

# Correspondence

## "Are You Better Off?"

TO THE NEW MASSES:

Apropos of Roosevelt's intimate questions over the radio: Several days later the Columbia Broadcasting system held a beautifully faked street-symposium in half a dozen cities, asking the "people" these questions relating to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I say "faked" because it was obvious that the announcers, who asked the questions, were choosing "at random" the best-dressed, best-fed, happiest-looking individuals they could find at the various street intersections. What a conglomeration of newspapermen, vaudeville actors, salesmen, race-track gamblers, stenographers, small businessmen and housewives! Nevertheless, in many instances the radio interviewers got more than they bargained for.

Only a decided minority could answer affirmatively to the question, "Are you better off than you were last year?" Only a few could boast of any bank account at all; and while the majority of this angelically white-collar crew still thought their individual future "more firmly grounded," there were some dissenters who thought otherwise. There was, for example, a dress manufacturer in Philadelphia, employing eighty people, who confessed he had no hope for the future, production was kept apace only of demand—no future production—that it was harder to borrow from the banks, and, in so far as he could judge, his workers were no better off in working conditions.

When the "mike" was shifted to Detroit, I said to myself, "They're bound to find a proletarian now." And, sure enough, the radio boys had the bad luck to select two of them. The first was a house painter. He had been unemployed for two years. Didn't have a dime in his pockets, said he, how could he have a bank account? Said he didn't have any hopes from the present regime. Guarded answers, taking no chances of being run in on vagrancy charges. The second fellow was a tool-dye maker, very belligerent. (The poor radio boys!) Yes, he was employed—but only for the seasonal business. Working conditions were maddening. And the future? And then the belligerent proletarian blasted into the "mike": "I see no hope in the future unless the capitalist system is abolished." "Very pessimistic, aren't you?" murmured the radio boys. Then they switched the "mike" to Kansas City and asked a race-track tout what he thought about the depression. "Never heard of it," he wisecracked. After a while a band played *I Wish That I Were Twins*. The unemployed didn't.

W. J. WALLER.

## A Professor Stands Up

TO THE NEW MASSES:

Nineteen workers and students were sentenced by the courts of Massachusetts for peacefully demonstrating against the German fascist ship, the *Karlsruhe*. All are out on bail, pending an appeal to the higher court. Their sentences vary from heavy fines to seven months in prison. Among the number are five Tech men who received the same brutal attack by the police and received the similar injustice dealt by the courts as other workers. They narrowly escaped expulsion from Massachusetts Institute of Technology only because of the firm anti-fascist stand of one of the country's greater mathematicians.

Prior to the trial, the Dean of Undergraduate Students, Harold E. Lobdell, who has already expelled one student for anti-militaristic work, was lunching with members of the faculty. In his dinner table conversation, he politely remarked of the impending trial of the students: "Unless those students mixed up in that affair in Charlestown stand

up in court and plead guilty tomorrow morning, I'm going to see that they are all expelled. They should learn to take their medicine on the chin like men. Wasting their time with the National Students League and Communistic affiliations, they cannot expect anything else."

In a hurried meeting of some more liberal members of the faculty, the matter was discussed in detail. A few of them had seen the attack of the police on the protest meeting. From the group sprang a man equal to the occasion.

Professor Norbert Wiener, mathematician and philosopher, rushed to the Dean's office. He told the pro-fascist, pro-militarist yes-man of big capital what some of the lesser professors dared not to do.

"If those boys who protested against Fascism are to be expelled, my resignation from this narrowback institution becomes immediately effective. Had I been younger, I would have protested against the reception afforded the fascist ship in Boston. Culture, science, worker's and racial liberties have been suppressed in Germany. And if these students are expelled, I'll resign and tell the world why I did so."

One professor had the courage to stand and tell a carbon copy of a man his convictions. What can thousands of workers throughout the world do? What can their protests accomplish?

Cambridge, Mass.

LAWRENCE EMERY.

## The Living and Dead

TO THE NEW MASSES:

The enormity of the recent massacres in Germany will probably obscure the murder of certain heroic individuals who must not be forgotten, nor confused with the dead freebooter captains such as Roehm, Heines, etc.

First, the cold-blooded killing of Richard Scheringer, idealistic and youthful lieutenant sentenced to fortress imprisonment for pro-Nazi activities in the Reichswehr, converted to Communism through contact with fellow-prisoners, and thereupon re-sentenced to a longer term. Released during the Nazi regime, he was seized at once by the political police and now has been murdered in the general blood purge. Scheringer, though a Reichswehr officer, sought and found the road to social justice, then never budged from it.

Secondly, the "suicide" of Erich Muehsam, in the most dreaded of all concentration camps, Sonnenburg. Muehsam, mistakenly called a Communist in the press dispatches, was in fact an anarchist—a brilliant mind, a gifted and upright character, an incorruptible fighter.

Many words would be needed to tell the historic and symbolic importance of both of these heroic figures. However, that has been done better than I can do it by the collective authors, members of the Association of Revolutionary Proletarian Writers of Germany, who wrote the pamphlet *Brains Behind Barbed Wires*, which it was my privilege recently to translate and edit.

The shocking news of the murders of Scheringer and Muehsam confirms—if confirmation was necessary—the appeal made in that document for protest on behalf of the intellectuals imprisoned by Hitler: writers and fighters against the brown plague.

Scheringer and Muehsam must be stricken from the list of those it is still possible to save. But others remain—Carl von Ossietzky, editor of the *Welt-Buehne*, a great journalist, a brave and honest man—and hundreds of others.

Scheringer, now dead, and Ossietzky, now being done to death, in their lives both rose above the limitations of their professions—professional soldier and democratic journalist.

Such dead can be commemorated by us and such living rescued in one way only—PROTEST, unending, resourceful—here and all over the world

against the fascist regime of murder, bestiality, and unchecked degradation of every humane impulse. Make this protest heard! The regime is tottering, crumbling. Outcry will help bring it down.

HERBERT A. KLEIN.

## Guarding Academic Freedom

TO THE NEW MASSES:

During the last few years the educational system of the city of New York has been subjected to a long series of attacks by the banking and business interests, which have resulted in pay cuts, reduced state-aid, neglect of the health of the students, and a general crippling and impairment of educational standards. In attempting to fight back these onslaughts, a small number of teachers who had fought most bravely and fearlessly, met the inevitable fate of those who oppose the entrenched interests—they lost their jobs and with that their only means of livelihood.

Amidst the host of teacher organizations there was not one which had as its primary function the financial relief and legal defense of teachers unjustly dismissed. One might lose his job for teaching the truth as he saw it, or for engaging in some extra-mural activity, or for fighting too openly in defense of teachers' standards, and there would be no organization to which he could turn for immediate financial help. Was it any wonder then, that the ordinary teacher was a veritable "Casper Milquetoast," timid and fearful, and reluctant to express his opinion on any controversial question?

It was to fill this obvious gap in teacher organizations that we have organized the Teachers' League for Academic Freedom. Our aims are to advance the cause of academic freedom in the most effective and practical way—by coming to the financial relief and legal defense of any person who shall be a victim of the violation of the principle of academic freedom. Any instructor who shall be punished for his political and economic beliefs, or for his activity in defense of teachers' standards will know that he can come to us for financial help. We have already during the last five months, expended close to six hundred dollars in aiding Mrs. Burroughs, Mrs. Silver and Mr. Begun, three of the teachers who lost their jobs in the defense of their fellow teachers.

All teachers are eligible for membership. The dues vary with the financial circumstances and personal wishes of the member—from ten cents to one dollar per month. We shall also accept contributions from all those outside the teaching profession who may be interested. Please make all checks payable to Mr. A. Zitron, Secretary, 1346 Elder Ave., Bronx, N. Y. For any further information communicate with Mr. Fromowitz, chairman, 5102—11th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., or with Mr. George Rosenbloom, executive secretary, 12 East 60th St., New York City.

THE TEACHERS' LEAGUE FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM.

## Announcing "The Vanguard"

TO THE NEW MASSES:

The rising wave of lynch terror and the increasing fascization of this country has confirmed the need for a publication which will clarify the role of the Negro misleaders and fight effectively in the liberation struggles of the Negro masses. With this in mind, the Writers' Group of THE VANGUARD, a group of Negro and white intellectuals, announces the forthcoming publication of a magazine which will serve such a purpose.

Available articles, stories, verse, drawings, etc., are earnestly requested at once. Address all communications to the Writers' Group,

THE VANGUARD.

235 W. 135th Street, New York City.

# B o o k s

## The Breath of Revolution

*AND QUIET FLOWS THE DON*, by Mikhail Sholokhov. Alfred A. Knopf, \$3.

THE extraordinary stream of people and events of *And Quiet Flows the Don* is given unity and importance by the single red thread of incipient, developing, and finally full grown and struggling revolution. Beginning with peace times, the people of the Don Cossacks are carried through war, revolution, and civil war to the final scene, where brother shoots brother and the front line of men of reaction witnesses the killing of the red Cossacks. The red soldiers fall into the trench, but the words of Podtielkov, the leader, ring out over the shamed crowd. "You are blind . . . ignorant. The officers have tricked you, have forced you to kill your blood brothers. Do you think it will end with our death? No. Today you are on top, but tomorrow it will be your turn to be shot. The Soviet government will be established over Russia. Remember my words. In vain you are shedding our blood. You're a lot of fools." The earth is shoveled over the soldiers, and revolted Gregor Melkov spurs his horses away from the scene. Someone plants a melancholy shrine over the body of a red Cossack slain as he seeks to join his comrades. But bastards build a nest at its roots. If Tolstoi's *War and Peace* ended with the rich life of the woman and mother, this book ends with nature itself, with a bird hopefully laying new eggs at the foot of a decaying shrine.

To discuss in this way the end of the book rather than its beginning is to indicate at once its significance. The vital early scenes of the book are not there to develop Gregor the man so much as Gregor the Cossack. The scenes of fishing, reaping, wood cutting, loving, and child bearing, lavish and fully detailed, are the soil nourishing a people swept into historical events greater than their individual lives. Gregor Melekov is a Don Cossack, an average one, with love for home and the river Don deeply imbedded with him. He loves illicitly, is married against his will; the war carries him unwillingly away from his own deep instinctive concerns. He is revolted at bloodshed, but as a Cossack, crosses for bravery are awarded him.

The Don Cossacks were destined by the Czarist generals as shock troops against revolt within the ranks. They were stationed at strategic points along the entire front. The passionate and brave nature on which the generals relied was undermined for the duty assigned them by homesickness and craving for their land. It made the Cossack regiments susceptible to Bolshevik propaganda and pulled entire regiments into revolutionary ranks. With the provisional government tottering, Kornilov attempted a military dictatorship,

the backbone of which was snapped by the desertion of the troops. When the Cossack regiment deserts the wagon carrying the men to Petrograd, their officers attempt to trick them into surrender. The conservative Cossacks vacillate at the tempting arguments held out by the officers, waver, and are whipped into final desertion by their leaders uncovering the trick and flagellating their pride.

This vacillation, this deeply conservative nature, the going a little ahead, then a little back, the continual movement of civil war involving a people who are drawn into bloodshed while yearning for land and home, is focused in Gregor whose sensitive reaction to bloodshed leads to desertion of the Bolsheviks when they summarily kill the officers who would trap them.

The killing gags Gregor, but not conclusively; he is only wounded and obscure in his beliefs, uncertain, and returning home to a wife and twin babies, cannot sink into forgetfulness of the horrors of civil war. The struggle follows to his very doorstep; he is called out to take sides against the Bolsheviks, does so as a spectator, and is again horrified at the slaughter of his former comrades. A blind pity for the personal fate of the dead stifles his ability to judge the cause for which they were slain.

But if there is uncertainty in Gregor, there is none in the red soldiers as they are shot down and the words of the leader are above death. The so-called propaganda thread of this narrative, the red thread, provides an incandescence to the naturalistic passages, the descriptive scenes, the river Don itself, the humor and intensely colloquially inventive language of the Cossacks, all so satisfying in themselves but raised to a higher power of significance by this underlying motivating force.

The pull this book undoubtedly has is due not to the love affairs, the war, and the descriptions of lust, drunkenness, and passion, but to the challenging sweep of forces that speak today with more than a novelist's voice in every land. Anyone in this country in touch with the working-class movement or the revolting farmers will find curiously familiar and close to home the doubts and arguments of the Cossacks, who sick of war and government betrayal, find in "propaganda" that burning interest so difficult for the comfortable middle-class mind to understand.

Quite frankly, this writer does not create "characters" of the old school. He creates living people in the flux of vital events that endow his very prose with fertility and excitement. This book richly rises to the living concerns, impulses, and driving forces of today, and when I say today, I do not mean today in Soviet Russia only but in every country in the world.

JOSEPHINE HERBST.

## Traps for the Farmer

*A LIVING FROM THE LAND*, by William B. Duryee. Whittlesey House. \$1.50. *CHANGE IN THE FARM*, by T. Hennel. Cambridge University Press and The Macmillan Company. \$3.50.

The more capitalism in its last agonies crushes the workers and farmers, the more distractions and medicated plans do capitalism's agents advance to keep the aroused masses from finishing up the monster. Subsistence homesteads and a return to the simple life are dangled before the eyes of the toiling masses to get them ready for the serfdom under Fascism. Both *A Living from the Land* and *Change in the Farm* are the works of reactionaries whose chief function is to help in getting the exploited workers and farmers backed up between the shafts.

*A Living from the Land* is by the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture of New Jersey, a former county agent and assistant manager of the Walker-Gordon Milk Co., and chairman of the New Jersey Milk Control Board, which was created by the milk trusts to maintain their spread of profit by milking the small farmer with one hand and the consumer with the other.

"Homesteading days are here again," sings Mr. Duryee. Hurrah for the old oaken bucket, home fruit and bees, poultry, the garden where the worker can water his soul in the evening if he has any soul left after putting in a hard day's work at the factory. There is no other way out because today "we know that many urban industries will operate on a seasonal basis and we know too that periods of unemployment and shorter working days will provide more leisure and probably lower incomes for hundreds of thousands of families."

Reactionary statements stud this book, but its class character is most apparent in the chapter on "Financing and Protecting the Investment," which greases the worker who has a little money to put it into the hands of the banks and mortgage companies, the only ones making a living from the land these days. All Mr. Duryee's evasions and flinging about of bushels of roses cannot hide the fact that it is not machinery which has "become an octopus" and so is responsible for the depression, but that capitalism is the octopus and men like Duryee are the cups on its tentacles. His plans are no solution but a trap for even members of the lower middle-class who may stumble upon his book. Going back to the land is no help when even during "prosperity days" only 15 percent of American farmers had piped water, 13 percent electric lights, 34 percent telephones, 13 percent tractors, 13 percent trucks, and only 8 percent inside toilets and tubs.

*Change in the Farm* is one of these pious works abounding with love for the English countryside and quaint customs and tools and outbuildings. It is in the tradition of Constable and W. H. Hudson, placid and satis-