

Correspondence

Minimum Budgets

TO THE NEW MASSES:

Somewhere in New York City there is a mother and daughter in distress. Both women, Blanche and Muriel Marquis, complained before a Supreme Court referee that they could not keep body and soul together for less than \$41,800 a year. The Wall Street broker-husband was apparently trying to chisel on alimony by making his family live within twenty or thirty thousand. In court, Mrs. Marquis, a tenant of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel-slums, submitted a minimum budget which I contrast with a "fair" minimum budget estimate by the National Industrial Conference Board for a worker's family of three:

	Mrs. Marquis' Budget	N. I. C. B. Budget for an American worker
Rent	\$9,600	\$306.00
Food	4,800	529.36
Clothes	5,000	178.86
Medical care.....	1,900	30.00
Entertainment	900	4.50
Summer home	3,000	—
Winter in Florida...	2,500	—
Miscellaneous	14,100	346.82
	\$41,800	\$1,395.54

The contrast becomes all the more biting when it is pointed out that the average income of workers has never reached the figure estimated by the N.I.C.B. The unemployed, of course, earn nothing; and those on relief or work projects receive sums which wouldn't keep Mrs. Marquis' dog in comfort.
HARRIET M. WRIGHT.

A Round Table on War

TO THE NEW MASSES:

On the night of Friday, December 13, the Henri Barbusse Memorial Committee will stage an event of vital significance at the Pythian Temple, 135 West 70th Street.

Sir Norman Angell, distinguished recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize and an honorary member of the Presidium of the World Committee Against War and Fascism, will be featured in a public round-table discussion of the subject; "The New Line-Up of Forces for War." Sir Norman will discuss the subject before the audience following his lecture, with leading members of the press, including Charles Angoff, Joseph North, Varian Fry, William F. Dunne, Alfred Bingham and representatives of important newspapers and periodicals, as well as educators, economists, directors of peace organizations and political writers. Dr. Harry F. Ward will serve as chairman.

Sir Norman is of the opinion that the editorial position generally assumed in this country with reference particularly to sanctions misinterprets considerably the true facts. The following letter, quoted in part, addressed by Sir Norman to the Barbusse Committee, is illuminating:

I wish I could have been in New York for the Anti-War Dinner. Had I been able to confer with the American Committee, I would have urged upon them the advisability of lining up with the forces for peace in Britain and France in active support of measures in restraint of Italy—even if the measures are taken by the League of Nations.

The press here has not quite correctly described the line-up of forces in Europe. It is the imperialists in Britain and the fascists in France who wish to restrain the League in its action against Italy.

Sir Norman will expound this position for his audience at the Pythian Temple. The Henri Barbusse

an authority of an issue uppermost in the thought of all opponents of war.

ROGER BALDWIN, Chairman,
Henri Barbusse Memorial Committee.

The Strike at May's

TO THE NEW MASSES:

The strike in the May's Department Store in Brooklyn, entering its fifth week, is agitating the New York Labor movement. Over 100 strikers came out in answer to a strike call when May's began to fire members of Local 1250. The working conditions in May's are absolutely intolerable. We are fighting against the starvation wage of \$10.00 and \$12.00 for a 50 and 60-hour week. This wage is lower than that received by most workers on relief projects. We have been compelled to work on Sundays or suffer the loss of a day's pay, or worse, the loss of our jobs. We have been terrorized and intimidated by the ruthless policy of this employer. The May's strike must be won.

The militancy and courage of the strikers has won the widespread admiration of labor for the struggle we are making. Wholesale arrests, reaching a total of 102 have been made, the "conspiracy to interfere with business" charge made against two union organizers and three strikers have hardened us and we are more determined than ever to win this fight. The threat of a conviction on these false charges must arouse organized labor to come to our defense. If this charge is sustained, it will mean the outlawing of all strikes.

We will win this strike if you give us your support. We appeal to you for assistance. Through your Executive Board, through your membership, through your affiliations we appeal for immediate financial aid.

Send all contributions to Leonard Levy, Chairman of Finance Committee, Department Store Employees Union, Local 1250, 265 West 14th Street, New York City. Tel.: CHelsea 2-9652.

DEPARTMENT STORE EMPLOYEES UNION.
New York City.

Arizona's Chain Gangs

TO THE NEW MASSES:

It seems that Georgia is not alone in maintaining its barbarian chain gang system. The Hearst-con-

trolled Arizona Republic has taken to publicizing Arizona's fascist tactics. The following boast appeared in the November 17 issue which was devoted to Arizona resources. The article was printed as an assurance that tourists visiting Phoenix would not be molested by panhandlers, pickpockets, Communists or other undesirables!

"In Phoenix all prisoners who are physically fit have to work their FULL SENTENCE on the CHAIN GANG! And do the 'Professional Bums' hate THAT? To them work is worse than hangin'!"

I am writing this letter to ask other Arizonians what can be done about it. There is one thing at least that your readers and indeed anyone who believes in freedom and justice can do. And that is to boycott The Arizona Republic and its brother paper The Republic and Gazette.

Pima, Arizona.

HEROLD LILLYWHITE.

"Shoot to Kill"

TO THE NEW MASSES:

You may be interested to know that there is a magazine, National Republic which is circulated in school libraries and which reprints your title page of a July issue of NEW MASSES, "Shoot to Kill." Underneath is the title page of a pamphlet issued by the Civil Liberties Union, both put together in such a manner that the idea is very strikingly conveyed that the article "Shoot to Kill" was a call by you for terror on the west coast—in other words that you advocated "shooting to kill" to your readers.

New York.

A. R.

A Correction

TO THE NEW MASSES:

My review of Isidor Schneider's *From the Kingdom of Necessity* in this week's issue of THE NEW MASSES credits Dreiser as the author of *Dvoe's Pilgrimage*. As this may surprise some people I should like to comment that *Dvoe* should read *Love* and that a line dropped by the proofreader makes the following sense: "Dreiser in *The Genius* and Upton Sinclair in a badly written but curiously powerful novel, *Love's Pilgrimage* developed the personal conflict of a writer's life."

JOSEPHINE HERBSY.

Letters in Brief

A member of the Vermont Marble Strike Committee asks NEW MASSES readers for financial assistance in their fight. There are a thousand families to feed and clothe. The strike has helped give birth to the Vermont Farmer Labor Party and has activated the political "atmosphere from somnolence to militancy." Food, clothes, soap and tobacco should go to Edward Brenard, Danby, Vermont; and checks to Gene Pedersen, Rutland, Vermont.

The League of American Writers announces through its chairman, Waldo Frank, that John Chamberlain of The New York Times; Dale Curran, author of *A House on a Street*; and Raymond Guthrie, author and critic, have just been admitted to membership.

In response to the letter by Tessie Tennelle of the League for Southern Labor, appealing for a typewriter, Charles Eskstat has come forth to offer one.

Dr. William Rado thinks Stephen Alexander's article on Van Gogh is the finest analysis of the

Nine leading educators, representing most of the institutions of higher learning in New York City will give their impressions of the Soviet Union as they saw it during the past year in a meeting at the Washington Irving High School on Monday, December 9. The affair is being sponsored by a committee of students and teachers together with the Friends of the Soviet Union.

Lester Anderson, whose open letter to Consumers Research we published October 15, reports that he has received a post-card from C.R., "bemoaning the delay in getting out their bulletins on account of the strike," and that around the edge of the card was written the following: "There is nothing funnier than a Marxist who believes what he reads in THE NEW MASSES, advising liberal democracy. . . . R your charge of absurdity, haven't you heard of Le Russia's defensive affiliation with imperialist France? Don't hesitate to cancel on C.R.'s account."

The New Film Alliance asks us to state that it urgently needs part time assistants. The secretary is Edward Kern, 110 West 40th Street, telephone Pennsylvania 6-3239.

REVIEW AND COMMENT

Caldwell Sees America

SOME AMERICAN PEOPLE, by Erskine Caldwell. Robert M. McBride & Co. \$2.

IN some respects this collection of travel sketches and jottings can be called the best book Erskine Caldwell has yet done. The whole work continues more or less on one high level and the finish (the Southern tenant-farmer section) gathers weight to close the volume with a mighty wallop aimed flush at the jaw of industrial and agrarian exploitation.

Now let us examine the book more closely. Mr. Caldwell opens his volume with a blast against the average American traveler's method of traveling, giving out an indictment to the effect that the average traveler (who has the means) either speeds like the whirlwind across his fatherland, or merely views the physical sights such as the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls, then goes on to the next sight. There is some truth to this statement, but on the whole the indictment is far-fetched. The American, in the main, is a good sound traveler, when he is not rushing across the continent on business. He takes his time (the only time he does), stops off at tourist camps, is friendly and loquacious, prepares food with the assistance of new-found acquaintances, talks politics and business and, in short, gets to know his fellow American. Sometimes people who have met in Ohio or Pennsylvania will pass and re-pass each other on the road the way to California, renewing their friendships and comparing notes as they go. This is no bad way of traveling by any means.

Mr. Caldwell started out from the West Coast and covered the drought area. He tells us tales picked up at gasoline and hot-dog stands, in itself a makeshift way of getting information. We get the feeling of a population being affected by the drought and yet we do not get the feeling of the drought. There is hardly any description of the land at all, save for a few phrases of its bareness. This reviewer recalls an article he once read about the drought in *The Saturday Evening Post* two years ago which described the topography of the land, the look of the trees with the blown soil hanging in the branches like lichen, the glare in the sky, the effect of the heat, how much top soil was blown away, how far it blew, how the cattle stood it, the reaction of the farmers' families, etc. In short, the drought was depicted as the drought and became a dramatic thing, charged with life and pathos. In Caldwell's book there is none of this. It is true Caldwell admits in his foreword that his volume lays no claim of being an exhaustive study, but nevertheless he is criticized by this reviewer for falling down on

the job. Caldwell had only to throw a stick to hit a state farm-school graduate along the road who, in an hour's time, could have given him all kinds of information and data.

This is not to minimize Caldwell's swell job of reporting. When he comes to Detroit he is on firmer ground. He reports the speed-up in the automobile industry, the spy terror and the accidents with harrowing detail; and it is evident to the reader that Caldwell had had some entree to the facts behind the scenes.

And when he comes to his native South, Caldwell is on home soil indeed. Here we get facts and figures and the blazing rage of a man who not only feels for the people but knows. Caldwell piles up such a case against the program of exploitation of the sharecropper and wage laborer that this reviewer confesses he has never read anything to beat it. *Tobacco Road's* author's unrelenting honesty and fierce clean prose cut through the layer of lies and false reports like a surgeon's knife. The book closes with a charge against the federal government which has, and is, bungling Southern agrarian relief in such a fashion that whole families and communities have been driven to subsist on the roots of the field and, in some cases, on clay.

The grimness of the volume is relieved at times by several deft sketches in the well-known Caldwell manner, namely, "Grandpa in the Bathtub," "A Country That Moves," "A Badland Tale" and other little stories, any one of which is worth more than a bushel's weight of the type of "introspective"

tales turned out by Alvah Bessie, William Saroyan, Whit Burnett and other stooges of *The Story Magazine*-Arch-deaconess Edward J. O'Brien clique.

Erskine Caldwell, to this reviewer, is one of the few young American writers who seems to be definitely advancing and not just standing still or slipping backward. The fact that he is not an inhabitant of New York stands vastly in his favor. In Manhattan most of the writers for years have never set foot beyond a ten-mile radius, except to pay a visit to a writers' colony or to spend a week-end with a friend on a Connecticut "farm." Many of these writers originally come from the South, the Middle West or the Far West, but they have not gone home for years to see how the home folks have been hit. Their writing, consequently, has flattened out and staled and anything they have to say about their birthplaces is gleaned from the files of newspapers or occasional letters from home. A writer, if he is to amount to anything at all, must return to his people again and again for nourishment, even if he hates or despises them. Failing to do this, he is doomed to rootlessness and creative poverty. Literary history is strewn with the corpses of exiles and expatriates whose works, before they expired (from a creative point of view) thinned down to repetitious water or stopped completely. The letters of Turgenev are recommended to the interested reader, Turgenev, that big lonely hulk of a bachelor who couldn't stand Russia but felt castrated every time he left her soil. His talent and his honesty literally forced him to return to Russia every year or two, and it is noteworthy to recall that after almost



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