

The Saturday Review of Literature

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Notes from the Air

TOKYO.

IN A LITTLE more than two hours, the plane puts down at Haneda Airport in Tokyo, from which these notes will be cabled to SRL. From Tokyo, I go on to Hiroshima for ceremonies relating to the establishment of a world peace center on the site destroyed by the first atomic bombing of a city four years ago. The schedule also calls for a visit to Nagasaki, scene of the second atomic bombing in actual warfare. Concerning all this, more later.

Meanwhile, here are some notes about the trip itself—a flight of some 14,000 miles interrupted only for refueling and changes of planes. Sky reading on this trip includes Robert King Hall's "Education for a New Japan," a comprehensive and obviously competent review of facts and factors that must go into the making of a progressive and pacific Japan; Helen Mears's "Mirror for Americans: Japan," a briskly written and sharply argued indictment of American policy in Japan and the Far East in general; the Penguin edition of Conrad's "Almayer's Folly," and the inevitable "Practical Cogitator," an indefatigable and insistent air companion that has shared my seat in perhaps 100,000 miles of air travel since it first clamped down a lien on my reading time four years ago.

But, however ideal the sky may be as a reading room, it is even more impressive as a dining room for the imagination. It spreads a table of such self-perpetuating wonder and variety that the eye and mind become

willing gluttons, the craving increasing, expanding with each dish. No sunset or sunrise seen from a mountaintop ever gave the optic nerves a finer time than when they have the clouds for a floor instead of a ceiling. The spectacle is a total one in the sense that it is circular; everything gets into the act and the picture, held together by a vast frame of continuing color. As for the clouds themselves, Guy Murchie has a passage in "The Cogitator" well worth quoting:

If winds are the spirit of the sky's ocean, the clouds are its texture. Theirs is easily the most uninhibited dominion of the earth. Nothing in physical shape is too fantastic for them. Some are thunderous anvils formed by violent updrafts from the warm earth. Some are the ragged coattails of storms that have passed. Some are stagnant blankets of warm air resting on cold. Some are mare's tails floating in the chill upper sky in the afternoon. I've beheld a quadruple rainbow moving against a stratocumulus layer below. Not an ordinary rainbow that forms an arch, but the special rainbow called the glory, known only to those who fly: a set of complete circles, each inside the next concentrically. These formed a sort of color target that sped along the clouds on the opposite side from the sun with the shadow of the airplane in the center.

If things get too crowded in Manhattan, I'm going to suggest to my colleagues that we publish SRL from a flying office. You get a sense of stretch up here, you have the feeling that this is the natural habitat for men who think they'd like to work together. You find it easy to understand why the Acheson-Lilienthal Report on Atomic Energy was largely hatched up here in the blue. I seem to recall that either in the report itself or in a statement by Mr. Lilienthal the point was made that after long hours of earth-bound indecision,

the Committee members would adjourn to a conference room 10,000 feet up and discover ways of getting the hang of what the other fellow was talking about and of arriving at basic agreements that previously had seemed elusive or impossible. There was little intervention by the individual ego and a good deal of a disposition to consider rather than to confront.

Dealing as they were with what comes pretty close to the ultimates, the members of the Committee had only to look out of their window for establishing the true nature of the problem, which was not the atom but man. And their window was a complete frame of reference. For when you get up above a mile, you see only the evidence of man but nothing of man himself. You see his roads and his fields and his cities, but never man. Going by the evidence, you might conceive of him in terms of units of electrical energy, rather than of matter. And if, assuming you were able to scrutinize him through powerful microscopes and could establish the fact that he was matter and energy both, you would be able to discern virtually no differentiation between one man and another—no matter how many specimens you examined from different areas. And yet you could tell from the evidence that these differentiations seemed to man to be more important than life itself.

You would wonder, considering how small is the fraction of the earth's surface he occupies, how he could find his way from one distant area to the other to get at the throat of someone just like himself. You would wonder at the faculty which enables him to identify such a person as totally different and to proceed to attempt to kill him and his kind for a reason which, from the perspective of your sky platform, would seem as incomprehensible as a war between the forests. Up here, at least, you have some idea of what the real challenge is. You see that the dominant portion of the earth is not land but sea. You can see that very little of the land is congenial to man's existence and development. You can see vast eroded areas and other vital areas threatened by erosion. You see vast areas where there is too little rain and other areas where there is too much. If you fly over Europe and Asia, you can see that the typical city is the destroyed city, and that the pattern of destruction is not static but enveloping, suggesting unity of a sort if man rejects the unity which sanity might produce. If the proper study of mankind is man, up here in the blue is the place for it.

—N. C.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

"The Life of the Party"

EDITOR'S NOTE: Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s candid analysis of the American Communist Party ["The Life of the Party," *SRL* July 16] has provoked a number of letters sharply challenging his statements. We have asked Mr. Schlesinger to comment on several of these letters.

SIR: Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., whose popularity with the slick magazines is perhaps too great to permit him the luxury of calling other writers hacks, notes that "Like Maltz, John Howard Lawson, Alvah Bessie, and Dalton Trumbo, the fellow-traveling ex-proletarian writers go to Hollywood and become film hacks. Until, that is, they refused to own up to their political beliefs before a committee of Congress—in response to which the film industry, rearing itself in an unwonted spasm of moral nobility, turned them out into the storm."

Quite aside from the fact that I, for one, worked in motion pictures before I became an "ex-proletarian writer," this business of refusing to answer questions relating to political and trade-union affiliations is one which has deeply and unnecessarily agitated the Luce intellectuals of late. I say unnecessarily because I do not think it possible for a committee of the Congress to ask Mr. Schlesinger a question which would do violence to his conscience. He takes his stand squarely in the tradition of chronic confessors who have plagued the earth since the first establishment of orthodoxy.

Wherever inquisitorial courts have been set up, Mr. Schlesinger and his breed have appeared in eager herds to proclaim: "I do not wish to imply approval of your questions, but I am not now nor have I ever been a dissenter. I am not now nor have I ever been a Communist. I am not now nor have I ever been a trade unionist. I am not now nor have I ever been a Jew. Prosecute those who answer differently, O masters, silence them, send them to jail, make soap of them if you wish. But not of me, for I have answered every question you chose to ask, fully, frankly, freely—and on my belly."

DALTON TRUMBO.

Frazier Park, Calif.

Mr. Schlesinger replies:

Dalton Trumbo's well-known rhetoric requires no comment, except perhaps "whew." I might say to Mr. Trumbo, though, as from one hack to another, that he still does not answer the simple question as to how he would feel if witnesses before a Congressional committee refused to say whether they were members of the National Association of Manufacturers, the Trotskyite movement, the German-American Bund, or the Ku Klux Klan. But I would be naive, of course, to suppose that Mr. Trumbo thinks that Trotskyites and Klansmen, for example, should be accorded the same rights as Communists and fellow-travelers. As Paul Robeson made clear at a recent conference of Mr.



"Why don't we compromise, then, on a quadripartite bizonal control of the triumvirate on a unilateral basis?"

Trumbo's Civil Rights Congress, members of the Socialist Workers Party and of the KKK are not entitled to the protection of civil liberties (see *The New York Times*, July 19). Fellow travelers are welcome to this double standard; but I see no reason why liberals are supposed to admire them for it.

* * *

SIR: In his recent article Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., commented at considerable length on me, on my part in a *New Masses* literary controversy and on the case of the Hollywood Ten. I beg your fair play in extending me adequate space for a reply, especially since Mr. Schlesinger has passed invidious judgment on my integrity.

1. In 1946 I published an article in the *New Masses* in which I severely criticized certain patterns in its literary judgments. My article was met by great hostility in the left-wing movement. An extended controversy followed that was indeed extremely heated and abusive. Yet beneath the abuse serious literary and philosophic issues were being discussed, whether well or badly is irrelevant. In a second article, and I take pride in the fact, I chose to ignore the abuse and instead attempted to grapple, not too successfully I think, with some of the issues. What is at point here is this: On certain fundamental matters, such as the relationship between literature and politics, I believed that my critics were right and I was wrong. I freely and earnestly said so. To Mr. Schlesinger this is proof of a lack of intellectual integrity. What fine cant this is, especially from a man who quotes Emerson: "Speak what you think today as hard as cannon balls, and tomorrow, speak what you think in words just as hard though you contradict everything you said today." Apparently Mr. Schlesinger approves of this in all but the practice.

It so happens that I would not today write either my first or second article as I did then. But if I were to reconsider the same issues, I would repeat some of my strictures of left-wing criticism and I would profit from some of the criticisms of my own, earlier

position—and I would do both with a recognition that Marxist thought has had, and I think will have, a profound effect upon American letters.

2. Mr. Schlesinger also characterizes me thus: "Albert Maltz, a former novelist, who had become a Hollywood writer..." I must comment on this because Mr. Schlesinger presses a heavy point about it: "So direct political control either throttles the serious artist or makes him slick and false. Like Maltz, John Howard Lawson, Alvah Bessie, and Dalton Trumbo, the fellow-traveling, ex-proletarian writers go to Hollywood and become film hacks." This is a neat tangle of misstatement. First, having published two novels, one of them this spring, in the eight years since moving my residence from East to West, I am scarcely a "former" novelist. Secondly, how puerile it is to ride this Hollywood myth about the automatic corruption of writers. Robert Sherwood, Lillian Hellman, Elmer Rice, Maxwell Anderson are not slick and false because they have written films. The slickness or falsity of a writer can be judged by his work and nothing else. I submit my work. Thirdly, there are writers who are slick and false who have never been concerned with politics. I have been and am, but no one has, or ever will, dictate to me how or what I write. It happens that my current novel has met vitriolic disapproval in *Masses* and *Mainstream*. Does this now make me a writer of integrity in Mr. Schlesinger's opinion? Or must I also attack the sound, Marxist thesis of the social responsibility of the artist and embrace Whittaker Chambers to achieve that? I will do neither.

3. On the case of the Hollywood Ten, he writes: "Until... they refused to own up to their political beliefs before a committee of Congress..." Own up? When men risk prison on an issue of principle, they may be wrong on the principle but upon what basis do honest men attack their integrity? The vilest committee in Congressional history held an investigation with these stated purposes: 1) to drive certain individuals out of film employment, not because of their works,