

# A LETTER TO OUR READERS

By THE EDITORS

IN OUR issue of June 26 we published an editorial indicating our position on the Duclos article and the resolution of the National Board of the Communist Political Association. We wrote then that we are convinced "the theories adopted by the American Communists in January 1944, were profoundly mistaken, and that NEW MASSES itself must accept its share of responsibility in giving currency to those ideas." That editorial initiated a time of stock-taking, of examination of past mistakes so that we can learn from them in order to gear the magazine for the onrush of today's and tomorrow's responsibilities. Heavy responsibilities indeed, as we shall indicate further.

That examination is predicated on what, by now, is a truism to NEW MASSES readers: that practice cannot be divorced from theory. We know that a set of erroneous premises impels a train of wrong actions. With that realization, we are, with the participation of NM friends and collaborators, reexamining the approaches we had to various aspects of our work—our handling of domestic, international, cultural issues; our practice in dealing with writers and individuals who differed with our outlook; our specific journalistic presentations; our fundamental relations with readers, writers, artists. In short our whole way of work. We shall soon begin publishing the conclusions drawn from these examinations for our readers' consideration; meanwhile we want them—you—to let us know what you feel, what you think; we want you to join us immediately in hammering out a magazine policy that will result in the kind of publication the times require. We want to make these pages real examples of Marxist journalism.

We know NM has fallen short of that, particularly in these past several years. The reader who took exception to our saying in the editorial that "NEW MASSES is a Marxist magazine" had merit in his criticism and was right in suggesting we should have said we "strive to be a Marxist magazine." We did not hit the bull's-eye. We were using a wrong range-finder.

To fulfill our responsibilities requires a complex of many attributes; mastery of the Marxist approaches, genuine collective work, improved liaison with our readers and contributors, stronger ties

with the progressive and democratic organizations in the country, particularly the trade unions, industrial and white collar, and various cultural groups; greater integration with America's writers and artists seeking to achieve cultural forms to aid the people's progress.

The times require this: we can already see the shape of things that reaction plots for America. It seeks to destroy the bulwark of our democracy, organized labor; hence we must become more integrated with trade union life. Evil men like Rankin and those who inspire him seek to pit veterans against labor, Negro against white, Gentile against Jew, middle-class against working-class. We must consistently expose the unfolding aspects of this plot so our people can be forearmed. In our particular milieu, we know that those who advocate an unbridled American imperialism, such journalistic hierarchs as Henry Luce, plan to bring out a devil's brigade of "magazines of opinion." They will assault the bastions of clear, honest thought on the political, economic and cultural issues of our time.

In short, the heinous effort to destroy the democratic coalition is upon us. Therefore our duties become all the greater. Though we know the democratic coalition has unprecedented power and rich experience, we are well aware that hard, grueling conflict is ahead, conflict imposed upon our people by the many pronged, powerful, well-heeled campaign of the economic royalists and their flunkies.

To gear ourselves for this is our—your—immediate concern. For this we want your utmost cooperation. The Duclos letter and the discussion of the Communist Political Association is dispelling a fog; Marxists can begin to see the shape of the terrain before them. It is hard, dangerous land, scarred with many pitfalls, but it is not impassible. To traverse that terrain successfully, we must march together, work together, united, help each other chart the necessary paths.

The draft resolution of the CPA has done a fundamental job in charting the road, and as we have indicated, we fully agree with its major tenets.

We would, however, like to see the following considerations added to the draft resolution: more specific attention

to labor's allies in the democratic, anti-fascist coalition—the white-collar groups, the professionals, the cultural and scientific workers, as well as the farmers. We expect the CPA to cope with these problems, but specifically, they fall within the orbit of NEW MASSES' regular attention. We shall continue to discuss these issues in greater detail, but we wish, immediately, to pose the following for our readers' consideration: the struggle for a genuine, anti-fascist democratic culture is one of NEW MASSES' primary responsibilities. We publish in an America that has powerful democratic well-springs, but we know that evil, fascist cross-currents flow swiftly. America is daily subjected to the racist, reactionary ideas of the Hearst-McCormick-Patterson Axis; our peoples' thinking is constantly assaulted by anti-labor, anti-Soviet, anti-coalition ideas in the weekly magazines of Henry Luce and his fellows; *Reader's Digest*, one of the most baneful influences in our national culture, reaches nearly 10,000,000 monthly; in many of our educational institutions pro-fascist ideas are disseminated covertly, if not openly; anti-Negro and anti-Semitic practices are far from uncommon in our universities where, in reality, the *numerus clausus* is accepted without second thought; Hollywood, for instance, continues to produce films libelous of the great Negro masses in America; our cultural workers and professional strata live and seek to fulfill their talents for the common good within a pattern of contracting livelihood, as we have recently pointed out. All these factors converge upon us with heightened impact as the nation moves into the transitional times of a peace economy. We must, therefore, refashion the magazine into a powerful, crusading champion for a vital, popular, democratic culture.

To grapple with these problems adequately, we want your help. NEW MASSES is not an organization; it is a magazine with readers scattered across these forty-eight states; readers who have wide, intimate contact with the heart of America. We cannot gather in a hall to talk over these problems, to hammer out a policy. But we can achieve the possible. You can write NM what you are thinking, acquaint us with your reactions to the various aspects of our work. What you feel is good in our

(Continued on page 23)

# READERS' FORUM

## A Critic of NM

**T**O NEW MASSES: Your editorial of June 26 was profoundly discouraging. Instead of the title, "NM Evaluates Its Course" it would have been far more accurate to caption it "Once Again NM Underestimates Its Errors." The editorial contains no genuine criticism of the magazine. It merely summarizes (second hand) the criticisms of Foster and Duclos of the revisionism which took place in the Communist Political Association. This goes on for column after column: a fluent well written summary, to be sure, but one to which NM seems to attach itself somewhat casually. When the article finally reached its last paragraph, the editors took stock of themselves; briefly, most generously, and with a smugness that was mighty hard to take.

In previous months, there have appeared in the *Readers' Forum* many sharp criticisms of the magazine by Pollack, DeGraaf, L.L. and others. To interpret these objections to the editorial policy merely as "a lack of full clarity and vigor" is incomprehensible. Either you refuse to take such criticism seriously, in which case you have learned nothing in this period, or you disagree with it, in which case you should attempt to defend yourselves. But to pass it off as you do is deliberate misinterpretation, and, in my opinion, intolerable.

Such an attitude is bound to lead to the next neat bit of phrase coining. Having done your "duty" by outlining the errors, you go on: "the period following the end of the European phase of the war is the one in which the non-Marxian conceptions adopted by us would have proved most damaging." With that cheery conclusion, which showed that it wasn't really so bad, you continued your spectacle of intellectual acrobatics, somersaulting happily to the position "our work was a formidable plus" and with a final coy wave of the handkerchief, flipped yourselves right on the "high road again."

You may be on the high road again, but from where we stand, you've landed, not on your feet, but flat on your backs. The "high road" which you cherish is a sorry illusion, a dream cloud. If you're there, you're there alone. The rest of us are down below, in the mass of the debris, examining the extensive damage, preparing to work our arms off to the elbows, hoping to clear the wreckage, which might take years, to get back on that high road. We stand in awe before those who can do it in one easy editorial. This much I know: if you stay up there while we're working below, the twain will never meet again.

Evidently you're so high on the road you can still make such glaring errors as the one which appears in the same issue of the magazine on the page directly opposite your editorial.

You give almost three columns to a gentleman named F. J. Meyers (which is proper enough) to explain why he considers Browder's position correct. He wrote the letters, but *you* wrote the caption. Now this letter could have had any number of captions. It could have been headed, "Upholds Browder Position," "Disagrees with Foster," etc., etc. But, no. On the page opposite your editorial which deals with your new found conclusions that Browder was in error, you title an article upholding Browder, "The Marxist Road Today." At least if you had put a question mark after it, to prove you meant what you said in your editorial.

Further: is there such paucity of material today, or was it impossible for you to find anything more to say about the errors of the magazine during the last period that forced you to devote space for a lengthy article, plus an editorial, plus a special boxed editorial, on the momentous discovery that Hearst is a pro-fascist? That Hearst has discovered the "big" lie? This is not news, just because it hits an editor of NM. It could have been, and should have been disposed of in a box, announcing that Ruth McKenney has joined the long list of people who are suing Hearst for libel. But to blow it up as a sensational "discovery"! May I suggest that editors sit down around a table and start a serious discussion and not feel they have completed their work with one happy little editorial?

If NM is going to meet the great responsibilities which lie ahead, it *must* change its policy. It can no longer be a house organ, nor a pipeline for the policies of others, automatically and unthinkingly accepted, rewritten slightly and passed on. Once again NM must become a hard hitting, critical journal. Use your abilities, not to prove that others are correct, but to determine whether or not they *are* correct. Let's have fewer eulogies of historical figures and more searching examination of current history, less slick phrasemaking and more hard hitting facts, less "write-a-letter-to-your-Congressman" and more "throw-the-rascal-out."

Get out of that misty, rosy-hued cloud and come down here amidst the wreckage and meet your readers.

L. A. C.

Hollywood.

## "Devoutly Thankful"

**T**O NEW MASSES: For your "NM Evaluates Its Course," all but the reactionaries and our Social Democrats are devoutly thankful. A temporary tactic applied as an over-all strategy becomes as dangerous as the most idealistic rationalization of historical facts. Pure logic, like pure mathematics, is an excellent tool, but it would be difficult to point to a single important step forward in man's progress that could be directly attributed to pure reason. Correct premises are essential; and the only way to keep them correct is to rely on the scientific approach of dialectic materialism. The harm that has been done to our movement is serious enough. That it has not been irreparable is due to the simple fact that, in practice, it has not been possible for serious Party workers to give more than lip service to Mr. Browder's "notorious revision of Marxism."

It has not at any point been possible to do anything demanded by the current historical situation without rationalizing the nonsense of the "revision" into sense. That is the fallacy of Browder's position. When a Communist has to rationalize there is something terribly wrong. There is confusion among the workers; there is alienation of the sound Marxist thinkers among the professional people, who are most anxious to help us; and the door is thrown open to all manner of Bukharinist "tripe" like that of Mr. Landy on the woman question. Like my great friend, Mr. Eugene A. Cox of Lewiston, Idaho, I am pleased beyond measure at the promise of returning sanity among North American Communists. That is why I renewed my subscription to NM last week.

C. B. DARWIN.

Vancouver, B. C.

## Historical Errata?

**T**O NEW MASSES: I hope you have some space for comment on the articles by Ralph Bowman and Elizabeth McCausland (NM, July 10).

1. Drawing attention to the anti-feudal aspect of the American Revolution and to the significance of widespread land ownership in the rise of American capitalism, Mr. Bowman states that the colonists were not faced in 1776 with the task of destroying feudal agrarian relations. *True*. But the reason, he adds, is that "Britain broke its ancient laws and hallowed traditions to permit the colonial farmers to buy land. . . ." *False*.

The "ancient law" provided for the grant of land, by the Crown, in one of three ways. Details aside, their purpose was to secure immediate revenue to the Crown by granting to a merchant company or some Lords Proprietors the right to colonize lands overseas and make money thereby. The latter had the right to collect quit-rents, but they never got far with their attempts because the colonists resisted and the entire machinery of American colonial government was on short rations a good part of the time—the politicians being