

masses

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OUR CREDENTIALS

IN the summer of 1931 two or three young artists and writers met occasionally to discuss the possibilities of organizing a little group. They were somewhat dubious of the success of the project. They were not particularly interested in establishing a group of writers and artists per se. There could be little purpose served in that. Their object was to provide the basis for the development of a militant working class art and literature.

They were justifiably disgusted with the barren fields of Canadian bourgeois culture, with the smirking complacency of Canadian artists and writers, with their puerile ignorance of and contempt for social questions, with their snobbish nose-thumbing at the workers and their movements. Those intellectuals who have "revolted" against the ideas of the swell mob have quite comfortably landed on the pink cushions of bohemia.

In the Fall of 1931 the random conversation became less vague and gave birth to what became known as the Progressive Arts Club of Toronto, with about 35 members working in an artists' group, a writers' group, and a dramatic group. Productive work commenced. A number of poems and articles were published in the workers' press. Rehearsals were modestly undertaken by the dramatic group. A considerable number of cartoons, drawings and lino-cuts were reproduced in various labor papers. A few symposia were held: an exhibition of paintings and sculpture and a number of readings.

IT is true that none of the members of the P. A. C. have been crowned by the academy. None of its writers have found their names on the stiff boards of expensive editions. Only a few have had their work exhibited in the local Art Gallery. But the movement which finds its form in the cloak of the

present P. A. C. is one which should be taken seriously by virtue of its historically progressive character.

This little group, inexperienced, largely unknown, does not lose heart in its climb. It is young. It is dissatisfied. It strives. It searches. It works. And by its very existence it stands as a challenge to all that is corrupt, all that is reactionary in Canadian bourgeois society generally, and in Canadian cultural life particularly. It does not seek the applause of the select literati, nor does it ask for their tolerance. It is a movement of workers. It is a movement that will find its greatest encouragement in the approval by the workers, of its work. It addresses itself to the workers, to the poor farmers, to the jobless man in the bread-line.

It rejects the theory that art can have nothing in common with politics, that art functions only by and for art. It asserts that all art, whether by the conscious will of the jingo intellectual, or by the self-styled aloofness of the ivory tower recluse, is under capitalism (as in preceding

societies) the art of the ruling class. Art is propaganda, or more precisely, a vehicle of propaganda. Whether it is a pretty conclusion or not does not matter. Art is the product of the current (and previous) social and economic conditions. Feudal art propagated the teachings which conformed with the interests of the feudal barons. Bourgeois art propagates those ideas which are most acceptable to capitalism. It is the art of a decaying society.

Intellectuals the world over are today reluctantly climbing down from their towers. They are taking sides. They are associating themselves quite definitely, either with the forces of reaction, with movements in search of an elixir for capitalism, with fascist demagoguery, with all varieties of pink and yellow and black reformisms or, as in the case of Derisier, Langston Hughes, and others, with the movement of the workers, and in the ranks of the labor battalions in class struggle.

THIS development has not as yet very forcibly manifested itself in Canada. Possibly it is because Canada has been so culturally sterile. But there are a number of Canadian writers, painters, — intellectuals of greater or lesser achievement. Are they eternally to remain silent? Will they perhaps actively engage in the social life of Canada, — but in the drawing rooms of our social pillars? Or will a few be found who will go among the workers, try to learn something from the workers, try to understand the sufferings of the workers, their struggles, their hopes? Will they continue to remain silent, or at best to stifle their indignation when workers are massacred, as in Elstevan, when workers are jailed under sedition laws, under Section 98, under every manner and form of anti-labor statute? Can they remain silent and "impartial" when workers are starving in tens of thousands, when farmers are evicted, when foreign-born jobless are deported en masse?

Are there any honest intellectuals, who will study the life of the workers, who will make the aims of the workers their aims, who will consciously lend their art to the cause of the working class? Will they do what Gorky is doing, what Gropper is doing, what Dos Passos is doing, what Barbusse is doing? Will they accept the philosophy of Marxism in place of a sickly idealism of contemporary philosophy?

The Canadian working class will judge. But the working class will not depend on them. The workers will produce, and are today producing, their own writers, their artists, their revolutionary intellectuals. **MASSSES** is the first publication of its kind to appear on Canadian soil, produced from the life of Canada's factories, farms, — and breadlines. It has a whole battlefield of barbed wire to traverse. It will rip down the wire. It will with the support of the workers succeed at least, if in nothing else, in throwing its credentials on the table, though they be not endorsed by the elite. It carries by **AVROM** its credentials from the masses.



ARISTIDE BRIAND — R. I. P.

The "Apostle of Peace" is translated to Paradise.

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