

# A Letter on Review of Murray Kempton Book

The following letter by Simon W. Gerson and George Blake Charney to the editors of the weekly journal For a Lasting Peace For a Peoples Democracy has been released by the authors for publication:

To the Editors  
For a Lasting Peace and A Peoples Democracy

Bucharest, Roumania

Dear Friends:

In your issue of March 23, 1956 there appears an article by Maxim Lieber entitled, "Falsifiers of History." The article deals primarily with reviews of a book published in the United States by Murray Kempton, columnist for the New York Post, as well as with the book itself.

The issue here is not Lieber's criticism of the reviews or the book itself. There is much merit in Lieber's criticism, especially in regard to Kempton's negative views relative to the '30s, a period of great struggles by labor, the farmers, the Negro people, the intelligentsia, small business, small homeowners, i.e., virtually all the non-monopoly sections of the American population. It was a period out of which emerged great popular political movements that influence—and have continued to influence, to some degree—the world struggle for progress and democracy.

A truly objective account of that period must give considerable credit to the constructive and dynamic role of the Left and, particularly, the Communist Party. Mr. Kempton, as is his right, disagrees with such an estimate of the role of the Left and Communist Party. Lieber correctly sets forth in a general way the true role of the American Communists in the '30s.

But we must take issue with his harsh, one-sided and somewhat static criticism of Mr. Kempton. Lieber presents a picture of Mr. Kempton as a scion of the Southern "feudal aristocracy whose plantations before the Civil War were drenched with the sweat and blood of Negro slaves."

Apart from the old maxim that the sins of the fathers are not visited upon the children, Lieber's statement flies in the face of well-known facts. A reader uninformed of the facts might be led to believe that Kempton's sympathies are with the racists of America.

Quite the contrary is true—and is a matter of wide public record. Whatever his forbears may have been, the fact is that Mr. Kempton

has been a courageous fighter against racism, against the Dixiecrat violence and oppression of the Negro people. His eloquent writings and his activities on the Emmett Till murder, the Autherine Lucy case and other issues have properly given him a high rank in the crucial fight for democracy in the South and throughout the nation. If he is to be classed as a Southerner, he clearly belongs to the new voices of the South.

Note should also be taken of Mr. Kempton's contributions in the struggle against McCarthyism and for the all-embracing application of the Bill of Rights. He has taken a forthright stand for the right of dissent in general and for the rights of Communists in particular.

Although himself opposed to Communism, he has staunchly fought the Smith Act under which a number of Communist leaders have gone to jail. He has spoken up for victimized Communist veterans like Robert Thompson and Saul Wellman. He has spoken up against the brutal action of the Social Security Administration in cutting off pensions of Communists. He has undertaken to help raise funds for Smith Act defendants in the current trial now under way in New York. In fact, an appeal for funds for two defendants was sent out by Norman Thomas, the veteran Socialist leader, and was subscribed to by liberals Murray Kempton, Roger Baldwin and the Rev. Dr. Donald Barrington.

Surely, these actions contradict the estimate reflected in Maxim Lieber's article.

Of course, in fairness to Maxim Lieber it must be said that these recent positions and actions of Kempton don't emerge from the book, "Part of Our Times." Kempton's position today undoubtedly evolved as a consequence of the growing resistance to McCarthyism and racism in American life. But in this development he reflects some deep-going new currents in the American scene.

Whatever our differences with Kempton and many of his friends—and these differences are profound—we consider as uppermost the readiness of Kempton and an increasing number of liberals to subordinate differences in order to advance democratic freedoms.

Strict respect for the actual facts of the American scene, in our judgment, require this correction, and we are confident that the editors of For A Lasting Peace will accept it in the spirit in which it is offered.