

READERS' FORUM

Nazis and anti-Nazis in Hollywood—An open letter to the son of the Duce

TO THE NEW MASSES:

Your readers will no doubt be interested to learn that two ambulances bound for Spain have started for New York this week. First, however, they are touring the country with literature, speakers, and motion picture appeals by stars. There are one hundred famous Hollywood names signed on the bodies of the ambulances, which will make forty-eight stops along the way, hitting all the small towns.

At the celebration of German Day here, while von Killinger was concluding his speech in Hindenburg Park, an airplane swooped down low over the trees and dropped leaflets attacking the speaker and the Nazis in general, and demanding that German-Americans remember the principles of democracy under which they live in this country. The incident got whole page spreads in the *Daily News* and the *Examiner*.

The Anti-Nazi Committee has arranged for programs to be broadcast over the R.K.O. station here. They have been using the March of Time method with much success. One program which was very effective was a dramatization of von Killinger's life. Another dealt with the Brown network. Next week's will cover the Hindenburg Park meeting. Last year's meeting was much more indiscreet. This year Edgar Hoover attended so that it was all tuned down politically. The program will show German Day before Hitler, a cultural celebration. The picture is easy to conjure up from the remnants of color, and dance, and song in evidence even at the recent corrupt celebrations. Then it will go on to present last year's German Day when Dean Cromwell spoke and the Nazis really laid their cards on the table. Then to this year, with the commentator emphasizing that because of a federal investigation the Nazis stuck to "Americanism." The program will be climaxed by the sound of the airplane and the reading of the leaflet.

Hollywood, Cal.

J. P.

A Scenario for Vittorio Mussolini

DEAR VITTORIO: When you land in democratic New York on September 23, on your poppa's proud liner, the *Rex*, on your way to Hollywood, will you please stop a moment to read this after you first make the fascist salute to Mr. Generoso (sandman-Tammany) Pope, né Papa, and the consular clique, and the Italian colony's fascist intelligentsia? I understand you are going to Hollywood in search of technical aid and themes because your poppa, not content with transforming *la bella Italia* into a tragic circus, also wants to build a big movie industry in Rome. I don't blame him; why import dope, I say, when you can manufacture it at home? But to get back to you—I've got a swell scenario, just what you are probably looking for, so why go all the way to Hollywood and face all those noisy demonstrations which some dirty Jews and bolshevist Wops are going to prepare for you?

Here's the scenario, look. Its purpose will be to reveal the new sensibility of an entire generation—a sensibility which a strong man, like your dad, imposes on a naturally decent youth normally overflowing with human love and warmth. The scenario will describe with a Nietzschean nonchalance the flights made by the Disperata squadron as it soared over Ethiopian villages, bombing and burning, after which the flying fascists return to their camp to play brisco, drink wine, and dance.

We can introduce the hero this way. He is a flyer, a Roman-faced, blackshirt boy who is also a writer. And he is always writing to the sweetheart he left behind in Italy. How's that for love interest? We can have him write this way about his first reconnaissance flight:

"I have never been lucky enough to see a fire. When I see a fire truck dash by, I immediately get on its trail. However, invariably, I am led to the fire house or the charred and wet ruins of a fire that has already been extinguished. Probably some one here was aware of my frustrations and therefore some planes of the Fourteenth Squadron were ordered to effect a bombing in the zone of Adi Abo and to use incendiary bombs exclusively. I do not believe a more important reason existed."

Catch on? That's what the perfidious, bolshevist French call insouciance.

So the hero goes on writing: "Anyway, after loading our tanks and adding more bombs to our fuselage, we undertook the flight on the morning of the twenty-third. Adi Abo is a region near Eritrea. It was feared that a column might be moving up along the caravan road and, therefore, in order to achieve a better visibility, every mountain top, plain, and village had to be burned. We also brought along some regular bombs which we found useful—about fifty brigands tasted our missiles."

Then the hero sort of feels sorry for what he's doing and we have him write: "It was a diverting task with a tragic but beautiful result."

But then we can have him shake off this mood and go on letting him write this way: "At a reasonable distance we began the systematic hurling of the bombs; before they reached earth, they made a large, white, smoke screen, a great flame followed, and the parched grass began to burn."

Then once more his humanitarian, non-fascist sentiment gets the best of him and he writes this way: "I thought of the animals; how they must run!"

This should bring tears to the audience's eyes, thinking of how all those poor Ethiopian animals burned to death in the jungles. You know, Vittorio, a little sentiment never hurts—ask Hollywood. After all, it's all in our fascist hero's work, and he fights and writes on: "On the following day, too, we received orders to repeat the action. We took on another enormous load of incendiary bombs."

But like a good fascist, our hero hates the vulgar machine age, and he writes in this vein: "After the mechanical unloading, we began to hurl them by hand. We threw them with abandon on huge tukuls, ghebi, and then I tried to make a hit with a beautiful four-pound bomb."

You understand his feelings, Vittorio, you must have read Marinetti's essay on the "Beauty of Violence." And how our hero puts this fascist aesthetic into practice! He misses and writes: "It was most diverting: there was a large hut, surrounded by trees which I tried to hit three times. I missed. It was necessary to center the straw roof and I succeeded on my fourth encirclement. The wretched inhabitants who were inside and saw the roof catch fire dashed out and ran as though possessed by the devil. One of them shot at us, but without effect. Thus in two days all of Adi Abo was in flames, and it burned for several days as the fire advanced slowly but inexorably."

Our hero will write the entire scenario in this insipid tone and style of idiotic indifference. Our hero will burn and raze an entire village of men,

women, and children, and he will get excited about the animals. This gives the scenario its elty and its quality of a sure hit, Vittorio. An this way it will reveal the new sensibility I s about. Then we will have our hero make the lowing explanation as to why regular (non-in diary) bombs do not satisfy him: "I get me effects, perhaps because I expected giant explos of the type one sees in American films. (Wh coincidence, Vittorio!) Here the small Ethic huts made of clay and brushwood give little s faction to the bomber."

And he gives this reason for resorting to ir diary bombs: "Incendiary bombs give a great faction; at least one sees fire and smoke. burned the entire zone (about Makale) rather oughly, but there were no more people."

Most of the bombardments which our hero lead will be over villages, market places, etc. cause we will have him explain that in Ethiopi distinction between the civil and military po tion "was quite impossible."

Then imagine the scene wherein we have boast that they killed five thousand Ethio "Closed in a circle of fire, about five thousand opians suffered a bad end. It was hellish; the rose to spectacular heights and the flames until long after the oncoming twilight."

Then the scenario has some colorful camp You know, African moons, desert silence, et hero writes: "Be quiet, be quiet, maybe they us spend Christmas in peace. This is w heard after chow or after the daily game of But we grew used to it. In fact, on the 1 (fortunately there was much 'dancing' that d order came . . ."

And then for variety when our hero is no ing Ethiopians, we can have him hunt ani Eritrea, about which he tells his anxious swe "An unbounded admiration and envy over for those brave devils like Brazza and Liv who on foot and alone marched through ur regions without even a thermos bottle."

Our hero will be a very proud and vai guy, something like your father, Vittorio. H concerned about his beard. He boasts th known throughout the empire."

You see, this picture will demonstrate chology of unconsciousness your dad has end young men of Italy with since 1922. It will i in the grand manner and sort of make peop stand that our hero is absolutely incapab ing anything according to decadent, demo terns. Of course, we won't have him Ascagi maiden—that would get your fat but we can show a lot of Ethiopian gir brassieres and things like that. It ough our textile industry. And then of cours comes home with one lion and a civet cat ries his sweetheart after he kicks her yello be communist suitor down the stairs.

Really, Vittorio, don't you think it v thing? Just think how the pink, parlor home will eat it up, and how the womer only rings for the boys will wish they h much more—for the boys, the fatherlar empire.

Oh! I've forgotten something, Vittorio, know whether I should tell it to you might think I'm a cheap, disgusting pl I got my idea and quotes for the scen book you wrote and published last year romantically entitled *Voli sulle Ambe Ambe*.

You don't mind, do you? Look at stolen from your father.

Yours in empire,

Newark, N. J.

SALVATORE



Aaron Sopher

REVIEW AND COMMENT

Those who quibble, bicker, nag, and deny—Chinese unity—Spanish ballads—The Soviet Arctic and a French novel

COMMUNISM is good news. Once understood, once believed in, it holds out hope to all but capitalism's pampered few. If one accepts the Marxist analysis of history, one believes that the establishment of a classless society is not only possible but inevitable. Without minimizing for a moment the difficulties in the way of the building of socialism, Communists hold that socialism will be achieved the day after the revolution; they are confident that socialism will inaugurate a new era of human development. Communists offer no short cut to Utopia, but are far from despair.

The essential hopefulness of Communism is not a mere theory. The understanding of it that Communism gives does inspire a sense that is capable of changing human nature.

I have seen, among intellectuals, confidence and weakness yield to clarity and strength. I have seen a baffled and desperate laborer transformed into a militant, capable leader of labor. I have seen men and women, working together for their class, and the pettiness and frailty observable in the conduct of each as an individual. There is something miraculous about this; it results simply from an insight that is confirmed by logic and by action.

Some of us have felt that left-wing literature ought to be able both to reflect and to communicate this hopefulness. We have, therefore, rejoiced when such writers as Grace Paley, Jack Conroy, Fielding Burke, Josephine Johnson, Thomas Boyd, Edward Taylor, and others tried to catch the militancy of the class-conscious proletariat. I have regretted that such writers as Erskine Caldwell, and John Dos Passos so frequently failed to communicate even, so far as we could tell, to a warmer mood than the desperation just expressed by such avowedly defeatist writers as Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner. It seemed to us particularly unfortunate in these writers, having apparently lost at one time our kind of confidence, lapsed into old despair.

We kept steadily before us the fact that Communism was good news, some of us called sectarian and have been criticized with prescribing content and treating the writers of the Left. Let us be clear about this. Possibly our criticisms have had useful effects. Novelists may have placed a greater confidence than they felt in the probably, than they could communicate. Slogans have sometimes been substituted for reality, and stereotyped situations for experience. On the other hand, those who dealt in despair have usually lost their integrity and carried conviction. Our critical opponents sometimes seem to

assume that all the more positive writers have been guilty of slogans and stereotypes and that we have a preference for shoddiness and superficiality. I admit neither charge. I do not know that my opinions of the authors I have mentioned have changed in any fundamental respect, and I deny that their novels are in any important way shoddy or superficial. But I will grant that often I have not borne down so heavily as I might have on writing that, in one way or another, I recognized to be bad.

I should like to explain why. If I have tolerated, let us say, the formula of the conversion short story or the formula of the strike novel, it is because I know that there is a dramatic reality in conversion and a powerful story in a strike, and I have hoped that some day the formulas would be transcended. And if I have urged gifted writers to try to see as clearly the hope for the future as they see the causes for despair in the present, it is because I refuse to believe that the central fact in Communism can be without significance for those writers who, in some sense or other, call themselves Communists.

Yet there are certain facts that have to be examined. It is invidious to mention names, but there is no other way to escape vagueness. I think it has to be granted, for example, that Farrell sees all the way round his characters as Newhouse has thus far failed to do. Cantwell is a more competent craftsman than Conroy. Caldwell's people are memorable in a way that, as a rule, Josephine Johnson's aren't. There are passages in Grace Lumpkin's novels and Fielding Burke's that show less than complete mastery, whereas John Dos Passos almost constantly maintains a certain level of artistic excellence. Of course, having said so much, I ought to go on and say whether Josephine Herbst is more impressive when she is affirmative or when she is nostalgic. I ought to discuss the extent to which Farrell, Cantwell, and Dos Passos do try to reflect the militancy of the proletariat, and why they succeed or fail. I ought to talk about Halper, and Rollins, and Roth, and Leane Zugsmith. But perhaps our critical opponents will be satisfied

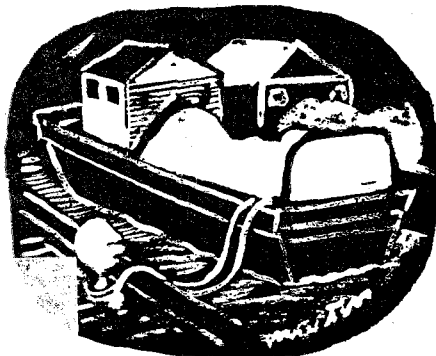
if I say that, among writers on the Left, those who are more militantly affirmative are often guilty of faults from which the more passive and pessimistic writers are generally free.

We are told that this is because the more Communist writers find their creative powers thwarted by the Communist Party line. Earl Browder stated at the first American Writers' Congress that the party had no literary line, and the facts bear him out. It is a matter of record, for example, that certain rather starkly pessimistic writers are members of the party and that certain affirmative writers are not. It is conceivable that one or two writers pumped up a kind of artificial cheerfulness in response to the repeated assertion by myself and others that Communist literature ought to be able to reflect the Communist hope; but it is more likely that even these writers were led astray by their own feelings and not by critical admonitions.

The party-line theory, though convenient for party enemies, does not hold water. What seems, on the other hand, to be true is that it is much harder to express the Communist conviction of the triumph of the working class than it is to communicate a mood of disgust and despair. The explanation partly lies in the readiness of the more intelligent reading public to accept the latter. *Man's Fate*, for example, seemed fine and moving to many readers who could not accept *Days of Wrath*. Many of Farrell's admirers found the end of *Judgment Day* mechanical and unconvincing. Caldwell's "Candy-Man Beechum" was more easily accepted than "Daughter." Certain authors sense this lack of receptivity, and feel themselves incapable of making the effort necessary to overcome it.

A further explanation lies in the literary training of the present generation of Left writers. The average poet or novelist of the Left was brought up either in a bourgeois family or in a proletarian family under bourgeois influence. He knew little from early experience of what is called class-consciousness. His first gesture of intellectual revolt was, in all probability, directed against the complacent assumptions of his parents and their contemporaries: he became a militant pessimist and devoted himself to pointing out the innumerable causes for despair. Later he heard about Marxism and became intellectually convinced of its truth, but he continued to read the pessimistic writers and his first literary experiments were based upon their work. Almost against his will he became part of the pessimistic tradition.

How true this is could not be better illustrated than by *New Letters in America*.* Mr Gregory has not limited himself to L



Charles Martin

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