

Can British Columbia Journalists Unite?

(By D. A. Chalmers)

"They advertise others, themselves they cannot advertise," might fairly be written of newspapermen and journalists generally. It is all the more fitting that in connection with the recent formation of an "Institute" in British Columbia some note of the organization should be published if only for the information of the numerous journalistic brethren throughout the Province who had no opportunity of attending any initial meetings of what was originally intended to be a Province-wide body.

About the end of last year a number of gentlemen (several outstanding ones connected with one Vancouver daily) took certain steps in the matter and in association with newspaper representatives from Victoria, held several meetings, which resulted in a "Constitution" and "Objects" being printed and passed.

Later, at a meeting in 1920, the first to which certain other members of the newspaper or journalistic fraternity had been invited, a marked difference of opinion was revealed with regard to the retention among the "Objects" of a statement to the effect that the organization was not to be of the nature of a trades union. One man, an earnest promoter, among the first to give publicity to the idea, unhappily used the expression that that negative statement was "the price to be paid" for organization and thus stirred to rebellion, in oral exercise at least that "Britons-never-shall-be-slaves" spirit in what, for the time being, proved to be the majority (in attendance) who passed a resolution which involved the deletion of the negative statement.

Thereupon the acting chairman and president insisted on resigning, and the editor of this magazine had (entirely unexpected and unsought) the fortune or misfortune to be voted into the position vacated. As directed by the (then) ruling majority, the pro-tem. president, in association with the acting-secretary, Mr. John Williamson, who had done good service and continued in office, proceeded with the registration of the organization as a Provincial Body, and with these two as official representatives, or trustees, a Government charter was duly obtained.

Meanwhile a formation Committee (convened by one of the original dissenters to deletion) had been at work in connection with the "Vancouver Branch," and this committee speedily brought in a report not merely of progress, but containing recommendations with regard to officers, and also one to the effect that the negative statement, previously discussed and discarded, be restored to the Objects or Constitution of that "Vancouver Branch." Whether from the non-attendance or conversion of the members who had made the strong majority when the statement was deleted, is uncertain, but the fact was that a majority of those attending the later meetings endorsed all that was arranged, pre-arranged or re-arranged by that committee; and steps were then taken to turn the "Branch" into the "Trunk," or main body.

Just as there were alleged to be reasons in the first place for the insertion among the "Objects" of the statement that the organization was not to be in any sense a trades union, so no doubt in the view of the majority of that formation committee there was cause for the re-introduction of the clause.

It may none the less still be questioned why it should be necessary to make any such statement. Independently of the question of the freedom of the press, and particularly of the pressmen, we do not believe any newspaper manager or proprietor need be exercised about any "trades union." Ordinary newspaper reporting and writing work cannot any more than journalism or literature in its higher branches be measured like brick-laying, and it would be impossible to fix minimum and maximum values in salaries or otherwise.

Apart from the introduction and discussion of that negative qualification—which we venture to believe **might** have been entirely avoided had representation at the outset been more widely sought—we believe a serious mistake was made in placing the "proprietors of daily papers" as "honorary" members. Surely, if our vaunted "Democracy" means anything, it should have been left open to newspaper managers and owners alike equally with others to be active members—unless of course the underlying idea was to make the Institute mainly or merely one for employees. There is a sense in which all newspaper men are "journalists" from junior reporters to publishers and up to, shall we say, the venerable and happy-spirited "Diogenes" and the racily reminiscent and enlightening "Lucian," who surely are the "doyens" of the Journalistic world in Britain's Farthest West Province.

Besides, there are "daily newspapers" in British Columbia outside of the two big Coast cities, and it is not at all unlikely that there are "proprietors" and editors there who would prefer to be ordinary, that is active, rather than "honorary" members of any such organization, if it is to be one of real service and lasting influence.

Some newspaper proprietors may conceivably, and legitimately be only "business managers" or money-making investors rather than "journalists," properly so-called. In the West one part-owner some years ago told the writer quite plainly that his chief or only interest was in the balance sheet of the concern. Others may echo "quite right." But still there are those who, while not belittling the importance of the business side, will venture to hold that the strong, one-sided interest in the case in question was not unconnected with the fact that the publication (as such) though one of the oldest and most influential, ceased to prosper and passed away.

Newspaper work, journalism, literature, form an ascending scale of effort and influence—though the financial results do not necessarily correspond. Is it not the case that one of the biggest money-makers in "journalism" in the Old Land, made his fortune, primarily, through publications that not only did not promote individual or social progress but, if anything, pandered to the frivolous spirit in all humans, the dominance of which makes irksome any beneficial reading or concentrated thought. That publisher's career reminds us that money may buy personal power, of a transient kind, and even lead to a pass to a gilded chamber, but cannot ensure lasting social and literary influence.

Just as newspaper influence itself may be commercialized, so newspaper owners may in certain communities and under certain conditions have to choose between making money by careful trimming and a non-committal policy, and exercising independent criticism with more or less of lasting influence upon, and real social service to their day and generation.

So far, the most promising feature of the new "Institute" is that a man seems to have been secured for president, who combines wide experience in life and considerable experience in journalism with an attractive personality.

RE VERSES TO H.R.H. PRINCE OF WALES.

Yes, curious reader, though we have not hitherto mentioned the fact in this Magazine, much less advertised it in the newspapers, H.R.H. the Prince of Wales DID acknowledge the verses by the editor of the B.C.M. which appeared in a former "insert" addressed to him as "Prince of the British Commonwealth." Not only so, but their Majesties, King George and Queen Mary, also sent an acknowledgment.