

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SUPPORT FOR THE LAPINS

READERS WHO have followed the story of the Ravensbrueck Lapins may be interested to know that the recent SR editorial "An Open Lettter to the German People" [Feb. 13] was reprinted in full in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* together with editorial comment to the effect that the German people have an obligation to see that settlement of the Lapins' claims is made without further delay. Several members of the Bundestag have also indicated their concern and interest in pursuing swift and just settlement.

Another heartening development was the recent donation by the Pfizer Company of \$8,000 worth of medicine to Lapins in Poland. Henceforth, the Pfizer Company informs us, any products manufactured by the company will be made available to the Lapins when needed, at no cost.

CAROLINE FERRIDAY.

New York, N. Y.

LITERATURE AND THE RUSSIANS

THE MOST DEPRESSING and frightening aspect of Alexander Chakovsky's enlightening report on Soviet writing [SR, Apr. 2] is the extreme childishness exhibited in the discussion of Boris Pasternak's masterpiece. Childish indeed is the attitude revealed by the statement that the Russians "do not want to publish 'Doctor Zhivago.'" Only immature mentalities believe that things can be made different by ignoring them.

It is disturbing to realize that the Russians do not believe that the very characteristics Chakovsky admits exist in Pasternak's novel—"Olympian detachment and epical placidity"—are the rarest and most to be cherished and cultivated of human qualities. One of Pasternak's most moving observations is that what destroys the hope of attaining these qualities denies man his highest hope. What makes "Doctor Zhivago" intolerable to the hobbled mind is Pasternak's dispassionate exposure that the Russians still deny themselves many things in the name of a goal that is not "great," but stultifyingly second-rate. It is hard but often necessary to realize that the dead do die and the living struggle in vain when death and sacrifice are the bitter fruit of ignorant and hysterical superstition.

Chakovsky's attempt to justify the Russian psychosis by drawing an analogy with post-revolutionary attitudes in the United States simply doesn't work. Writers did point out that "pre-revolutionary culture had been vilified by the American Revolution" and that "the intelligentsia had become extinct." Within a generation of the Revolution, one of our most revered writers, Washington Irving, was nostalgically extolling the charms of British culture, and only a few years later in books like "Home as Found," one of our most highly praised authors, James Fenimore Cooper, was vigorously condemning the whole accomplishment of independent American democracy.



"Pardon me, but I couldn't help but overhear your remark about man's inhumanity to man."

Americans did despise Cooper for what he said; but they did not suppress his books, they did not deny him foreign honors, there was no talk from influential sources of intimidating him into silence.

The point is that post-revolutionary Americans had a serene yet dynamic faith in their destiny that enabled them to laugh off opponents; that the Russians lack this ability to brush aside rather than exterminate suggests how happy that land really is.

Before one draws comparisons between post-revolutionary Russia and the post-revolutionary United States he should contemplate the comparative relations between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson on the one hand, and Stalin and Trotsky on the other. Bitter opponents for power during their earlier lives, in their later days Jefferson sent Adams philosophical letters; Stalin sent Trotsky an assassin.

WARREN G. FRENCH,
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Gainesville, Fla.

LEST THE READERS of SR be misled by Mr. Chakovsky's piece on Russian writing, I should like to report that many American publishing houses are constantly searching the works of modern Russian writers in the hope of finding something that will satisfy the American literary taste and therefore be salable and commercially feasible. This is being done without any intent of censorship, but only with the thought that our readers must like and be willing to buy the books. Frankly, the pickings are very slim.

There is one other factor that discourages the American publisher from undertaking the translation and publication of Soviet literature. This is the question of copyright. Since there is no copyright in the Soviet Union and since that country is not a signatory to the Universal Copyright Convention, there is no protection for the publisher who invests in the publication of a translation. A publisher might well find on the day he publishes a Soviet title in translation that a competitor has translated and published the same book. As a matter of fact, the Soviets themselves might translate the book and export it to this country. This is known to have happened.

For the past two years a committee of publishers has worked with representatives of the Soviet publishing industry in an effort to overcome some of these problems. Progress, if any, has been slight; but until the basic copyright issue is settled, the Soviet Union cannot look forward to any enthusiastic translation program on the part of American publishers.

EDWARD E. BOOHER,
McGraw-Hill Book Co.

New York, N. Y.

MENTAL BLOCH?

IN HIS REVIEW of Sir Pierson Dixon's "Farewell, Catullus" [SR, Apr. 9] Robert Payne attributes the "magnificent and too little read 'Death of Virgil'" to Ernest Bloch. Its author is of course the late Hermann Broch.

DIANA GUIRAGOSSIAN,
New York, N. Y.



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SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

Sellers Market

NOW THAT it's officially settled that "Ben-Hur" is the greatest movie of our time, that Charles Heston is our finest actor, that William Wyler is our best director, and that the script of "Pillow Talk" has more stature than the script of "Wild Strawberries," you may be in the mood to escape from the cozy dreamworld that Hollywood attempts to sell us each year, and see a biting, uproarious British comedy called "I'm All Right, Jack," which, in the process of alienating just about everyone by mocking a few dozen sacred cows, manages only to tickle, charm, and delight. This Boulting Brothers film, which deals with the adventures of an addled upper-class young Englishman in British industry, has already, so it has been said, affected the last British election, largely through its satire on trade unionism. It seems that vast numbers of Britons took the movie to heart, relishing the shafts tossed at work stoppages, wildcat strikes, and labor union officials who speak in stolid clichés. But why the Conservatives should have escaped damage is a mystery, since the bosses, management, No. 10 Downing Street, and even the BBC are bludgeoned thoroughly, too.

Here, relatively immune from the British political swirl, it is possible merely to relish a vastly entertaining story about an enthusiastic young man, used as a pawn by the directorate of a firm called Missiles, Inc., who can't see why crate-loading shouldn't be done at a brisk clip, especially since the gadget used to facilitate the task is remarkably efficient as well as simple to operate. This attitude speedily gets him into difficulties with his fellow workers and with management. His union card taken away from him, he manfully shows up for work each day in the plant, now abandoned because of a strike called over his case. Public figures make statements. The Transport Union, naturally, goes out in sympathy. Ships lie idle at the docks. But there is more than this: there is romance, too.

And such romance. The young non-conformist has taken to living at the home of the shop steward, who has a daughter, a big, blonde, doughy girl who is a spindle-polisher at the plant. "Are those your real teeth?" she asks the young man after their first kiss, which occurs in his little bubble car parked near a rubbish dump. "What's he talking about?" she asks, during a

speech to the unionists made by a director. "Commercial foreign intercourse," she is told, and, thrilled, she anxiously awaits the spicy revelations she is sure will follow. As the girl, Liz Fraser is an example of inspired casting. But there is no one who does not give his all to the venomous frolic: Ian Carmichael as the continually astonished hero, Terry-Thomas as the representative of management, Dennis Price as the director of the firm, Margaret Rutherford as the hero's valiantly upper-class aunt, and—I'm afraid we must say outstandingly—Peter Sellers as the shop steward who recommends Marx and Engels as light reading, and abhors time-and-motion studies.

A word for Mr. Sellers, who in the past few years has become one of England's most important stars. Only thirty-five, he plays roles ranging in age from thirty to ninety, is a magnificently funny man, a consummate actor who submerges himself thoroughly in each of his parts, and tools every word and gesture with delicacy and precision. Yet, unlike some of our egomaniac Hollywood comedians, he leaves breathing space for other actors. He has modesty, taste, and intelligence. An enormous range of expression crosses a face that is seemingly deadpan. See him in "I'm All Right, Jack." See the movie, thank your lucky stars for the Boulting Brothers, for the mood of irreverence that has swept from Britain's novels and plays into its movie-making.

YOUR APPETITE whetted, you may well wish to see Peter Sellers in something else. Due soon at art-houses is "Man in a Cocked Hat," somewhat of a misfire as comedy, but with Sellers and the madly agreeable Terry-Thomas attempting to straighten out the affairs of a small island colony, forgotten about by the British Foreign Office. And, for another accomplished character study, there is again Peter Sellers in "The Battle of the Sexes," a British version of James Thurber's "The Catbird Seat," the scene transferred to Scotland, with Sellers, as the business manager of a woollens firm, outwitting an American woman efficiency expert. Robert Morley and Constance Cummings provide noble support, Charles Crichton's direction is expertly sly, but the story gets a little thin and runny when stretched out to full feature length.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.