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Notes on the Cultural Front

By Michael Gold

THIS YEAR I crossed the continent in an automobile. I talked to California longshoremen and fruit-pickers, to Wyoming oil workers and Pennsylvania miners, to waiters, gas-station attendants, and little shopkeepers.

Roosevelt is their symbol of the new, and the C.I.O. stirs them as Columbus and his subjective geography must have affected the Spanish court. The spirit is: we don't know exactly where we're going, but we must be on our way. When the people sleep, it is as if the sun were not shining; pessimism and cynicism darken the mind. But now this American people is in motion, as never since the Civil War. It is possible to breathe again. Destiny and hope hover over the great continent.

NEW YORK, too, had felt the spirit that walks America. Renewing old friendships here in the unions of the garment workers, the food workers, the waterfront workers, and those of other trades, I found a remarkable change. The whole struggle has debouched on a new and higher plane. Communist trade unionists, a few years ago still affected by the sectarianism of any unpopular minority, have learned the difficult art of the united front. Now they think and act like labor statesmen, instead of isolated soap-boxers. They have acquired a sense of power and responsibility, and a deep-rooted importance in the very heart of the class-strategy. The recent New York elections, in which the Labor Party emerged as a national force, and in which the Communist Party first made itself felt as an effective political group, demonstrated this great change abundantly. Yes, the nation is on the march.

It is true that fascism has become bolder all over the world. It is on the offensive, as all gamblers down to their last chips must be. The democracies seem weak and divided. An international class war is in the making, and the Fifth Columns are busily preparing it in every nation, betraying their own people in the process.

Gulliver can always sweep off the feverish midgits of fascist capitalism by merely stirring his limbs in one mighty coördinated gesture.

The people's front is Gulliver's first sortie. Experi-

mental and clumsy, it has already checked fascism in Spain and France and put a spine into the Chinese resistance to fascism. England has been the weakest link in the chain of democracies, but a people's front is slowly emerging there too, against all the sabotage of the sordid labor Tories.

And now, by some powerful working of the instinct of self-preservation, we behold the American masses groping their own way toward a people's front—for if these C.I.O. and labor-party movements mean anything in the international scene, it is just that.

So is it not a great hour in American history, a time for confidence, for optimism and heightened action, a time to sink all petty partisan quarrels into a vast united effort? It seems so to millions of Americans; this is the mood of the country, I believe. In New York, however, it appears there is also a group of mourners. They think the country is going to hell, and it is all the fault of the emerging people's front. No, I am not talking about the Wall Street section of Franco's international; I am referring to the Trotskyfied intellectuals.

THEY ARE a small band, working in a small milieu, but what energy, what remarkable ingenuity and persistence they display! Some of them called themselves Communists two or three years ago; but they were rather faint-hearted then, passive fellow-travelers with little passion. Now they overflow with enthusiasm against the people's front, against the Communist Party, against the Soviet Union, against loyalist Spain, and China, and proletarian literature, the labor party, the C.I.O., virtually the whole of Gulliver, the awakening people.

They fill the intellectual and literary journals of the bourgeoisie with their hymns of hate. A few years ago they seriously questioned whether the creative writer would not be injured if he entered the political arena and allowed the working class to lay demands on him. This was when they were "Communists"; now, when they are Trotskyites, they are intensely political, and cannot write a line of poetry or a short fiction sketch without allowing their political feelings to overcome them, and to distort their talents.

It is all strange, until one regards it also as a psycho-

logical, as well as a political, phenomenon. In most people, love and solidarity are the passions that drive them to action; in others, the malice and hate of warped personality can be as strong a motivating force. Shakespeare knew this, and his Iago, a genius of malice, is certainly shrewder, more active and inspired than the noble Othello.

Intellectuals are peculiarly susceptible to Trotskyism, a nay-saying trend. The intellectual under capitalism is not a full man, since capitalism has little use for a culture that brings no immediate dollar-profit. The "intellectual" is rather a stepchild at the capitalist feast. The great and small fiction of the western intellectuals during the latter part of the nineteenth century and up to the present is permeated with the bitter poison of frustration, and the malice and pessimism that accompany frustration. Suspicion of life reached a point among the western intellectuals where, as Nietzsche pointed out, it became a form of biological inferiority.

This suspicion of life, so organic with the intellectuals, has made them the peculiar prey of Trotskyism, which at present denies the whole current movement of the people's history.

Trotskyism has no mass following. It finds its only strength in this isolated world of those intellectuals who, with the frustrate, negative psychology capitalism has implanted in them, were never really at home in the Communist working-class movement. The workers, however oppressed under capitalism, still knew themselves vital to the functioning of capitalism. Every strike was a demonstration of this. If they did not work, the wheels of society would stop. But intellectuals never knew this class feeling of being functionally important enough to be dangerous.

So those intellectuals, who had numberless reservations when they were fellow-travelers in "communism," now have no reservations in Trotskyism. Trotskyism is merely an extension of their previous distrust of the positive working-class philosophy and reaction to life. Now they are at home again with Iago.

We can, therefore, discard all the new "Marxist" jargon these people have learned in the past five years and pierce to the spiritual and psychological core of their new-found energy. It is the simple malice of the Joycean intellectual, hating life. Iago has found a new mask to assume in a new situation.

I CAN REMEMBER these same people only a decade ago. It was Christmas Eve in the harem, and all the eunuchs were there. Santa Claus asked them what they wanted in their stockings, and they shouted—but you know the answer.

The ivory tower, once a hermit's refuge and revolt against a vulgar, commercialized world, had become vulgarized into a bedroom. The eunuchs pranced and frisked merrily; sex, sex, sex (God knows some of them needed it badly) was the chief preoccupation of these intellectuals; the Coolidge boom was on; and James Branch Cabell, an aristocratic panderer from Virginia, told them "naughty" stories. He was their chief "artist," as Mencken was their "critic," for ten futile years!

Bah! It was a sordid and contemptible time, and I want to spit whenever I think of it. In that period of

the triumphant *nouveaux riches*, when even stock-brokers went in for literature, because literature meant "feelthy pectures," only a handful of us remained loyal to the old-fashioned doctrine that literature was more than an aphrodisiac or entertainment.

We were isolated; and perhaps we ranted a little, and sneered, and made mistakes. We must have seemed as one-ideaed as hairy Jeremiahs to those fat revelers at the Coolidge banquet into whose ears we yelled: "Your prosperity is a fraud! You have forgotten the American people! Your literature is no more representative of American life than a French *capote*! To hell with you fakers, wait till your stock market crashes!"

Yes, I was one of the Jeremiahs, and I remember that once that most unfortunate and charming man of talent, Clarence Day, said to me from his "mattress-grave," "You fellows must be awfully lonesome." I answered, "It would be a lot more lonesome among the liars."

I have no apologies to offer snooty young "proletarian" critics who, like Dr. Dryasdust, read the past without imagination and tell us now our manners were bad, and our æsthetics faulty. They didn't happen to be there. They are living in a time when proletarian literature has become important enough for Thomas Lamont's *Saturday Review of Literature* to "demolish" week after week.

Then we were not noticed at all—we were jokes and freaks. If I hadn't read Marx and Lenin, and learned some economics, and learned to trust the people, I might have felt like a freak, perhaps. But I knew enough to know that the fashions of intellectuals are only froth on a mighty wave, and that the real ocean of reality is where the people earn their daily bread.

Well, the stock market did crash, and the "literary" criticism of the "political" Jeremiahs in literature proved correct; the ensuing depression swept away all the gilded, phrase-mongering, bedroom heroics of the Menckens and the Cabells, all that seasonal fashion.

The market quotations went down, and proletarian literature went up. Unemployment brought thousands of intellectuals into our ranks. Overnight, almost like Byron, the concept of "proletarian literature" became famous. Even the dizziest Cabellists stopped contemplating their you-know-what, and turned their eyes outward, on the class struggle. Hunger came through the door, and Eros scrambled through the window. It was a real "boom."

But some of the old guard, like Mencken, austere and unmoved by the cry of twenty million jobless Americans, cast a fishy gaze on this novel sight. "This is just a new bandwagon," Mencken sneered in the *Saturday Review*, "a new seasonal fashion among the intellectuals."

The stern old Baltimore Babbitt was partly right. A swarm of piffing paste-pots, dilettantes, cynics, frustrates, and bourgeois Iagos were among us. For a time they threatened to swamp even us with their alien ideology, their bourgeois zeal to distort Marx and to direct the working class. But in the end, they could not "adapt"; they were only Menckens at heart, after all; old Father Babbitt had shrewdly estimated his own children.

Then, the class struggle sharpened. At the first critical moment, a large group of the "converts" began deserting the proletarian "bandwagon" in a scramble back to their native own. I must confess I was never alarmed. I believe evacuation of the bowels is necessary to a healthy body. This is a purge of unhealthy stuff without any effort on our part.

Yes, they had their fling at "revolution," and they hated it. But they learned something in the process; how to fight with new and more skilled weapons the Communism they had previously feared and distrusted. Now in the name of Marx himself they fight the Marxists; in the name of the revolution, they sabotage the revolution; in the name of the people, they try to confuse, slander, and destroy the people's front. They call themselves "Communists," and the chief enemy they seek to destroy in every land is the Communist Party.

THE PROCESS is becoming clearer every day on the political front. Here is a little incident, one of many:

The other day I attended a Communist mass meeting at Madison Square Garden to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Russian revolution.

In the rain, on all the streets around the great hall, groups of earnest young men paraded with signs. They were Catholic students from nearby seminaries and col-

leges. Their fascist elders had sent them forth to battle for God and the Liberty League. Their signs pleaded with New Yorkers to boycott the Communist meeting. They handed out various leaflets. The one reproduced on this page is typical.

There it is in a nutshell. Franco's chief supporters in New York employ Max Eastman, Eugene Lyons, and Emma Goldman as their final argument against the first workers' state. This has become the function of Trotskyism in the present period. Even when an honest man falls into this peculiar camp, innocent, perhaps, and pure in heart as those young Catholic students, he cannot avoid finishing in the camp of the enemy. The Madison Square incident is being repeated a hundred times every day in every land, including Spain; but the Trotskyites see no shame in being used in this manner. They even go on calling themselves "Communists," for it is as "disillusioned Communists" that they are chiefly valuable to the capitalist press.

The whole Dostoyevskian story of the degeneration of these people was told by themselves in the Moscow trials. In America, these trials have been slandered as frame-ups, as if there were no Soviet justice. But the Bolsheviks educated an illiterate nation, and lifted one-sixth of the world out of ancient poverty and superstition into a new historic stage of evolution. The Soviet system is indivisible, and if Soviet nurseries, libraries, and schools are a sound development, Soviet justice must be as sound, for it comes from the same source as the Soviet cultural renaissance.

The Moscow trials are horrible, but they are horrible only because they reveal the malicious depths of the Iago-Trotskyist soul.

ON THE CULTURAL FRONT in America, the Trotskyites are being used by the bourgeois press in the same manner; as "disillusioned" intellectual witnesses to the alleged narrowness and decay of proletarian culture.

The *Saturday Review of Literature*, which, as you know, is subsidized by Thomas Lamont, has been conducting a veritable campaign against our literature. The *Nation*, as Granville Hicks shows in a documented study in this issue, has been second in the campaign, and from time to time *Scribner's*, *Harper's*, and the slick-paper magazines for the middle class join the refined Red-hunt.

The renegade Trotskyites supply them with their ammunition. When did these magazines ever print an essay by any intellectual who takes a positive position toward the Soviet Union or proletarian culture, even when the intellectual is more distinguished in achievement than a Eugene Lyons or a V. F. Calverton; Romain Rolland, perhaps, or Maxim Gorky. This is obviously not a non-partisan search for truth, but a war on the "Reds."

Why do these magazines need to conduct such a campaign? That, too, is obvious. The depression drove thousands of the American middle class into the left camp, and it has become necessary to bring them back. But tory authors would not be believed; only Trotskyist authors, renegades who have learned the left phraseology, are effective. In Chicago, the head of the Red Squad is a Russian Jew who was once a 1905 revolu-

Why Do We Picket?

Because We are for Americanism and Against Communism

America Stands for:	Russia Stands for:
1) Freedom of religion	1) No religious toleration
2) Freedom of minorities	2) No minority rights
3) Freedom of ballot	3) No party choice
4) Freedom of ownership	4) No property rights
5) Freedom of speech, assembly and press	5) No civil liberties
6) Freedom of the arts.	6) Prostitution of the arts.

"Russian freedom is applesauce" Max Eastman

"In Russia, revenge is being wreaked on the very masses that were to be saved by that cause." Eugene Lyons

"The fundamental characteristic of Russia's Bolshevik psychology is distrust of the masses." Emma Goldman

"Many more have been sent to die in Siberia under Stalin than under the Czar. In fact the Stalin government is the most cruel, the most brutal class government and lower class government the world has ever known." Emma Goldman

"Once more the toiling masses have taken arms and died for equal liberty and once more they have received a more efficient system of class exploitation." Max Eastman

"A Socialism that offers to fill the bellies of its people but retains the privilege of slitting those bellies at will, is reactionary." Eugene Lyons

Printed courtesy of Perdham Ram

A Catholic anti-communist leaflet cites as its authorities three self-confessed "revolutionists."

tionist. He has built his police career on his special knowledge of how the revolutionary movement functions. In our American literary world, similar careers are being made by a group of Trotskyist authors. It is significant that few of them were ever published as freely, or reviewed as cordially, when they wrote on the working-class side. Have they taken such a sudden leap forward in the technique of their art or the clarity of their thought?

Of course not. It is a Red-hunt that is going on, a political battle, and they are valuable to the enemies of communism.

I HAD INTENDED to write some sort of essay that would try to answer all the recent criticisms they have been bringing, and inspiring in others, against proletarian literature. To prepare myself, I read through some of the renegade essays and found that they weren't literary criticism at all, and that it was impossible to answer them except in political terms.

Their arguments always boil down to one basic slander: viz., proletarian literature is dead in America, and it was murdered by the Communist Party which practiced a rigid political dictatorship on it.

The Catholic-fascist circular said: "Russia stands for prostitution of the arts." They learned this from Max Eastman, no doubt, a man who did not scruple to call Maxim Gorky a prostitute and an "artist in uniform." But Eastman's stale thesis has been made the foundation of the whole Trotskyist "line" on proletarian literature in America, I have found.

They have spread this legend of party dictatorship far and wide among the intellectuals. And how can one answer a vague myth? The liars cannot cite a single example of party dictation over literature, or a single extract from the writings of a Communist critic advocating such dictatorship. They have no facts, only a common myth of slander.

In several notable speeches at writers' congresses, Earl Browder, secretary of the Communist Party, made it sufficiently plain that the party policy on literature was one of complete freedom.

There is no fixed "party line" by which works of art can be separated automatically into sheep and goats [said Browder in 1935]. Our work in this field cannot be one of party resolutions giving judgment upon æsthetic questions.

Within the camp of the working class, in struggle against the camp of capitalism, we find our best atmosphere in the free give-and-take of a writers' and critics' democracy, which is controlled only by its audience, the masses of its readers, who constitute the final authority.

We believe that fine literature must arise directly out of life, expressing not only its problems, but, at the same time, all the richness and complexity of detail of life itself. The party wants to help, as we believe it already has to a considerable degree, to bring to writers a great new wealth of material, to open up new worlds to them. Our party interests are not narrow; they are broad enough to encompass the interests of all toiling humanity. We want literature to be as broad.

Is this the edict of a dictator? Is this the language of "politicians" who would "control" literature?

For a few years, accompanying the fiercest moments

of the depression, there was a wave of proletarian literature in this country. Its authors were close to the Communist Party. They found nothing in the Communist Party that hampered their expression, or how were all those novels and poems ever produced?

True, some of the works had a narrowness of theme and some lack of imagination in style. Some were too heavily weighted with the slogans of politics. Might not this have been the fault of the authors, immature experimenters in a new field, rather than the fault of the bogymen, Stalin?

But a galaxy of fine books came out of the movement, along with the lesser work. American literature is permanently richer, I believe, for the advent of such poets and spokesmen of new areas of American life as Jack Conroy, Grace Lumpkin, Fielding Burke, Leane Zugsmith, Erskine Caldwell, Clifford Odets, Albert Maltz, William Rollins, John L. Spivak, Alfred Hayes, Kenneth Fearing, Edwin Rolfe, Isidor Schneider, Langston Hughes, Edwin Seaver, and many others who managed to retain their individual souls under the so-called "dictatorship."

But now the political situation has altered. Stark misery and brutal oppression of the workers marked the period then; now the working class has climbed to a higher stage, and is fighting not only for bread, but for political power. This has been a sudden and revolutionary change, of the sort that can happen only in great historic periods such as ours. The American proletarian writers haven't quite caught up with it; literature needs time to mellow and digest the daily fact. Our American writers, I believe, are experiencing a little of the problem faced by the Russian writers who had to pass from the Civil War into the construction period.

It isn't easy. And it will take a deeper study of working-class life than was demanded in the more primitive period, just as the people's front demands of Communists more integrity and wisdom than ever before. The class struggle is more complex than it was five years ago. This means that a richer and more complex approach will be demanded in our proletarian literature.

So there is a lull, perhaps, while the authors prepare themselves for the new tasks. Meanwhile what has been accomplished is that the work of the proletarian pioneers has already become an influence on the whole national literature. When Hollywood presents plays like *Dead End*, it is unconsciously acknowledging the national victory of literary ideas whose champions ten years ago could be found only in the pages of the *MASSSES*.

But proletarian literature is dead, say the renegades. It was killed by the Communist Party dictators. If it is dead, why fear it so much? Why do they write so many obituaries, why are the bourgeois journals so eager to print over and over those slanderous stale epitaphs?

I SAY AGAIN that we have ended one period and are about to enter another in proletarian literature.

What Mencken did not know, and could never know, is that the bandwagon rush brought us good as well as evil. Thousands and thousands of white-collar workers and professionals were permanently proletarianized

during the worst years of the depression. They will never be the same again. They cannot desert, like the Trotskyist renegades, because they have all their roots in some organization, and in the trade-union movement. These masses of members in the Newspaper Guild, the Lawyers' Guild, and the trade unions of the social workers, architects, and technicians, the teachers, actors, and musicians, authors, and the rest, are new species of "intellectuals." They are dwelling in no ivory tower, but in the real world, where ideas must mirror objective truth.

They are serious, constructive, skilled people, who have learned to think and work in groups. No longer susceptible to the Freudian, bohemian, and phrase-mongering egotism of the previous generation, they aren't Hamlets, or Iagos, or Napoleons—but practical trade unionists. Deep in the American people, their approach to the labor problem is surer and more intimate than that of the preceding generation of white-collars.

Renegades, Red-baiters, Trotskyites, who daily bury the Soviet Union, Spain, China, the people's front, proletarian literature, and what have you in the bourgeois press, have never made any dent on this new generation. These people have had to fight against Red-baiting. The bosses have invariably used it against their own unions. They have been on picket-lines and in jails; they have had to do the things workers do, and

make the same mistakes. Nobody can fool them about the realities.

Out of them, I believe, will come a new wave of proletarian literature, different and more complex than the last, more at home in the working-class world. For every white-collar renegade, there are thousands of these "new people." In the factories, mines, and mills are thousands of other lads whose whole outlook is being shaped by the C.I.O. The future of proletarian literature is in these hands. Labor is on the march. The farmers, professionals, small businessmen are stirring. Several thousand young American Communists and liberals are fighting in Spain. A labor party is being born. The American people are in motion.

Who can doubt that all this new historic experience and collective aspiration will not be expressed in our literature, so that the Communist Party, which plays a great role in this political ferment, will not also inspire with clarity and courage the new generation of writers, as it did the preceding one? Where else can such writers go for a philosophic key to the turmoil they are in? Can they go to the nihilists and saboteurs who deny that anything new has happened, or that the people are awakening? Proletarian literature carved a road despite the Menckens and Cabells and Max Eastmans of yesterday. It will go on widening that road despite the new crop of ivory-tower Iagos, Communist-haters, and naysayers to life.

Back to Work

By Leane Zugsmith

BREAKFAST was special with two eggs for him and Mildred barely able to nibble her toast for watching him. Each time she cleared her throat, he knew it was not because of what she found hard to say but because of what she wanted to avoid saying. With a bread-crust he mopped his plate clean of egg, at the same time keeping a sharp watch on the alarm clock beside him. Then he held out his cup for more coffee and, as she poured from the dented pot, he noticed once more how thin her arms were and how the bones at the base of her throat stood out like a little boy's bones. But she wasn't a little boy—she was a young woman, his wife, who had been faring on anxiety for more than three years. Only it was all over now. He would fatten her up and buy her new clothes and take her places. It was all over now. There would be no more relief jobs. He had handed in his resignation. This morning he would begin—his eyes reverted hastily to the clock—back with a private firm for the first time in over three years. The solemnity of the occasion suddenly caused his hand to shake; some coffee slopped onto the saucer.

Instantly Mildred spoke. "It's so perfectly marvelous, Seth," she said, her voice high and rattling. "I keep thinking, it's like a painter getting his brushes back

and his easel and, oh, you know, everything. Isn't it? Don't you think so?"

"Hey, how do you get that way?" His voice was teasing. "I'm no artist. Nixon, maybe he calls himself an artist; but I'm just an operator, don't you forget it." He grinned. "And a damned good one, don't you forget that, either."

No one could deny that, he thought, no one who had ever done studio work with him. On the relief job, he might not have been so hot, taking censuses, taking everything but pictures. He knew, all right, what she had meant when she talked about getting the brushes back; she meant that he hadn't even had his portable camera to practice with, having had to sell it a couple of years back. And he also knew what she hadn't said but what had really been in her mind. Well, Jesus God, the breaks had been bad, that was all. If they had been good, he might have been running his own studio by now, like Nixon, and signing his name to his photographs. He'd be damned, though, if he would have gone in for the kind of soft-focus work that Nixon had showed him when he decided to give him the job. Not that he couldn't handle a soft-focus lens; he could handle any lens ever produced. And not that he had anything against Nixon; far from it; in fact, it had been