

## UNIVERSITY TUTORIAL CLASSES

### WHAT THEY ARE

#### AN OPEN HIGHWAY OF EDUCATION.

By Victor E. Kroemer.

Now that the University Tutorial Classes Joint Committee has been definitely formed the question looms prominently, What is a University Tutorial Class?

#### Five Years' Experience.

After five years' experience the Workers' Educational Association became convinced that its co-operation with universities must in the main depend upon the establishment of a system of classes in industrial and, if possible, in rural districts open to working men and women alike, regulated and governed by the students themselves, subject to the approval of a university body composed of direct representatives of workpeople as well as of members of the university.

The first step in this direction was taken at Oxford in August, 1907, when the delegates of 200 organisations, mostly Labor, approved the appointment of seven workpeople and seven nominees of the university to draft a scheme. This was done, and after 18 months the result of their deliberations was published in the now famous "Oxford Report." The result has been the establishment of joint committees at Oxford, Cambridge, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Durham, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Nottingham, and Sheffield, and of a central joint advisory committee, consisting of representatives of every university and university college in England and Wales, together with workpeople.

It was a new and welcome sight to see at Oxford a laborer, a shipwright, a weaver, and a compositor helping to appoint university teachers, and having a definite standpoint in relation thereto, for the universities belong to the people, and representatives of all sections of the people should share in their government.

#### Brains and Character.

The position taken up by the Workers' Educational Association, which is a federation of over 2,000 working class and educational organisations, is that brains and character should alone qualify for admission to the highest educational privileges, and that money and pride of birth ought to have nothing at all to do with the matter. It believes that the time now spent at school is all too short, that child-labor for profit during the years of attendance at school is obstructive to development; that secondary education (diversified, of course) should be the privilege of every child; and that universities should be accessible to all who can fit themselves for the highest teaching. This is what the association means when it talks of a broad "Highway of Education."

This road must not only be open to boys and girls who proceed straight from school to college; those, too, who have passed during adolescence into industrial and commercial life, and have kept true to intellectual ideals amid their social burdens, must be able to claim their share in the best that the universities can give. And they must claim their right to give in return that which the universities cannot otherwise obtain—experience of real conditions of life and work and a sufficient appreciation of the stress and strain of modern employment. Just as some workpeople should for a time go into the university, so university teachers should for a time take part in the outer work of the world. It is most certainly true to-day that the university needs to learn lessons from workpeople, just as they in turn need to learn of the university.

There is no need to decide who will profit the more. Suffice it to say that in the existing experiments both have learned and both have been inspired. Universities, and indeed all higher schools, have become divorced from labor. The consequence is that they have missed much and bias has revealed itself in their teaching—bias mainly occasioned by ignorance of the lives and thoughts of the working masses. This state of affairs has induced suspicion in

addition to other deplorable ills. The advocate of tutorial classes sees in such classes a powerful instrument to set matters right in and through the exaltation of the thoughts and power of workpeople and universities alike. These classes are in one sense outposts of the university; in another sense they are its eyes and ears, they are the university in that fullest sense, wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of Education."

#### The Idea of a Class.

But now let us get to the idea of a class. The old notion of a teacher telling people things, to be simply accepted and believed, must go. A class is a group of people who may differ fundamentally in politics, religion, or theories of social organisation, but who are anxious to get facts, mental training, and a clear exposition of varying views. The teacher assumes importance only because he is skilled in imparting knowledge and has had special opportunities for acquainting himself with all the aspects of the matter under study. Just as in his capacity as teacher he must be able to sympathise with all points of view, so must the students not expect him to become the biased advocate of any school or system. The spirit of the class must be comradeship in the pursuit of truth and the attempt to extend the bounds of knowledge.

There are some people who believe that the economic doctrine of one school or person is absolute truth. A teacher who, though he passes no adverse judgment, does not press the doctrine in question is regarded by them as wrong in essentials. Such people have a real place in a tutorial class if they have the spirit of comradeship, and if they earnestly

attempt to use new opportunities for seeing the problems under study from their own standpoint, but steadily and in all their breadth.

#### A Mutual Relation.

A successful teacher affirmed his nervousness before meeting 30 students; he was asked, "What right have you to be nervous; you are only one 31st of the class?" That is true, and represents the spirit of the tutorial classes. It is a mutual relation, none before and none after. As one student said, the teacher addressed the class for one hour and the class addressed the teacher the second hour.

No class should consist of more than 30 students, of whom at least 26 should be workpeople in the strictest sense; the remaining four might well be school-teachers. The classes last for three years and comprise 24 two-hour lessons each winter, with 12 fortnightly essays. Each student pledges himself to attend unless illness, unemployment, or, if he be an official, meetings of his trade union, intervene. No one under 18 would be admitted, but there is no other age limit. The subjects asked for have so far been mainly industrial history and economics, but literature, history, natural science, philosophy, and psychology have also had a place.

At first the essays trouble some students, but when they realise the teacher as a friend, not a critic, helping them on from where they are, the trouble passes. Some of the most capable students are bothered by spelling, grammar, and punctuation, but these difficulties are soon adjusted. At a joint committee meeting these matters were under discussion, but the tables were turned when a workman member said that the students of one class complained that they could not read the tutor's writing.

The essays must all be kept because they form the basis of examination for university recognition. It is clearly not wise to set adults down to elaborate examination papers; it is much better to decide upon their qualifications by a perusal of their essays and by conversation with them.

#### Fine Scholars to be Produced.

Out of these classes many fine scholars will arise. If these are approved by the class members as men who will be true to their fellows, and will serve the common good, forgetting individual advancement, they should be enabled to proceed from the class to a period of study at the university itself. It is hoped that universities, local education authorities, and organisations of work people will combine together to make this possible. These scholars will not attempt to prepare themselves for the professions; their object will be to gain knowledge for the illumination of the dark places in industrial and social life.

A question which will naturally rise in the minds of intending students concerns itself with the cost of the classes. All these classes are deliberately arranged so that the poorest workman shall not be excluded from attending. The fees are low, and all expensive books must be provided by the joint committees, free libraries, and other sources. It is quite certain that if a teacher says a certain student should read a certain book that book and student must be brought together.

#### All Kinds of Trades and Callings.

In 1907-8 there were two classes and 80 students, and in 1912-13 the number had risen to 117 classes and 3158 students. Of the 3158 students in 1912-13 about 560 were women. If the circumstances of women workers be considered this proportion is not surprising. But those in touch with the movement are keenly alive to the necessity that women as well as men should share in the training which the classes offer. All kinds of trades and callings are represented, there being quite a number of unskilled laborers. The majority of the students take an active part in the work of organisation. Many of the students are troubled with overtime and unemployment. One of the teachers states that he has watched individual students, who began work with enthusiasm and capacity, gradually sink through unemployment into a state of mental despondency and distress, in which every thought of education disappeared before the question—"How shall I earn a living to-morrow?" At the same time, it is wonderful how persistent the students have been, even when troubled by these economic conditions, which, from an educational as well as from a sociological point of view, seem to demand instant and urgent enquiry.

One important principle laid down by the joint committee is that the teachers, wherever possible, should actually teach in the universities. This completes the scheme, because it ensures that the lessons that the teachers learn shall not be lost, but shall pass into the ordinary teaching of the universities; and this workpeople consider to be most necessary. It ensures, too, that the teacher shall be in touch with every new advance in the study of his science. At the same time, the spread of the classes makes it impossible for all teachers to take their share in university work.

#### Enjoyment of Life.

Finally, when the classes have been started and the students have been gathered together, they have been asked in joining the class to keep before them not merely their own personal advancement and enjoyment of life. What is of paramount importance at this period of educational reform is that the workpeople of Australia should make a clear and decisive demand for higher education, and that the demand should take some such practical form as these classes. A practical and considered demand of this kind will prove to the various authorities that the desire for workpeople's education is a real one, and will lead them to co-operate in the opening up of facilities, so that the danger of an uneducated electorate may pass away.

The Workers' Educational Association asks for the open highway for education. It realises that unless students pass up