

of "artistic eccentricity," had long been among the leading architects in the Soviet Union. A man with considerable reputation, his project for the Columbus monument in Haiti aroused interest among artists in America, while his Soviet pavilion in Paris and his Intourist garage in Moscow were praised even by his most intransigent critics.

Had I not been prepared by Stashev's violent reaction to Melnikov's house on Krivoarbat Lane, as well as by the sharp tone of The Pravda articles on Shostakovich, I should have been a little more pained by the virulence of the Young Communist paper. Now I was inclined to accept the criticism, though I was still disturbed by its vituperative manner.

I knew, from experience, that the article in The Komsomolskaia Pravda was only the opening shot. That a barrage in the whole Soviet press would inevitably follow. That all kinds of meetings and conferences would take place. That many architects—constructivists, formalists, eclectics—would be rising in public and with real or pretended fervor would beat their breasts and cry *mea culpa*.

Of course, there was, in a sense, historic justice in all this. The Soviet masses have become awakened. Their tastes have developed. They are refusing to be bamboozled

by names and reputations. They want simple but beautiful and comfortable cities, houses, factories, clubs, theaters, railroad stations. They do not want buildings that look like hammers and sickles. They do not want tricks, boxes and ugly hybrids. I understood all that. And I was ready to be happy over it. But the one thing that kept gnawing in my consciousness was Stashev's cheerfully uttered prophecy.

"Now, Stashev," I turned to my visitor worriedly, "about the many casualties—that sounds pretty sinister to an outsider. Perhaps you don't know it, but the harsh treatment Shostakovich received in The Pravda created a very unfavorable impression abroad. Liberals, some of them warm friends of the Soviet Union, have taken the whole thing rather badly. Here is The Nation, for instance, liberal magazine in America. Well, according to its critic Joseph Krutch, Shostakovich has been 'cast out into outer darkness' and is now 'sitting amid the ruins of his reputation.' You see, they seem to think it was a pretty shabby way of treating an artist. And now you come along gloating over possible casualties. . . ."

Stashev, whom I had scarcely ever heard laughing before, now burst out into an amused chuckle: "That's rich! Casualties!

Gloating!" Then earnestly: "No. Don't worry. There'll be no blood, prisons, no ruin and no darkness. The fellows who deserve it will be criticized—that's all. Some a little more severely, some a little less. Those whose reputations are based on something solid, those who have genuine talent and have something to say, will recover very quickly. Those who have no talent and have nothing to offer, they, let's hope, will be persuaded to go into other work, where they might be of more use to themselves and to society.

"As to Shostakovich, will you write to your Mr. Krutch that he need not shed too many tears? I saw in a paper this morning that Shostakovich has been commissioned by the Maly Operny Theater of Leningrad to compose the music to a libretto about the revolutionary Baltic Fleet. The libretto was written by Osip Brik. The opera is expected to be ready for production some time next year. Not so bad for a fellow who has been cast out into outer darkness!

"There will be many such casualties also in architecture. And Melnikov will be among the first ones. Of one thing you may be certain: from now on he will apply his talent to better use than building stairways that lead nowhere."

Communist Street Speaker

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER

Again looks at his watch; and though less time has passed than his nervous foot has ticked off in his shoe, his impatience holds. He thinks: with every minute gone, go men.

"Where are the comrades? the stand, the literature, the flag? Where are they? This is the time, and time is our resource. He said a true word who said: 'The Communist's ledger is his watch.'

A half hour lost will lose the night. The listless lateness soon will quiet this corner; our voices will clot on silence. The swallowing wind will leap for our voices."

He scans the passersby.

The anxiety, the love in his straining eyes holds them a moment;

then they go. And he sees where they go—their faces in the cinemas,

melted in film, steeped to the inner brain in painted fog; in the dance halls shaken to the most narcotic nerve; stumbling in saloons, in the alcohol chains welded on their legs.

"Stop them! Stop them!" his mind cries. "Come, Comrades! This is the hour!

This is the workers' hour! The brief strength they took in with their meal;

the brief peace they have before the workday cramp returns, before their hour of sleep signs in their weary yawn."

And just as he has pulled the watch again, the metal hot on his palm, he sees them. The comrade with the stand uncramps its limbs and sets it up; the comrade with the literature

opens her stuffed briefcase; the comrade with the flag

ties it to the platform; this smiling girl has phoned the police and smiles with the memory of the precinct captain's fret.

He climbs the stand, grips the thin rail like a rein, feels for the loosened board and fits his foot across as in a stirrup;

and like one mounted and commanding men, summons the passersby,

"Fellow Workers!" And they stop; they gather, they stand before him,

sneerers and enemies, along with the tired, the trusting, the bitter,

the curious, the lost, the hopeful, the indignant. A warmth runs from him through them. The light of his mind is not glassed in

like a lecturing savant's, turned on and off by semesters.

It is an open fire; he flames with gestures; his voice gives heat. A heckler hisses; his phrase sputters out as if spat into a fireplace.

When the speaker ends, the applause is like a crackling under the glowing faces whom his fire has kindled. When they scatter,

their faces are still alight, a spark on each eyeball.

The handclasps give a pressure like a pledge.

A comrade, saying,

"Good speech, comrade; here's a proof," brings forward a recruit,

introduces him to the speaker, pulls from his pocket, proudly, the signed card, shows it. The recruit, the speaker smile, the look of comradeship between them.

Our Readers' Forum

Protest at Once! SMASH THE SEDITION BILLS!

The Tydings-McCormack bill would make it a crime to criticize militarism; the Russell-Kramer bill would prevent anyone from expressing any opinion distasteful to America's fascists. Help smash these sedition bills. Send your protests to THE NEW MASSES and we will forward them to Washington.

"Chain Gangs in Palestine"

Pity the poor writer! He publishes an article in a magazine, and immediately he is the target of letters from readers who demand that he answer all sorts of questions not connected with his article at all.

In "Chain Gangs in Palestine" I set myself the task of describing the brutality with which British imperialism punishes political prisoners in Palestine. I also described the strike against intolerable and unjust conditions by the political prisoners, which was part of the same subject, and how the leaders of the Histadruth, through their official organ, *Davar*, betrayed that strike.

Now writes "D. M." of New York City to "take issue" with me on my "treatment of the Jewish question." He (or she) urges support of the Jewish aspirations for a national homeland, and says that even Lenin and Stalin favored such a project, as witness Biro-Bidjan! D. M. urges united action between radical and Zionist in the struggle against Fascism and anti-Semitism and imperialism, "both here and in Palestine." Now, my article did not urge a divided front, did not attack "Jewish aspirations for a national homeland"; and did not even offer any kind of "contributions to the solution of the main problems" of Jews, "constructive" or destructive. That was not its purpose, and I feel no obligation to answer D. M.'s letter on that score, any more than if D. M. had scolded me for not properly appreciating the poetry of Bialik.

Next comes A. Kirson of Roselle, N. J., who says I deserve "the gratitude of millions of radicals and liberals for exposing the intolerable conditions of the chain gangs in Palestine," but who then attacks me for not mentioning prison conditions in the Soviet Union, where, he assures me, they are even "worse" than those in Palestine. My dear Mr. Kirson, I have never been in the Soviet Union, so how can I write about prison conditions there? I have READ a great deal to the effect that the sanest and most humane prison system in the world exists in the Soviet Union; that the object there is not punishment but the reclamation of the criminal by society; and I know that former depraved criminal elements gladly built the great White Sea canal. But all of that I have only read; the Palestine conditions I have seen.

Manfried Manskopf calls my article "unreliable" and "doubts whether any of the incidents have ever occurred." He produces no disproof of them, however.

S. Shilitz of West New York, N. J., wants to know how he can obtain the issue of *Davar* which openly appealed to the public not to support the political prisoners' strike. The issue was that of

August 6, 1935, and can probably be obtained by writing direct to *Davar* for it, at Jerusalem.

I would enjoy, of course, to enter into controversy with some of the writers of these letters, but certainly there is no necessity to use up space in which to correct D. M. concerning the fundamental difference between the object of the Soviet government in establishing Biro-Bidjan as an autonomous Jewish socialist province, and the object of the Zionist organization in attempting to build a Jewish homeland in Palestine on a capitalist (read exploiting) basis.

In attacking the Histadruth leadership for selling out the prisoners' strike, I no more attacked the workers who belong to it than THE NEW MASSES' attacks against certain reactionary leaders of the A.F. of L. constituted attacks against trade unionists. Palestinian workers, both Jewish and Arab, have done a magnificent job in draining malarial swamps, setting up electrification, building roads, providing a refuge for victims of European fascism, etc. But when British imperialism, playing the old game of divide and rule, is actually aided by Histadruth leaders and their organ, they must be exposed, and if we are misunderstood in doing so, we will patiently explain, again and again.

Last July 22, in the midst of the strike, *Davar* wrote that the Palestine administration "attempted to put the prisoners in prison dress by means of violence. . . . When they refused, they were mercilessly beaten and thrown in solitary confinement. The politicals called a hunger strike in reply."

This clearly shows that *Davar* knew perfectly well what the real issue of the strike was. Why, then, in its later petition to the Government, did it becloud this issue by limiting its appeal to books for the strikers? The Government readily enough saw to it that the prisoners received books—and then it continued to violate their fundamental rights by treating the politicals worse than the most brutal murderers! On August 2, *Davar* declared that "the most painful deprivation is the denial of books and newspapers" and that "since the Government has declared that the prisoners have never been denied them" there is no further excuse for the strike, and therefore no need for workers' support of the strike.

In the same number, touching upon the real issue of the strike, *Davar* declared that it is not interested in the question of whether political prisoners must wear prison clothing and do prison labor or not! And four days later, on August 6, in an article entitled "After the Hunger Strike of the Communist Prisoners," it appealed to the public not to support the strikers and to the Government not to grant their demands. When all of these maneuvers failed to deceive militant workers in Palestine, *Davar* went further and actually called the political prisoners such names as "pogrom makers" and "inciters", and therefore not deserving of "special treatment."

For the benefit of Mr. Manskopf, who, in his letter, attacks the Palestine Communists because "time and time again they provoke the Arabs to

attack the Jews, who have given thousands of them employment," I would like to quote a few lines from the mouth of Ben Gurion, head of the Histadruth and one of the really big shots in the Jewish Agency. Here are his words to the Palestine Jewish Congress as reported in *Haaretz*, No. 3839: "Just as it is unthinkable for a Jew to open a house of prostitution in one of the Jewish villages, so unthinkable must it become for a Jew to employ Arabs. And with full responsibility I say to you, to open a house of prostitution is less of a shame than to give work to Arabs." (my italics.)

ELLIS SAX.

Virginia Peoples Bookshop

Our Peoples Book Shop which will open in Richmond, Virginia, May 1, carrying a full line of labor, liberal and revolutionary books, pamphlets, newspapers and magazines, will be the first of its kind attempted in the South.

Many people here are unable to buy the books which they would like to read; they will be able to read them if we have a rental library.

We ask your readers to help in organizing the South by contributing appropriate books—the type of books now being sold in Workers Book Shops throughout the country—proletarian novels, books on political, economic, and social changes, theoretical works, etc., etc.

PEOPLES BOOK SHOP, 205 North 2nd Street, Richmond Virginia. Thank you.

ALICE BURKE,

For Richmond Sponsoring Committee.

No Tour to Naziland

Your editorial in THE NEW MASSES of April 14 did an excellent job of exposing the reactionary attitude of certain officials of the National Education Association. Unfortunately, however, a number of NEW MASSES readers have received the incorrect impression that Edutavel is offering an educational tour to Germany in connection with the Olympics. I wish to clarify the issue for the benefit of those readers who have written or spoken to me about the matter.

We are not offering such a tour. We merely asked The Journal of the National Education Association whether they would publish an ad for such a tour. Surprisingly enough the management of The Journal of the National Education Association replied that they would publish our advertisement for a German tour if we were offering one.

But we are not offering such a tour and have never intended to do so. I. SOLLINS, Director.

Owen Dodson's Poem

I have just read a poem in the April 14 issue of THE NEW MASSES by Owen Dodson. I enjoyed reading it very much. I shall buy the magazine in order to reread the poem and really get the full pleasure from it.

ANN SUTTON.

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