

REPORT TO OUR READERS

By THE EDITORS

THIS is an interim report. For the past few weeks *NEW MASSES* has been publishing letters from readers about the magazine, many of them sharply critical of our work in the recent period when we embraced Earl Browder's ideas concerning a postwar capitalist utopia. Readers may have been wondering whether the editors were seriously facing up to the problem of correcting mistakes and revitalizing the magazine. Let us assure you that the process of self-criticism is painful and difficult, but we are making every effort to examine our work seriously and searchingly. Nor is the mere recognition of errors sufficient. There still remains the struggle against the vestiges of wrong thinking and wrong habits of work. And there is always the danger of losing one's balance, of forgetting that even in the period when *NM* was weakest, it nevertheless made valuable contributions in many fields. In the future too we must avoid tossing out the baby with the bath-water.

Besides, we cannot limit ourselves to eradicating what is bad: there is still the problem of making correct policy breathe in the pages of *NM* as the flesh and blood of American life. There is still the problem of permeating the very roots of our thinking with Marxist science, of giving every article and cartoon fire and strength and excitement.

Frankly, we don't know all the answers, but we're trying hard to find them. And we must have the help of our readers if we are to succeed. The editors are now holding a series of meetings which are also being attended by a number of contributors. After Labor Day we expect to hold such meetings with our readers, though because of physical factors we must continue to depend on mail as the major means of involving our readers in these discussions. Three of the ideas that were emphasized at the last meeting of our editorial board were the need to develop genuine Marxist independence of thought; the magazine's role as a cementer of the alliance between labor and the middle class and consequently the importance of closer ties with both the labor movement and middle class organizations; and *NM*'s task as an educator in socialism. Some of the questions to be taken up at forthcoming

meetings are the role of Marxist theory in the magazine's work, *NM*'s activity in the field of culture, the development of self-criticism as a continuous process, the strengthening of ties with our readers, and the problem of manpower, that is, of writers and artists to contribute to *NEW MASSES*. (The latter problem has for several years been perhaps the toughest we have faced; we appeal once again for cooperation from writers, artists and readers.) And all the time, of course, history is on the march. Reconversion, spreading unemployment, the tensions in Europe and Asia—these and a hundred other questions must be dealt with at once.

OUR patterns of thought and action must conform to reality not only in the sense of eliminating the wrong conceptions of the past, but also of avoiding new distortions that may prove just as damaging. We share with our readers the belief that Joel Bradford is one of our most valuable contributors, but it seems to us that some of the ideas in his column elsewhere in this issue err in the direction of ultra-leftism. His statement that the war has been just "because it was the struggle of the world proletariat against the Axis bourgeoisie, and only for this reason could other proletarians unite with 'their' capitalists, who, in turn, were forced to unite with the world's first socialist power," is too narrow a characterization. This was primarily what Marxists call a national war (even though it also contained elements of class war as well as of imperialist war) because it embraced the interests not of the workers alone, but of all classes, including the bourgeoisie.

If in the war of 1914-18 Lenin was able to speak of its progressive national element as represented by the struggle of Belgium and Serbia—an element which would have justified support of that struggle had it not been engulfed in the larger conflict of imperialist powers—how can one overlook the predominantly national character of the gigantic war against the Axis, in which the very existence and democratic achievements of large nation-states were at stake?

Mr. Bradford's comments on the American Communists also appear to us one-sided. He sees evidence of incapacity in the fact that the Communists had to make three efforts before they could produce a proper resolution; others might see in that fact a genuine effort to rid the movement of the remnants of non-Marxian thinking and a genuine respect for the opinions of the rank and file, who submitted some 5,000 amendments to the original draft resolution. And Mr. Bradford seems to demand a kind of humility of every Communist who was mistaken in the recent period—which would mean close to 100 percent of them—that would result in paralysis of action. Surely he would not want that.

We think it good, however, to be able to thresh out such differences and eventually arrive at common agreement. In this connection the letters we have been getting from readers—unfortunately, we don't have space to print all of them—have proved very helpful. Some of the criticism has hurt even though we have had to recognize its essential truth. Some of it has seemed to us extreme and not very constructive. What we need now are more letters that will help in our own "reconversion" job: that will tell us what readers like and don't like among the features of *NM* and what improvements they suggest. And we want, too, letters that will tell what is happening in various parts of the country and will reflect the experiences and thinking of average Americans. Not a few of the letters we have received have impressed us with their authors' writing skill: we want more of such non-professional writers to feel that this is a magazine where their efforts will be welcomed, that they too can help give *NEW MASSES* that depth and richness we are striving for.



Eugene Karlin.

READERS' FORUM

The Thirst to Know

TO NEW MASSES: What is the most impressive aspect in the intellectual life of our progressive movement? It is the aliveness, the eagerness to learn, the desire for knowledge on the part of our people, not merely on one specific subject, but, generally, in all sorts of cultural fields.

You will find the Negro immersed in the history of anti-Semitism; the worker engrossed in the influence of Picasso on modern artists; the overworked physician fascinated by the story of Poland's history. Of course there is a relationship—Negro, anti-Semitism—worker, Picasso—physician, Poland—and we wouldn't dare deny or discourage it. On the contrary, our publications should expand, even further their scope of subject matter for the enjoyment and benefit of all types of workers and professionals.

The outstanding intellectual characteristic of the leaders in the Communist and progressive movement is this: they are acquainted with almost any subject you may care to mention. This is true both here and abroad. The party organizer in India, the Yugoslav partisan officer, the doctor from Milan, our Bill Foster, each of them, any one, could with comparative ease discuss the history of the labor movement; anthropology—the wonderful adjunct of Marxism, with its splendid examples of varying civilizations; the lessons of great literature or philosophical dissertations.

This is no accident. For to grasp the significance of trends, to mold opinion, to command respect for leadership, to direct the struggle for the "right," calls forth a new type of man and woman: the worker-intellectual . . . "Worker," because he earns his living by his hands and brains, not from the sweat of others working for him, hence, having no interests apart from other exploited. "Intellectual" because he is interested in knowledge, not to earn more money, or acquire fame, but for the satisfaction it gives him, for the liquid nourishment it offers to his thirst for truth and cultural inquiries.

The opportunity is present for all progressive publications to attract people of this calibre to our movement. Often too tired from overwork, Mr. Average Worker can't very well read avidly hundreds of magazines, or attend classes at the University, or peruse vigorously courses given by well-meaning progressive pedantics requiring basic knowledge of Latin, physics, mathematics, dialectics and geology. He must instead rely on one or two magazines, because he hasn't the

time, the formal educational requirements, the patience, nor the financial resources necessary to do any of the other things.

Yet, we can boast, without any contradictions from even *enemy* sources, of the remarkable level of our workers, our professionals, of all those who adhere to our progressive movement. It can be said that outside of the specialized press (Greek, Jewish, Negro, Russian, Italian), and professional journals (art, anthropology, music, theater, geology, history), nowhere else in any general magazine, can information be gleaned on subjects touching the histories, arts, sciences, literature, the *politik* of cultural and present day social trends.

Our press must cater to the inquiring mind, the searcher for what truly is occurring, the restless spirit, the indomitable courage to rise from the restrictions of the ghetto, Jim Crow, the slum or restraining atmosphere of Babbitism, spread by the insipid hirelings of the owners of our national productive wealth. To them, the spouting of political slogans is insufficient; for them, the history of the Negro and the splendid African heritage they possess . . . the significance of the cubists, the surrealists, the Lybdenko botanists, the documentary film, is important for its interest, the satisfaction acquired from pure knowledge itself, the astringent qualitative effects on the tired mind harassed by mundane economic problems of a personal nature.

So, we find articles of varied sorts in our press. Our plea is for more and more of such features.

NEW MASSES and other publications in the postwar period, without the worry of paper quotas, with the aid of its loyal readers, must increase the number of its pages and of readers for them. It can do this by offering to the new reader something he can never find elsewhere: an answer—or at least the compass to find for himself the magnetic truth. For example, articles on marriage and divorce in this and socialist society would be interesting. The absorbing science of etymology, the origin of words, could be discussed with sidelight reflections on the interpretation of words, such as those in the Yalta agreement, which some well-meaning people claim is the only bar to the betterment of Soviet-American relations. The mere description of corresponding fields of endeavor in the USA, the USSR and India would show the contrasting influences the economic mode of life arising from the ownerships of productive means reflects on them.

What possibilities! Here within these pages, the honest artist and professional can express himself. Here, the worker can find his cultural bracer. Here, in all its simple majesty, the movement of the musicales, the low-price art fairs, the debate, the pamphlet, the yearning far beyond the pay check, here, embodying the finest and cleanest, here, the pulse of man's quest for knowledge, beats.

What have we to lose in expressing our opinions on all subjects in all fields? Nothing . . . but we could gain the worker, the professional, the discriminated, the Jim Crowed, all who are seeking the way out of the maze of capitalist buncombe.

We might conclude, with a familiar paraphrase: let our writings be in the American parlance (form) . . . with the "guts" of socialism (content).

HARRY STERNBERG.

Brooklyn.

For Action

TO NEW MASSES: We have subscribed to and enjoyed reading NM for years.

The thought just occurred to me while going through the current issue that perhaps it would be a good idea to print a small paragraph somewhere entitled "What the Reader Should Do" and devote it to legislation, etc., where a letter of protest or praise could do some good. In this way the reader will have the satisfaction of giving vent to the emotions which your magazine invokes and who knows—perhaps some good will come of these letters. Of course there is nothing to stop readers from doing this now, but even NM readers may be too lazy to pick out the articles that should be followed up with a protest or encouragement. This may mean a little extra work for someone on the staff but I feel it will pay its dividends.

GOLDIE L. HELLMAN.

Philadelphia.

Cezanne, Picasso et al.

TO NEW MASSES: It was good to see Charles Arnault start the ball rolling in the direction of more profound art criticism.

However, there are a couple of points that should be clarified. I do not feel he does justice to his own thesis when he says Cezanne would probably reject the extreme modern distortions of today. This is certainly not giving art forms room to function dialectically. Cezanne, were he alive, would utilize every means of form to express the spirit of our world today. His age could use more moderate distortions than the world of today, or to put it more positively, our age demands a more dynamic expression. It is probably, however, that Cezanne, with his classical outlook, might overlook social content. Picasso, an heir of Cezanne, has to some extent—with "Guernica"—brought the dynamic, abstract expression of our age into the social field. It is up to our generation of artists to carry on in this fusion of form and content.

As to an artist like Mondrian: he certainly has his place, but he is too cold and intellectual. His perfectionism leads to sterility.