

A Socialist looks at the Unions

By E. P. MIDDLETON

What's Wrong With The Unions?

By Eric Wigham, Penguin Special, 3s. 6d.



THE author of this excellent book is a journalist of long standing and a labour correspondent since the last war. He is a man who has an

understanding of unions and deep sympathies with unionists' needs. That does not, however, prevent him from sharply criticising many aspects of union policy and methods and the attitudes, often destructive of their avowed principles and aims, of unionists themselves.

In an early chapter, "A Plantless Society," Mr. Wigham clearly indicates his own political sympathies, which may be broadly described as Labour-Socialist. His aim, therefore, in this book is not to decry the value or importance of unionism, but to show how the unions are their own worst enemies.

Readers will look in vain for any evidence of economic wisdom tending to throw doubts on the usefulness, or otherwise, of unions within the social and economic community; yet they may draw their own conclusions from the copious examples Mr. Wigham gives of union shortcomings and human failings that tend, inevitably, to create frustration, even stalemate, in employee-employer relations and to postpone indefinitely the day when Labour and Capital will work harmoniously in production.

Here are Mr. Wigham's main criticisms:

1. That unions over-work and under-pay their leaders, employ too few experts and do practically no public relations work.
2. Their dues are too low.
3. Their link with the Labour Party damages their interests.
4. Their structure is out of date and they have no long-term policy.
5. Rivalries cause major strikes and demarcation rules damage industry.
6. There is too much reliance on the "closed shop" idea in preference to recruitment.
7. Union authority is breaking down and unofficial strikes are increasing.
8. Communist control is the result of apathy.

9. Vindictive action against non-strikers is a destructive policy.

10. Excessive power wielded by use of the block vote at national conferences is anti-democratic.

11. Restrictive practices reduce output and so endanger jobs.

It is a formidable list which, in the main, adds up to a picture of human indifference, on the one hand, and fanatical idealism gone astray, on the other.

One of the most illuminating chapters in the book is entitled "Descendants of King Ludd," in which Mr. Wigham's description of restrictive practices and their ill-effects demonstrates, not only the methods which harassed and ignorant men will adopt in their desperation, but, unconsciously no doubt, how inevitably both employees *and* employers are forced into this kind of warfare by the basic injustice of society. Given equal rights to the resources of nature and complete freedom of trade, the individual would no longer need such organisations as trade unions to protect him from exploitation, any more than he would have to suffer the spoliation of taxation, "credit squeezes" or "wage pause." Only then could the phrase "the dignity of labour" have a comprehensible meaning.

There is pessimism in the author's closing words: "As I look at these carefully drawn-up suggestions, I cannot avoid a feeling of frustration. I am quite satisfied that most, if not all, would benefit the trade union movement. I am equally sure that few, if any, will be adopted."

This book is one more addition to the documentation of the futile struggle on which so many good men and women waste their substance. One can only hope that it will lead a few more such to a closer examination of the true causes of our economic and social malaise.

Land Reform First

By PAVLOS GIANNELIAS

Struggle and Misery in the Underdeveloped Countries

By Peter Ussing Olsen, "Nature and Culture."

UNDER the title of "Struggle and Misery in the Underdeveloped Countries," the Swedish editor of "Nature and Culture" has published the translation of a very profound and detailed study by Peter Ussing Olsen, member of the Danish Georgeist Party (*Retsforbund*). This book is concerned with land distribution, land tenure and the struggle against hunger and exploitation in a number of countries throughout Africa, Asia and South America. The situation in Japan, Communist China, Formosa, India and Israel is presented in a particularly interesting manner. The so-often-neglected, or even intentionally evaded, question of land and its taxation is discussed from the point of the philosophy of Henry George. Most readers will agree with Peter Olsen that the abolition of misery in the underdeveloped countries requires first of all reform of land ownership. Once