The Rand School of Social Science:
140 E 19th Street, New York:
What the Rand School Is

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Likely an uncredited reprint from the New York Call.

“I do not undervalue the part which sentiment plays in social progress. Love of liberty and hatred for injustice are great motive forces. But I am of the opinion that sentiment reaches its higher power when it is backed by arithmetic. It is not enough to have an inspiring ideal; we must also know the conditions and means to its realization. No revolution ever rises above the intellectual level of the class by which it is achieved. In order that the movement of the proletariat may fulfill our hopes, the working class itself must be equipped with knowledge adequate to the greatness of its task.”

In such words as these Lucien Sanial, a white-haired and young-hearted veteran of the Socialist and Labor movement in America, speaking at a dinner held by friends of the Rand School of Social Science, had stated the need which the institution serves.

The establishment of the Rand School in 1906 was made possible by an endowment provided at the suggestion of Prof. George D. Herron, by the late Mrs. Carrie D. Rand, with a contributory fund added by her daughter, Mrs. Carrie Rand Herron, who showed a keen interest in the work until her untimely death early in 1914. The income from this fund is supplemented by tuition fees and by donations from individuals and organizations in sympathy with the purpose of the school.

This purpose as originally stated and as since adhered to, is twofold. To offer to the public opportunities for the study of Socialism; and to offer to Socialists instruction on lines calculated to make them more efficient workers for the cause.
The Rand School was at first a purely local institution, offering evening and Sunday classes in Economics, Sociology, History, and kindred subjects, and also in English and Public Speaking, for residents of New York City who wished to use to the best advantage in directed study such time as they could spare from their breadwinning occupations. Some attended but one session a week, some two, three, or even four. Many came year after year to study different subjects. The sexes were at all times about equally represented in the student body. The majority were mechanics, factory operatives, and office workers, with a sprinkling of school teachers, housewives, professional persons, and others. From 40 to 60 percent were members of the Socialist Party at the time of their entry, and many of the others joined the party organization during or after their term at the school. Year by year the number of individuals attending such classes at the central building on 19th Street has varied between 200 and 450, and the aggregate for the nine years runs well above 2500. But these constitute only a fraction of the whole body of Rand School students.

It soon became evident that the work of the school should not and could not be kept within such narrow limits. Extension classes were formed from time to time in outlying parts of the city and in neighboring counties of New York and New Jersey, and in 1913 an autonomous branch was established in the East Side. The number of persons who have attended branch classes is at least equal to those who have studied at the central school.

As the work of the Rand School became known through the country, requests for a further extension of its service came from the most distant places. At the same time arose the question of providing for persons who wished a more thorough and advanced training than could be given in evening classes. The financial difficulties under which the school labors made it a serious problem to meet these new demands. This problem has been solved along two lines.

In 1911 the Rand School inaugurated its Full-Time Course, for comrades who could arrange to devote themselves wholly to intensive study for a term of six months. In the four years that have since gone by, 61 persons have entered this course. Thirty-eight men and eight women have completed it, while 15 have withdrawn in mid-term on account of ill health, lack of funds, or for other reasons. The list of graduates includes residents of 19 states and one Canadian province. About half were born in the United States, but there were also natives of Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland,
Poland, Russia, and Wales. Several are now holding positions of responsibility in the party and trade union organizations and the labor press, while others are doing good service in the rank and file of the labor movement.

In 1913, after some experimental attempts, the Rand School definitely launched its Correspondence Department, which met with a warm welcome. Up to the present time correspondence courses have been taken up by about 3600 persons. The National Executive Committee [of the Socialist Party] has formally endorsed this work and advised locals to form study classes, and several state secretaries have spoken in warm terms of the service rendered by such classes in strengthening the party organization.

In 1914 still another forward step was taken. At the request and with the cooperation of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union, the Rand School instituted a special course for 100 members of that organization in New York City, giving instruction in such subjects as History of Trade Unionism, Labor, and Social Legislation, Practical Problems of the Labor Movement, Parliamentary Law, and English. It is hoped that this will be but the beginning of an extensive work of education within the unions.

Thus, from small beginnings, the Rand School has steadily grown in response to the needs of the movement, until today it can fairly claim rank as the Workers’ University of the United States. Taking all departments into account, it has had more than 2000 students in the year 1914-15, and about 10,000 during the nine years of its existence. Its directors feel, however, that only a start has been made. They intend to go on, as in the past, with a minimum of wordy promise and a maximum of solid achievement, confident that honest and unpretentious service will bring the support necessary for further development.

No account of the Rand School would be complete without some notice of its standing as a center of the intellectual and social life of the working people’s movement, both political and industrial, of the metropolitan district; but space permits only the barest mention of the various activities which go on within its walls. The library and reading room, equipped with about 3000 bound volumes and a large collection of pamphlets and periodicals, are at the service of all who care to use them. The restaurant, “At the Sign of the Torch,” is a favorite rendezvous for people with ideas, whether they come from the shop or the college; the attractions of good food and low prices are
strengthened by the atmosphere of informal but not “bohemian” comradeship and by the beautiful decorations, which represent a labor of love, executed by Herman Kobbe and other devoted friends of the school. The lecture hall and classrooms have been used during the past year for several hundred meetings not directly connected with the work of the school — shop meetings of union garment workers, quiet gatherings to promote organization among department store clerks and office employees, sessions of the State Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, of various committees of Local New York and of the Board of Management of the Call. Mention should be made of frequent special lectures on topics of timely interest outside of the regular instruction courses, of occasional art exhibits, and of the newly founded Modern Drama League, which aims to develop amateur talent and use it in the presentation of serious plays. The debate on armaments between Morris Hillquit and Congressman [Augustus P.] Gardner, arranged by the school in conjunction with Local New York, which brought more than 3000 persons to Carnegie Hall, is but a sample of the big things the school now dares to undertake. Nor would it do to forget the annual ball, conducted by the Rand School Alumni Association, which is one of the half-dozen leading social events in the New York movement, or the numerous smaller gatherings where people forget whether they are “Highbrows” or “Jimmie Higginsons” and remember only that it is very pleasant to associate with comrades.

The Rand School is controlled by the American Socialist Society, an incorporated body, which has always followed the policy of taking in only party members. It has at present 119 members, and the number is being gradually increased. Members pay annual dues of $2, and are expected to attend four meetings each year and to take a personal interest in the progress of the school. The detailed administration is in the hands of an executive secretary and an educational director, chosen by and responsible to a board of directors, elected annually by the society.

It is not practical to name all the many comrades who have contributed to the building up of the school, some by gifts of money, others by unpaid labor of hand and brain, not least among whom are those who have taught and lectured either gratis or for nominal compensation. It seems proper, however, to express the thanks which the school owes to a few men standing outside the movement in its strictest sense — notably Professors Charles A. Beard, Franklin H. Gid-
ding, Jacques Loeb, William P. Montague, Scott Nearing, James H. Robinson, James T. Shotwell, Charles Zeublin, and the late Professor Lester F. Ward — who, inspired by enthusiasm for the idea of mass education rather than class culture, have brought their great abilities to the aid of our school. Nor would the present staff omit to give credit to William J. Ghent, the first secretary, who bore the main burden through the early years and did most to lay the foundations upon which the present structure rests.

An idea seems to have got abroad that the Rand School is a richly endowed institution. Unfortunately, this is far from true. From the beginning its tasks and its expenses have been larger than could have been foreseen. They have grown from year to year, and they will go on growing. The income from the Rand Fund has never been sufficient to meet the needs. This fund, moreover, is subject to diminution and ultimate extinguishment.

Undoubtedly the Socialist and Labor movement ought not to permit any of its institutions to depend for their very life on the accident of some wealthy person here and there having breadth of vision and generosity of spirit to support them. It [has the right?] to accept the aid of such benefactors only on condition that it does not shirk its responsibility.

On the other hand, no genuine educational institution is or, under present social conditions, can be “self-supporting” in the ordinary sense of that term. Least of all can the Rand School put itself on a business basis without defeating its own purpose. If the tuition fees were raised so as to cover expenses, no matter how large the student body, they would have to be so high as to exclude just those persons whom the school is intended to serve. They have been and can only be a minor item in the budget.

Individuals and organizations are beginning to give their aid, and all who agree with the words of Lucien Sanial, quoted at the beginning of this article, are invited to assist. There are few who can afford to give “in three figures,” but there are many to whom a yearly contribution of $5, $10, or even $25 would be no heavy burden, and single dollars will by no means be despised.

As it now stands, in order to go forward without fear, the Rand School ought, in addition to the fluctuating and eventually diminishing income from the Rand Fund and the revenue derived from tuition fees, benefit entertainments, and book sales, to have the assurance of $3500 a year for its Scholarship Fund, which is used in aid-
ing desirable full-time students who are unable to pay their way in full.

Single contributions or, better still, pledges of annual contributions to be paid at stated figures will be warmly welcomed by the executive secretary, upon whom rests the daily responsibility of “keeping up the steam.”