

## A REJECTED REPLY

**D**EAR COMRADE EDITOR,—The enclosed article was sent to the *Labour Monthly* by myself, as a fellow Communist, in reply to Dutt's attack on *The Plebs*. In accordance with the principles of the new Marxism, it was refused publication. As it may be of interest to readers who are both Plebs and Communists, you might care to print it.

Yours fraternally,  
R. W. POSTGATE.

### THE PLEBS: A REPLY.

The attack upon the Plebs League by the Editor of the *Labour Monthly*, R. Palme Dutt, in the February issue of his magazine, requires an answer. Anybody is entitled, of course, to say that any book, including the Plebs' Imperialism Textbook, is bad: when it comes to misrepresentation of the aims and personalities of a whole movement, a reply is necessary.

In the first place, Dutt suggests that the faults he finds in the book are due to "Plebs authors," subservience to reformist Trade Union officials—"perhaps the fear of ill will of Trade Union officials" (p. 129), "there is nothing in this book to disturb the equanimity of the most offensive and treacherous member of the General Council" (p. 127). "The Plebs had really better merge itself in the Labour Magazine" (p. 125).

Not to exacerbate an unnecessary quarrel, I will say no more of the suggestion than that it is a lie: but it is really essential to point out to Dutt that some at least of the Plebs' members whom he is attacking are members of a Party on whose Executive he sits. Does that Party provide no other means of discussing policy differences between members than public slander? Or are Executive members privileged to attack without warning, in the press, other members who are doing work recognised by the Party as valuable? If an editor who is also a Communist believes that certain of his fellows dare not

say anything that the U.D.C. and the Labour Party have not approved (this is not a joke—he actually says this on p. 127) is it not an abuse of his position to rush into print at once about it? Whether it is or not, it is unfortunate for the victims that while they may be attacked, party discipline forbids the only effective retort.

Dutt denounces the book in question on the ground that it is not Marxist. His objections to Plebs education are really, as we have found before, based on absolute ignorance of the Plebs movement—he imagines that the London Labour College is typical of the movement, also—after "careful attention"—that South Wales is a typical district. Without experience of the actual needs of a workers' class, he reasons theoretically, like any other academician, and produces what he would like best without regard to what is really needed. So he vastly prefers an economic treatise, upon "Finance Capital and Oligarchy," "Export of Capital," "Parasitism and Stagnation of Capitalism," and so forth, to a "collection of information." That is to say he prefers (naturally, from his point of view) an interpretation of and deduction from a whole series of facts known to him, to a recountal of those facts. If he had even a little Plebs experience he would realise that he has gone much too far ahead. The facts (which he assumes) are not generally known; the "banal" chapters of the Plebs textbook, are the first necessity for workers who do not know the everyday facts of the last ten years. A synthetic economic theory based on them, however good, is merely unintelligible. What can it mean to people who do believe that British Foreign policy has been based in the main upon abstract justice?

Once, of course, he has claimed that this Plebs book is a failure because it is history and not theoretical economics, Dutt goes merrily along. Awful is our crime because we have quoted from Brailsford, Hobson and

Newbold ("in his I.L.P. period"—aha! Had us there, what?), and not from Marx, Kautsky, and Trotsky and old uncle Varga and all. Our plea that in an historical work you quote the authorities for the period, not later pamphlets on theory, is of course worthless. I look forward to a scathing attack by our gifted comrade on Edward Gibbon, who quoted in his work authorities hopelessly out of date and utterly ignored the writing of John Wilkes.\*

So, too, because a history of capitalist imperialism is not a history of the Labour movement, he assumes that the absence of remarks on the "violation of pledges in 1914 by the workers' leaders" (he has a simple theory of history) is due to a desire on our part to pretend such a thing is "of no concern to the workers." This sort of stuff is called comradeship in the book of words—but in any case, what tripe!

On the same page (p. 127) he sneers at the authors for their "moral censure" in saying the Treaty of Versailles "grossly violated" the Armistice terms. Again—inexperience. Most of us pass through a period of Marxism when a realisation of the fact that ethics are dependent on social conditions expresses itself in a childish amorality. Since there is no right nor wrong, then "let us be wicked." With a thrill like a curate in Leicester Square the young learner prepares to be "bad" and have no scruples. Another man may call something "a dirty trick," but our young professor has outgrown all that. It appears that R. P. D. has not yet passed through that simple stage of inverted

\* We are rebuked for quoting Hobson four times. In the book he praises so, Lenin quotes Hobson fourteen times! "It is really superfluous to add anything to this."

sentimentalism. But even if our "moral" phrase about Versailles offends him, is it not a statement of fact? Is it not further a statement of fact that two out of every four workers would query? When one talks only to Communists and sympathisers, one may have an utterly false idea of working class mentality outside. But somebody has to do the donkey work outside the sacred circle.

Finally in his general war-whoop and concluding exhortation to attack the Plebs (in accordance with C.P. resolution and the no-splitting policy of the International, no doubt) he writes:—

"It is not the case that there can be a vacuum of no politics, as they hope and imagine (!); if they exclude the revolutionary politics of Marxism they inevitably come at the mercy of Liberal politics."

On this the justest and severest comment is to transcribe Dutt's own words on the reason for the existence of his own organ:—

"The need for an independent journal of *Labour thought*, untied to any party or organisation, is all the greater to-day...."

and again:—

"It is peculiarly the function of a journal, which, as being a *non-party journal* is able to choose its writers from every side, to undertake the work of dwelling upon the larger issues...."

A pretty professor!

R. W. POSTGATE.

[R.P.D.'s criticism is also discussed in this month's "Bookshelf." — ED., PLEBS].

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