

new Masses

JUNE 16, 1936

A Novelist's "Crime"

THE organized terror against the striking cotton choppers in Arkansas is attracting nationwide attention. THE NEW MASSES' special correspondents, Josephine Johnson, Pulitzer Prize novelist, and Joe Jones, painter, went on June 6 to Forrest City, Arkansas, with Caroline Drew, labor organizer. There, they attended the trial of Dave Benson, organizer of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. In the crowded courtroom, the novelist, painter and labor organizer talked with a Negro striker—and were promptly arrested. Sheriff J. M. Campbell explained that they were permitted to speak to anyone they liked—provided they spoke only to court officials or to him. And when the three displayed their press cards from the East St. Louis Journal and THE NEW MASSES, the sheriff said: "We's seen those before; they don't mean nothin' to us."

The visitors were released after a brief session in jail, during which time they were searched, their baggage rifled, their private letters opened and read by the local police officers. We expect to publish Josephine Johnson's article with Joe Jones' illustrations in an early issue.

The Way Out

THE Supreme Court's ruling on New York's minimum-wage law, and President Roosevelt's failure to challenge the Court's usurpation of power, compels those who have held back from active support for a national Farmer-Labor Party seriously to reconsider their stand. The President's readiness to yield before advancing reaction can be traced in no small measure to the gratuitous endorsement he has received from influential trade-union leaders. In the absence of that independent pressure which the labor movement is capable of exercising in its own interests, the President has been left free to retreat at a speed determined only by his anxiety to placate finance capital. The dire consequences in store for labor if the present trend is permitted to continue, become increasingly evident. The Liberty League forces behind the destruc-

tion of minimum-wage legislation are bent on crushing the trade-union movement itself. The Black Legion revelations prove the gravity of the fascist danger.

Efforts of progressive unionism to organize the basic industries can be nullified if this legal and extra-legal assault of Big Business is not halted immediately. Spokesmen for Labor's Non-Partisan League and for the Committee for Industrial Organization have in recent declarations shown themselves to be favorably disposed toward the idea of independent political action. Further delay in making these sympathies effective may prove very costly. Already the groundwork for a national Farmer-Labor Party in 1936 has been prepared.

At the conference held in Chicago last week the proper organizational channels were established for its crea-

tion. The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, aided by a national advisory council, is throwing its full weight behind the movement. Roosevelt's labor supporters may enter into the movement without compromising their pledges of support to the President, ill-advised as these pledges may be. A national Farmer-Labor Party in 1936, counting on the support of the mainstream of the labor movement, could return a bloc of victorious Congressional candidates who would really fight reaction. It would carry into effect the defiance of Supreme Court despotism voiced by the last convention of the American Federation of Labor, by pressing for a constitutional amendment and by taking immediate steps to challenge the right of the Supreme Court to throw out legislation duly enacted by Congress.



FLAG DAY ON THE LOT

Gardner Rea

Let Them Choose!

WE have been going over some old letters from Arthur and Elise Ewert, and have marveled again at the nobility of spirit of this German couple. One letter from Elise Ewert, written in 1927, discusses Floyd Dell's novels; another urges us to read *The Counterfeiter*, "a wonderful novel with a new style"; a third advises us to put more of the passion of the social struggle into the pages of THE NEW MASSES. Arthur was at that time warning the German workers against Hitler: Elise was calling their attention to the autobiography of Mother Jones.

For many months the Ewerts have been tortured in the prisons of the Vargas dictatorship in Brazil. Now Vargas has ordered them deported to Germany. This may add two more lives to the toll already taken by the dictator, whose ferocity in persecuting liberals knows no limits. Victor Barron, young American, has been killed by the Vargas police; Luis Carlos Prestes, idol of the Brazilian people, languishes in jail with 17,000 other progressive men and women, many of them intellectuals. The most recent victims of the Vargas tyranny is Rodolfo Ghioldi, secretary of the Argentine Communist Party and recognized as Latin America's leading Marxist. Ghioldi, visiting Rio de Janeiro, has "mysteriously" disappeared while in police custody.

Arthur and Elise Ewert are scheduled for deportation to Nazi Germany to face the concentration camp, perhaps death. Last week, New York workers and intellectuals demonstrated before the Brazilian consulate and similar protests are being held elsewhere to free Luis Carlos Prestes, Rodolfo Ghioldi and to allow Arthur and Elise Ewert's deportation to a country of their own choice.

"Anti-Hearst Day"

WITH the organization by the American League Against War and Fascism of a Citizens' Committee Against Hearst, the fight against America's union-busting-Red-baiting-war-mongering fascist makes a sturdy advance. Over a hundred trade unions and numerous church, liberal and peace groups are supporting the Committee's announced plans for making July 4 "Anti-Hearst Day." Senator Schwollenbach will deliver a radio speech analyzing the dangers of the Hearst press. Millions of people at the beaches for the holi-

day will be presented with leaflets, pamphlets, speakers and even fireworks denouncing Hearst and urging all anti-fascists, liberals, trade-unionists and everyone opposed to war to boycott Hearst's newspapers and magazines. Other communities inflicted with Hearst publications can support the New York Committee by organizing similar activities for Independence Day.

Robinson's Rage

THE struggle for higher salaries, promotions and improved tenure conditions in New York's municipal colleges has reached an acute stage. Prior to the charge by the City College Alumni Committee that President Frederick B. Robinson is to be whitewashed in the investigation of his fitness for office, Dr. Robinson managed to persuade Tammany-appointed heads of Brooklyn and Hunter colleges to agree with his proposal that the by-laws governing tenure of office be amended. The suggested changes exclude legal protection for a significant number of the staff in all three municipal colleges and the majority of the City College staff. Moreover, allowable grounds for dismissal that will hang over those lucky enough to survive the "purge" threatened for next year, practically destroy tenure as an actuality. Disloyalty to the college, or *any other cause which makes a teacher unfit* will be sufficient reason for dismissal.

These developments certainly justify the opinion of the Teachers Union that the Schappes case has not yet been won. Dr. Robinson has defied City College trustees (who ruled that all teachers on the staff for three years or over could be removed only after a public hearing) by sending a notice of dismissal to Robert J. Rosenthal who has taught chemistry at the college for five years. The only discernible reason for the second dismissal is Rosenthal's eligibility for promotion.

These attacks on the principle of tenure have been carried out under cover of a gag rule passed by a faculty subservient to Robinson. It reads, in part:

Recommendations for appointments, promotions and cessation of contract are not properly matters for public discussions until decision has been reached by the administrative authorities.

Plainly, Robinson and the reactionary forces behind him feel strong enough to ignore not only liberal opinion but also

the expressed wishes of the College trustees. Certainly Robinson counts on the imminent end of the school year to diminish protest against his dictatorial and arbitrary program.

Mid-West Writers Conference

ISOLATION is not the natural condition of the artist. That concept, the product of a society which virtually outlawed all socially-useful activity which could not be exploited for profit, was discredited in the emerging movement for a reconstruction of society. The 1935 Writers Congress in New York which resulted in the League of American Writers, and the American Artists Congress, which constituted itself as a permanent organization, have proved that creative artists are now realistically aware of the social functions of art, and are prepared to assert their participation in the life of society, especially in view of the threatening fascism which would destroy culture.

But America is so large and the urge for unity so intense that national centers in New York cannot fill the need. The Pacific Coast writers are projecting a conference. The Midwest writers are holding their conference this week in Chicago, June 13 and 14. The call has been issued in the name of the following writers: Meridel LeSueur, Jack Conroy, Nelson Algren, H. H. Lewis, Dale Kramer, Jay duVon, William Pillin, J. S. Balch, Richard Wright, Kerker Quinn, Lewis Fall, Clark Mills, Richard Leekley; and a number of organizations.

The conference in Chicago has been called, among other purposes, to end the isolation of Midwest writers who, though they may be neighbors, learn of one another's work through magazines published in eastern centers. It will discuss plans to make this group reach its own geographical audience, to be effective in its own region. It is certain to be one of the most important cultural events of the year.

Steel's Future

PRESIDENT GREEN of the A.F. of L. threatened the Committee for Industrial Organization (C.I.O.) with expulsion. Mike Tighe and Louis Leonard of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers tried to sidetrack the militancy within their own union. The steel corporations warned that they would resist any attempt at organization. Yet progressive

The Communists in France

RAOUL DAMIENS

The following exclusive interview with Maurice Thorez, general secretary of the French Communist Party, is the first to appear in any American publication and was cabled by our correspondent.

Spurred by the electoral victory of the People's Front, the French working class struck spontaneously. The movement rapidly grew until over a million workers, emulating the strikers in the metallurgical industries, demanded economic improvement and employer recognition of their organizations. Workers in industry, transport and commerce occupied factories and shops wherever demands were refused. By combining discipline with firm insistence upon their demands, the strikers prevented the reactionaries

from provoking a state of chaos which might have endangered the Blum government.

When the People's Front government took office, it immediately vindicated the trust placed in it. The government itself brought pressure upon employers' organizations and ended the strike with general wage increases, recognition of the unions (initiating the "closed-shop era") and the granting of collective bargaining.

As we go to press, white-collar employes, heartened by the victory, follow the lead of workers in industry and strike for their demands. The government, through Léon Blum, has promised to enact within the next few weeks legislation granting the forty-hour week and vacations with pay.—THE EDITORS.

PARIS, June 8.

MAURICE THOREZ—miner, farmer, bricklayer, ex-political prisoner—is today, despite his youth, the effective and active leader of the Communist Party of France. You will understand his ability to hold this position when you look at this thirty-six-year-old leader, when you talk to him, when you hear him address meetings or receive the press, when you listen to him debate in the Chamber of Deputies or handle truckmen on strike.

He is at home in every society, among ministers, longshoremen, ambassadors, police officials. He has brains and courage, ardor and suppleness, humor and authority. His vast knowledge of politics, economics and history was not gathered at school but laboriously through study and experience. He is the French Communist Party's diplomat, strategist, organizer and beloved upholder of people's rights. Whenever a delicate job arises, Maurice Thorez is delegated to perform it. Look at his round, pug-nosed, boyish countenance, his twinkling, merry, brown eyes, his simplicity and vitality and you will guess why this youth, a member of the Party from his 'teens, has skyrocketed in a few years from the Secretaryship of the Pas de Calais section to the head of the French Communists.

You will understand his rise better still if you know his labors and achievements which, since 1934, have been more than almost any other one man's. He is the architect of the united action with the Socialist Party which blocked fascism in the recent electoral victory of the People's Front.

When I saw him at a meeting last week I said, "Comrade Thorez, for months now THE NEW MASSES has asked me to interview you, but you have been so pressed with work that I refused to pursue you."

"You are a good fellow to spare me," he answered.

"But now that there is a bit of a let-up," I said, "will you give me an appointment?"

"With pleasure, Comrade."

He received me on Friday, June 5, in his bare, tiny office at Party headquarters between sessions of the Chamber of Deputies. I asked him about the strikes that are now sweeping France, their origin and significance.

"After five years of depression," he began, "after workers have been underpaid and overworked, after unemployment and misery and the arrogance of the bosses, the victory of the People's Front resulted in the outburst of impatience on the part of the working class. Strikes broke out in the most exploited trades and spread to the unemployed. This mass movement, like the People's Front itself, is spontaneous and just as disciplined. The great initial danger in the strike movement was that it might disrupt the popular unity and cause irritation among small shopkeepers, peasants and consumers with their working-class brothers. As a Communist fruit-grower of Gard wired, 'You won't let my cherries rot in the markets, Comrades?' So we whispered to the food handlers, 'No nonsense with babies' milk, with the housewives' market baskets, with the tradesmen's living, with the farmers' produce.' As *L'Humanité* put it, 'everything is not possible at this time.' The workers understood and kept within the broad limits. With the cities' food assured, public sympathy was bound to remain with the strikers."

"What, Comrade Thorez, is the Communist conception of the People's Front?"

"The People's Front is very dear to the Communist Party. Ever since February 9, 1934, we have labored unceasingly, first, to gain united action with the Socialist Party comrades and next, with the Radical Socialists, thus creating a United Front against the fascist menace. As early as the Nantes Congress of the Radical Socialists in October, 1934, we said that it is not true that there

is no immediate alternative except between Doumergue and the setting up of Soviets. There was room at that time for a policy more nearly corresponding to the people's needs. We insisted on a common front of all proletarians at all costs and the reunification of the General Confederation of Labor (trade unions). It was the Communists who proposed the intertwining of the Red and the Tri-colored flags. We wrote the united oath of July 14, 1935. We were not afraid to proclaim that we love our country and therefore would not let the fascist shame sweep over us. This policy did not stem from the Soviet Union; we French Communists assumed full responsibility for it. We naturally rejoiced when Dimitrov at the Eighth Congress of the Communist International upheld us and recommended the French model of the People's Front to other sections everywhere in the world.

"Why did we do this? Because the elections of 1934 showed certain sections of the middle class were being seduced by fascism as they had been before in Germany and Austria. We were ready despite all sacrifices to obviate such a calamity in France."

"Will the People's Front local committee continue in existence?" I wanted to know.

"The Socialists do not agree with us in this policy. They propose to set up merely skeleton political organizations, but the People's Front was never purely a political organization. We asked for, and the people approved, mass units which include not only the voters, but women and youth. The Radical Socialists want no organization at all. Meanwhile, these committees have grown spontaneously in strength and number. The masses are determined to keep alive the organization which saved their liberties. Victory at the polls is only the beginning. A few weeks hence the Paris district will hold its first Congress of People's Front Committees."

"One more question," I said, "and I'll let you alone."

"Thanks," smiled Maurice Thorez, "I will be grateful for that. The Communist deputies are being seated in the Chamber and every man's presence is now necessary."

"How do you like the present government?"

"I will judge by its fruits," he answered. "If it carries out the program of the People's Front steadily and vigorously, if it democratizes the army, the bureaucracy and the judiciary, if it adopts the public-works program and grants amnesty to political prisoners, if it gives farm aid, passes a capital levy and dissolves the fascist leagues, we will like it and give it unstinted, uninterrupted backing."