

dressing-room has hot and cold running water and a shower. The artists' dressing-rooms, foyer and buffet, as well as all the studios, are fitted with wireless connecting with the stage, so that every artist can be kept in touch with the progress of the performance and be given his "call."

Main considerations of the designers have been maximum comfort and space, and perfect visibility from every seat. There is a seating capacity of nineteen hundred—and so cleverly has the space been used that no seat is more than ninety feet from the stage. Ventilation is excellent, and the hall and foyer are beautifully and comfortably fitted out. Wide stairways lead to spacious promenades on the projecting roof of the theater. Above the theater hall is a concert and rehearsal hall with seating room for four hundred, and above this are the technical studios.

Engineer Maltsin has designed all the stage machinery which reduces waits between the acts to a minimum, and does all strenuous physical exertion. So roomy and solid is the stage that even horses and lorries can be brought on for mass productions. There is room for eighty musicians in the orchestra.

The Central Red Army Theater is but one of many new theaters provided for the Soviet public for the coming season. Nearing completion also is the new Nemirovich-Danchenko Theater, designed by Architect Popov, which will without doubt be one of Moscow's most beautiful buildings. This new opera theater, semi-circular in shape, is surrounded by an imposing colonnade. Seating capacity is fifteen hundred. All the latest scientific inventions for acoustics are being utilized.

The Stanislavsky Arts Theater is being extensively rebuilt, and the auditorium and stage will be completely transformed.

A new concert hall is now being put up on the Mayakovsky Square in Moscow.

These four Moscow theaters, the first of a series, will next season be an addition to the forty theaters already open in Moscow, and are impatiently awaited by the Moscow public.

Many new theaters are to be opened in other towns in the Soviet Union this year. In Minsk, a new opera house with fifteen hundred seats, designed by Honored Architect Langbart; the Red Theater, with sixteen hundred seats, in Leningrad; an opera house, with eighteen hundred seats, in Ivanov; an opera house, with fifteen hundred seats, in Smolensk; and a theater, with eleven hundred seats, in Kirov.

A theater is also to be opened in Gori, Stalin's birthplace.

All these theaters have been constructed and equipped for the greatest comfort of the spectators and the actors. Most of them have revolving stages. In addition to these theaters, all of which will be opened this year, there are a large number of other theaters now under construction for completion next year, as for example in Novosibirsk, Cheliabinsk, Erivan, Stalinabad, Alma-ata, Stalino, Frunze, and so on.—ART AND CULTURE IN THE SOVIET UNION, Moscow, August 1938.

# Readers' Forum

## Arnold Reid

LAST week the news reached NEW MASSES office that Arnold Reid had been killed fighting in Spain. Reid was a member of the editorial staff of NEW MASSES for nearly a year, in 1936, during the editorship of Joseph Freeman. We asked Mr. Freeman to write about Arnold Reid, and the following is from a communication just received.—THE EDITORS.

... There is no phone in our house and telegrams are delivered by mail; that's why your wire took so long to reach me. When it did come, the news of Arnold Reid's death was so great a shock that for a day or so I could not write you anything about it, let alone a formal piece. You must have gone through similar experiences yourself, and know how numb under these circumstances all your thoughts turn. For a long time I could only see his face, young, pale, sensitive, yet with growing strength and resolution in his large brown eyes, high forehead, and square jaw. All the boys in Spain are our comrades, the death of anyone of them hurts like the death of a brother; but when it's someone you have known and worked with, the thing hits you harder. Then you say to yourself, this was to be expected; everyone who has taken up a rifle for the People's Front has gone into action knowing that death in battle might be his untimely end. These boys hate to be called heroes, yet every factor of true heroism is theirs, not least the modesty with which they offer their lives in a combat of whose sacred purposes they are wholly conscious. This is war, necessary war, and in war the imperative victory can be gained only at the price of death; and in our frightful civilization, so full of agony, chaos, waste, there is nobility as well as tragedy in the end whose epitaph is those four terrible words of your wire: killed fighting in Spain. You say all this to yourself, and yet the news seems incredible, and a wild fury comes over you against those barbaric forces who have imposed this war upon us and would like to impose even greater and more savage ones. You cannot mourn, you can only fight and wish that all the good people of the earth would stand up together and smash this monstrosity to pieces with one blow.

But this doesn't give you your commemorative piece. The truth is, I am not equipped to write it. Like so many of our boys in Spain, Arnold Reid had packed a great deal of action into his young life, and someone who knows far more of that life than I do should pay him the tribute he deserves.

He came to NEW MASSES two years ago, reticent about his past. Only occasionally, outside the office, at dinner or drinking beer after a long day's work, he might speak of his work in the YCL, his days in Mexico, his year in Cuba during the underground democratic movement against Machado. But it was mostly about other people that he talked. He had a genuine love for his Latin American comrades, was proud of their gifts, their courage, their love of liberty. Once we had dinner at his house, cooked by his wife, a charming and intelligent Cuban school-teacher. Some six or seven Cubans were present, and Arnold made each one tell his exploits in the fight against Machado. The deeds were sometimes fantastic, and this made Arnold beam; this was Cuba, and behind the extravagant deeds, the incredible bravery bordering on rashness, was the lucid program of a people's movement. Of his own work in Havana he said

nothing, yet he who pays tribute to him now should know that story fully.

In the office he was at once shy and firm; shy because he was just beginning to learn the elements of journalism. He was doing a great deal of work on the side—teaching classes at a workers' school, carrying on election work in Harlem, serving on committees. None of this bothered him; he was at home in organizations and on the platform; this was his life, and he lived it all his waking hours; his universe was the movement. When he sat down at the typewriter to do a piece for us, he worked excessively hard: it was part of his acute sense of responsibility, so rare among young people in general, so common among our young people, conscious and trained in struggle.

That sense of responsibility lay behind his firmness too, for that firmness was confined to politics. Gentle in all his personal relations, Arnold was immovable when it came to principle or tactics. He wanted us to be politically right, to commit as few mistakes and stupidities as possible. But there was nothing of the pedant or instructor about him. He was not laying down the law to us or giving us the benefit of any superior wisdom; no, he was one of the comrades, this was a common venture, and all of us were responsible to our readers, to the movement for a better world. Our mistakes were his, and if he saw them first he fought to correct them, just as when he made a mistake he was the first to call attention to it. I mention this not only because, like so many Communists, he realized Whitman's dream of the manly love of comrades, but also because he was a new type of American, forged in the fight for a truly democratic society, an American whose responsibility to society permeated his whole being. It was not only a principle with him; it was a way of life, so much so that without being prissy he was, in the true sense of the word, pure.

Even the manner in which he went to Spain was typical of him. It was a period when everyone in the office was anxious to go, and we had to insist that some stay to keep the paper going. One day Arnold appeared and said quietly he had gotten some work to do in Paris. As usual, he wouldn't say what it was. We shook hands, said goodbye, and that was the last I heard of him till your wire came, saying: killed fighting in Spain.

It's a terrible loss, and you begin to wish we would appreciate our comrades more while they are alive. And then you remember the way Arnold used to talk about his friends killed in the Cuban struggle; he loved them, regretted them, accepted their destiny as an inevitable part of the struggle for a free society, and went on working energetically with the living for that same great end. I know that is the way he would have wanted us to think of him. If the dead could speak, he would say to us: Go on fighting and don't make any more political blunders than are absolutely unavoidable. He would be proud of the survivors too, those members of the Lincoln Battalion who come back to us still young but profoundly matured by their experience, strong in their faith, assured of our ultimate victory. And this perhaps was the main point; Arnold was a beautiful personality but not uncommon in our ranks; and just as we are proud of his memory, so he was proud of the fine Americans who, in increasing numbers, are joining the struggle for democracy and Socialism. This was the goal of his life; this the meaning of his heroic death.

JOSEPH FREEMAN.

Accord, N. Y.

# REVIEW AND COMMENT

## The Left Book Club

London.

**R**EADERS of NEW MASSES will remember that, about a year ago, Victor Gollancz contributed an article to this paper on the subject of the Left Book Club, of which he is the founder and publisher. Since the Fabian movement, there has been nothing in this country comparable with the growth and potential importance of the Left Book Club. It is therefore well worth trying to estimate the causes of its success: how has it been able to reach its present membership of 53,000, and to undertake the activities which I shall mention in my article?

First and foremost, the LBC was founded at the right "psychological moment," at a time when the increased menace of fascism, the deterioration of the international situation, the disillusionment of great masses of our people (and especially of the middle classes) with our National government—all combined to create amongst these masses a feeling that some kind of popular front was necessary for their own salvation, and that—unless they took a hand themselves—nothing would get done. The LBC provided both the knowledge necessary for such action and a form of organization in which progressives of different political parties or no political affiliations could work together, thrash out their differences, and advance from a purely cultural basis toward wider activities. The LBC study groups, of which there are now no less than 945, brought middle-class sympathizers and the more or less vague progressives into contact with individuals both of the working class and the politically minded bourgeoisie, to an extent that none of the political organizations had yet been able to achieve; and this contact did a power of good to everyone concerned.

Credit for seizing the "psychological moment," for demonstrating in action that "knowledge of necessity" which must be the first, second, and last virtue of the Marxist is due to Victor Gollancz himself. "V. G." is well known to be nearly always a jump ahead of his rival publishers; and this, no doubt, is the main reason why they are apt to refer, rather acidly, to the good thing he is making out of the LBC. He has certainly made a good thing out of it, but in something very much more than the financial sense. He has proved that left publishing need not be a charity organization, that the spirit in which the working class of the nineteenth century struggled for self-education is not dead.

It was not only the international situation which stimulated the development of the LBC. The British labor movement has never possessed a coherent political philosophy; it has, of course, learnt a great deal from its struggles in the past; but no system of thought has been evolved from these struggles which should coordinate and explain their causes and results. Socialism in our country has always been a rule-of-thumb business. The books published by the LBC, and the groups formed to discuss them, have already done a great deal towards showing the need for scientific political thought and demonstrating Marxism (though its publications have by no means been all written from the Marxian standpoint) as the only trustworthy instrument for dealing with the contemporary chaos. We must certainly rate this crying need for scientific political education as the second most important factor in the growth of the LBC. It is also, incidentally, the main reason why official labor in this country looks upon the LBC with suspicion and sometimes with hostility. Although the leader of our Labor Party has written a book for the club, the feeling of the Labor Party and trade-union leadership on the whole seems to be that the LBC is a breeding-ground for advocates of the popular front, Communists, and other "undesirables." This is a sad pity, when we consider how little we can afford such internal dissensions at the present time, and when we realize that LBC study groups have already done a great deal toward forming Labor Party branches in rural and other backward areas, and have also recruited for the Labor Party in more active localities.

This naturally leads us to the question of the future of the LBC. Have we reached saturation point?—the membership has not materially increased from its fifty thousand figure of this time last year. Are we in danger of losing our cultural basis, and becoming just another political organization? Can such an organization maintain its initial momentum on the basis of reading and discussing books, however valuable those books may be? Are we likely to become too left, and thus fail to attract the mass of liberal-progressive opinion which the club originally aimed to attract? There is material for answering these questions in the more recent activities of the club, some of which I will now describe in greater detail.

First, I should say there was a real danger

of our losing our cultural basis. When a book has a guaranteed sale of fifty thousand, author and publisher can so easily fall into a certain complacency of mind as to the manner in which it is written. Some of the LBC books, of course, have had to be produced in a great hurry to deal with some topical question or crisis. But there have been one or two published recently which have no such excuse for the slovenliness of their style and arrangement; excellent material has been partially wasted thus, and ideas will continue to be ineffective as long as there is a feeling that it does not matter much how they are presented provided they are the right ideas. From the cultural viewpoint, too, it is a fair criticism, I think, that the LBC has paid too much attention to the intellect and not enough to the imagination. Any form of education, whether indirectly or directly aimed at a political objective, will be inadequate unless it is realized that converts are made through the heart as well as through the head. Facts, statistics, close reasoning are essential for us of the left; but those outside our ranks must be approached through an imaginative medium, and the LBC has published too few books of an imaginative nature.

This is proved by the enormous success of such a publication as Joseph Freeman's *American Testament*. A comrade who has recently been leading discussions on this book writes to me, "... literally dozens of people have said that they regard it as the most valuable book the club has published, because it has explained them to themselves so well." A step in the right direction is the formation of the LBC Theatre Guilds. There are now over 250 of these in different parts of the country. Most of them are reading or rehearsing plays for production this autumn, among which Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* continues to be the most popular. Some groups are actually writing their own plays; and, although the guild has only been in existence for a year, it organized a National Theatre Festival this summer, at which fifteen groups competed. I myself have seen how the formation of such a dramatic group in a backward area of the country has revived interest in the LBC itself. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of these plays, both in drawing young people into the orbit of the LBC and in presenting imaginatively to the unconverted the realities of the world they live in.

Another method, which combines appeal