

A YEAR OF OURSELVES

By R. W. POSTGATE

THIS is the last week that I shall write as Editor of the COMMUNIST. We are all agreed that the Party paper cannot, during the financial stringency, support two editors any more: we are all agreed, too, that Comrade T. A. Jackson is, under these circumstances, the best man available for the job. Everybody, including myself, will welcome him heartily, taking him, as he would say, by the hand as a preliminary to encouraging him yet more ardently. Henceforward, as he says, I am the Setting Sun and he is the Rising Moon; next number will be Twilight and thereafter the Full Moon, or contrariwise as one might say.

But seriously, and after quite seriously wishing Jackson the best of luck (I hope I may be permitted to give a hand to assist him now and then too), I should like to take the opportunity of looking back and making certain reflections on the experience we have gained in the short life of the COMMUNIST. First under Francis Meynell and then with T. A. J. as my assistant, I have spent more than a year in this office. One's first feeling is regret, of course, that private circumstances prevent one carrying on. But on the whole, I think we should be wrong to take anything but encouragement from the history of the paper. We have proved at least one thing, that the glib stories of our opponents to the effect that "there is no market for Communism," that the British worker will not listen to "Bolshevik agitators," are baseless. Our circulation is so much above our party membership that it is clear a large section of the working class outside the Party ranks are willing to listen to Communist propaganda and follow Communist guidance, although they have not as yet made up their minds to enter the Party.

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Now this article is first and foremost an appeal for the continuance of that support and that attention. We ask all our readers to consider what the Communist Party, speaking through its official organ, has done for them in the past. We stand on our record.

Take, for example, the most obvious instance—Black Friday. What did we do then? We exposed relentlessly the intrigues which were leading up to the final collapse—a collapse whose terrible effects are even now only just being seen. Some good comrades of the working class doubted us: questioned the truth of it. But, after the breakdown we were shown to be right—in that blackest of days even one of the best known Fabian leaders had to say:—

"The Communist" wasn't half right after all."

Yes, the COMMUNIST wasn't half right, after all. We ask you to remember that.

What we did then, we shall always do. Not that we do not believe in the "United Front." The "united front" is no new tactic for us. We are, and always have been, pledged to rally round and support any section of the working class, any Executives or trade union leaders who are genuinely fighting the bosses. We do not care what their opinions are; if they are in the fight, we are in with them. But it is a United Front for fighting, for resistance to the bosses. We do not offer our assistance to conceal cowardice or treachery. We simply say we come in to aid in a fight.

But we do not propose to stand silent while the leaders use their tens of thousands of followers after the manner of the Famous Duke of York. Therefore, when those who should have been fighting, lost their nerve on Black Friday, we exposed them pitilessly step by step, following their every action. We did not care that one of our own members, as we believed, had failed in

his duty. We treated him exactly as the rest, because our first duty is to the working class. The principles by which we are ruled, and which we shall always stand by, are those that Trotsky stated in last week's COMMUNIST:—

"We understand by honesty a conformity of words and deeds before the working class, controlled by the supreme aid of the movement and of our struggle; the liberation of humanity through the social revolution. For instance, we do not say that one must not deceive and be cunning, that one must love one's enemies, etc., for such exalted morality is evidently only accessible to such deeply religious statesmen as Lord Curzon, Lord Northcliffe, and Mr. Henderson. We hate or despise our enemies, according to their deserts; we beat them and deceive according to circumstances, and even when we come to an understanding with them, we are not swept off our feet by a wave of forgiving love."

But we firmly believe that one must not lie to the masses and that one must not deceive them with regard to the aims and methods of their own struggle. The social revolution is entirely based upon the growth of proletarian consciousness and on the faith of the proletariat in its own strength and in the Party which is leading it. *One may play a double game with the enemies of the proletariat, but not with the proletariat itself."*

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In doing this we may claim that we have never been deterred by the fear of the ruling classes. The COMMUNIST was the first paper for decades that had dared to strike at the biggest sham of the whole British State—the Royalty. Because of our jesting at this vast hypocrisy, because of the Prince of Wales cartoons, we were raided. So, at least, the late Sir Basil Thomson wrote in the *Times*, and he should know. Did we then cringe and remember henceforward to talk about other things and respect His Maj. and family? If you keep or can find a file of the COMMUNIST, look down it and see. . . .

We cannot go on too long (nor would you like it), blowing our own trumpet. We can at least say that we believe that through the publication of these and many others (such as the Engineering Employers' secret circular), the Party has, in the past two years, stimulated and raised the conscious revolutionary feeling of the British workers to a point it had probably never reached before in the last fifty years.

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We are not (believe me) under the impression that this progress is due to the surpassing talents of Jackson and myself. Surpassing these are indeed, as Jackson intervenes to remind me. But we must always remember this—that not only the circulation but the quality of a paper depend upon its readers.

The readers make the paper: the paper only lives if the readers are a part of it.

It is, of course, necessary that an editor should be a trained journalist, should be able to write, and so on. Agreed, agreed, but that is nothing like all. The paper is only a good paper if it is continually subjected week by week, to the influence of its public: if it hears from them regularly what they want and do not want.

Let us take a lesson from the enemy. Why did *John Bull* succeed? It did not succeed because of the charm of Mr. Bottomley. It succeeded because he was able, firstly, to get his readers to believe in the honesty of his paper, and secondly, because every

reader, soldier and civilian, wrote in to tell of his grievances and experiences—to ventilate his anger even if he could not get redress. The paper was packed with correspondence, answers to correspondents, items of news provided by readers, "scandals" unearthed by them, and each reader had a half-feeling that it was *his* paper.

Now the COMMUNIST has been that, to a certain extent, but not nearly enough. We have not a hundred eyes in King Street for us to see everything that happens all over the country. We speak to Party members first, but also to all class-conscious members of the workers' movement when we say—"This is YOUR paper." We want this paper to be a true reflection of the working-class movement: we want it to voice the desires and anger of the workers: we want, in fact, you to write in and tell us "what about it." Let us know what is going on. More than that, if you don't like what's in the paper, don't be shy. Jackson positively enjoys being ticked off, he says.

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Broader and larger than this is the general question we might be asked: What is our aim in running the COMMUNIST? What are we after? What do we think we are? Well, we are always and everywhere on the side of the struggling working class, no matter how irrelevant or misdirected that struggle may seem to be. And, for our ultimate aim, let me quote a passage which William Gallacher, ex-Bishop of Zion City, has just shown me. It is from Carlyle's "Hero Worship," and deals with Oliver Cromwell and the Rump Parliament:—

"At the uttermost crisis, when Cromwell and his officers were met on the one hand, and the fifty or sixty Rump members, on the other, it was suddenly told Cromwell that the Rump, in its despair, was answering in a very singular way: that in their splenetic envious despair, to keep out the Army at least, these men were hurrying through the House a kind of reform Bill—Parliament to be chosen by the whole of England; equitable electoral division into districts; free suffrage, and the rest of it! A very questionable, or indeed, for *them* an unquestionable thing. Reform Bill, free suffrage of Englishmen? Why, the Royalists themselves, silenced indeed but not exterminated, perhaps outnumber us: the great numerical majority of England was always indifferent to our cause, merely looked at it and submitted to it. It is in weight and force, not by counting of heads that we are the majority! And now with your Formulas and Reform Bills, the whole matter, sorely won by our swords shall again launch itself to sea; become a mere hope, and likelihood, *small* even as a likelihood; And it is not a likelihood; it is a certainty which we have won by God's strength, and our own right hands, and do now hold *here*."

"Cromwell walked down to these refractory members; interrupted them in that rapid speech of their Reform Bill—ordered them to be gone, and talk there no more.—Can we not forgive him? Can we not understand him? John Milton, who looked on it all near at hand, could applaud him. The Reality had swept the Formulas away before it. I fancy most men who were realities in England might see into the necessity of that."

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That, perhaps, as near as few words can give it, is the spirit we want to get. That Reality should sweep away Formulas. And more and more, as the *Herald* falls into the power of the Labour Party officials, as the various weekly "Socialist" papers wilt away and become more and more official, what paper but the COMMUNIST is there that will express that working class Reality?