

Our Readers' Forum

Freezing Out Minority Parties

If a Farmer-Labor Party is to make any genuine headway in this country, it will first have to overcome what amounts to a deliberate conspiracy to keep minor parties off the ballot. Many states make this necessary condition to election victory almost impossible.

Take, for example, the case of North Carolina. The Socialists, thinking to place their ticket on the ballot in 1932, were told that a total of 10,000 signatures would be necessary. One election-board official, since that time appointed to high national office in the judiciary, apologized for the high requirement by saying, "We hafta do somethin' to keep the Communists off, 'cause they got a nigger on the ticket." But the Socialists were game, and at great expense and time secured the signatures and thereby got their presidential electors on the ballot. Apparently playing for the votes of the liberals in the state, Democratic politicians (among them the chairman of the election board) publicly announced that in the next legislative session there would come into being a new election law that "would treat minority parties more fairly."

And here is what they did. Whereas in 1932 the 10,000 names required had to be merely voters of the state, in the new "fair" election law such signers are required to declare themselves members of the party in question and have to promise to help organize the same. Now since most of North Carolina's Socialists are workers (there were 5,591 Socialist ballots in 1932), very few would dare risk their jobs by thus openly declaring their party affiliation. Obviously, the Communists are even worse off. The effect, therefore, was virtual disfranchisement.

Unless such laws and officials are effectively counteracted, the possibilities for a new anti-reaction party in 1940 are extremely slight. The pot-bellied politicians in the various state capitols will attend to that.

E. E.

From Another Hearst Employee

The article "I Work for Hearst" in this week's issue is very encouraging to other Hearst workers like myself. And I think it is doubly important in the sense that it shows the world that all of us who get our salaries from America's would-be Hitler do not share his stinking reactionary opinions.

I am a reporter on "America's greatest evening newspaper," and I am also a subscriber to NEW MASSES, because I like to read the truth at least once a week.

More power to NEW MASSES and let there be more "I Work for Hearst" articles exposing this louse for what he is and what he hopes to be.

A JOURNAL REPORTER.

Terrorizing Citrus Workers

Down here in sunny California the dark clouds of fascism are gathering rapidly and ominously. Vigilantes, Red-baiters, and terror are running rampant. Every large paper is engaging in a hysterical Red-baiting crusade. Recent events are only the logical outcome of such poisonous propaganda.

During the past week the citrus workers have been on strike in Placentia. After the hiring of strike-breakers and the calling out of the police, who used their usual brutal tactics, the climax was reached Friday, July 10.

The 150 strikers were holding a peaceful meeting when a band of vigilantes, armed with tear-gas bombs and clubs, stole upon them, fell upon the dumbfounded workers without warning, smashed jaws and cracked heads, dispersed the group save for one striker left lying on the ground smashed into unconsciousness.

The next morning the yellow press came forth

with headlines praising the "heroism" of the vigilantes—loyal American citizens fighting the Red menace, etc., etc., ad nauseam.

The more enlightened Evening News, published by Manchester Boddy, investigated the case and disclosed the fact that the "heroic" vigilantes were "twenty-eight Los Angeles bums, recruited from streets and beer-halls through a detective agency and paid eight dollars a day by the citrus growers to foment violence and terrorize the striking Mexican pickers."

Henceforth, nothing that happens in this Hearst-Chandler infested area should be cause for surprise. Secret bands and organizations are sprouting up like mushrooms. The notorious Rev. Dr. Martin Luther Thomas, founder and a leader of the Christian American Crusade is preaching his gospel of fear and hate twice a day on the radio. From every quarter the Red scare is being raised.

Perhaps the picture I paint is not a pretty one. But I am frankly pessimistic. The forces of reaction compel me to be so. The vultures of fascism are loose.

ADOLF CHERN.

On Singable Poems

Will you please give me written permission to use the text of "The Slow Ride," by Robert Allison Evans, published in THE NEW MASSES, for a song? It's one of comparatively few left-wing poems which lend themselves well to a simple musical setting. We composers are at our wits' end to find suitable texts. Apparently few poets give any thought to the requirements of music, which is understandable enough—they're not writing for composers. But, though the material of our poets is often magnificently stimulating to the musician, the form seldom lends itself well to setting except in the so-called "art-song," which is dead, so far as the music of the workers' movement is concerned. I wish it were possible to talk to a lot of these poets, to discuss with them how, without great effort on their parts, a lot of their material could be made available not only to the reader, but also to the musical audience. There's something for consideration by the next Writers' Congress.

GEORGE STRONG.

Worth Watching

Why an open hearing on this alleged naval spy? Aren't they usually closed to the public?

I am suggesting this for your editorial comment. I hope you have a reporter on the spot.

J. B.

In Defense of Free Education

Free public higher education in New York City has repeatedly been the object of attacks by small groups who have been willing to reduce taxes at the expense of an enlightened citizenry. Thus far it has withstood the attacks, furnishing ample evidence to the unrepresentative character of these organizations.

The self-appointed citizens' Budget Commission, Inc., which recently proposed that the students at the three city colleges be required to pay \$75 per year for tuition, represents the interests of a small banking and realty clique rather than the interests of the vast majority of the city's taxpayers.

It is significant that the report of the commission did not even consider the ability of the students to pay.

Had the Commission investigated this question, it might have found some embarrassing details. It might have found, for example, that at the City College, about one-seventh of the student body is dependent upon and receives fifteen dollars per month from the federal government's National Youth Administration (N. Y. A. funds are extended to those in the direst need); that this figure represents only the quota allotted to the college; that the number of applications exceeds this quota by 250%.

When so large a proportion of students have to be supplied with money for carfare and lunch, it is quite evident what the imposition of a \$75 tuition fee would mean.

Public higher education is the practical application of the ideal of equality of opportunity; it is one of the earmarks of a true democracy. If the City of New York adopts the plan of the Citizens' Budget Commission, this ideal will become a myth.

The city should be proud of its public colleges—colleges which have attained national eminence by their high scholastic standards.

We call upon the city's true citizens, not its Citizens' Budget Commission, Inc., to oppose the efforts of a minority group to deny deserving young people the right to a college education.

American Student Union
City College Chapter,
SIMON SLANN, Chairman.

A 15-Week Lockout

One of the most heartening signs in the labor world has been the increasing interest shown by, as active participation of, non-labor groups in the everyday struggles of workers for better living conditions. This splendid cooperation has been a mainstay in more than one strike that came to victory.

The forty-five workers who were locked out at Ohrbach's for union activity have been out on the picket line for fifteen weeks. The fine, militant spirit of these young men and women has enlisted the sympathies of scores of organizations. Trade unions have supported them financially and on the picket line; the International Labor Defense lawyers have fought tirelessly to protect their rights in the courtrooms; the League of Women Shoppers has helped in numerous ways. This league has on several occasions sponsored entertainments to raise the much-needed funds to carry on this fight.

It takes not only "guts" to carry on a struggle of the type now going on at Ohrbach's: it takes lots of money. The locked-out workers need money for bail, stationery, carfare, and the thousand and one other necessities, without which they cannot go on. If anyone cares to help, funds should be sent to Department Store Employees Union Local 1250, 52 W. 42nd St., New York City.

FLORENCE JACOBSON,
For the locked-out Ohrbach workers.

Critical Self-Criticism

In comparing the British with the American editions of Mayer's life of Engels, I see that the former has a preface by Mayer himself (although it omits the Introduction by G. D. H. Cole) in which he calls the book "a new biography, which I have written for the English-speaking world."

From this it is clear that Mayer himself is responsible, and not merely his editor, for the character of the book, which he frankly says "leaves the theorist in the background."

Therefore I must withdraw a good deal of what I wrote to you, at least the part tending to exonerate Mayer. The book, of course, is not a "new biography," as comparison with the two-volume original shows. It merely omits the more important parts of the original.

I apologize for my initial outburst and in view of Mayer's own preface agree with the spirit of your objections to the book.

HARRY J. MARKS.

Cambridge, Mass.

[In the July 7 issue of THE NEW MASSES a letter was published from the author of the above in which he made certain criticisms of a review by Isidor Schneider of Gustav Mayer's life of Frederick Engels. The review was published in the issue of June 9.]

REVIEW AND COMMENT

Left-Wing Literature in Britain

LONDON.

WHILE politically we here in England seem to be living in a state of suspended animation and are doing our best to relieve the tenuous atmosphere with such breaths of life as we may draw from across the Channel, culturally at any rate we are in the midst of interesting developments. At last our contemporary literary consciousness seems to be catching up with our contemporary social being. Everywhere our intellectuals are looking Left and it is becoming more and more impossible not to do so and still remain intelligent. In the last two years the output of left-wing writers on politics and general sociological subjects has grown enormously not only in quantity but also in intellectual quality. Further, these writers are becoming more and more impregnated with Marxism. Marxism, indeed, has become all the fashion and in contrast with the ridiculous neglect to which it was subjected until very recently, is receiving an attention that is in some cases embarrassing in its urgency. But this acceleration in the production and Marxization of left-wing political literature is new only in range and extent. What is essentially new and, some would say, of more ultimate importance is the fact that literature, in the strict sense as "fine art," is at last beginning to shake off its tradition of intellectual loafiness and to penetrate the social realities of contemporary life. Aldous Huxley, for example, who hitherto, from the safe retreat of his intellectual abstractions, had poured pitying, cynical scorn on the wretched humanity beneath him has now, in his new book, *Eyeless in Gaza*, taken up arms against inaction as an active, missionary pacifist. The act that his new creed, with its ingenuous belief in the salvation of the world through individual psychological ascetics and external socio-economic arrangements in the light of reason, is hopelessly unrealistic is not as important as the fact that a literary artist of the importance of Mr. Huxley has at last seen clearly the need for social action on the part of the intelligentsia against the forces of reaction.

And Mr. E. M. Forster who, like Huxley, has had his literary inspiration choked by the scene of social chaos around him has, in his recently published *Ainger Harvest*,¹ put on permanent record his magnificent address of last year to the International Congress of Writers at Paris and thereby, together with the whole tenor of this book of reprinted writings, shown definitely where he stands.

But there is more to it than that. Not only have our literary artists begun to grapple with social realities; they are even beginning to become class conscious. We have begun to produce a definitively proletarian literature of our own. In the last two years writers like Bates, Blumenfeld, Heslop, Hanley, etc., have been laying the foundations. But perhaps even more important than individual works is the fact that in the last few months proletarian literature has definitely been brought into the forefront of general critical discussion. So much so that even our bourgeois pundits of literary criticism have begun to sit up and take notice. It was definitely a revolutionary step when no less a paper than the Times Literary Supplement devoted the leading article² of its February 22 issue to a discussion on the "American Writers Congress" and "Proletarian Literature in the U. S." (both published in England by Lawrence). No finer and more prominent advertisement could have been dreamed of. This was followed by a long and important discussion on proletarian literature in the London Mercury (March to May).

In both these discussions the line is taken, in true English fashion, that proletarian literature is a legitimate, indeed—considering the gravely anemic state of present-day bourgeois literature—highly desirable, new form of literary art. Its revolutionary character is deliberately glossed over. The Times Literary Supplement offers up the hope that this new literary phenomenon will not allow its Marxian form to enslave its artistic spirit and tries to reduce its political significance to a minimum. The London Mercury follows suit, and, after welcoming proletarian literature as bringing a much-needed impetus to outworn literary conventions, adds the thought that it may at the same time provide a useful safety valve for social discontent and so act as a social deterrent to political strife.

So much, then, for literary movements. Now for some recent and one forthcoming book.

Ernst Toller's *Letters from Prison* (John Lane) has been hailed on all sides as a distinguished accession to the increasingly important body of prison literature. Many of these letters deal with his plays (some of which, of course, he wrote while in prison) and in these letters, as well as in others, Toller has delivered himself of judgments on the nature and purpose of proletarian literature. In particular he comments on

Masses and Man and the *Machine Wreckers* and underlines the mysticism, or as he would prefer to call it, the "spirituality" of the former and the symbolism of the latter, thus enabling us clearly to see how Toller misconceived his function as a revolutionary writer. The purpose of such a writer is "to create the cultural medium for revolution" (as Waldo Frank has well put it) in terms of "socialist realism." Realism need not be representational; it can grasp the sum and essence of things and yet make that sum and essence recognizable in human terms. Toller, overcome by his intensely personal vision, has failed to resolve it into forms which are realistic without being photographic, imaginative without being mystical. To question the ultimate reality of economic and political facts, to doubt even the reality of personal existence (as he keeps on doing in his literary judgments in these letters) may be all very well for the metaphysical solipsist or the mystical poet, but not for the artist who would "strengthen the proletariat's will for freedom."

But Toller was a politician as well as a dramatist of the proletariat and in these letters he alternates his artistic judgments with political commentary. From some of these, especially in those that illustrate his unscientific attitude to revolutionary action, we are helped to see why the German Revolution of 1918-19 was such a fiasco. But on the other hand, when he is merely observing events and not passing judgment on them, he can be surprisingly good and at times his insight into the future development of Germany is almost uncanny in its prescience. Indeed it is not too much to say that the whole tone and feel of life in the German Republic is more vividly represented in Toller's book of letters than in all the pretentious documentation and research of Herr Heiden's *Hitler*.³ This is a badly written book and makes most uncomfortable reading. The whole thing is done in the modern jazz style with arbitrary chapter headings and innumerable small subsections and so on. The treatment is done in terms of psychological-personal analysis interlarded with snippets of social facts. The book wears a specious appearance of critical judgment but is really a most superficial and unconvincing work. Nowhere is there any real organization of the mass of laboriously accumulated facts, nowhere any unitary interpretation of the man and his background. Time and again the book alternates between a sensational account of Hitler the man and a journalistic record of the movement. We leave the book with a convincing picture of neither.

¹ Reviewed in our July 7, 1936, issue.

² Reprinted in our June 30, 1936, issue.

³ Published in America by Alfred A. Knopf.