

# Readers' Forum

## "Let Us Look Up"

TO NEW MASSES: My house is on the side of Telegraph Hill, just under the hill's steep top, and the sun on the garden is good. Even after I had washed the garden dirt from my hands and cooked my supper, I could still feel the sun-heat in my shoulders. As I ate, I talked to my cat curled on the kitchen table beside my plate.

And without warning the house shook; its food-fragrant warmth became a vacuum and terrible; thunder burst in my head; the cat, suddenly gaunt, streaked for the bathroom, hid quivering under the toilet. It was one step for me through the back door and into the garden. And again the house shuddered; the thunder shut off the eardrums; and this time crimson whorls of fire exploded in my face.

I knew, cheek gripped against the wall, that this was the night they were going to set off fireworks from the top of the hill.

But in the first instant, it had not been fireworks; it had been Ethiopia, or China, or Spain.

The next time the house staggered, I walked into my garden, as though brave. I stood with my face upturned as the colored fire shot down into my eyes; with a crash the fire-blossom exploded, spiraled and spread; again it bloomed wide in vermillion; now, blinding white, with offshoots that whirled with a crazy whish.

Farther down the hill you could hear the thrill of the crowd, after each boom. The little Italian girls made a game of saying a long, alto "Ahh-hh-h" as each flower of flame unfurled and faded. The voices of the Chinese children were high, staccato.

The men and women laughed excitedly. You could hear their accents, Italian, Spanish, French, Slavonic. They all live on Telegraph Hill. And you could hear the more cautiously modulated laughter of the people who had come from across town in their cars and the people who were watching from the windows of the big apartment house.

"Ahh-hh-h," chanted the little Italian girls. And I stood, brave, my feet planted squarely on grass that I had weeded with my hands, staring upward unabashed at the blazing bouquet, its blood-buds bursting, catapulting downward, and I knew they would melt into darkness an incredible second before smashing me to pieces on my own earth.

You wouldn't do this in an air-raid, I whispered under the next crash.

In an air-raid you would have seized your shuddering, scratching cat, and fled gibbering from the house, leaving your little pale green willow shoot to be stripped, your pansy bed to be crushed, your house to be stove in, smashing your grandmother's china that she loved and your mother loved and you loved, ripping up your Gauguin print and your Van Gogh, crushing the music out of the Beethoven and Bach of your records, making a bonfire of your Thomas Mann, your James Joyce, your Edna St. Vincent Millay, and as you ran down the street to nowhere, because there would be nowhere to go, your cat would leap screeching from your arms and be trampled to pieces under the terrified feet of others running nowhere.

And this would not matter because the little Italian girls would still be saying, "Ahh-hh-h," long and wailing, for their arms and legs would be torn from their bodies, and the voices of the Chinese children would be high and staccato with pain, and the men's and women's voices, Italian, Spanish, French, Slavonic, would be loud, and some shouting and some laughing—crazy laughter.

And all their dogs and canaries, and newborn litters of kittens, and their shelves of spices in the kitchen and the sausage they were saving for

a festive occasion, and the dresses they were making and the suits they were mending, all these would be shattered to pieces, blown to bits, maimed, burned, reduced to ashes, along with all their dreams of picnics, of music lessons for the little boy, of a raise next month and maybe a car next year, and the dreams of the young of love and marriage, and the dreams of the newly married of children, and the dreams of the old for peace.

And when it was over, over for tonight, over for a few hours anyway, who could go back to his gutted house and think of the trip to the mountains for his mother, the radio for his wife, the linen closet he had promised to build in the bathroom, or the poem he had wanted to write?

The fireworks have finished, and the Chinese children go back to their homes over the stores of their parents, the stores displaying placards addressed "To our American Friends," the placards that plead for a boycott of those who are murdering Chinese children in the home of their ancestors. The Italian children go back to their homes, where some of their fathers hum the strains of *Giovinezza*. Some do not. Some hum other songs behind closed doors. The Spanish children go to their homes, where their mothers and fathers do not know what has become of their own parents in the old country.

The fireworks have finished. The last fierce petals have rushed at the earth. It was Mussolini's son who found war so beautiful, the dropped bomb turning the tight knot of Ethiopians huddled on their homeland into a beautifully opening red flower. But that was war seen from above, looking down. Let us look up, let us look at it from below. Let us look upward at the evil flowers, the perverted blooms with their roots in the sky that grow downward to devour us. And then let us rise and take those roots in our strong hands.

San Francisco.

JEAN WINTHROP.

## Land of the Free

TO NEW MASSES: My first school days began at East Boston about the beginning of the Civil War in 1861. The procedure was like this: After calling the roll the school-mistress would read a chapter from the Bible, although the scholars were not old enough to understand what it was all about. The school would then sing in unison a verse that went something like this:

"I want to be an angel,  
And with the angels stand.  
A crown upon my forehead,  
A harp within my hand."

This was sung very unctuously, with the teacher leading; then after glancing about the room with a toothsome smile, she would ask sweetly, "Do all you little boys and girls love Jesus this morning?" And every little liar—myself included—would pipe up, "Yes'm."

A patriotic song was next in order, the last stanza of which, sung *fortissimo*, was

"Land of the free  
And home of the brave."

After entering grammar school I began to study history and learned that because the Seminole Indians objected to having their lands stolen from them, they became ignorant savages, and their chief, Osceola, a little lower than a "horse thief." According to this history, Capt. Daniel Shays, who led an economic revolt in the Berkshires, must have been a cross between a bushranger and a highwayman. This was the brand of teaching and history to make patriots—used in Civil War times.

Now I would like to call the attention of the readers of *NEW MASSES* to a book entitled *Land of the Free*, by Archibald MacLeish. It consists of nearly one hundred full-page photos, together with a poem by Mr. MacLeish. It is a well known fact that a fine picture of an event or a people taken from life is more convincing than a long windy dissertation of hundreds of words, because the average worker has not the time or the disposition to read a long tiresome article, but a fine photo drives home its point instantly.

I believe that there is a concerted effort to soft-pedal this book, for with its photos and Mr. MacLeish's biting poem it constitutes the most bitter, devastating indictment of the present regime that has ever been published.

"Land of the Free"—the home and breeding place of the slimy political crook. This book proves conclusively what 162 years of capitalism, aided and abetted by all the political crooks, has done to this land of the free and its people. They should be proud of their work. Rockwell Kent is right. Communism is the hope of the world.

Waltham, Mass.

W. R. JOHNSTON.

## Modern Dance

TO NEW MASSES: Blanche Evan's article on the modern dance rightly called for the modern dancer to be concerned with (1) specific thematic materials, (2) a more immediate intelligibility. Correctly, too, she indicated that the modern dance is aware of its remnants of obscurantism, its lack in rapport with the people's audience, that it wants this audience and is consciously moving towards clearer statement and composition built on materials of specific and current significance. However, the extent of this movement, its speed of development away from preoccupation with the introspective psyche towards the more objective social scene was left largely to the imagination—so that a distortion of the actual state of the dance resulted. Also an element of confusion entered as a consequence of sometimes careless formulation, sometimes a discounting of serious developments in the art, and sometimes, as well, an unclear understanding of its esthetic.

Modern dance was born not simply in revolt against the romanticism of Duncan, the eclecticism of St. Denis, etc., but rather definitely grew out of the post-war efforts of the intellectual bourgeoisie towards a separation from the reality of the social scene, escape.

However, modern dance, scarcely ten years old, like any other art, demands an audience, was compelled by the changing tenor of social forces to move out of its reticence and obscurity into a more comprehensible language. The road was not and is still not easy. But love of purity was not its principal difficulty. "Pure dance" went by the boards with the coming of the memorable unemployment marches and the hunger demonstrations. But dance is not a literary art, and does not aim to translate into physical movements its related arts, music, poetry, etc. Body movement is its medium (plus whatever other elements, voice, costume, color, etc., the dancer deems necessary to the specific composition), and body movement as a medium of intellectual expression (dance, not pantomime) is quite a new thing—which should explain, among all else, its small, but rapidly expanding, audience.

Nevertheless, the dancers have made and are making consistent strides in this direction. Contrary to Blanche Evan's remarks, whatever "purity" is left is being discarded rapidly; programmatic notes are more and more in evidence (that sometimes programmatic notes and dance choreography are at variance must be expected and must be laid to specific failure rather than to opportunism), themes are increasingly of a more objective character and socially pointed: Tamiris' *How Long Brethren*, the ten-week-run dances of Negro Songs of Protest, Nadia Chilkovsky's WPA children's tale of proletarian rising, Martha Graham's *Deep Song*, Charles Weidman's *This Passion*.

OWEN BURKE.

# WHERE IS THE CONSCIENCE OF THE WORLD?

**We Are Refugees from Bombings...**  
**3,000,000 of us!**



## Must We Starve, Too?

The American people are answering this question of Spain's women and children by sending them 5,000 tons of food, clothing and medical supplies in September. This life-giving cargo will sail for Government Spain in a ship of mercy chartered and filled by hundreds of thousands of persons working with the Medical Bureau and North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy and many other organizations and trade unions throughout the country.

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# REVIEW AND COMMENT

## The Logic of Our Times

**J**OHAN STRACHEY has been called the most successful "popularizer" of Marxist theory in English. But that description in no way does him justice. For Strachey is a master teacher. He convinces not because he simplifies or vulgarizes but because he translates what he has to say in a manner that becomes both clear and meaningful to the reader. His ability to communicate stems from his own thorough and integrated understanding.

His books, for all their clarity, are not "easy" reading. They demand attentiveness and creative thinking—the willingness to build a structure of thought from the bottom up. The argument that takes form through the pages of Strachey's fluent, flexible, patient prose does not attempt to avoid subtleties. Yet to the reader who participates in the development of Strachey's theses, the conclusions become inevitable. And the knowledge gained is far different from the pseudo-comprehension making for bright conversation that covers up ignorance. Strachey stimulates an appetite for more study, a realization of how much yet remains to be learned.

The purpose of Strachey's latest book (*What Are We to Do? A History of the British and American Labor Movements*, by John Strachey. Random House. \$3.), he tells us in the introduction, is "to discover whether, and if so under what conditions and circumstances, the labor movement may be an instrument of desirable social change." There can be no more important question in this country today: "There is not the slightest danger that we shall not be forced to do something. On the contrary our whole danger is that we shall not have learnt in time what to do and how to do it."

Perhaps the title of Strachey's book is somewhat misleading. He has not written the factual history of the British and American labor movements—references to American experience are, for the most part, passing examples to illustrate the general theme of the book. Instead, Strachey has concerned himself with the ideological development of the labor movement, admittedly restating the studies of Marx and Lenin on the same subject and applying them to the contemporary scene. He seeks to explain the past so that the present becomes clear. For, as Strachey says, "It is only in the study of the past that we can hope to discover what to do now."

The book can profitably be read in conjunction with Allen Hutt's superb *Post-War History of the British Working Class*, with William Z. Foster's *From Bryan to Stalin* (to

which Strachey often refers), and with several recent examinations of the rise and growth of the CIO. With these books as additional background, Strachey's dynamic, Marxian examination of the theoretical premises and the resulting direction of the American and British labor movements becomes complete, and his suggested pattern of action for the immediate future becomes even more convincing.

The labor movement in England failed to fulfill its promises. Not because it did not grow, not because it did not gain political power, but because the ideology underlying the British labor movement and its political party rejected scientific Socialism. It embraced a theory of "gradualism" that foresaw a time when the ruling class would make ever greater concessions to the working class. With the premise that the economic health of capitalism and its capacity for expansion would continue steadily on the upgrade, the "British" or Fabian Socialists confidently waited for the inevitable rise in power of the labor movement. Of course, this rise of working-class power would be slow; as a result, the British Socialists were convinced that it was their task to sell the capitalists the idea of introducing Socialism in easy stages. Taken together with the confusion that building Socialism and the winning of power were in the end one and the same thing, the program of the British Socialists led them into collaboration with the class in power. The working class, in their eyes, must conciliate the capitalists so that the ruling class would not be hostile to Socialism. The owners of the means of production must be won over, by kind words, kind deeds, friendly gestures, to a willingness to embrace a Socialist society. Once the capitalists saw the evil of their ways, they would gradually—oh, so gradually—adopt more and more of Socialism's forms until capitalism withered away.

This notion unfortunately found support

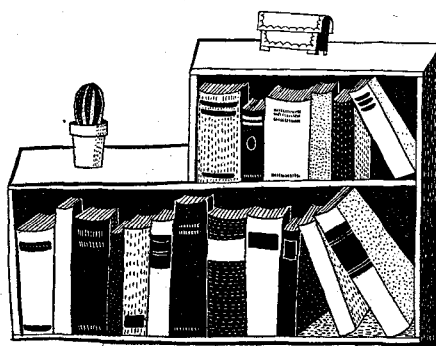
not only among the Fabians but, through them, among a large number of trade-union leaders and, more important still, among the leaders of the British Labor Party. The result was capitulation to the capitalists. By not anticipating capitalist crisis and, once crisis occurred, by refusing to recognize it, the British Labor Party gave way even more abjectly before the retrenchment program of the ruling class. Denial of the class struggle led the Labor Party to cooperate with the capitalists in the attempt to make the workers pay for depression and capitalist decline through unemployment, pay cuts, lowered standard of living, and the weakening of workers' organizations.

One retreat led to another. The resolve of the British Labor Party, once it won office, for its members to be better guardians of the capitalist state than the capitalists themselves disillusioned the workers and their allies. Capitulation to the enemy class led to the desertion by Great Britain of Ethiopia, China, Spain, Austria—and to the present wordy but so far impotent fretting by the Labor Party against Chamberlain's policy of placating the aggressors and of cooperating with the warmaking fascist nations.

Strachey could have illustrated the dangers of collaboration by citing the ineffectualness of the American Federation of Labor. Gompersism was based on a denial of the existence of class antagonisms, and a belief that the interests of the employers and the interests of the workers were identical. In his explanation of why the American unions did not form an independent political party similar to the British Labor Party, Strachey suggests:

The AF of L was simply too weak to have any prospect of success in creating a party of its own. Its leaders saw no prospect of actually getting the protection they needed by means of a labor party.

True enough as far as it goes, but still more significant was the fact that the illusion fostered by Gompers that class antagonisms between owners and workers were nonexistent led the American trade-union movement to the conclusion that the bosses and the unions had the same outlook. And therefore Gompersism contended that, though the ruling class dominated the Democratic and Republican Parties, these parties, nevertheless, could represent the political interests of the workers quite satisfactorily. In addition, the policy of collaboration led the unions to conciliate the employers; Gompers and his aides were convinced that independent political ac-



Tom Funk