

Change the World

Albert Maltz and
Plain Speaking

by Mike Gold

ALBERT MALTZ has written a letter answering my column discussing his New Masses piece. Albert is angry. He says I have slandered him. His letter is long, but I give the gist of it in this limited space:

"I was prepared to find in your column a searching analysis of what I had to say. But what did I find? No analysis—a few words devoted to mis-statement of my position—and then the conclusion that I was about to join Max Eastman and Eugene Lyons.

"What follows now? Don't you see that the result of this personal attack on me can only stultify all discussion, frighten off people who have come to any conclusion (not necessarily mine) that disagrees with accepted tenets?

"It is easy for me to reject your scare-crow image of me, for I am firm in my beliefs and in my loyalties to the progressive movement. What I was—I am. The beliefs I held—I hold, and will continue to hold, despite your unfriendly haste.

"The real victims of your column are

the younger writers . . . those new to the movement . . . who witness this ferocity, this unbecoming descent to personality slander—all directed against someone who raises a question and advances a thesis—possibly an unpopular question and unsound thesis."

Out of one omitted paragraph let me stop to pick this epithet—"political blackmail." Albert says I am using a "blackmail" club and forbidding anyone to discuss the points he raises.

This is very rich arguing, indeed. Free speech to Maltz means that he can freely write a piece in the New Masses in which the Communist movement is accused of enforcing a vulgar, coarse, anti-artistic, narrow dictatorship over writers, a dictatorship that has hampered our literature and falsified our critical standards.

Albert can say this, in 2,000 words or so, but I am not supposed to take 750 words in a column to answer him. Which is not free speech, Albert. People have a right to defend the "left literary movement," as well as to defame it.

As to your charges of personal slander, I can't believe you are thin-skinned. You are not a little boy, a literary novice just coming into this movement, but a veteran of some 15 years. It doesn't matter whether my manners are good or bad. That's not the main issue here. There

are bigger things, and one of them is the future of the Communist movement in this country. Over that we must fight like tigers for the Marxist line. Browderism is what happens when we don't.

MALTZ shows by his letter that he still doesn't understand how dangerously anti-Marxian his whole way of thinking has become.

I might have been "personal, slanderous and crude," but Samuel Sillen, Daily Worker literary critic, took the Maltz contraption to pieces with skill, reason and good manners. Not a harsh epithet was used. Not a personality was uttered. Sam gave the "searching analysis" Maltz demands in his letter to me.

Maltz ignores all this, however, to concentrate on my lack of manners. I would rather hear him make some detailed answer to the case made by Sillen—that Maltz's thesis is a retreat from Marxism, that it is a denial of the social role of the artist, that it is a veiled attack on the Communist movement and lays a new basis for conciliating Trotskyism, that it defends the liquidators of left-wing literature, etc., etc.

And Sillen is not slandering—he is arguing for the basic truths and principles that alone can build a labor literature and lead the American people on the road to socialism.

AS A VETERAN Maltz knows that the Communist movement is coming out of no decade of narrow, stifling sectarianism, out out of a period of Browderism, when Marxism was being liquidated. We grew so broad we lost our own shape and standard. All that was truly Communist and rooted in the masses was being skillfully wrecked by the champions of "breadth" and Browderism.

Now that is over, and we are painfully trying to get back on the Marxist rails of history. The young writers Maltz worries about will never be misled by this return to Marxism. But they would be derailed and damaged if they learned to tolerate Trotskyites and to be as non-political as Albert Maltz tells them they can be.

That way lies the Ivory Tower, the floundering in the marsh, the negative and passive literature of the cafes and esthetic cliques. Albert is preaching a terrible confusion. It makes me mad to think of him doing it so "naively," after 15 years in the movement. I have a right to fight such stuff and shall never surrender that right. Furthermore, the time has come to restore the fighting Marxist heart into our literature—fascism is strong now, we must become stronger, not weaker, Albert.

