

Change the World

by Mike Gold

ALBERT MALTZ, who wrote some powerful political and proletarian novels in the past, seems about ready to repudiate that past, and to be preparing for a retreat into the stale old Ivory Tower of the art-for-art-sakers.

If you can extract any other message out of his piece in the current *New Masses*, you are a better mind reader than this columnist.



His thesis is the familiar one, viz: that much "wasted writing and bad art has," for the past 15 years, "been induced in American writers by the intellectual atmosphere of the left wing" and that this bad influence has its central source in our vulgarized slogan: "art is a weapon."

"It has been understood to mean that unless art is a weapon like a leaflet, serving immediate political ends, necessities and programs, it is worthless or escapist or vicious," he says.

Another charge is we tend to judge works of art solely from the standpoint

of the politics of the author.

"Writers must be judged by their work and not by the committees they join."

As an example of our "narrow and vulgar" tendency, Albert says: "The best case in point—although there are many—is James T. Farrell . . . one of the outstanding writers of America. I have not liked all of his work equally, and I don't like the committees he belongs to. But he wrote a superb trilogy and more than a few short stories of great quality, and he is not through writing, yet. . . ."

THERE'S a lot more of such theorizing, but I believe I have given a fair sample of the whole.

It has a familiar smell. I remember hearing all this sort of artistic moralizing before. The criticism of James T. Farrell, Max Eastman, Granville Hicks and other renegades always attacked the same literary "sins of the Communists," and even quoted Lenin, Engels and Marx to profusion.

One can refuse to answer Maltz on esthetic grounds, however. The fact remains that for 15 years, while Maltz was in the Communist literary movement, he managed to escape with his talents and get his novels written.

The Road To Retreat

This Communist literary movement in the United States was the school that nurtured an Albert Maltz and gave him a philosophic basis. It gave him his only inspiration up to date. It also inspired and created a Richard Wright, who was born and reared in a humble John Reed Club.

The best American writers of the past 15 years received their inspiration, their stock of ideas, from their contact, however brief or ungrateful, with the left wing working class and this Marxist philosophy.

MALTZ'S coy reference to the "political committees" on which James Farrell serves is a bad sign. Farrell is no mere little committee-server, but a vicious, voluble Trotskyite with many years of activity. Maltz knows this. Maltz knows that Farrell has long been a colleague of Max Eastman, Eugene Lyons and similar rats who have been campaigning with endless lies and slanders for war on the Soviet Union.

It is a sign of Maltz's new personality that he hadn't the honesty to name Farrell's Trotskyism for what it is; but to pass it off as a mere peccadillo. By such reasoning, Nazi rats like Ezra Pound and

Knut Hamsun, both superior writers to Farrell, must also be treated respectfully and even forgiven for their horrible politics because they are "artists."

There is a lot more one could say, and maybe I'll say it in a later column. Meanwhile, let me express my sorrow that Albert Maltz seems to have let the luxury and phony atmosphere of Hollywood at last to poison him.

It has to be constantly resisted, or a writer loses his soul. Albert's soul was strong when it touched Mother Earth—the American working class. Now he is embracing abstractions that will lead him nowhere.

We are entering the greatest crisis of American history. The capitalists are plotting (and the big strikes are a first sample) to establish an American fascism as a prelude to an American conquest of the world.

Literary evasions of this reality can afford no inspiration to the young soldiers and trade unionists, the Negroes and all the rest of tolling humanity who must fight. The Ivory Tower may produce a little piece of art now and then, but it can never serve the writer who means to fight and destroy the Hitlers of this world.