

FEATURES

Dalton Camp Reports On:

The London School of Economics

By this time, the Beaverbrook Overseas Scholar should be feelings symptoms of hardening of the impression. He breaks out with a rash of opinions, some of which will leave a lasting mark on his mind. And I suppose that the safest subject for this writer and for this journal would be the London School of Economics, that eminent wing of London University founded by Sidney Webb in 1895 with somebody else's money.

Including Lord Passfield, or Sidney Webb as the Labour Party prefers him to be called, LSE has a marked association with the Labour Party - people like Mr. Attlee, Mr. Dalton, Lord Chorley, Graham Wallas, Mr. Laski, to name a few, have given the school a political character altogether unique.

The London School of Economics may be found on Houghton Street, off Kingsway, and a stone's throw from Dickens Old Curiosity Shop. It stands facing itself on opposite sides of the street, two buildings of comparatively modern construction with an interior that smells of anti-septic - strongly on Monday's and faintly on Friday's. It has been called "the cradle of bureaucracy" and it is a school where students are tempted to take professors rather than classes.

There is at LSE a deep reverence of economics, amounting almost to idolatry. After spending a day ricocheting from one econ course to another, amid the din of statistics and government finance, one emerges onto the darkening streets feeling like a Capital Account dragged through the Central Dollar Pool and struck heavily by an Invisible Deficit.

The stellar attraction at LSE is Harold J. Laski, an evangelical socialist of enormous persuasion whose lectures are not as good as his books but a great deal more fun. His audiences - I avoid the word "classes" - are so large that Mr. Laski needs lecture in either of two theatres at LSE. That he will enjoy a longer run than 'Charley's Aunt' or 'The Drunkard' is certain.

Students queue up for his lectures, and when the doors are open all available seats are quickly filled. The overflow sits in the aisles, on window seats or stands. Listening to Mr. Laski is like eating peanuts, both salty, nourishing and habit-forming. And if partaken of to excess, I believe, both are indigestible.

As might be expected, LSE has the maximum number of students societies, of which the political ones are most active. The Labour Society is the largest, understandably, but I find it has the same vice of all political "clubs" whose party is in power, i. e., respectability. The Communist Society, and its Junior Guild known as the Socialist Society, are vastly more stimulating and only slightly less in number of active members. The Tories have a club too, patronized by young men who show a surprising dislike of Mr. Churchill. I am a paid up member of the Liberal society - a small nomadic band which holds meetings in alcoves and cubbyholes, and tends to behave like conspirators. You could, to turn on an old joke, fit all of us into a telephone booth.

At the risk of letting the side down, I will defer discussion of the Government, Marshall Aid, and Food until a later date. I could say this about the food: There seems to be enough for all, but it does lack variety, and the bread, as Mr. Gammon points out, lacks personality. And I personally take an extremely dim view of the British institution known as the Fish Market. Every day I pass the one in our neighborhood to be greeted with the sign: Live Eels Inside. Once (finding) it was indeed a fish market and not an aquarium, I developed a deep and abiding suspicion of all fish appearing on the table on Friday. I have not yet seen anyone purchase a live Eel, and I am still wondering how one gets it home after one does buy it alive. My own limited experience with eels leads me to the conclusion that they are more difficult to kill than rumor and as awkward to carry as water in a bag.

This leads me to the opinions of a certain Mr. Robertson, an American Corporation executive, who, after roughing it for a few weeks here in the Savoy Hotel, returned to America to announce his views. He held that the labour Government was increasing its domination of the electorate without the latter body being aware of it. To use his metaphor, you can put a frog in a pail of water, slowly add hot water until you have boiled the frog alive without his knowing it. From his vantage point at the Savoy, Mr. Robertson went on to say that he saw women in London wearing orchids and "little" evidence of the real desperate food situation England faces.

I don't think orchids, the Savoy, and boiling frogs can

lead one to any relevant conclusions about the situation in Great Britain today. There is some support of Mr. Robertson's views in England, from people who are not orchid fanciers nor accustomed to the good life. But there is a great deal of evidence to be sifted, many alternatives to be considered, and no little consultation with history, including that which happens only yesterday. Until such a time this is done with reasonable thoroughness, it would be wiser and more kind to say nothing.

There is a final thought too. A BBC comedy team made a joke about a Minister of the Crown on the radio some time ago. In fact, the joke was about a mythical cousin of the Minister. The BBC was bombarded with letters from listeners who questioned the right of low comedians to make jokes about high politicians. Whereupon the BBC banned all further humorous references about Cabinet Ministers and their cousins, and the comedians made solemn apologies to the public. A number of resolutions were passed by town and country Labour organizations condemning the BBC for such bad manners in the first place, and, secondly, insisting that there be no more funny business about "Mr. Gaitskell's cousin" (Minister of Fuel), etc. etc.

Aside from the immaterial fact that I didn't get the joke I take severe issue with this kind of business. Some of the richest sources of humor I know of are cabinet ministers, although I have no intelligence as to the laugh provoking quality of their cousins.

Add to this another scrap of evidence concerning the discovery of a tremendous quantity of papers and notes belonging to Boswell. The discovery of this precious material sent the literary world into a rapturous tizzy - except in Great Britain, where, one would think, anything new that turned up on Boswell would be considered worthy of some kind of demonstration. The overseas edition of the New York Times gave the story two precious pages of play, but the Boswell find has not yet been mentioned in a British newspaper or periodical that I have read.

On the other hand, the British press has devoted too much space to a libel action brought against a newspaper by a Labour M. P. The gist of the matter was that the mem-

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