the people themselves. We can separate from the frenzied shouts of partisans the undertones of fellowship and idealism. We can discover the driving force that is used by demagogues, but which keeps outliving all demagogues. The alert worker is tired of divisions; he wants to know something of the Labour Movement as a Movement. He is confused by sectional policies; he wants a knowledge of those fundamental principles of Labour, through which he may regain his faith, and by which he may judge sectional divisions. He is weary of Trade Union divisions; he wants the knowledge by which the group solidarity of the factory may be made the basis for a working-class loyalty, that, instinctively, he feels is being betrayed by contending factions. He is already beginning to feel how unsatisfactory is the position that interprets Labour policy by the accident of residence, and demands allegiance, on the pains of expulsion, to a Scullin in Victoria, a Lang in New South Wales, and a Collier in the West. Labour is eager for active, courageous leadership, as evidenced by the increasing support given to Orr of the Miners' Federation

Working-class education must give the worker an understanding of what is happening in the modern world, a simple account of the different theories, and a clear analysis of the different policies inside the Labour Movement. The teacher may support a particular group, but he must be fair before the workers when dealing with the different schools. He must encourage thinking, and fight against the blinding influence of personalities and the imputation of motives. He must face all the questions raised by the worker, and be frank in stating difficulties and doubts. The education must be analytical and emotional. Working-class education needs an emotional drive from the tutor, and a spiritual response from the student. Labour needs its heroes and its martyrs. If the people are not shown the highest to love, they will turn their backs on the ideals they might have followed. Labour must look to men like Lane and Spence for the good they

did, and not for the failures that lie interred with their bones.

Working-class education must place ever-increasing responsibility on the workers themselves, and set out deliberately and unceasingly to encourage every evidence of creativeness . . . Workers' Art Clubs performing plays of the great masters—workers of Newcastle performing an amateur play of Labour history—a railway worker and his comrades writing and producing a play about Soviet Russia—men drawing up their own manifestoes—workshop committees everywhere blossoming into workers' control and popular participation—Marx and William Morris, Lenin and Tolstoi, Maurice and Kingsley, writing for workers and being appreciated by workers.

I am a democrat in the Leninist sense that I want to see more and more people participating in governing, educating and entertaining themselves. I am a Utopian in the sense that William Morris was when he made "work-pleasure" the basis of his Socialist creed; as Lenin was when he quoted the Marxian Utopia, "when Labour will have ceased to be a mere means of supporting life, and will itself have become one of the first necessities of life"; and as Stalin is, when he sums up thus one of the achievements of the Russian Revolution: "The most remarkable feature of (Socialist) competition is the radical revolution it has wrought in men's views of labour, because it transforms labour from a disgraceful and painful burden, as it was reckoned before, into a matter of honour, a matter of valour and heroism." Lenin would have used the masses to smash the bureaucratic capitalist State. Did he not visualise the time when everyone would take part in the administration of the State at the wages of an ordinary workman? But mass interference was to be more than a destructive force. Did he not see under Socialism the revival of primitive democracy, when "all will take a turn in management, and will soon become accustomed to the idea of no managers at all"? Ralph Fox, in his "Life of Lenin," has emphasised the unique position of Lenin, when he put forward as the aim of mankind, not the perfect administration of the mass by the chosen few,

but the fullest control, accounting and administration of things by the largest possible number of men and women. But if you do not like Lenin, as a theorist in the aim of adult education, there is a host of industrial psychologists who have found the source of much unrest in the thwarting of the people's desire for self-expression, creation and participation in a common achievement. Until society learns how to develop to the full the possibilities of every human personality, constructiveness will run to waste in Rotarian hiccupping, Garbo gesticulating and Manhattan madness. Adult education must aim, partly, at finding an outlet for the desire to create and participate. Not merely must it show the individual where he fits in the complicated system of modern civilisation, but it must help him to find a place that gives him satisfaction in filling it, and it must help him to make up his mind how to transform the social system.

Voluntary educational activity is one of the methods "whereby the vanguard of the oppressed classes can uplift, educate and lead in its train the whole gigantic mass of these classes which until now have stood outside all political life, outside history."

So Lenin writes on the Soviet form of government. A class must be an educational Soviet. It is a co-operative group, learning through living and experiencing together, as well as in discussing together. A tutor leads, but the best type of class is one in which lecture and discussion are one, because all take part freely and completely: Members learn to tolerate not merely one another's ideas, but their mannerisms. In a class on economics the experience of the worker is as important as the theory of the leader. In a class on drama, all should be doing something towards the success of a production—there should be no names on the programme, no final curtain, and no flowers. So all would learn to think and work together, to govern one another and help one another, as a preparation for the time when society itself is a complete democracy.

A SELECTED LIST OF BOOKS.

- "Australia's Awakening"—W. G. Spence.
"The History of the A.W.U."—W. G. Spence.
"The Industrial History of Broken Hill"—G. Dale.
"Eureka"—R. S. Ross.
- "Australia"—W. K. Hancock.
"Economic History of Australia"—E. Shann.
"Australia: An Economic Interpretation"—G. V. Portus.
- "History of Trade Unionism in Australia"—J. T. Sutcliffe.
"How Labour Governs"—V. G. Childe.
"Australian Socialism"—H. St. Ledger.
- "The Village Labourer"—J. L. and Barbara Hammond.
"The Town Labourer"—Hammond.
"The Martyrs of Tolpuddle"—Trades Union Congress.
"Trade Union Documents"—W. Milne-Bailey.
"A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement"—G. D. H. Cole.
"The Old Trade Unions"—William Kiddier.
"History of Trade Unionism"—Webb.

COMING PUBLICATIONS.

- "The Meanings of Australian Socialism"—Lloyd Ross.
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Lloyd Ross.