

NEW OUTLOOK

DECEMBER, 1933

Red Letters

The revolution in America today supports about a dozen main propaganda organs. Chief of these is the "*Daily Worker*." It is a genuine, standard size six-page sheet, described on its masthead as "America's only working class daily newspaper." Its circulation is among the largest in the radical field, touching 15,000 daily, and, on special occasions, reaching the 25,000 mark. Distribution is national. Earnest Communists in Seattle peruse it, five days late, as eagerly as their comrades in New York—which in its way is more than the most powerful "capitalist" newspapers can boast.

It has all the features (except the full page advertisements) of its enemies, including sports, a daily column, medical advice, books, theatres and women's page—all of a strictly proletarian nature. The proletarian nature is no light matter. Yale-Harvard may fight out the gridiron battle of the century, but the sports editor will ignore it. His interests lie in far less bourgeois fields. The women's page alternates between sensible advice on cheap cuts and long lectures on, "Woman's Place Under Capitalism." There is no nonsense about fashions, or etiquette, or advice to the amorous here. The daily column follows the "correct party line" at all costs, sometimes amusing, often excruciatingly dull. Medical advice is less political, but not above an occasional crack at the "enemy." Theatre criticism looks at nothing but social content; books the same, for after all, the cultural front can allow none of the arts and sciences to escape.

News is confined to labor and economic interest, always with a revolutionary tone. Strikes make headlines in the "*Daily Worker*," and not because they are viewed with editorial alarm. News of political prisoners comes next, and the slightest development in the Mooney case is front page matter. Occasionally a scoop is registered, the latest being the revelation of Nazi activities in America through an inter-

OldMagazineArticles.com

DAILY WORKER

cepted letter. Factional struggles, the bane of all radical movements, occupy a large space. Obscure enemies or traitors within the ranks are constantly played up for their misdeeds. Nothing delights the editors more than catching a Socialist rival in some revolutionary blunder. The effect, while doubtless entertaining to initiates, is often confusing and dull to the outsider.

Russia occupies less space than one might expect for the proletarian fatherland. It is doubtless wise that it should, in view of the criticism that Communism in the United States is not a native movement, but a foreign product totally unadaptable to America. News of national and world events featured in ordinary papers is often ignored or skipped over lightly—because it has no revolutionary significance. A constant stream of criticism is kept up on the industrial and labor policies of the government. At the moment the NRA is the chief victim, subject to a running fire of abuse and sarcastic comment. “Blue Buzzard” is one of the mildest nicknames for General Johnson’s Eagle. The initials over the bird’s left eye become “No Relief Allowed,” and similar pleasantries. “We Do Our Part” is tastefully embellished with pictures of armed deputies slugging strikers, police evicting tenement dwellers, and such.

The “*Daily Worker*” makes no pretense at impartiality. It is a revolutionary organ and nothing else, frankly admitted at every turn. For the genuine Red no such thing as an impartial newspaper exists. Class division occurs in every field, even those with the most sanctified air of objectivity. Until the classless millennium arrives, it will be so. The revolutionary editor, in the meantime, regards it as his duty, as well perhaps as his pleasure, to be partial. And until all the news is communist, all the news that’s fit to print will be severely limited.

No one gets paid very much in the Red press. Salaries of twenty or twenty-five dollars a week are the maximum, and the spread between editor and copyboy is narrow. One reason is political, we were told. Revolutionaries do not believe in high salaries.

DAILY WORKER

The work, like virtue in an older philosophy, is its own reward. But another reason (perhaps equally compelling) is poverty. Revolution is always conducted on a shoestring, and the propaganda departments have no more than their meagre share. Contrary to the old impression—possibly fading now—no money comes from Russia to support the destructive work in America. Support is entirely native, and comes from sales, subscriptions, and the annual contribution drive. Forty thousand dollars a year must be raised in this way, and annually for months at a time the front page features the appeal. Depression makes it difficult, but the "*Daily Worker*" has survived ten years to date, with five of them in time of crisis.

The revolutionary magazines number something like a dozen—it is difficult to keep steady count of them. They have taken the place of the "little magazines" of a decade ago, and are often of the same ephemeral quality. Starting a magazine has always been one of America's favorite indoor sports. Radicals, like other folks, enjoy it too, and just now they are being heavily reinforced from the young graduate intellectuals who are turning their backs on poetry, aesthetics and the arts for politics. Consequently revolutionary periodicals are known to start up, glare fiercely at the enemy for a few months, and collapse again. The process is not new, and neither should it be discouraging to the sympathizer. Like many other American qualities, it is a biological fact—perhaps even the arrival of the revolution will not seriously alter it.

Oldest and best established among the periodicals is the "*New Masses*." Its history stretches back to the dim mists of the world war, when it was known as the "*Liberator*." Its early career was stormy, for its chosen task was to oppose American participation. Mitchell Palmer marked it for suppression in his notorious censorship campaign, and at one point the editors were tried (and acquitted) in a body under the Sedition Act. During the war and the early post-war period, many brilliant writers and artists worked for it, the best known names including Floyd Dell, Max Eastman (now anathema as a "Trotskyist"),

OldMagazineArticles.com

DAILY WORKER

Art Young, the cartoonist, and others who have since achieved distinction.

The old "*Liberator*" (later, "*Masses*") was a lighter and more entertaining affair than it has become at present. Humor was deliberately cultivated where now it seems as deliberately rejected. Revolution in the earlier days was considerably less of a serious matter apparently, possibly because the atmosphere was more exhilarating, with everyone's hopes high for world wide spread. "*New Masses*" today is more sober. Its articles and stories are more learned, more correctly revolutionary, but they are often less readable. Latest plans for the magazine announce a return to the older form, with less narrowly professional appeal. It is hoped to secure more contributors, and through them to vary the tone from the strictly party line. Since none of the revolutionary magazines pay for contributions, the plan may meet an occasional snag—not because writers are more mercenary than other people, but because they must eat.

Each section of the party has its own organ. The international Labor defense has its "*Labor Defender*," which has done prominent work on issues like the Scottsboro case. The revolutionary trade unions, set up in opposition to the more conservative organizations, have "*Labor Unity*," a five cent monthly of strictly trade union interest. Women workers have the "*Working Woman*," a magazine far removed from the sweetness and optimism of the standard woman's publication. Even the children, we found out, have a periodical, the "*New Pioneer*," organ of the Communist version of the Boy and Girl Scout movement.

But the revolutionary press, on the whole is decidedly weak in America.