

Movies, TV and...

by david platt

A Group of American Communists Take A New Look At the Arts

I APPROVE of most of the exploratory statement by leading Communist cultural workers on "some aspects of cultural work" published in "Party Voice" for January.

This document is the most persuasive statement of where we got off the track, how we can get back on and where we are going, that I have seen in print in years.

It indicates the opening of doors in all the arts and the end of intemperate and pontifical handling of cultural questions and cultural figures such as characterized the disgraceful attack on Albert Maltz ten years ago.

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I AM HAPPY that the article in "Party Voice" recalls this outstanding case of criticism by intimidation and slander. Maltz, in 1945 had challenged the slogan "art is a weapon". He argued that it had become a straightjacket for the writer.

His accusers, led by a then leading Marxist literary critic said this amounted to taking an ivory tower position. They proved it by quoting from the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Gorky, and hardly any American sources.

One well known writer went so far as to express "sorrow that Maltz seems to have let the luxury and phony atmosphere of Hollywood at last to poison him".

He wrote that about a year and a half before Maltz and other members of the "Hollywood Ten" were brought before the Un-American Committee, indicted for their ideas, blacklisted, and jailed.

As the "Party Voice" piece on culture notes, Maltz in his controversial article was simply arguing for a freer atmosphere in the arts on the left "which would enable writers to explore, investigate, experiment, test".

His position was peremptorily rejected and a basic discussion of his views abruptly cut off.

"The supreme mission of the literary left" said his chief opponent, "is to rally, unite and strengthen the most conscious progressive writers in America."

He added: "We must proceed to bring into being whatever literary journals are necessary to combat the Trotskyite, social democratic and the general literary press which spreads reactionary poison under a "literary" guise and which offers a snare to certain honest writers looking for a medium of publication".

Looking back on it, this rigid defining of the limits of argument and debate was the perfect platform for stewing in our own juices. It was influenced by the writings of Zhdanov in the Soviet Union and Roger Garaudy in France.

It was the end result of years of slavishly applying theoretical statements from abroad to the American scene. "To put it more bluntly", the Party Voice article says "while rejecting the slanderous accusations that we were foreign agents, we believe that we were ideologically subservient to Soviet thinking and political needs. And it is indisputable that this uncritical acceptance of Soviet ideas brought us into conflict with the ideas and experiences of the American people and intellectuals."

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WITH THIS platform under which we "applied a political means test to all cultural work", plays like Ted Pollack's "Wedding in Japan" which dealt vigorously with Jim Crow army life in conquered Japan but was weak in its treatment of the Japanese were lambasted in the Daily Worker.

Lester Rodney recommended the movie "From Here to Eternity". There was a meeting and he was blasted. Ben Levine enjoyed "Lydia Bailey". There were consultations with leading political and cultural figures. He was blasted and had to print a retraction. I myself played an important role in the "Lydia Bailey" affair, influenced as I was then by V. J. Jerome's "The Negro in Hollywood Films", a pamphlet whose preposterous conclusion that the "New Look" postwar films on the Negro (Lost Boundaries, Pinky, Intruder in the Dust, Home of the Brave, etc., etc.) constituted a "tactical concession . . . more dangerous because more subtle", I am now convinced has damaged the fight for better films.

There were other cases where dissent was stifled in which I was silent which was just as bad as playing no role, such as the time when a former film reviewer on the paper was slapped down by the top editors for criticizing the Soviet film "Admiral Nakhimov", a "turkey" if ever there was one.

And how well I recall the time when, as feature editor I published a letter without comment from a woman reader who was disturbed by what she believed represented male supremacist thinking in the Soviet film "Dream of A Cossack". The next day a leading Party official rushed

The Puerto Rican A

Following is a letter to Jesus Colon from a reader who attended the Exhibition of Puerto Rican Art at the Riverside Museum, 310 Riverside Drive, and was tremendously impressed. Colon's column on Tuesday also discussed this important exhibition. You still have time to see it. It closes this Saturday.

Dear Jesus:

The current showing of twenty-five Puerto Rican artists at the Riverside Museum, 310 Riverside Drive, must not be ignored or remain unvisited. From the very moment I ascended the staircase of this beautiful interior, I was confronted with a myriad of stately serigraphs and posters. I was beset upon by a burst of color and form which made my head swim and as my eyes tentatively scanned the walls wondering where to begin, I knew I was looking at a monumental display — not of vain dilettantism or superficial brush daubing, which is not an uncommon sight these days—but a real, vibrant, lusty, enduring people's art of a high order.

I can, but at best, give only a brief account of this important event, which must be personally seen and absorbed and returned to again. I guarantee that a visit to the Riverside Museum will stimulate and delight the senses no end.

The people of Puerto Rico have extended their hands to us and I would ask all who can, painters and lay persons, to grasp this opportunity and see for themselves the inspiring message of fellowship and humanity offered to us by this proud people: the Puerto Rican people.

There is, to begin with, a painting by Lorenzo Homar, entitled Le-Lo-Lai, done with an impeccable brush technique and velvety in color and texture, a depiction of the "Three Kings" making music which I believe is symbolic of a good cheer and amity, and a softer pastellish study of a group of acrobats hurling through the air, grasping for each other's hands. The feeling of motion and danger cannot fail to impress the viewer. It is alive. I noted a number of wood cuts called the plena or folksong series, which are graphics by the same artists. "The Boys From Catano" for instance, depicting some men in a boat feverishly dumping booze into the water to escape the probing eyes of the marine officers, or "The Bus" loaded with a good natured crowd of people reminiscent of you know what, the humor of which hits home. These prints are in the best tradition of art communication and are excellently done.

Also represented are the paintings and wood cuts of the superbly trained artist Rafael Tufino. His "Goyita" is a classically modelled large head portrait of the artist's model, the majestic dignity whose face is set against a background of

workers' shacks. Tufino seems to cry out: "This is my mother, my humble mother, my humble origin my people." This is one that you would not forget for a while.

There is a smaller composition called "The Slums of La Perla," which is a striking representation of congested workers' quarters, accentuated by a tiny clothes line alley, remarkably reminiscent and impressively designed. Tufino's masterful graphics of "Plena's" themes and "Coffee Series" portraits of the toilers of the coffee industry at work and at play. They are among the best prints I have ever seen.

Epfanio Irtzarry's ample canvas of "The Fisherwomen," among others of his luminous works, is executed in crisp, broad brush strokes and which I returned to repeatedly. Then there is Julio del Valle poignant "Children with Sugar Cane Sacks" and a massive canvas called "Children with a Goat," wistful and with a haunting quality. This prolific painter is the most represented in the exhibit and runs the gamut from classico-modern to a Picasso-like cubism, as shown in his "Portrait of A Young Man." Jose Torres Martino's "House and Trees" are in a floral pattern of cool tropical greens and a joy to behold.

Samuel Sanchez, Eduardo Vera Rodriguez, and a host of others too numerous to discuss at length, but of no less importance, are also represented. I repeat, they must be seen.

I would like to comment on three abstract canvases by Olga Albizu which stand out in annoying contrast to the atmospheric whole of the show. A donkey's tail dipped in paint and backed into a canvas would render me equally at loss to proclaim the merit or intent of the result. Miss Albizu is at present

Protestants Tak 'Martin Luther'

CHICAGO, Jan. 23 (UP). — A television movie that never got on the air has stirred up a religious controversy that may reach all the way to the Federal Communications Commission.

The movie is "Martin Luther," portraying the life of the Protestant Reformation leader. It was briefly scheduled and then withdrawn by station WGN-TV and, after a Christmas season truce, was stirring up hotter arguments than ever today.

One faction, representing Protestant churchmen, said it would protest the "Luther" cancellation to the FCC. They hired Washington, D.C., attorney Frank Ketcham to represent them.

The TV station, meanwhile, said its mid-December scheduling of "Martin Luther" touched off an "intense emotional reaction."

The movie was cancelled because the station did not "want to

into the office demanding a retraction. How dare anyone say there's male supremacy in the land of socialism?" she fumed. The inevitable apology a day or two later made us all look mighty foolish.

It all seems so long ago—so many things have happened since, which if we are not adamant to change, promises much for the noble cause we believe in.

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IT PLEASES me no end to see that the cultural statement in "Party Voice" proposes fighting for the "freedom of all artists to explore, practice, investigate, experiment, without genuflection to dogma or political demands.

"It should ask of the artist and intellectual in its ranks what it asks of its other members; primarily, support of its general political program, participation in the organization and payment of dues.

"Within its ranks and without, it must foster the fullest flowering of debate, fighting relentlessly against those conditions which choke off dissent or require cultural workers to conform.

"It must fight for the right of all cultural schools of thought to speak, publish, create, produce—while exerting its own purely moral influence to point to the superiority of humanism and realism as guiding methods in the arts." I'll buy that!