

# 'Daily' Readers Discuss Literary Issues

## HOW TO CREATE ART MEETING NEEDS OF TIMES

Dear Editor:

I believe the nub of what we should discuss is the independent role of the working class movement in our country's cultural life. To achieve that requires a Marxist approach to the improvement of our admitted shortcomings. Everything else falls into line once that is established. In the field of literature, as elsewhere,

Browder had led to the abandonment of Marxism, and we must reconstruct those approaches speedily.

For writers aspiring to depict reality, to show men their true stature, face the greatest challenge of our times. The classes confront one another as the people move into the offensive; that offensive will surely generate the conditions for an upsurge of culture as the masses demand utterance of their needs, their aspirations, their search for a happy life that can only be won through socialism.

The Big Money is not unaware of this. Monopoly capitalism seeks to establish hegemony over every national endeavor, cultural as well as industrial. Henry Luce, for instance, is flashing his fat pocket-book before young writers, as are his associates in publishing, radio, movies. The battle grows hotter on the ideological, cultural front. To control men capitalism must win their minds. Hence the imperative need for the working class to battle for working class ideas, working class culture. Hence the imperative need for the vanguard of the working class to propagate its social science, Marxism.

This is the essence of the present discussion, which, once granted, permits us to tackle the many aspects of the problems in improving our literary work. Samuel Sillen put his finger on the issue. Advance with the working class or retreat into the camp of the enemy.

This is the rock-bottom issue, and we should guard against being sidetracked by questions of "sharpness of tone," "personalities," etc. (and, incidentally, Maltz did not speak in dulcet tones in his New Masses article). No, the issues are far greater. The discussion must be put on its feet, on a Marxist base. Then we can make quick headway.

The fact that NM presented the issue in the manner it did is one of the vestiges of Browderism. Browder continually sought to transform the movement into a sterile debating society, debating

## WRITER SAYS THESE THINGS NEED SAYING

Hollywood, Calif.

Dear Editor:

While I do not support the Maltz position (separation of artists and citizens), I must say that I emphatically do agree with many of the things he did say. I agree that these things HAD to be said and should not have needed to be said, had we not dwindled into such a sorry state of thinking.

I, for one, would like Sam Sillen or Mike Gold to discuss just what the position of the left-wing writer is in the class struggle. How is he to work for the people and also work for the trusts and remain an honest man and an honest writer?

Where can he have his things printed so that they will reach the wide masses and still bring the truth home?

Where is the left-wing magazine that will reach out a hand to fresh young talent in revolt and enable it to find expression and to grow along the path of struggle?

On the question of criticism we face a problem of utmost importance. Is it good art even if its creator has no political motive? Or even if he has a bad political motive? And conversely, is weak, sloppy work to be hailed as magnificent

## Who's to Have the Weapon?

Dear Editor:

Standard Oil recently showed its collection of oils, water colors, and drawings, which illustrate Oil from home front to fighting front. It asked documentation from the painters it had commissioned, and the results were admirable picturizations of the workings of industry—from the drilling for oil to the alert GIs guarding the precious stuff.

It is understandable that there are many artists willing to accept such commissions, for painting has less of a tangible market in America than any of the other arts, except sculpture. Certain concrete advantages can be found through this patronage—the chance to travel and paint, new subject matter through change of locale, and also the certainty of prestige of a sort.

But I wonder if any painter who accepts such a commission would dare to paint the living conditions of the workers, a union meeting, a picket line—any of which might be seen at any plant to which he was sent. That is also documentation. It is just as much a result of Big Business as the great plants.

### MONEY BAGS AND THE ARTS

A foretaste of the resulting thinking from artists has appeared in an article by Thomas Benton, published in the Jan. 15, 1946, Art Digest, in which he has Big Business saying, presumably to the people, "... you have approved of and bought my stuff and made me successful and rich and I want to return some of this to you by supporting your cultural development."

It is obvious that the danger to artists from Big Business as an art patron is therefore one of bias. The artist will in his painting show one side of the picture only—that of the benevolent goodness of Big Business! Artists run the great danger of being weaned away from their base with the people to a smug complacency because they are asked to paint this idea.

However, neither can the artist produce work while living on a crust of bread a day, as is the romantic conception. The artist has his right to a livelihood in his chosen skill.

The suggestion recently advocated by M. Garaudy in the Daily Worker Saturday, Feb. 23, that "One hundred thousand copies of an original picture, paying the artist one franc's copyright a copy, for instance, yields him as good a standard of living as if he had sold the oil painting for 100,000 francs," is one that should be fought for here in America. Support given to artists from unions and progressive organizations, which at the moment is necessarily small, is another correct step.

Art IS a weapon—the Big Businessmen recognize it as such and are hurrying to ally the artists to their cause. As a weapon it can be used by either people or capital to the advantage of each.

pains of an American writer torn between the art and politics of the middle-class, the philosophy of pragmatism, and the art and politics of the working class, Marxian materialism. Farrell has already made his own choice, definitively; whereas Maltz is still fluent and flexible enough to develop rightly, provided he learns more about Marxism-Leninism, especially its esthetics. I for one, still have faith in his groping and confusion.

## SAYS SHALLOW CRITICISM STILL PREVAILS IN 'LEFT'

Editor, Daily Worker:

I have just read the first five installments of Sillen's answer to Albert Maltz's recent New Masses article. I have also read the Mike Gold blast which I consider a disgraceful performance. Even in Sillen's pieces, there was a hostility and defensiveness that I found hard to understand.

This does not by any means imply that Maltz's thesis should be swallowed whole. Many of its seeming implications call for a great deal of thought and discussion, and even polemic, if you will. But nothing is gained if bits are taken out of context, lined up and marked with a bull's eye to be knocked down. Particularly was this the case in Sillen's whole discussion of "Art as a weapon," where Maltz is made to appear to attack this slogan in its entirety and not in its narrow misuse.

### A CASE IN POINT

It also seems to me that he passes over the mistakes of present and recent Marxist critical thought, much too rapidly. Let us frankly admit that these mistakes are often glaring and that they still exist. Perhaps in theory, the shallow kind of criticism that Maltz attacks is a thing of the past. In practice, it carries on with a vengeance. Such criticism is harmful to the authors in question, to other writers and especially to younger writers, and it is also harmful to an audience which must inevitably become fed up with such criticism and refuse to read it.

Let me recall a case in point relating to a work in which my wife and I had some part, the musical comedy "Bloomer Girl." For a musical, it undoubtedly had many good and progressive things to say. And yet, for whatever virtues it possessed, the execution fell far short of the intention. In Sillen's review in the "Daily Worker" and in the "New Masses" review as well there was only praise. There was no mention of shortcomings. In fact there was no serious critical discussion at all.

But this is just one phase of the problem. Along with a log-rolling, climb-on-the-bandwagon approach to progressive writing, goes a frequent opportunist criticism of writing in general, in which authors are welcomed with too open arms when they have something politically progressive to say, and then are attacked too bitterly when they don't. They are frequently rewarded, frequently punished, but all too often they are not evaluated at all.

I bring up the negative side of things because that's where the correction has got to come. I feel this was also Albert Maltz's intention. As it happens I am not in agreement with him in the area which calls for greatest discussion, that is

### ON THE ISSUE!

Today this department presents the first letters to reach us on the discussion of the position and responsibility of writers and artists in the class struggle. More letters will appear on this page Friday.

the separation between political and artistic appraisal of authors and their work. Also his position on Farrell and Steinbeck is poorly formulated and open to challenge. Still because a man is honestly wrong on very difficult problems is no reason to treat him as an enemy or a renegade.

The one thing we must all get out of this discussion is a magazine in which these questions can be aired and the truth thrashed out.

Beyond everything else, this is one area in which we can all agree. Marxist criticism, real Marxist criticism has a tremendous amount to give to writers. A lot of people have been calling for it for a long time. When is it actually going to be set up and started functioning?

DAN JAMES.

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## Thinks Writer Will Grope Way Through

Manhattan, N. Y.

Editor, Daily Worker:

Albert Maltz, the novelist as critic, wishes to separate a writer's politics from his art. Thus, in the case of Farrell, he suggests that we separate Trotskyist politics from the pragmatist, anti-Marxist basis of Farrell's esthetic. If this be so, then what is the method of Marxism as distinguishable from bourgeois literary criticism? Maltz is suffering the growing

C. P. WEST.