

"Culture," Science and Working Class Education

By MARTIN ABERN

There are those who would "broaden" the scope of our educational activities in our own particular working class organizations and among the masses of the workers. We are told by these "higher education friends" of ours that our viewpoint is too narrow. We are bound to a single way of thinking. Our conceptions and understanding of problems, of things of the world and life is "narrow" because our method of thinking and viewing things is "biased" from a class point of view. That the class struggle does exist; that there is a particular working class viewpoint to present, oh yes, that is all well and good and proper—in its place. But don't you know, comes the remonstrance. We should concern ourselves more than we do with the natural sciences, with the arts, music, sculpture, painting, and really we should devote more time to the "new thought", to the realm beyond matter, or say even to the most pressing working class problem of a Jewish fatherland in Palestine. We must embrace the higher and broader culture. Culture and science are not limited and bound by class ideologies and prejudices. Oh, certainly not, they are all-embracing. Independent working class education is stultifying and narrow in its outlook.

Now we can grant all possible sincerity to those persons (thought that has nothing to do with the correctness or wrongness of the ideas) and still show the absurdity of such ideas.

There is no denying the advantages of an all-round scientific training and understanding. It would be of tremendous aid, in our work of education and organization of the worker for liberation from the system of wage slavery, from class slavery, if the worker could obtain a working knowledge of the sciences, if he could see the development of the sciences, the unfolding of the various arts, the evolution of the ideas held by the ruling class of the day and the masses, side by side or corresponding to the development of the forces of production and distribution. He could then see the economic foundation of all the sciences, all the literature, all the arts, all the ideas that have grown out of and because of the particular way in which men made and distributed the means of life. He would then have a sociological reason and interpretation of all that is about him instead of, as is too often the case, a biological, a pedagogical, intellectual, or what you will, interpretation of sociological factors. Plainly, he would learn to think straight. It would be well, if thru the study of the natural sciences, he could learn to think scientifically in the domain of sociology.

But it happens too often that the man scientific in the field of natural science, is the veriest of eclectics and marrow-minded of geese when invading the field of social development. The man however, who has grasped a fundamental understanding of the materialist interpretation of history, has got hold of a practical intellectual weapon with which he can invade all fields, including the natural sciences, and if not always able to view the facts and phenomena with mathematical clarity and accuracy, can at least under-

stand the process correctly. He has learned to think dialectically, to see things in their relation to each other, not as things separate and apart from one another.

Now if this seems like straying from the subject, let us return to the more particular. As said before, an understanding of these sciences is all fine and dandy. But from a workers viewpoint and needs what is education for?

Is it to obtain "culture"? We hardly think so. If he understands anything at all, he wants to be freed from the shackles of capitalist slavery. That is, his aim and purpose is the abolition of capitalism and its replacement by a working class government building up a classless, non-exploiting society, a communist society. And anything which tends to interfere with that aim must be all very good, but, whatever be their values, great or small, they are only the part, the smaller cannot be sacrificed for the greater. And that which is greater and embraces all of them (tho it will do away with much that is known as "culture" to-day) is working class freedom, which frees all classes including the capitalist. The greatest education is independent working class education, for until the workers have been freed, there is no room under capitalism for the real, potential development of the workers. Man must be economically free before he will really begin to expand, before he can really begin to acquire a culture which is not binding and pressing upon ones intellectual and physical development. All education to-day is biased, prejudiced for one class or another. Nothing to argue about. Just a condition. Any ruling class tries to perpetuate itself by "educating" the mass to its way of thinking and developing ideas which it believes beneficial to itself. And dominant economically and politically, it has the means therefore of seeing to it that, generally, its viewpoint is presented in science, in the arts, in education. Does it require any great intelligence to realize that the capitalist class will not permit the free and open discussion on socialist and communist theories in the schools? Do the scientists even those farthest away in reasearch holes and supposedly not having an appreciable affect on society, have a free hand in carrying on their work? Or is it not obvious that the carrying on of their work is very largely dependent on those who supply the money, the material means for it. If the technical experts in the various fields of industry are considered, then it is a glaring fact that science is carried on (it will be of great advantage to the workers, when they have achieved power) in the interests of the ruling class. All of which, briefly, means that there is no such thing as education for education's sake, but education and science for the capitalists sake.

And in the field of art, it is no less different. What is the great mass of our paintings, our literature, our music (if we have any music in America, that is, our own) but plain, vain-glorious adulations and praises of capitalist society? Could anything be more class-biased and thought out in degree, than that very thing

which the unthinking have called "the broadminded and liberal manifestation" of the "broad-minded society" (capitalist class)—the arts and sciences?

Without further proofs, therefore, it should seem clear that education cannot be unbiased; that there is no class—viewless culture; that, in truth, it is as true to-day as when Marx first spoke those words: "The ideas of a society in any giving period are the ideas of the ruling class." And from this it follows, unless we want to accept the ideas of the capitalists, that we must teach from a strictly working class view. "We can afford to be candid but not impartial." So our education is independent working class education. Education aiming at making the worker realize his slave position in capitalist society; making him realize that there is only one salvation for him, the overthrow of capitalist society, the establishment of a working class society, a producers' society. Making him see that there can be no real culture, no real education, no real sciences until man is freed from exploitation. That only then will the necessity of teaching and educating from a class view be done away with, that only when there is economic freedom of opportunity can there be real freedom of thought and research, the realization of the impulse to create without the fetters and restrictions of capitalism.

And we believe that we have shown that those who would have the workers, our educational classes, etc. stress the importance of engaging in the study of these sciences, of sculpture, painting, etc. to become "better rounded" men and women are, whether knowingly or not, aiding and abetting the capitalist classes. For to-day, more than ever, the need of independent working class education is plain.

Our public schools cover the fields of natural science in one fashion or another. True, the presentation of scientific truths is not by any means always accurate. Capitalism does not us teach the whole scientific truth; it must and does give a theological twist to its science. The capitalist system must, how-

ever, for the efficient running of its own system teach a certain number of fundamental and valuable things to the workers. The vocational schools which exist everywhere give the youth the education he needs in the shops, in the mills, in the factories, etc.

But it is most important for our opinion, that we must concern ourselves chiefly with education of a strictly class nature due to the fact that in this country, the working class youth has not yet even grasped the elementary principles of the class struggle. They have not yet discovered (intellectually conscious) that they are workers. The young workers (and the old as well) still find their chief interest in baseball, football, dancing, other sports. That is the problem we must face and solve. These men and women must and can become revolutionists, working men realizing the need of a complete social change. But are we going to hasten this process or get it moving at all, by teaching, as some would have us, the value of sculpture to the revolutionary movement, a series of lectures on zionism, christ-killing (a la rationalist style) the establishment of study classes in chemistry instead of the Communist Manifesto, and so on? Hardly. To repeat, we have to concern ourselves almost exclusively (and certainly so at this time) with matters of the class conflict, social theories, immediate problems on the economic and political field, etc. And we need never fear that we will do too much teaching of this sort; the fault lies the other way. Let us cease interminable discussions which do not, in our opinion, touch practically, theoretically, fundamentally the working class problems and the problem of our problems—that of educating and organizing the working class for the overthrow of the capitalist system and the capitalist state. Let us not any longer be ensnared by the siren songs of "culture", "broadmindedness", "art for art's sake." There is only one culture—the proletarian culture, the culture of the Free Man.