

This is typical. Mr. More, we learn, has no use for "sordid plutocrats." In believing that civilization depends upon "the security of private property," he recognizes, we are told, the possibility that "the man made free by the security of his possessions may misuse his freedom," and he holds that this is "something to be corrected, as effectively as possible." But Mr. More, so far as I can discover, despite his "deeper, truer understanding of what is real in the brotherhood of man," has never used that disinterested, powerful, incorruptible mind of his to correct the abuses of the system of private property he endorses. He has written many attacks upon the humanitarians and reformers, discussing them specifically and by name. The "sordid plutocrats," however, remain nameless and even as a class they are criticized only parenthetically and in general terms.

Mr. Shafer is a good pupil. Eloquent about the "absolute tyranny," "abject slavery," and "cruel, ruthless, and bloody dictators" of the Soviet Union, he has not a word to say about the tyranny of capitalism in the United States. Like William Randolph Hearst, he weeps for the peasants in

the Ukraine, but he is far too staunch an anti-sentimentalist to waste a tear on the workers and farmers of America. He worries only about the danger that "our great and widespread material prosperity," combined with the Rousseauesque humanitarianism of the New Deal, may undermine the national character.

There is a sense in which Mr. Shafer is right in maintaining that Mr. More has not been properly appreciated. Observing the similarity of his views on the Soviet Union to Mr. Hearst's, of his views on property to Mr. Ernest Weir's, of his views on liberty to Mr. Herbert Hoover's, of his views on reform to Mrs. Dilling's and Mr. Jung's, of his views on education to President Angell's and Chancellor Bowman's, of his views on morality to Bernarr Macfadden's, one cannot but feel that his light has indeed been hidden under a bushel. Surely that almost perfect prose of his would grace the pages of *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Saturday Evening Post*. And there is no good reason why, if he would try very hard, he should not be printed in *Liberty*.

GRANVILLE HICKS.

Pamphlet Poetry

LENIN LIVES, by Henry George Weiss.
B. C. Hagglund, Holt, Minn. 25c.

YOU OWN THE HILLS, by L. Spier.
Alpress Publishers, Philadelphia. 25c.

PRELUDE TO DAWN, by Martha W. LeCoq.
Burlington Chapbooks, Philadelphia. Price not stated.

WHILE publishers blanch at the mere thought of issuing poetry written by unassuming proletarians whose names would make but the sound of cotton falling in the cash register, proletarian and revolutionary poetry is being written, collected and published. It appears in pamphlet form from widely separated geographic points (a significant fact for revolutionary publishers to remember, what with the intensification of fascist tendencies and the imminent dangers to our press). The publication of these pamphlets is in itself a poem to courage and faith. It means that the poet has dug deep into his own pockets to defray the expense; or else that the publication was a truly cooperative enterprise, with comrades contributing dimes and quarters to make the pamphlet possible. When the history of the early publishing of proletarian literature is written, B. C. Hagglund of Holt, Minnesota, who has been pioneering in this field, will surely occupy an honored position therein. For many years he has operated a press that hung together only through the grace of God and haywire, setting type by hand, moved by a rare and beautiful courage and faith to work desperately at net wages that would make a sweated worker seem affluent. It was largely

because of his endurance that the poetry of H. H. Lewis appeared before the proletarian public and it was through his efforts that the present *Lenin Lives*, by Henry George Weiss, appears.

Weiss had been writing revolutionary and proletarian poetry for many years before this term became current as a distinct concept in poetry. Before there was a Communist press, he wrote for the wobbly press and his poems have appeared in almost every working-class newspaper in the country. He has lived for many years in Arizona, a victim of tuberculosis, but his work has not suffered in loss of vitality because of that. Of the proletarian poets now practicing the art, Weiss may be said to approach more nearly the concept of the "Party poet" than any other. He has something in his work that suggests the immediacy of Demyan Bedny and the informality of Joe Hill. He disdains subtleties, his lines have the clarity of a manifesto by Lenin and breathe such an easy air of familiarity that they could easily become the structure for a mass poetry. He is not lost in the mazes of an "esthetic lag," striving desperately to impart a Communist spirit to the rhythm of a T. S. Eliot. His message is direct, often unliterary and uncouth, and is usually an exhortation to battle with very little of revery in it. Quite often he strikes a forceful note by relying solely on simple contrast as in *Contemporaries*:

Resting by the roadside
an old man
covered with festering sores
hugging to his breast
a bag swollen with money.

Across the road,
swinging a sickle,
a young man in overalls
clearing ground for a grave.

Occasionally relying not even on symbolism or contrast, he achieves considerable force as in *As Men Having a Job to Do*:

Not in anger (though we feel anger),
nor in hatred (though we know hatred),
do we say this; but thoughtfully,
as men who having a job to do,
would do it and be done.

Revolutionary poetry written in conventional rhythm and meter often enough seems naive, sentimental and hackneyed; Weiss, however, does secure a different response, as in *His Grave*:

They say no lettered granite marks
The spot where Wesley Everest lies,
That vandal feet have stomped the ground
Into his wide and staring eyes.

They say the place is all unknown,
That never sad-eyed mourners come
To leave their wreaths of flowers on
That lonely and deserted tomb.

Perhaps—but ah, what matters it!
We say to them who tread him down,
Six feet of earth is not the grave
On which we lay the martyr's crown.

Weiss' poems bear titles that have about them something of proletarian urgency and nearly every poem could be a "Party poem." However, some of the poems in this pamphlet have something so casual about them that they appear uninspired and badly in need of revision. His method of dealing directly with the subject at hand and the disdain with which he views aesthetic subtleties give some of these poems the baldness and uncouth directness of a journalistic report, justifying altogether the current criticism of "leftism" in poetry. On the whole, however, probably more so than any other poet writing directly from and for the proletariat Weiss *belongs* and has in him potentialities for becoming a mass poet.

Leonard Spier, in *You Own the Hills*, continues, in the main, the excellent note struck in his previous pamphlet of poetry *When the Sirens Blow* (also printed by Hagglund). Spier comes closer to grips with the formal elements of poetry. He has more restraint than either H. H. Lewis or Henry George Weiss, a wider imaginative power and a greater precision, but he has not the passion of either of them. Where one will excuse Lewis quite often for his grotesque face-making in a mirror, because of the searing hate and passion and satire that seethe in his lines, in the more formal and cool and precise lines of Spier one is more apt to stumble over a faulty rhythm or badly chosen word. Spier's poem, *Alien? Who Is Alien?*, a really fine revolutionary poem, has about it the solidity and satisfying breadth of a Walt Whitman chant. He is also successful to a lesser degree in *Medals*, *Vigil in Hungary* and in the title poem. When he essays the long

ballad form (a type of poetry strangely absent in proletarian verse) he fails lamentably, both in imagination and technical facility and succeeds only in mawkish sentimentality. His pamphlet is divided into two sections, *You Own the Hills* and *Escapades*, the latter being intended to be in a lighter mood, thus following superficially the practice of some of our better-known poets who dedicate a few slim pages to the class struggle with the air of making a great sacrifice of "art" for the sake of the barricade, but the resemblance is only superficial. For even in lyrics ostensibly dedicated to grass, indian carrots and love, the class struggle breaks into his pattern and vitalizes his lines. In addition to his unquestioned gifts as a

lyric poet, Spier is also performing a valuable service in making available to American readers poetry written by revolutionary Hungarian poets in what seem to be competent translations.

It is difficult to go into detail concerning *Prelude to Dawn*, a very small red pamphlet containing four pages of print. The poem loses its force somewhat because it apparently deals with an episode not generally known to the reading public and despite a fairly well sustained imaginative vigor, occasionally lapses astonishingly into "washing the streets with patriot red" "to the tune of traitor guns" and "in the homes they had built for their children."

JOSEPH KALAR.

plea for government subsidy, we do not find in the Housing Division's Bulletin No. 1 any serious challenge to the forces which, it repeatedly indicates and implies, are effectively obstructing an adequate program of workers' housing.

Quite similar to the above, is Henry Wright's *Rebuilding Urban America*. Mr. Wright is an architect and so his approach to the question is somewhat more technical. His book traces the development of slum and blighted areas in our cities, the chief cause of which, it would seem, is a "lack of planning." In spite of the numerous ground plans and other illustrations and in spite of Mr. Wright's desire to be practical, his conclusions and his program for getting some low rental housing done are singularly vague and unconvincing. The best he can offer us, apparently, is the example of Europe.

In this he is encouraged by Lewis Mumford, who, in the preface to *Rebuilding Urban America* talks of "the promise held out by the new standards of domestic living and the cooperative technique such as those that the more advanced planners in Europe and America have been building up." (Mr. Mumford doubtlessly includes America in his statement only out of courtesy to his friend Mr. Wright.) This argument is quite common today. We find Mrs. Wood and others also making the point. "Europe

Answered Sixty-three Years Ago

THE HOUSING QUESTION, by Frederick Engels. International Publishers. 75c.

SLUMS AND BLIGHTED AREAS IN THE U. S., by Edith Elmer Wood. Bulletin No. 1 Housing Division, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works. Free.

REHOUSING URBAN AMERICA, by Henry Wright. Columbia University Margin Press. \$7.50.

SLUM, by Howard Marshall in collaboration with Miss Avice Trevelyan. William Heinemann, Ltd. \$1.

THE HOUSING PROGRAM OF THE CITY OF VIENNA, by Charles O. Hardy and Robert R. Kuczynski. The Brookings Institution. \$2.

MODERN HOUSING, by Catherine Bauer. Houghton Mifflin. \$5.

this current interest in housing and significantly enough, the solutions which they offer are in all fundamentals similar to those dealt with by Engels over sixty years ago.

In *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States*, Edith Elmer Wood officially presents the liberal position which is also maintained, with proper caution, by Administrator Ickes and the Housing Division of the P.W.A.

Despite the final liberal phrases and the

IN 1872, Frederick Engels wrote a number of newspaper articles, later republished in book form as *The Housing Question*. The present volume is a reprint of the second German edition and is here translated into English for the first time. In the preface to this edition, Engels explains that his special interest in this question was aroused by the need for exposing the "social quackeries" involved in certain schemes which were being brought forward at that time not only as projects for clearing slums and rehousing the workers, but cures for other social ills.

Today in the United States, the housing question is also being raised and in much the same manner. It is raised on the one hand by workers and farmers who are beginning to demand better living conditions including housing. The question is being raised most energetically, however, by other interested groups; for example, the Roosevelt Administration, which needs votes, the builders and manufacturers who need business, the native housing experts and those exiled from Austria and Germany who need jobs and the social reformers who do it for nothing. The books under review reflect



THE HOOCHY-COOCHY GIRLS

Adolph Dehn