

A useful volume reviewed

Labour in Irish History. By James Connolly. Paper covers, 1s net. Published by Mansel & Co. Ltd., 96, Mid Abbey St., Dublin.

Home Rule and Carsonism are filling the columns of newspapers. Wild and furious threats, accompanied by more or less genuine spasms of gun-running, are thrown out as to what will happen if Home Rule is established, and thousands of workers both in England and Ireland are quite excited as to the result of the conflict.

At such a time much good may be done by drawing attention to certain historical evidences for the fundamental facts so important for the workers' consideration.

And this book will largely help in such a desirable end.

Written by one who has made some study of the Marxian analysis of society, it cuts through the sham superficialities of the struggle between Home Ruler and Ulsterite, Catholic and Protestant, and shows how in Ireland, as everywhere else where classes exist, the real fight, the fundamental antagonism, is between those who own the means of life and those who have nothing but the sale of their labour-power to depend upon for an existence.

The development of the worker in Ireland is traced from the days of the Williamite wars to the present day, after a short account has been given of the previous conditions.

A particularly useful part of the book, in face of the many romances dealing with the time, is the description of the period preceding and covering the "Act of Union" between England and Ireland. The analysis of the various "revolutionary" leaders and their movements, with the exposure of frauds like Grattan, Flood, and O'Connell, is well worthy of study. Above all the fear and hatred of the working class by the wealth owners is shown by their slimy scheming to disarm the volunteers at that time.

These consisted of three sections—the Liberty Corps—working class; the Merchants' Corps—capitalist class; and the Lawyers' Corps—members of the legal profession.

As the author puts it:

"The Government [Irish Government bear in mind] had to use force to seize the arms of the working men, but the capitalists gave up theirs secretly as the result of a private bargain . . . and the lawyers privately handed their guns over to the enemies of the people."

"The working men fought, the capitalists sold out, and the lawyers bluffed."
(p. 58).

An interesting account of a co-operative colony founded at Ralahine, County Clare, in 1831 is given, but the reader will tend to gather the impression that it is by such means the workers will emancipate themselves—an impression distinctly reactionary in face of the growth of the Social forces and the power needed for their economic manipulation.

There is one part of the work, however, to which distinct exception can be taken. This is the section dealing with the first Irish Socialist. One is here curiously reminded of

the same attitude taken up by Miss Beatrice Potter (now Mrs Sidney Webb) in her book on *Co-operation*.

The attitude is one of suggesting a thing without actually saying it.

The author claims that the great forerunner of Marx—standing between the Utopians and the latter—was an Irishman named William Thompson, who, among numerous notable statements, laid bare the source of value in his work entitled, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Wealth most conducive to Human Happiness*, etc, published 1824, where it is laid down that all labour can be reduced to unskilled labour of the average kind at a given time.

Miss Potter says Marx took his notion of “homogenous human labour” from Thompson and incorporated it in *Capital*.

The author says “In the English speaking world the work of this Irish thinker is practically unknown, but on the Continent of Europe his position has long been established” (p. 115).

Now what is common to both Connolly and Miss Potter is the curious fact that neither of them state who established Thompson’s position and made him known on the Continent. The uninstructed reader may learn with surprise that the person responsible was—Karl Marx!

Many years ago Dr Aveling pointed out in a little book called *Darwin Made Easy*, that the various “objections” by ignorant Christians and parsons to Darwin’s work were all first formulated by Darwin himself in the *Origin of Species*, and no opponent had ever brought forward any other. So with Marx. All the opponents of Marx who are so loud in their claims to have discovered “forerunners” of his work and ideas are all of them—German, English and Irish alike—*indebted to Marx*, who first discovered and gave full credit to them in his various works, particularly in the *Poverty of Philosophy* and the *Critique of Political Economy*.

And among others he points out that Benjamin Franklin had already in 1721 stumbled on the secret of undifferentiated labour as the source of value, though he (Franklin) did not work the idea out to any extent.

However, it is the fashion to-day among the shallow critics of scientific Socialism who are unable to refute the case or show a flaw in the arguments of Marx to pretend to demolish that genius by finding someone who “anticipated” him, and keeping “gradely dark” the fact that the very person they are indebted to for such discovery is Marx himself.

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