

Our Readers' Forum

A Contribution for Spain

Enclosed you will find a check for \$20.50, which represents the contribution of the members of the Great Lakes Symphony Orchestra in the city of Cleveland to the Chest for the Spanish People. This is their way of showing their sympathy with the Spanish people in the fight against fascism.

A MUSICIAN.

[Other readers who wish to contribute to the defense of Spanish democracy are urged to send funds to the United Committee for Struggle Against Spanish Fascism, 21 East 17th Street, New York City.]

A Chain-Letter Campaign

If the chain-letter may be used as a tool of Hitism and anti-Semitism, why should it not also an effective instrument in mobilizing and crystallizing public sentiment against the enemies of the people?

I have just sent off ten letters to acquaintances—mostly people living in small towns in upper New York, who would tremble at the word “Red”—in which I pointed out the despotic implications of Landon’s speeches and of his past career, and showed what reactionary elements are backing him. Having urged the support of independent labor candidates everywhere, I stressed the importance of defeating the Landon-Hearst-Liberty League gang. My letters followed a common pattern, with individual adaptations. It took me only about five hours to write them. I concluded, of course, with the suggestion that my correspondent send ten more letters.

Perhaps my suggestion may sound good to other readers of the NEW MASSES. Nothing takes the place of personal contact, of course, but the letter is far more personal in its appeal than the printed editorial; and the very act of copying such a letter several times, with the next link in mind, is a kind of political education. The cost is slight, since it involves nothing but postage. I should like to see our country covered by heartfelt, one-page political letters, a real democratic exchange of opinion. The speed with which such letters would multiply, if given a good start, is a mathematical marvel. A thousand beginners of chains could produce at the fifth remove, assuming only a 50-percent response along the line, no less than *six million*. Enough, I think, to exert heavy pressure on any government.

It behooves us, in this time of crisis and growing strikes, to miss no opportunity to present our way of looking at things to the widest possible sections of the electorate.

PAUL HAINES.

From Warren Billings

I think that in addition to the material contained in the article, “Police Photos Vindicate Mooney,” in the NEW MASSES of August 4, public attention should be called to the legal lawlessness indulged in by the California State Supreme Court, both in their method of conducting this present hearing upon application for a writ of habeas corpus, and in their previous action upon the petition of Warren K. Billings for a recommendation of executive clemency in 1930.

In the former and present instances, their action in designating that hearings should be held before a Referee instead of before the Supreme Court itself, as provided by the Constitution of the State of California, is clearly illegal, and their most recent action in that regard, ordering said Referee to make findings of fact in the matter and return to them recommendations upon which their decision may be based, indicates that their intention, expressed more than a year ago in the Sacramento *Bee* to grant Mooney a full and complete hearing, while at the time disclosing that said intention of granting a hearing was no indication that Mooney was released as a result of said hearing, is a

further demonstration of their willful lawlessness.

In the latter instance, when the matter of the application for executive clemency was presented to them, the Court had the audacity to appoint its incumbent Justices to analogous positions as unofficial fact-finding commissioners, at the same rate of salary paid to them as Justices of the State Supreme Court, and to divest itself of all its authority, even requiring that the Justices remove their caps and gowns and sit at a table on the floor of the Court Room, rather than on the bench, and thus conduct an illegal extra-judicial conclave at which sworn testimony was taken from witnesses, some of whom were “invited” in by armed officers of the law, because the Court as an unofficial commission admittedly had no power to issue process upon which such witnesses could be subpoenaed. This extra-judicial proceeding was boldly conducted without the Petitioner, Warren K. Billings, being present, and when it became desirable to secure the testimony of the Petitioner this startling body of legal giants, having no power to bring Mohammed to the mountain, moved the mountainous Supreme Court of the State of California to the Mohammed in Folsom Prison. Then, as a final gesture of defiance to all conceptions of orderly procedure, these pillars of California’s great system of jurisprudence rehabilitated themselves in their vestments of office, mounted the rostrum of the Supreme Court of the great State of California, and proclaimed to the world their legal decision based upon the illegal, questionable proceedings of this despicable, unofficial fault-finding commission. Not only was this hearing conducted without the presence of the Petitioner, but no evidence in his behalf was permitted to be presented, except such testimony as the commission itself permitted to be presented and elected to hear. In this connection full cognizance should be taken of the minority opinion rendered by Justice Langdon.

WARREN K. BILLINGS.

“Championing” Proletarian Literature

For some years now I’ve heard much talk about what kind of proletarian literature will really reach the masses, etc. In fact, it used to be the main topic at the John Reed Club and at the various meetings of the Greenwich Village coffee-pot Reds. While there was much talk as to whether to be lowbrow or highbrow and if one should “write down” to the masses, nothing much was done about it. Our big left-wing writers still wrote, and still do, for a very limited section of the intelligentsia and were miles away from the masses. All this leads up to the following: recently I picked up the July issue of the *Champion of Youth* and read a story by one Tom Dean called “The Killer Type.” I never heard of Dean before, but he has what it takes to bring left-wing literature to the people. He seems to write something that is a cross between Hemingway and a pulp story, and yet is a story that is packed with social meaning. Of course the *Champion* is meant for young men and women, but this story is the nearest thing I’ve seen to a leftish story with mass appeal. I would suggest that our proletarian writers study it.

H. C. HENDERSON.

Hats Off to Ufer!

Ufer is dead! Long live the Revolution!—He would like that, for in the last years of his life Communism became his life.

To those who did not know Walter Ufer, who died August 3: He was probably the most widely known of all the painters in the famous artist colony of Taos, New Mexico. His name is among the leading artists of America. He was a member of the National Academy of Design. His paintings have received awards in practically all of the important art exhibits.

Walter made the sleepy town of Taos conscious of the world Communism. He never received a petition

—whether for Mooney, Scottsboro, or others—but he immediately hot-footed it all over Taos for signatures. Every appeal for money saw him collecting dimes, quarters, and dollars. For the Gallup miners I think he collected close to \$200, nearly all in small change. His efforts were unceasing in getting subscriptions for the NEW MASSES and the *Daily Worker*. Indicative is this excerpt from the last letter I received from him—two weeks before his death:

“The students of the University are not dumb. One girl just returned *The Coming Struggle for Power*, by John Strachey, and I lent her another. The Hawaiian student has asked for a handful of NEW MASSES, and Bob G— just gave me \$4.50 for a yearly subscription to NEW MASSES. I sold P—, the tailor, the *Daily Worker*. . . .”

I think the best I can do in Ufer’s memory is renew my subscription to NEW MASSES—since he sold me my first. Hats off to Ufer! JEAN WOOLSEY.

From a Letter to Roosevelt

Franklin D. Roosevelt,
President of the United States,
Washington, D. C.
Honored President:

I read with great horror the two articles in the recent issues of the NEW MASSES on massacres of the American Jews. I am not apologizing for addressing myself to the head of my government. This is not a small issue—it involves the Constitution of the United States. When my parents pulled up stakes, fifty years ago, to come to our country where religious liberty was guaranteed, they made great sacrifices. They became loyal citizens, rearing their children in the customs of a free land under the banner of the stars and stripes.

In turn, I reared a family of four children, now adults and high in their respective professional careers. . . . Now I am past fifty, and my children are the parents of children—what Americanism can they teach their children in the face of the recent exposé? . . .

I started out to ask you a question, but digressed in order to make it patent to you why I am addressing my question to you, our honored President. If Mr. True is a 100-percent American and he openly plots pogroms against the Jew and Negro, what ideals are there left for my children to teach their children? Shall it be reprisals? Or is there an inch of ground left for the idealism of my American grandchildren?

Since I come to you in an honest endeavor to find an answer, I trust you will treat this communication with the same respect with which I am sending it to you.

EVE ROBIN.

Share Croppers Plan Strike

The Share Croppers Union decided in its recent convention to call a strike of the cotton pickers this fall. During the past two years the union has been leading strikes of the day laborers and share croppers on the plantations in central Alabama. Almost without exception these strikes have been bitterly attacked by organized mobs of landlords and their thugs. In spite of these attacks the Union has won many concessions and in some places permanent increases in wages from fifty cents to one dollar a day.

During strikes in the past, the strikers have suffered from lack of strike relief, so the convention instructed the Executive Council to raise a \$300,000 strike-relief fund. The union cannot raise such a sum from among the day laborers and share croppers whose yearly income rarely equals \$350.

We need your help. We ask for your moral support in our struggles and especially for your help in building the \$300,000 strike-relief fund for the union in the next few weeks. Funds should be sent in care of the NEW MASSES.

CLYDE L. JOHNSON.
Secretary Treasurer, Share Croppers Union.

REVIEW AND COMMENT

In Memoriam Henri Barbusse Died August 30, 1935

I SAW him first in 1933, in New York. It was a few hours after he had landed. In addition to the strain of the sea voyage he was convalescing from a serious illness. Nevertheless, he went to the meeting arranged for him in Mecca Temple. He entered the hall, noisy with an overflow crowd, brilliant with lights, leaning on two friends. His arms around their shoulders were like the wings of a wounded eagle. The exalted life that burned in his wasted body could be sensed only in the glow of his sunken eyes.

No one was prepared, therefore, for his voice—powerful, passionate and melodious—that penetrated every corner of the hall. His beautiful long hands delivered an oration of their own. Rarely had human speech been so profoundly affecting. Weary and ill as he was, he left the platform only to go to another. He spoke with the same passion and power to a second meeting in another hall, hired to accommodate the overflow.

With these meetings the American League Against War and Fascism initiated its history-making activities.

When I met him last year, in Paris, Barbusse recalled with affection the ardent reception given him by workers in New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and elsewhere.

A year has passed since his death. Not since the funeral of Victor Hugo had France accorded to a writer so spontaneous a tribute of national mourning. The tributes of another nation, the Soviet Union, followed his hearse in the vast procession. The tributes of the world's working classes made a mound over his grave.

Henri Barbusse was born in May 1874 in Asnières, an industrial city near Paris. His father was a writer, his mother a woman descended from English farmers. He lost her at the age of three and grew up a delicate, reserved, impressionable, book-addicted child. His scholastic career was brilliant. In high school he won attention for his essays and poems. He was a prize winner all through his schooling, and was an honor student at the university.

Barbusse turned twenty during the period when Zola was the outstanding figure and exerted a strong influence. But there were many other influences in French culture. From abroad came the Messianism of Tolstoy, the fatalism of Ibsen, Strindberg, and Dostoevsky, the mysticism of Kant, Nietzsche, and Sudermann, the symbolism of Verhaeren and Maeterlinck. These mingled with other conflicting currents within France—Hugo, Rostand, Verlaine, Rimbaud. One

thing resulted from this welter of influences, a sense of the universality of culture, of the international brotherhood of the human spirit. Barbusse was its product. His early writings are eclectic. They helped to form the humane spirit that distinguished his writings when he had found a literary way of his own.

His first published work was a volume of poetry, *Pleureuses (Those Sobbing)*. He was twenty-two when it appeared. It made a good impression. It was followed eight years later by a novel, *The Suppliants*, a psychological study of his generation. The first book to found his international reputation was *Inferno*, which was translated into ten languages. It is a study of sexual conflict marked by apparently inconsolable fatalism, but it carried the promise of his literary future in its discerning analyses of social causes. In 1914 he published a book of short stories, *We Others*, which carried on the tendencies glimpsed in *Inferno*, but also fulfilled them. He was at a loss where to turn for a fresh source.

The war came. Barbusse enlisted as a private, though he was offered a commission. The will to serve with the rank and file was characteristic of him. He was wounded three times, and received two citations for valor. *Under Fire* was written in a hospital in 1915. It swept the world and brought twinges of fear to the war makers. It was translated into fifty languages, but it had to go through barrages of suppression. There was a period when it was barred in America.

Lenin read the book in Switzerland. He said of it: "If a French intellectual who never was a socialist thinks of war in such a way, then hundreds of thousands of workers in the trenches hate war and will be ready to rise against it tomorrow."

But while Barbusse had not yet turned to Socialism, he had already worked against war. He had been one of groups of intellectuals who, before the outbreak of war, had desperately tried to stave it off by advocating international arbitration. The failure of these efforts in August 1914 convinced him of the futility of pure pacifism in the attainment of world peace, and after he had himself gone through the hell of war he probed realistically into its causes. This was the theme of *Under Fire* where, in one of the concluding passages, he writes:

Ah! You are right, poor workers of the numberless battles. You who fought this whole great war with your own hands. Whose faces are worn with a world of suffering.

There is nothing behind it but those monstrously interested in the war—financiers, big and small business men safe in their guarded banks or in their protected homes. They live off the war but live in peace during it. Their foreheads are closed to scruple, their faces are hard.

With them are the priests who incite you or lull you to sleep with the morphine of their paradise. Only in order that nothing might change here on earth.

With them too are lawyers, economists, historians, and who knows what not—all those who confuse you with their theories, who perpetrate and proclaim antagonisms between races and nations. While in reality, every modern nation has nothing but abstract and arbitrary geographical boundaries, and none of them is a race but racial amalgam.

In 1917 in the midst of the war he organized the Republican Association of Ex-Service Men in France, which broadened into an international organization against militarism. And immediately after the war Barbusse threw himself into the gigantic task of preventing future wars. In 1918, while at Versailles, the makers of the false "peace" that has bred fascism and war were at work, Barbusse was publishing *Clarté*, a manifesto to humanity. He wrote:

I am thrusting my call simultaneously into all countries, and before all into those against whom France has fought. From now on we don't want to differentiate among people according to their nationalities. The word "foreign" has no more the former superficial connotation. The word "victory" has no more the meaning which French and German chauvinists gave to it. In every land and everywhere in the world there are only two kinds of strangers, and two kinds of enemies set against each other: the exploiters and the exploited.

But he did not limit his action to writing. He organized "Clarté" groups in many countries of the world. It was an attempt to develop the vague, unorganized, bourgeois good will and idealism into a movement capable of serving the drive to world peace of a revolutionary economic theory. The activities bore some fruit, but not enough. When Barbusse withdrew to enter other work, the Clarté groups disintegrated.

Interest in Communism now began to preoccupy him. In 1920 he had written two books addressed to intellectuals, which dealt sympathetically with Communism. He wrote in one of them:

Communism is a practical conception and strategy in the midst of economic conditions peculiar to a present-day society; it is an eternal truth with no contradictions to reason or conscience. If one examines it in a frank and objective way, one will discover that all justified needs for the liberation of the human race find in it not only a natural place but a real vital as a part of a whole.

He joined the Communist Party in 1921. Even to the most chauvinist audiences said with challenging pride, "I have