

# Propaganda on the Prairies

BY CHAS. LESTOR

## FOREWORD.

The year 1922 was a busy one for yours truly. The first six months I was spreading propaganda in the Old Country. I left England on the 2nd June; spent five weeks in Winnipeg speaking during the Provincial Election campaign there, helping Com. Geo. Armstrong, S. P. of C. candidate. After that, one week of propaganda in Calgary. Arrived in Vancouver early in August. Spoke on the street corner of Carrall and Cordova Streets every fine night until I started on the propaganda tour outlined below. I have heard a great deal of talk about action. Don't know whether this constitutes action or not.—but it keeps me busy.

I left Vancouver on the 27th of October and arrived in Kamloops early the following morning. Comrade Orchard met me at the station and took me immediately to the home of Comrade McNab. We held a meeting at night which was successful from every point of view. Mr. and Mrs. McNab did all they possibly could to make my stay a pleasant one and I was sorry when Sunday morning came and I had to leave this hospitable neighbourhood. There are some good comrades in Kamloops and I hope it won't be long before I have the pleasure of meeting them again.

I arrived in Calgary a couple of days ahead of time but J. got fixed up at the abode of Bob Emery who looked after me when in town and took care of my literature, etc., while I was speaking in the small towns in the locality. The first place I went to in Alberta was Swalwell and here I found an old timer in the movement in the person of Comrade Beagrie. He had a meeting all fixed up and although some religious outfit had a chicken supper on we had a good crowd, and everything passed off well. Comrade Beagrie is holding it down practically alone in Swalwell. He is one of those steady reliable comrades upon whom we can always depend. I stayed at his place for the night, and he and his wife explained to me the farmer's position as it applied to them. As they have been farming for many years and reading the Clarion all the time they were able to provide me with good material for propaganda. The next morning I left for Trochu and was met at the station by Comrade Macpherson. Macpherson is a neck or nothing red. He has a car of a proletarian cut and he daily takes desperate chances. He never stops for ruts, fences or anything else. After a meal in a Chinese restaurant he took me eighteen miles to his home. He then whisked me eighteen miles back again to a meeting in Trochu which was held in a garage. The meeting was all right, but after it was over he shot me home again, another eighteen miles. This distance, of course, is nothing over ordinary roads and with a careful driver, but I was in the air most of the time and the only thing that Mac troubled about after every deep hole was to make sure I was still in the car. He never cared about which end up I was. I addressed three meetings in this neighbourhood and had the pleasure of meeting Comrades Bigelow and Smith, together with their wives. I also met Comrade Erwin. Mrs. Macpherson and the other ladies did all they could do to make me comfortable and I owe them much. I found the farmers here were beginning to understand that Capitalism held no hope for them. The Comrades in this district have been working faithfully and I hope my visit was of some assistance. The wives of the comrades here are faithful supporters of the cause and even the children are lining up in the right direction. The weather was now beginning to get cold and some of the journeys we had made were of considerable length. It is not the speaking that troubles the propagandist on these trips, but the travelling. You can imagine going twenty miles to a meeting in the bitter cold and then finding about a dozen people in a school house. The place is lighted by a miserable oil lamp. If you want a glass of water it seems to take an hour's work to get it because it has frequently to be fetched from a distance. The only compensating feature is that the farmers are good listeners. They don't

care how long the meeting last and, in the main, pay strict attention to all you say.

After leaving Trochu I went back to Calgary and on the Sunday addressed two meetings there; one in the open forum and the other in the Empress theatre. Ambrose Tree was my chairman at the evening meeting which, for some reason or other, was only poorly attended.

The next day I took the train for Hanna and there met Comrade Roberts. This Comrade is young but has already developed considerably and gives promise of becoming an able propagandist. It was here in Hanna where I first met Comrade John Egge who afterwards did so much towards making the tour a success. His kindness and persistent effort are beyond praise. The S. P. of C. has been able to keep going owing to the fact that its clear cut propaganda attracts to it men of his calibre. There is a young Russian in Hanna who recently arrived there from the Ukraine. This individual was raised in the same village as Machno, the anarchist peasant. Comrade Ben Dworkin introduced me to him and acted as interpreter. I obtained some interesting details of the stirring events that recently took place in Ukrania. Two meetings were held in Hanna. The attendance was small but this was not the fault of the Comrades who did their best. The weather handicapped us and in one instance we had our meeting sabotaged. Comrade Richardson and Roberts looked well after me and I wish to thank Mrs. Richardson and Mrs. Roberts for making me so comfortable.

I went from Hanna to Stanmore and arrived there in the small hours of the morning. Comrade Burton was standing on the platform and immediately like a sensible man took me to his house and without unnecessary conversation sent me to bed. The next morning I met Comrade Donaldson and he had arranged three meetings in the neighbourhood which were all successful. Comrade Donaldson is a valuable member of the party. He is one of the level-headed men who can perceive what is necessary and do it. He is a source of inspiration to those of his neighbours who are seeking the light. I found around Stanmore some of the most delightful people I have ever met. Mrs. Burton is a well informed woman and can converse intelligently upon many subjects. Mr. Donaldson and many others take a keen interest in the movement. The general atmosphere around Stanmore is of a stimulating character and the seed sown here by the old propagandists of the S. P. of C. is ripening and will soon be ready for reaping. The audiences here could immediately grasp any point and this showed more than anything else could that the educator had been at work.

From Stanmore on to Youngstown, and here I found O'Brien's footprints. Charlie was here many years ago and his visit is still remembered. I had picked up Comrade Dworkin on the train and Comrade Wiertz who was waiting to receive me took us and introduced us to his daughters who are going to school in Youngstown. Comrade Wiertz and myself then went out to the Homestead about seventeen miles away. It was early morning when we arrived and I was dog-tired. The first meeting we held started at one o'clock in the morning. It happened in this way. R. Gardiner, M.P., had arranged to address a meeting and our meeting was to follow. Gardiner started at 9 p.m. and spoke three hours. Then we had supper and I started. Some interruption took place but we came out all right. The cause was an Englishwoman who left her country for her country's good and didn't know it. I stayed at the house of Comrades Wiertz, Hughes and Stopps. The treatment I received at the hands of the ladies was of the best. I was sick here for a few hours; the strain was beginning to tell. I am pleased to say that I managed to deliver the lectures arranged for me. I

also met here Mr. and Mrs. McClosky who attended two of my meetings. Traces were to be observed of the work done by Frank Cassidy both here and in Excel. The position of the farmer in this neighbourhood is bad indeed and he is good material for propaganda. The illusions are all dispelled and he feels and knows his position. In days gone by a speech by Alf. Budden would cause an audience of farmers to foam with rage; now his most caustic comments would be received with approbation. The farmers are being forced to take a revolutionary stand. Large numbers of them don't know which way to turn; they don't own a thing and many would leave their farms but they haven't the wherewithal to enable them to purchase clothes decent enough to travel in. It is hard indeed for the women, and we may expect a steady support from some of these from now on.

From Youngstown to Excel and after a meeting there to Seal. The meetings I addressed around here were all satisfactory. Comrade Hansen and Jorgensen are doing their bit. The audiences were attentive. The Comrades here are active and intelligent. Seal is in the neighbourhood of twenty miles from Excel and it was a trying journey in the bitter cold weather. This is a Hell of a country. I stayed at the house of Comrade Jorgensen and had every care and attention. I did my best to arouse an interest in the proposition whilst in Seal and I hope the results will be good. The comrades here deserve success. They are a credit to the party. After leaving Seal I was taken to Excel station and had to wait four hours. We arrived at midnight. The station was being painted and the waiting room was full of paint cans. The stove was red hot. It was 10 below outside and a slight wind blowing. When I couldn't stand the smell of the paint any longer I went outside. When I was about frozen solid I went in and thawed out. I have had the taste of paint in my mouth ever since.

The socialist propagandist has many faults, but some of these should be pardoned on account of the great woes he struggles through. I went back again to Calgary and spoke on the Sunday following at the Empress Theatre. The Municipal campaign was on and the wreckage of the Wreckers Party were trying to line up the slaves in support of a renege red posing as the Labour candidate for mayor. The meeting at the Empress Theatre resulted in the policy of the S. P. of C. being understood and appreciated by many who, for the first time in their existence, realised that the reformer in whatever guise he may appear is an ally of the enemy. The wire-pullers who periodically launch new parties in order to occupy the lime light and bask in the sunshine of wage-slave ignorance are likely to pull off another stunt before long. What next I wonder? Comrade Dworkin and his family were extremely kind to me during my stay in Calgary as were also Comrades Mr. and Mrs. Emery. I can never repay them for their kindness and hospitality. In this, "the winter of our discontent," propaganda is made possible as a result of the sacrifices of unknown comrades, and it is well that their contributions to the cause should be recorded.

Everywhere I went men and women put themselves to all kinds of inconvenience to try and make me comfortable. The men are sometimes a little thoughtless and want you to talk too much, but the women wait until the time is opportune before they ask questions. The questions of both sexes are often about the comrades: Where is so and so? What is he doing? What sort of a man is so and so? Is he married? Sid Earp's contributions to the Clarion are eagerly scanned because they give a little news. I am not making any suggestions as to how the Clarion should be run or advocating any alteration in its makeup. I am simply giving my experience