

ART IS A WEAPON

THE workers are creating a new world. Signs of the great change are as apparent as the buds on the trees on each May Day. Everywhere new life is stirring and in Soviet Russia life has burst into full bloom. There we can witness, as in a laboratory, what the new workers' world will be like.

Government is different there, factories are different, the workers and farmers are different—they are new men. Women are different, homes are different, soldiers are different. What is happening is a revolution; not a single bloody storm of a few months, which is what ignorant or malicious people define as a revolution, but a colossally unfolding change in the way men act, think, feel and make their living.

I need not go into the whole process here. There are hundreds of pamphlets and books that describe the Russian Revolution, and that are well worth one's study. I wish to speak of some of the effects of the Revolution on art.

The Soviet artists have completely broken with the old stupid shop-keeping idea that art has nothing to do with the life of the masses—that it is a toy, to be purchased and enjoyed by a few idle rich, or that it is a special esoteric sensation, to be understood only by a few aesthetic useless aristocrats and Bohemian loafers.

Art, the Bolsheviki say, is useful or it is nothing. It springs from the life of the masses. It shapes the thought of the masses; is their expression, their daily accompaniment. It is not the monopoly of a few—it is shared, like the land and the factories, by everyone who labors. Art is no more an idle pastime than science; it is as necessary.

Art is a weapon in Soviet Russia. With mass recitations, plays, pageants, and great singing choruses the Bolshevik artists teach history and economics on a vast scale and weld the masses into a firmer solidarity of the revolutionary emotions. "Our palettes are the public squares, our canvasses are the cities," chanted Mayakovsky, one of the new poets. Painters have taken to designing textiles and buildings, and sculptors plan factories and communal apartment houses. Writers in Soviet Russia are closer to the masses than writers have ever been since the distant primitive days when Homer chanted his own compositions from Greek city to city. They write like participants of the daily life in fields and factories and union halls; and they are well beloved and understood. Mayakovsky, a great poet, has sold three million copies of his works;

his chants are on everyone's lips; here in America, Carl Sandburg, also a good poet, can only sell about two thousand copies of his books.

No one need offer any dogmas or definitions as to what is workers' art. The fact is, it exists. And its beginnings exist even here in capitalist America. There are a few poets, musicians, and painters of quality who have given up all the false promises of a bourgeois art career, and have plunged themselves boldly into the dramatic and hopeful world of the workers.

Many of the painters in this group have used the cartoon as their medium for revolutionary agitation. The cartoon is a strong weapon, the most direct and powerful one can find. A cartoon like one of Robert Minor's is as valuable as a dozen good speeches, and is more unforgettable, for the same reason that the movie is a better method of education than books, according to modern educators.

The revolution is young in America, and for this reason immature. Some of the cartoonists represented in this collection have not studied sufficiently, have not disciplined themselves in their craft. They have a great deal to learn. But the American workers have a great deal to learn. The hope of America lies in the fact that they must learn—history will see to that. And our workers' art, too, will find itself before many years have passed—and it will be something more wonderful than we have dreamed.

Meanwhile, here are a few cartoons, some good, some bad, some indifferent. Whatever anyone may say about them, no one will be able to deny that the greatest cartoonists in America have devoted their gifts to the working-class. The capitalist newspapers pay huge salaries, but they haven't enough money to have bought these men. There is much hope in that.

And there is hope, too, in that the other cartoonists represented here are working every day, doing their best, and unconsciously, surely laying the foundations for the American workers' revolution and proletarian art. This book of cartoons you have in your hand, dear reader, may some day be as historic a document as those cheaply printed little stickers pasted up on the walls of Moscow eight years ago, signed by a few not widely known names—those of the central committee of a certain party nicknamed the Bolsheviki. Beginnings are always interesting—and here is a beginning.

MICHAEL GOLD.