

READERS' FORUM

Heil Southbury!

TO THE NEW MASSES:

THIS summer the country was treated to the lively spectacle of some thousands of husky German-Americans uniformed as Nazi "troopers" drilling, goose-stepping, drinking quantities of beer, and "Heiling" lustily in thirty-eight camps of the German-American Bund that sprang up like mushrooms near our cities. A memorable week-end at the largest of these located in the New York metropolitan area, fascists united with their Nazi comrades, and *Wessel Lied*. Black shirts and brown in making loud and invidious comparisons of the boob democracies such as the one they sided in and their own puissant fatherlands, the amazed citizenry of the liberal-democratic good outside the fences and made strange

At this same German-American Bund decided to lease one hundred and seventy-eight acres of Connecticut countryside near Southbury for its largest camp (to be known as Camp von Steuben), it doubtless expected no more than the feeble, unorganized opposition that greeted the establishment of its other camps. The Bund's well-known contempt for the slowness and inefficiency of democratic processes would seem to have been well founded, for to date none of the cities afflicted with these camps had been able to organize public opinion in time to do anything that was too late. But this was the first time that hoary and venerable Yankee infantry, the town meeting of Southbury is a quiet little town of some twelve hundred souls, nestling in the foothills of the Berkshires in western Connecticut. It is a residential and farming community, and has known little excitement since the elm-shaded streets echoed to the tramp of the Central Army feet a hundred and sixty years

when, on a pleasant Sabbath afternoon in November, farmers in the vicinity saw some forty Germans from New York busily engaged in chopping down trees and clearing away in the pleasant Kettletown district, where wealthy New Yorkers have summer residences. They constituted themselves twentieth-century Reveres and spread the news of the invasion throughout the countryside.

The following Wednesday an indignation meeting was held in the nearby South Britain Congregational Church, a meeting which closed with the singing of the *Star-Spangled Banner*. Roughly-aroused citizens then held another at the Southbury Community Hall and organized Outpost No. 1 of the United Americans, filling-station proprietor by the name of Holmes as its first "Lieutenant." This meeting was a dramatic turn when a military-looking man came down the aisle, wheeled, and gave a full-arm Nazi salute. This intrepid Daniel promptly bounced from the lion's den, and Yale sent smiled when he was later identified as but a Harvard M.A. by the name of Walcott. He had done the whole thing on a bet. All this was rather obvious comic relief, but something was brewing. When the Germans returned on Sunday, December 5, commenced chopping down trees, the town con-

stable, backed by several deputies and a warrant from a grand juror, appeared suddenly on the scene and arrested two worthies, by name Gustave Korn of New Rochelle and Richard Koehler of Mount Vernon, for working on Sunday in violation of an old Connecticut blue law. They were promptly arraigned before the local justice of the peace, who had to crawl out from beneath a car on which he was working in his garage to grant them continuances on bail of seventy-five dollars each.

Boiling mad and almost dead broke after raising the bail money, the Nazis went home, and shortly thereafter proclamations and manifestos boomed forth from Hitler's American Führer, Fritz Kuhn of New York. The Bund was misunderstood. It was not against Americans at all, but only against Communists and Jews. Southburyites would love the Bund as soon as they could disabuse their minds of Jewish and Communist propaganda. The program of the Bund was like that of the Boy Scouts. Getting madder and madder, Kuhn threatened to have every citizen of Southbury who lifted his hand on Sunday arrested. He also hinted that the Bund had received a good offer for its land from Father Divine, and might sell if things were not straightened out in short order.

But Southbury was adamant to his threats, and on December 14 a special town meeting adopted a zoning ordinance which placed the Bund property in a "farming and residential" district and prohibited marching, drilling, and military training with or without weapons except by the regular armed forces of the United States. Democracy, at least in New England, had shown that it could act with vigor and dispatch when a crisis arose.

Confused and taken aback by this prompt action, the Nazis retired to Yorkville to lick their wounds and ponder the situation. A Bund camp without marching, drilling, and democracy-baiting is like pretzels without beer.

Their chief mistake, it would seem, is a geographical one. They should have located their camp about ten miles to the east within the city limits of Waterbury, where the city administration, as evidenced by its actions last summer in prohibiting the showing of the motion picture *Spain in Flames* and yet permitting the showing of an Italian fascist film called *Il Duce*, is not unfriendly to totalitarian concepts of government.

With democracy in full retreat across the world, what happened in Southbury, insignificant and humorous as it may seem, is a hopeful sign. Democracy, in this Connecticut town, made several mistakes, most notably in invoking a blue law that must be abhorrent to all lovers of liberty, but at least it is not "like a scared rabbit before a rattlesnake." Farmers are pretty good at handling snakes. There will be no "Heiling" in Yankee Doodle land.

Waterbury, Conn.

ALSON J. SMITH.

Cementing a People's Front

TO THE NEW MASSES:

SUNDAY afternoon, January 8, I was fortunate enough to hear all the last part of the long talk by Juan Marinello in the Stadium La Polar, over CBOX 9.2. To my knowledge there had been no previous announcement that it was to be broadcast. It lasted until 5:30, and I could hear the large crowd cheering. Reports later had from twenty to thirty thousand there. I do not know why he did not draw as large a crowd as the sixty thousand who came to hear Marcelino Domingo, but I have a hunch that many people were afraid of violence in the case of Marinello, whereas they were not afraid in the case of a widely known intellectual, a foreigner.

I was happy to hear of such a large turnout, anyway, for a man as left as Marinello. His speech was mainly a report on the things he had seen in Spain, all good and well done and well applauded, but his last few sentences were especially apt when he turned to Cuba and showed the absolute

necessity of a people's front there. He pulled no punches.

For months we have been hearing mysterious rumors that the Supreme Court was going to declare that Miguel Mariano Gomez had been illegally deprived of the presidency, ruling on his protest against the so-called impeachment. Finally the sordid truth came out—of the justices, only two had dared dismissal by voting for the protest.

The government is showing signs of desperation, by its closing of the democratic Spanish societies, its amnesty to the worst assassins of the Machado regime, and its recent approval of payment of the illegal Chase National Bank bonds, a great steal. Their room for demagogic maneuvering is becoming limited, but probably they will try changing presidents again rather than a coup which I believe is doomed to failure for lack of a mass fascist base. The Plan Trienal may have fooled somebody, but the little noise about it suggests that it will not be pushed. I look for more violence, and more mass protests, an increasingly revolutionary situation impossible to stem because of the successful people's front, which will scare Batista into calling as ineffective a Constituent Assembly as the State Department in Washington can devise. But it will be effective, for it will cement the people's front and teach it how to fight.

Orlando, Fla.

CRISTOBAL DAVIS.

Novels and the Class Struggle

TO THE NEW MASSES:

FIRST I want to congratulate us all on Robert Forsythe's return. He may or may not make his victims howl, but he's as good as a tonic to his fellow-travelers.

Then I'd like to put in a belated word with Mr. Hicks and other left-wing critics. It seems to me they have been too exacting and precise as to what must be included in left-wing fiction. I should think that any story material, skillfully presented on a class-struggle basis, would make a good novel.

Mr. Hicks is still too ascetic when, in a controversy, he mentions Grace Lumpkin as "a good writer." With apologetic reservations, as compared with the literary integrity of Dos Passos. There may be slight faults in *To Make My Bread*—I don't see them—but I think Grace Lumpkin has achieved a classic in this picture of simple admirable people, awakening to injustice and struggling for their rights. There are oversweetnesses in *A Stone Came Rolling*, but also a good story, fascinating, well contrasted characters, and a luminous charm of presentation throughout. These two writers, I think, have done very well at assimilating the "good news" Mr. Hicks proclaims so warmly—and winningly. I don't like to see apologies for them—especially not to Mr. Dos Passos, whose novels I have never been able to read. I found his articles more readable; but as to fiction, to my mind there was always something unvital and predetermined in his cult of ugliness. He could never mention a tomato unless it were a rotting tomato. He could never see "green" unless it were a "venomous green." At least, that's the impression he left with me. And it's my conviction that the inclusion of beauty, as an essential truth in life and art—beauty of sight and feeling—made *All Quiet on the Western Front* the most powerful of the war novels.

In her *Memories of Lenin*, Krupskaya tells about a certain worker in a boot factory:

"We are fined for everything," he said. "Shove a heel on a bit to one side, and bang goes another fine!" Vladimir Ilyich said, laughingly: "Well, if you put a heel on all askew, you deserved to be fined."

A writer must work for skill and effectiveness first of all. So long as it be presented with insight, the extent of the message he embodies in a novel is not a matter for criticism.

Staten Island, N. Y.

CATHERINE BLAKE.

BOOK REVIEWS

Sinclair Lewis's
Stink Bomb

THE PRODIGAL PARENTS, by Sinclair Lewis. Doubleday, Doran & Co. \$2.50.

AMONG the many persons annoyed by Sinclair Lewis, none has a better right to be irritated than the Marxist critic. The Marxist holds that there is a fundamental relationship between content and form. He argues that you cannot say a novel is bad as politics and good as literature, because he believes that the political qualities and the literary qualities are inextricably intermingled. But he insists that the relationship is subtle and only to be stated with a hundred carefully formulated qualifications. And then Sinclair Lewis comes along and illustrates the thesis in its simplest and baldest form.

During the past twenty years Mr. Lewis's political views have varied considerably, sometimes swinging fairly far left and then again fairly far right. If you arrange his books in order of their political astuteness, counting from left to right, they fall in some such order as this: *Babbitt*, *Main Street*, *Arrowsmith*, *It Can't Happen Here*, *Dodsworth*, *Elmer Gantry*, *Ann Vickers*, and *Work of Art*. Now judge the books by other standards—the convincingness of the characters, the verisimilitude of the situations, the vigor and veracity of the dialogue, the distinction of the writing, the little touches of insight—arrange them in order of merit, and see how they fall into very nearly the same pattern.

This is a distressing situation. Here we are, demanding more subtlety in evaluation, insisting that political correctness must not be regarded as synonymous with literary virtue, and here is Mr. Lewis, engaged in exhibiting a very unsubtle parallel. And to add to our dismay, his latest novel, *The Prodigal Parents*, which is by all odds the most reactionary, turns out to be by every standard the worst.

The Prodigal Parents is the story of Frederick William Cornplow, who owns an automobile agency in Sachem Falls, N. Y. Fredk Wm, as Mr. Lewis humorously calls him, and Hazel have two children, and they are a trial! The older, Sara, a Vassar graduate, is snobbish, bossy, and grabbing. (She was christened Sarah, but, as Mr. Lewis—the same Mr. Lewis who was recently castigating authors for their careless misuse of words—puts it, she “decapitated” the name.) The younger, Howard, a student at Truxon, is brainless, spineless, and shiftless. Both Sara and Howard expect their father to support them in luxury and get them out of all their fixes. Howard falls in love with Annabel Staybridge, daughter of Sachem Falls's prime snob, and Mr. Cornplow, who likes Annabel and thinks she is too good for Howard, pro-

ceeds to support them after they are married. But he is beginning to feel a little resentful, and he and Hazel run away for a vacation in the Berkshires. They are traced down, however, by the children, and brought back alive. When Mr. Cornplow continues to indicate his resentment, Sara tricks him into an interview with a psychiatrist. Then Frederick and Hazel flee in earnest, to Europe. This is enough for Sara, who gets married and settles down, but Howard goes completely to pieces. Fred comes back, takes his son on a camping trip, and Makes a Man of him.

If the summary suggests that the novel is both trivial and unconvincing, it may prepare you for what is to come. For the truth is that *The Prodigal Parents* is superlatively and fantastically bad. It is cheaper than *Mantrap*, duller than *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*, more amateurish than *The Trail of the Hawk*. Its badness is grotesque, embarrassing, and not quite credible.

The characterization is thin to the point of invisibility. The reader learns that Howard looks like “a Norse god” and has one silly idea after another, that Sara has a sharp tongue, that Annabel is pretty sweet, and that Hazel, despite her “slavery to possessions,” is a fine pal to Fredk Wm. Mr. Cornplow himself would be considerably more substantial than the other characters except that every time he exhibits what might be regarded as an individual trait, the reader gets him all mixed up

with George F. Babbitt or Myron Weagle or Sam Dodsworth. There are, indeed, whole scenes that stir up recollections of earlier books in the way that bad parodies evoke and at the same time destroy pleasant memories. And the dialogue might have been written by someone with a rather bad ear who had listened inattentively to a slovenly reading of *Arrowsmith* or *Babbitt*.

But the worst is yet to be told. The Cornplow children, at the outset of the novel, have fallen under the influence of a Communist named Eugene Silga. Now Sara and Howard are so completely unreal that one cannot say what they would or would not do. Perhaps the only thing one can state with any confidence they would not do is go through the process of reform that Mr. Lewis assigns to them. But next to that in degree of improbability is their displaying the slightest interest in Communism. Each little scrap of insight into their characters that we gather argues against such a development. The neurotic Sara might just possibly fall in love with Silga and hence accept his political views, but Howard—no, if Mr. Lewis is worrying about the radicalism of the Howard of this generation, he is wasting his time.

This is so obvious, and Mr. Lewis is uninterested in concealing it, that we can only conclude that Eugene Silga was introduced quite simply to serve the author's purposes.

Silga, “a radical agitator,” is “slim and taut.” He steals and he lies. He calls his young converts “cursed sons of aristocrats,” and he has a habit of humming the *Internationale* in emergencies. He talks about “a real honest-to-God dictatorship of the rednecks like me.” And he has “a reckless smile.”

Now perhaps a certain amount can be forgiven Lewis, the anti-Communist agitator. Silga, he says, “wanted power and revenge; he was willing to risk death in the hope of smashing the entire democratic system and winding up with the factory workers dictatorially running the country and himself running the workers. . . . He was neat and quiet-voiced; he smiled affectionately; and he was, to the world of Fred Cornplow—to the world of Franklin and Emerson and Mark Twain, of Willa Cather and William Allen White—as dangerous as a rattlesnake.” A crusader who has taken on, practically single handed, the job of saving the world. Franklin, William Allen White, et al., ought to be permitted an epithet or two.

But it is impossible to forgive Lewis the novelist for the creation of Eugene Silga. After all, Mr. Lewis rode 7382 miles smoking cars, consuming 346 cartons of cigarettes and unknown gallons of highballs, order to learn how realtors talk. He called in a medical expert to help him with *Arro-*

Recently Recommended Books

Two Wars and More to Come, by Herbert L. Matthews. Carrick & Evans. \$2.50.

Contemporary Mexican Artists, by Augustin Velasquez Chavez. Covici-Friede. \$2.75.

Marc Anthony, by Jack Lindsay. Dutton. \$3.75.

Letters from Iceland, by W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice. Random. \$3.

Old Hell, by Emmett Gowen. Modern Age. Cloth, 85c. Paper, 25c.

Madame Curie, by Eve Curie. Translated by Vincent Sheean. Doubleday, Doran. \$3.50.

Six Centuries of Fine Prints, by Carl Zigrosser. Covici-Friede. \$5.

Young Henry of Navarre, by Heinrich Mann. Knopf. \$3.

The Pretender, by Lion Feuchtwanger. Viking. \$2.50.

The Flivver King, by Upton Sinclair. United Automobile Workers of America. Also by the author, Pasadena, Cal. 25c.

Ralph Fox: A Writer in Arms, edited by John Lehmann, T. A. Jackson, and C. Day Lewis. International. \$1.75.

Labor Agitator, The Story of Albert Parsons, by Alan Calmer. International. 35c.

The Civil War in the United States, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. International. \$2.50.

Engels on Capital, translated and edited by Leonard E. Mins. International. \$1.25.