THE ARMY CLASS AT THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE.

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As it has been my good fortune to have just completed a course at the London School of Economics, it has been suggested that a short account of the course may be of interest to officers who contemplate applying for vacancies in future classes.

The institution of the Army class was part of the plan of Army reorganization introduced by Lord Haldane when Secretary of State for War in 1906. His idea was that Army officers would in this way be brought into close touch with problems of civil administration and organization and with the methods advocated to deal with them. Lord Haldane considered that, by being thus given a broader outlook on affairs in general, officers would be in a better position to work out the various problems of Army administration with which they might be confronted. No vacancies were allotted to the Royal Army Medical Corps in the original Army classes, but when, after the Great War, the School of Army Administration at Chisledon took the place of the Army class at the London School of Economics, Sir John Goodwin was able to secure the allotment of two places for officers of his Corps. The School of Army Administration was abolished under the economy axe and the Army class at the London School of Economics was re-instituted in 1924, when the Corps retained its two places in the allotment.

The Army class is composed of thirty officers, including one or two officers of the R.A.F. An Army order is issued in August calling for the names of officers who are desirous of entering and who are recommended. The course begins in the first week in October and, with a break of four weeks at Christmas, continues till the end of March.

The school is situated in Houghton Street, Aldwych, just behind the quarters of the Air Ministry in Adastral House, Kingsway, and forms part of London University. It has an international reputation second to none, and students flock to it from all parts of the world. So popular has it become that the various countries have to be rationed as to the number of students they are eligible to send. The students themselves are of both sexes and of all colours and ages. A special series of lectures is arranged for the Army class to which only members of the class are admitted, but the latter may attend any of the ordinary lectures and classes given in the school. In practice it is found that the special lectures are as much as the ordinary brain can absorb, and very few members of the Army class attended any lectures beyond their own special ones.

A large room is placed by the school at the disposal of the Army class
as a common room and study, and this contains a library of books dealing with the subjects of the course. The school possesses a series of libraries in which is contained every book that has been published touching in any way on economics. In fact, I believe this library is one of the most complete now existing. Adjoining the common room is the refectory, where meals of good quality and phenomenal cheapness may be obtained. Personally I preferred to walk to my club for lunch every day, but many of the class lunched at the school and put in quite a lot of work before the afternoon lecture at 2.30 p.m. Tea was served in the common room and was quite excellent. The following are the subjects upon which courses of lectures were given, and from this list it will be realized that the course is a most comprehensive one and embraces subjects that are a closed book to the average Army officer.

(1) Public Administration.—Five lectures were given in this subject by Professor Laski, dealing mainly with the British Legislature and Executive.

(2) Economic Problems of War.—Mr. Robbins gave nine lectures on this very difficult and complicated subject. Sir William Beveridge, the director of the school, was to have given some of them, but his appointment to the Coal Commission prevented him from doing so. He, however, gave one very good public lecture on the subject after the Commission had made its report.

(3) Accounting and Business Methods.—This subject was, to many, the hardest in the syllabus. Professor Dicksee delivered fifteen lectures and also set sums and problems to be answered between times. I would advise any officer to break the back of this subject before starting the course, as otherwise it takes up so much time that one is apt to get behindhand with the other, and more interesting, subjects. A most excellent little book is Pitman’s “Elementary Book-keeping” by Buxton, published at two shillings, and if one could have worked through this book carefully beforehand I am sure the lectures would have been more intelligible and the sums less nightmarish. In the end I found that I really knew this subject better than any other, but I admit that I had to work quite hard to effect this result. Colonel J. Hartigan, C.M.G., D.S.O., who had passed through the previous course with flying colours, recommended me to study Pitman’s little book and I gratefully acknowledge the help it gave me.

(4) Inland Transport.—Mr. Stephenson gave ten lectures on inland transport, first taking railways, then going on to road transport and finally ending with inland water transport. To those who were particularly interested in the subject Mr. Stephenson gave an additional ten lectures on railways, attendance at which was optional.

(5) Law of Contract and Property.—This formed the subject for twenty lectures by Professor Gutteridge, which owing to the very engaging and humorous personality of the lecturer, were most interesting and instructive.

(6) Sea Transport.—A very interesting series of five lectures was given
on this subject by Mr. Clement Jones, who is not a lecturer of the University but a director of the Booth Line, and who was secretary of the committee that was sent to the Mediterranean in 1915 to report upon the shipping situation. To those of us who had served in the Mediterranean his remarks regarding the use and misuse of tonnage were of the greatest interest.

(7) The British Constitution.—Under this heading, Mr. Lees-Smith, M.P., gave fifteen lectures describing parliamentary procedure, the working of the party system and the machinery of local government. Mr. Lees-Smith also took the class in two batches to the Houses of Parliament, where he personally explained the various procedures taking place and also showed us over the precincts of both Houses.

(8) Economic Geography.—Sir Halford Mackinder, in five lectures, presented us with an aspect of geography very different from that taught at public schools. He dealt in continents, pointing out those geographical features which had, and were still having, the most striking effects on the economic development of the world. An entirely new light was thus thrown on the subject of geography, and the ordinary atlas acquired a fresh interest.

(9) Banking and Currency.—Dr. Gregory delivered six lectures on these intricate subjects and one's grey matter had greater difficulty in absorbing his lectures than any others. This was because the lecturer had to cover such a large extent of ground in so short a time, and one's brain had not had time to take in one sentence before it was called upon to tackle the next. However, I think most of us are now able to take a more intelligent interest in the City articles of the newspapers and realize what is meant when we read that "money was tight" or "fine bills were in demand."

(10) Raw Materials.—Professor Sargent, in the course of ten lectures, dealt with the sources of supply, at present and in the future, of coal, iron ore, oil, timber, wheat and (by special request) rubber. He also gave us a short dissertation on hydro-electric power. These lectures were of great interest and, amongst other things, made me feel that investments in oil undertakings were necessarily much more speculative than those in rubber companies, provided the latter were situated in the right part of the world.

(11) International Institutions.—Professor Baker, in the course of five lectures, traced the origin of the League of Nations and gave a most interesting account of its organization and mode of procedure. Most of us had not realized how much the League has already accomplished in the way of settling disputes and what a real power in the world, in spite of the recent set-back at Geneva and the American Ambassador's gloomy forebodings, it has become.

(12) Social Institutions.—Mr. Lloyd gave five lectures on the history, aims and working of Trade Unions. To my mind this was one of the best thought-out series of lectures that we had and gave one a very good idea as to the causes of industrial unrest at the present time, and the reason why it is so difficult to discover a remedy that will be accepted by both the employer and employee.
Army Control.—That veteran lecturer, Professor Graham Wallas, only gave us four lectures on Army Control, but they were both humorous and instructive. It was difficult to realize in what a chaotic state the Army was even in Crimean days, and it was sad to hear the lecturer state that most of the wine and malt liquor ordered for the patients in hospital, found its way down the throats of the medical officers.

Each lecture lasted about an hour and was followed by a discussion lasting for half an hour or longer. The lecturers were all experts in their particular subjects and never appeared at a loss for an answer to the numerous questions, intelligent or otherwise, with which they were bombarded during the discussion. It was necessary to take rough notes of each lecture and then write them up afterwards. Some of the lecturers were harder to take notes from than others—thus, Professor Laski, although he said he had throttled down his rate of speaking to half speed, produced such a flow of oratory that it was most difficult to get down intelligent notes. On the other hand, Mr. Lees-Smith always dictated a précis of his lecture which saved us the labour of having to re-write the notes on his lectures. In addition to the formal lectures detailed above various experts gave us informal talks on subjects of topical interest; thus a member of the late Duma talked about the conditions in Soviet Russia, Dr. Hugh Dalton, M.P., talked on the capital levy as a means for reducing the burden of the national debt, etc. Visits of observation were paid to such places as the London Docks, the G.W.R. works at Swindon, the General Omnibus repair works at Chiswick, the Times printing works, etc.

I hope the above notes will give readers some idea of the scope of the course. I have omitted to mention, however, that there is unfortunately an examination in all the subjects at the end of the course. I say "unfortunately" because I do think that the examination spoils the course by making one cram up examination points instead of allowing one to dip rather more deeply into the various subjects, which one could do so easily with the wonderful libraries at one's disposal. The object of the examination is no doubt to make the officers work, and in this it is certainly most successful, but I would venture to suggest that if the system of writing essays on the different subjects were further extended, officers would still have to work as hard but they would not have that uneasy feeling that is engendered by the thought of a formal examination. Under the present system we had to write several essays, and I can see no reason why this should not be extended to every subject. Notwithstanding the examination, however, I must say that I really enjoyed the course. I think it most important that, if possible, none but volunteers should be selected for the course as it is essential to have the right point of view to start off with. It is not a cheap course as one naturally drops any extra pay during that period, and living in or near London is always rather more expensive, but, speaking for myself, I have no regrets that last August I summoned up courage to send in my application to be considered for a vacancy.