

C u l t u r e  
I N A *Changing World*  
A MARXIST APPROACH

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## PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

This booklet is based on the text of the major address delivered by V. J. Jerome at a Marxist cultural conference held in New York in June, 1947, under the sponsorship of the magazines, *Mainstream* and *New Masses*. It includes also the author's remarks closing the conference.

The conference, national in scope, brought together some two hundred cultural workers active in the arts and sciences to discuss their common problems in relation to major political currents in the United States and internationally. The conference examined the role of reactionary ideas advanced by various exponents of bourgeois ideology, the potentialities of the people's counter-forces moving toward a democratic culture, and the special responsibilities of Marxist cultural workers in the fight for peace, security, and the people's right, for the defense of culture.

The swift movement of events since this report was made only underscores the significance of the author's analysis. The emergence of the Marshall Plan, dressing up the Truman Doctrine, and the new efforts of the Thomas Un-American Committee to silence writers and artists, strengthen the author's appeal for uniting all progressive forces against the warmongers and Red-baiters.

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## INTRODUCTION

There are two groups in the United States keenly aware of the significance of culture in the class: struggle.

The calculating finance capitalists and their most realistic propagandists would turn culture, on the one hand, into a bludgeon and, on the other, into an instrument of obscurantism.

Those with a Marxist understanding of the role of ideas in history know that culture can be an organizing and mobilizing force for progress. They strive to rally the people for the defense of democratic culture. Besides these class-conscious forces, there are also increasing numbers of progressive Americans who are alarmed at the fascist threat to our nation's cultural life and are gathering in struggle against our native thought-controllers.

Marxist cultural workers feel a conscious responsibility to the working class and all democratic forces of the people. The specific nature of this responsibility is shaped by the concrete forms of struggle today between reaction and progress. Let us, therefore, examine our task in relation to the social and cultural currents in post-war America.

The anti-Axis war broke the fascist spearhead of world imperialism. Capitalism on a world scale has come out of the war greatly weakened and held more firmly than ever in the grip of its general crisis. The world has shrunk for the imperialist forces and expanded for the forces of progress. Never before in all history have advanced social ideas influenced and determined the actions of so many millions. Only in the United States has monopoly capitalism emerged from the war materially strengthened, although its immanent contradictions are intensified. Since the war's end, the center of world reaction has shifted to the United States, whose foreign and domestic policies are geared to drive for world domination. On an international scale reaction, fascism, and war-adventurism are headed, organized, and financed by American monopoly capital in alliance with British imperialism, which becomes more and more enmeshed in the toils of its senior partner. On the side of democracy and progress on the world scene are the peoples' forces. The new peoples' democracies of Europe and

Asia are consolidating their strength. The labor movement is making gigantic strides throughout the capitalist world. The World Federation of Trade Unions has emerged as a factor of immense political potentialities. In a number of European countries the agrarian masses are finally liberating themselves from the illusions that traditionally held them as reserves of reaction and are forging their alliance with the working classes in opening up new paths of social advance; legions of Leftward moving intellectuals are integrating themselves with the movement of the peoples. The struggles for liberation of the colonial peoples the world over are reaching new heights. All these forces have in the Soviet Union the champion of national freedom, of the sovereign right of all nations, big and small, to self-determination. The world's democratic forces find in the U.S.S.R. the most powerful counterforce to the imperialist pressures for world domination.

On which side do the forces of culture belong — on the side of the people or the people's oppressors? On the side whose victory will spell death, or on the side whose victory will mean life, for culture?

There are only two alternatives before artists and people of tire professions: either to be dragged along by monopoly capital as its servitors on its economic, social, and political terms; or to struggle in various ways for a people's democratic culture, and for the welfare and security of cultural workers.

Capitalism, especially in its stage of decay, is essentially and increasingly antagonistic to art and the real values of culture. One of the great contributions of Karl Marx to human understanding is the doctrine that the contradictions in the economic structure under capitalism make necessary a superstructure of ideologies — political, legal, philosophic, religious, aesthetic, and generally cultural — built on the illusion that these are absolute, eternal, and class-transcending. Between these ideological strata and the material base there is a correspondence and an effective interaction that are systematically turned to imbue the oppressed classes with bourgeois ideas, thus to serve the interests of the exploiting class. Apart from the defensive and offensive ideological values of the superstructure for the bourgeoisie, the cultural products themselves represent for that class a source of profit. In the words of

Marx,... even the highest intellectual productions are acknowledged and excused by the bourgeois because they are represented as direct producers of material wealth and falsely shown to be such... Under monopoly capital, cultural media for wide popular consumption, like the movies and the radio, become mass production industries vying for position at the topmost range. In this process the bourgeoisie commercializes and tends to an ever-greater extent to corrupt both art and artist. The vaunted liberty of art-for-art's-sake but feebly conceals the peonage of the artist. The cultural worker has long been one of the most economically insecure of capitalism's victims. In the best of "boom" times he lives under the shadow of the economic axe. During crises the material existence of most artists and members of the professions is undermined. The years '29 to '33 are etched in our memories, and already a new crisis holds the threat of unemployment, impoverishment, and agony over artists and professional men and women. Writers, painters, musicians, scientists, educators are increasingly menaced by retrenchments in subsidies, in endowments, and in the financing of cultural projects of all kinds.

Against this threat the artists and professional people have no choice but actively to identify themselves with the people's movement, its daily struggles, and its largest objectives.

*The defense and expansion of democratic culture are integral to the struggle for a people's America.*

*The defense and promotion of the people's rights and interests are integral to the struggle for a democratic culture.*

Too often the artist fails to realize that the individual in his entire functioning is a social being—in his attitudes, desires, emotions, images, thoughts. The conception of the private individual with his private consciousness is typically bourgeois. The artist, like every other individual, and even more than most, is socially active in his functioning. The issue therefore is not whether he should produce things that have social meaning; he cannot help doing so. The issue really is whether his social product reflects truth or distorts it, and thereby serves progress or reaction. The artist, sooner or later, must make his choice.

The struggle for culture is a vital aspect of the class struggle. Its arena is the theoretical sphere of the class conflict,



which, to use Frederick Engels' graphic metaphor, is concentric with the economic and the political spheres.

I propose to examine under four main headings some representative cultural manifestations in the post-war period in this interrelated context:

I. Reactionary ideology in present-day American culture.

II. Direct political manifestations of reactionary ideology.

III. The counter-forces of the people's democratic creativeness as expressed in cultural works and movements.

IV. The role of Marxist cultural workers, in relation to the working class and the people generally.

## Chapter 1

### IDEOLOGISTS FOR A DYING SYSTEM

The bourgeoisie seeks to enlist the cultural forces in its service allegedly on a non-class basis. Intent on concealing from the masses the true relationship of culture to society, the ruling class rationalizes its deception in the phraseology of philosophic confusion. In literature and the arts especially, where the element of form is present in such a high degree, bourgeois philosophic ideas insinuate themselves with less apparent vulnerability than in other cultural spheres.

#### *IRRATIONAL "ISMS"*

The root philosophy of bourgeois politics and culture today, as throughout the epoch of decaying capitalism, is idealism. Although the schools of philosophical idealism are various, they comprise a common system of thought in which the world that we perceive has existence primarily as idea. In thus denying the existence of an independent material world, of which our ideas are the reflections, idealism distorts the relationship between thinking and being and denies the existence of objective truth. Driven by the growing need to offer ideological apologies for a dying system, and faced with the increasing pressure of Marxist critique in every sphere of contemporary life and thought, the bourgeoisie has been impelled increasingly to present idealism in a variety of covert, ambiguous, "neutral," and "reconciling" attitudes, of which pragmatism, instrumentalism, and logical positivism are well-known manifestations.

This reactionary philosophy is expressed in the various subjectivist, intuitivist, mystical, and nihilistic cults, which have their source especially in the irrationalism of Henri Bergson and Benedetto Croce. Their specifically American source, less apparent, are the question-begging pragmatism of William James and its offshoot, the instrumentalism of John Dewey.

By its emphasis on action and practical achievement, pragmatism has staked out its claim as the philosophy of adequacy and success, the American bourgeois method of "getting there." In actuality, it is a philosophy of narrow, short-sighted

expediency, in which truth is reduced to subjective "satisfaction" measurements and tested by an "after the event" criterion. "An idea is 'true' so long as to believe it is profitable to our lives." (James.) For Dewey, "a hypothesis is true if it works." This myth-making subjectivism lends itself to the most reactionary uses. Thus, if the promoters of the Third Reich found racist Aryanism "profitable to our lives," then, by pragmatist logic, the doctrines of Rosenberg and Goebbels were true. Understandable therefore is the Nazi partiality to pragmatism and Mussolini's assertion of fascism's indebtedness to James, among others. Essentially, pragmatism, by its denial of objective truth, leaves practice without theory, revealing its vaunted action-philosophy as barren activism without basis for scientific generalization and deduction of fundamental conclusions. It is a philosophy that rules out scientific prediction and basic program for purposive social action and social transformation.

This pervasive contempt for theory was recently reiterated in Arthur M. Schlesinger's *The Age of Jackson*:

"... if social catastrophe is to be avoided, it can only be by an earnest, tough-minded, pragmatic attempt to wrestle with new problems as they come, without being enslaved by a theory of the past, or by a theory of the future." (p. 522)

The wrestling prowess of this tough-minded, theoryless pragmatism is demonstrated in a further conclusion in the book that "most important problems" are "insoluble."

An important instance of current cultivation of intuitivism as the philosophy of life and art is *The Meeting of East and West* (1946), by F. S. C. Northrop, Professor of Philosophy at Yale. The work has been hailed by some as one of the significant books of the age.

Northrop is an eclectic who sets out to bring about a reconciliation between intuitivism and reason, between what he calls the "aesthetic component" of the Orient and the "theoretic component" of the West. For the United States, Northrop urges "a new aesthetic approach to the nature of things, different from that of the European West." The latter, which the United States has taken as its heritage, suffers, in his opinion,

from “a predominantly political, economic, technological and practical emphasis.” To counteract this materialistic menace, he proposes “a religion of the emotions and cultivation of the aesthetic intuition for its own sake.” He presumes to trace in the United States a new art that is purely intuitive:

“...;the aim of this new art is to convey the aesthetic immediacy of things without intellectually added references and interpretations. ... Here seems to be something self-evident and basic upon which an America and a world fighting their way away from faiths that have failed them can build.” (p. 162)

What is significant in Northrop’s thesis is not its intuitivism or its irrationality in general – that is patently borrowed and re-hashed from Croce, Bergson, and others – but rather its attempt at accommodating the intuitive to the scientific, the idealistic to the materialistic. This manifestation – a highly developed technique in contemporary bourgeois philosophy – attests to the advance of dialectical materialism in the world today, which makes it difficult to offer idealism “straight” in the philosophical market.

I cite Northrop’s work because its thesis is applicable to the various forms of renunciation of reason which we find in present-day American literature.

A particular symptom of the increasing vogue of the irrational is strikingly seen in the sphere of the novel in John Steinbeck’s *The Wayward Bus*. Steinbeck’s novel, at bottom, expresses hostility to the artificialities and meannesses of bourgeois civilization. But, and this is very significant, because in Steinbeck’s mind civilization must of necessity be bourgeois, he regresses to an exaltation of antisocial primitivism. Thus, what might have been conscious revolt against bourgeois society turns into nihilistic flight, symbolized by the bus driver’s marooning and desertion of his bus with all its passengers. The outcome is emptiness and a deflation of human values. “It was a stinker’s game and a muddy track,” as one of the characters reflects.

Steinbeck’s novel illustrates the pernicious defeatism implicit in an irrational critique of an irrational society.

In the theatre, dead-end futility is bodied forth in Eugene

O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*. O'Neill builds his drama on the thesis that life is a struggle between illusion and reality, in which illusion is indispensable to life, while reality is unbearable and means death. This is true, it would seem, not only of society in the main, but even of the social dregs in Harry Hope's saloon and rooming house—this "last harbor," where you might think the embers of illusion lie extinguished on the hearth of each man's life. The attempt by the zealous salesman of reality, Hickey, to rob these lives of their self-deceptions is doomed to failure; he cannot face his own reality when he has cut its tie with illusion. O'Neill's philosophy of stark pessimism is summed up by the one-time radical Larry Slade: "The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober."

We need, however, to differentiate between the work of O'Neill, the foremost American dramatist, and the general run of flippant, nihilistic writing. We are concerned with a major artist who, though unconscious of the moving forces of reality and drifting into the "last harbor," yet strives seriously to grapple with the phenomenon of living. But he grapples blindly; unable or unwilling to see the guilt of capitalism, he condemns "Life." In O'Neill's skepticism there is an intense sympathy for people—a sympathy, however, not enlightened by any rational hope; thus his work becomes a shutter against the light of reality.

Writers and artists who lack clear vision of the course of history sink into decadence. To cover up or to glamorize their failure to see and express the positive, they improvise crude philosophies of despair and cynicism.

#### *HEROICS OF FUTILITY*

Of late the American bourgeoisie has imported a newfangled foreignism—that mystic hodge-podge, Existentialism. This current literary-philosophic fad has caused a stir rivaling that of the ouija board of a generation ago, which it has supplanted as the oracle of irrationality.

Existentialism sets up the "transcendent" man, man as absolutely free in will and choice: "man is freedom," proclaims Jean-Paul Sartre, chief of the existentialist school in France. "Man is nothing else but what he himself makes of himself."

“Such is the first principle of existentialism ... existentialism’s first manner of proceeding is to make every man conscious of what he is and to make the total responsibility of his existence rest on him.”

The summons to man (meaning the people) to recognize his responsibility toward his existence is, as Marxists have always stressed, a social requisite. But this recognition has meaning only when the nature of man is conceived, not in abstraction, but in his concrete social setting, in his historical development. Freedom for the historical man, however, consists, as Marxism points out, in the recognition of necessity. “Man makes history,” says Marx, “but he does not make it out of the whole cloth.” In other words, man is both the conditioned and the conditioner. The Sartrean “free being, entirely indeterminate,” is a metaphysical man metaphysically free. Sartre’s evasion of necessity is an evasion of the path to freedom. The leap of the existentialist man is not into the heights of freedom but into the abyss of subjection. By means of this idealistic elevation of the individual to the summits of free will, existentialism effects his actual subjection to the oppression of the existing system. For, if no evils are social and all evils are personal, the guilt for man’s misery is completely removed from the social order.

In keeping with this “transcendence,” cause-and-effect relation of phenomena has no place in the existentialist mode of thinking. To the question whether the sciences involve the idea of causality, Sartre answers: “Absolutely not. The sciences are abstract, they study the variations of equally abstract factors and not real causality.” Rejection of the category of causal relation means exclusion of all coherence, connection, interdependence, and mutual determination of phenomena; it means negation of reciprocal action of nature upon man and man upon nature, as well as denial of the influence of man’s activities upon his consciousness. Thus, existentialism shuts out perspective and goal in social life and leads to the embracing of mysticism, spiritualism, and their political counterpart, reaction.

Sartre’s “solitary” man, elevated above causality, social environment, and historical law, but walking under the pall of a guilt complex, is an abject, anti-social, agonized, unconfident,

and hate-filled creature: "...man is anguish ... man is desolate." To Sartre's individual his fellow-man is ODe to whom he is chained, without whom he cannot live and with whom life is hateful. Hence, a character in *No Exit* sums up the matter: "Hell is others."

Since Sartre, who participated in the French Resistance, bases some of his writings upon experiences of that movement, existentialism is able to surround itself with an aura of radicalism. This radicalism is but an expression of its adventurism and its petty-bourgeois anarchist self-exaltation; it is no less an expression of its demagogic "double-talk" which is useful to reaction as a disorienting factor among certain elements in the anti-fascist camp.

In the essays, dramas, and novels of the existentialist school we get the heroics of futility and a pseudo-radicalism culminating in the negation of life. Thus, one of this cult's leading exponents, Albert Camus, has stated: "There is only one philosophic problem which is truly serious, and that is suicide." The bourgeoisie finds this philosophy of historical accidentalism and extreme subjectivism a valuable commodity for export and import. It directs the sale of this "up-to-date" philosophy of life and aesthetics, with its façade of radicalism, especially toward the youth, who, growing increasingly disillusioned with things as they are, could otherwise be reached with the truth of social reality.

Might such a "spirit of the times" have served to influence the choice of Sartre's *No Exit* for the Drama Critics' award as the year's best foreign play?

#### DEAD-END PHILOSOPHERS

Finally, the trend of irrationality is marked by the current vogue of reactionary revivals centering about Franz , Kafka and the forerunners of latter-day existentialism, the nineteenth century obscurantist theologian, the Dane, Soren Kierkegaard, and the ultra-subjectivist and eventual Nazi, Martin Heidegger.

In critically evaluating such revivals, we should place our emphasis on the reactionary ends to which they are put. This approach will help us all the better to point out what is intrinsically dangerous in drawing upon the past under the guiding

spirit of such authors and their works.

To make clear the meaning of these revivals, it is sufficient to quote the following: "... there is only a spiritual world; what we call the physical world is the evil in the spiritual one ... a first sign of nascent knowledge is the desire for death... ." (Kafka.) "But if the task of life is to become subjective, then the thought of death is not, for the individual subject, something in general, but is verily a deed." (Kierkegaard.) "The trembling of anguish runs constantly through the human being.... The nought of anguish bares the nothingness which fundamentally characterizes the human being." (Heidegger.)

In exposing the meaning of the "revival" of Kierkegaard, Kafka, Heidegger, and other such writers, we do not by any means turn our back on literary tradition. As Marxists, we cherish the vital cultural creations of the past. We do not begin, doctrinaire fashion, "from scratch," but stand on the indestructible foundations of human knowledge, of science, literature, and the arts, which have been built, not only under capitalism, but under feudalism and under the system of slave-ownership before it. We value the great men of past ages for their contributions to human enlightenment, and do not use their historic limitations to hem in the horizons of society today. We stress with Marx and Lenin the continuity of cultural development.

This continuity must be achieved with the dialectical method of critical analysis, which offers the criteria for rejection as well as acceptance. Thus, our cultural heritage embraces everything that has through the centuries contributed to broaden man's awareness of the world of reality, everything that has served to transform the social consciousness in the direction of tire new and the arising. Thus, the struggle for the cultural heritage is for us integrated with the struggle for the people's inheritance of the future. Hence, our struggle is to reclaim the heritage of the best in the living past.

It surely is no accident that we today have no revival of Walt Whitman or Lewis Henry Morgan. Nor is it entirely accidental that the official memorial exercises for Tom Paine take the form of purging Howard Fast's novelized biography of that great revolutionary from the New York City public school libraries.



There come readily to mind for literary revival the names of such tremendous figures in democratic culture as John Milton and the Irish-born English deist, John Toland; as Diderot, Voltaire, and Shelley; as Boerne, Chernishevsky, Gorky, and our own Wendell Phillips, Frank Norris, and Randolph Bourne. These men brought to mankind, not obscurantism, not the phosphorescent pallor of mysticism, but the radiance of progressive ideas; they brought, not worship of a death-principle, but a sense of conquering the future and a strength for sustained struggle.

We repudiate the tug toward the dead past which we are invited to share by existentialists, Neo-Thomists, Trotskyites, and the sundry apologists for decaying capitalism with their revival of mystics, of novelists and poets who celebrated snob values and occultism, and of decadent philosophers and theologians. Our responsibility to culture, whose very existence is challenged today, is to reassert the positive, progressive values in our heritage—the living past, the rich democratic and proletarian traditions which can inspire the forward movement of our time.

### THE FAITH-CULT

An established and now more and more aggressive trend in current literature is the faith-cult. We get the deeper implications of this trend in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, published in 1943. In the first of the four long poems, "Burnt Norton," the way of life is set forth as:

*"...not in movement  
But abstention from movement; while the world moves  
In appetency, on its metalled ways  
Of time past and time future.*

The poem containing these lines was probably composed in 1935, the year in which the offensive of German, Italian, and Japanese fascism on an international scale had brought against itself the movement of the People's Front in a number of countries. It was the year of the great democratic upsurge in France, headed by the Communist-Socialist United Front, which saved that country from impending fascism. In Spain the proletarian-republican forces were shortly to engage in the epic struggle

against the fascist invaders and their Franquist Fifth Column. In Ethiopia, a brave people, with little more than spears for arms, was resisting fascist bombers and cannon. In Asia, the then existing Chinese Soviet Government and Red Army inspired the people to struggle against the drive of Japanese imperialism to annex all of China, which drive was being facilitated by Chiang Kai-shek's betrayal of the country's national interests. In Eliot's own Britain, 1935 was marked by strike movements and hunger marches and by the workers' struggle for the repeal of the hated Trades Union Disputes Act and the Sedition Act; it was a year in which British imperialism was flagrantly financing German rearmament as part of its general pro-Hitler policy.

And in that year, T. S. Eliot counselled "abstention from movement."

The American edition of *Four Quartets* appeared during the war, simultaneously with the British. This strategy for defeat developed by the faith-cult was fortunately counteracted by the healthy strategy of the people directed, "in *movement*," to immobilize fascism.

Remember the statement in which Eliot proclaimed himself a "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion." A writer's assertions of opinion are inevitably and consciously actions and incitements to action in others. Reaction cannot be presented as "abstention from movement." Even the putrescent corpse as it decays has motion within its coffin.

Paralleling the churchward beckonings of Eliot are the quietism, resignation, and intellectual self-destruction of Gerald Heard and Aldous Huxley, the Vedantists, and Christopher Isherwood, the Yogi. A kindred mystical cobweb has spun itself about the brain of Pulitzer Prize winner Karl Shapiro, who, in his *Essay on Rime*, speaks worship-fully of Eliot:

*"What we know  
In retrospect is that the prophet's eyes  
Were turned to the cathedral and the past  
As toward a promise. But in the interim  
Between his deep and masterly despair  
And the overt fulfillment of his faith*

*His word was our poetic law."*

Thus leading by not too strained a transition to the assertion that:

*"Art insofar as it involved the faith  
In revolution helped disprove itself  
And its dependent theory."*

Gorky, Neruda, Aragon, O'Casey! What matter these whose eyes are not turned to the cathedral and the past, whose depth and masterliness do not lie in despair but destroy despair!

The thesis of affirmation by faith is not limited to literature. Tire adoption of the cult of irrationality is plainly the confession, ideologically, of inescapable defeat – by a doomed bourgeoisie: the desperation which unleashes the drive to fascism.

As in literature and philosophy, so in the post-war theatre, mysticism and the faith-cult represent a considerable trend. A crop of plays has been presented which deal with the supernatural and the miraculous. In Maxwell Anderson's *Joan of Lorraine*, the pivotal character, Masters, the voice of the author, pronounces his credo:

*"We live by illusions and assumptions and concepts, every one of them as questionable as the Voices Joan heard in the garden. We take on our religions the way we fall in love, and we can't defend one any more than the other."*

As a major phase of this faith-cult, we should note the intensified pressures of reactionary clericalism upon all cultural media.

To the many subtle agencies of the Roman Catholic hierarchy has now been added *The Book Survey*, a quarterly issued by the Cardinal Hayes Literature Committee. Its appearance was given prominence in the press just before New Year's Day, 1947. *Life Magazine*, shortly afterward, published lavish propaganda articles designed to foster nostalgia for medievalism and the feudal papacy. And, of course, we must not omit the sumptuous magazine-confessionals of that glamorous convert, Clare Boothe Luce.

In motion pictures reactionary clericalism is making

unprecedented inroads with films of the type of *The Song of Bernadette*, *Going My Way*, and *The Bells of St. Mary's*. This is facilitated by the control of the hierarchy over this most popular entertainment medium, which is accomplished:

1. through the Production Code Administration which applies the hierarchy-formulated moral code, administered by a reactionary Roman Catholic ("The Czar of all the Rushes"), and
2. through the external, Catholic censorship and pressure group – the Legion of Decency.

This mystical trend is the counterpart in the cultural field of the hierarchy's increasing interference in political, educational, and trade-union life. This interference finds official encouragement in such actions and policies as the unconstitutional continuation of Myron C. Taylor in an ambassadorial capacity at the Vatican, and in the U.S. Supreme Court approval of the use of public funds for transportation of parochial school pupils – a decision flagrantly violating the Constitutional provision for separation of Church and State. The hierarchy's political encroachments are further encouraged by the Dulles-directed reactionary Protestant efforts at an anti-Soviet "Holy" Alliance with the Vatican.

### *THE BRUTE-CULT*

Philosophic idealism is never content to remain in the rarified atmosphere of "higher thought." Fulfilling its class function, it inevitably penetrates into every level of bourgeois thought, from the most esoteric journal or philosopher's seminar to the pulp magazine and the movies. This is even more pronounced today, as idealism unfurls its banner for the fascist offensive.

We should miss the significance of the present-day cults of irrationalism, were we to reduce them simply to their aspect of recession from reason, which reflects the anti-scientific and anti-historical outlook of declining capitalism in the epochal sense. There is something that is specific and new in the post-war manifestation of pretentious irrationality: it is an irrationality that is on the offensive. Idealism in the wake of World War II is *aggressive idealism* – reaction fighting for its life. What

marks dominantly the sundry expressions of idealism today is not idle introspection, not the yearning for Nirvana, not self-mummification in the vaults of antiquity, not self-exile from life. Today irrationalism encroaches actively upon the people's affairs for outright reactionary purposes. It is the philosophy of the anti-democratic camp of blood and force. Today, expressing the aggressive politics of an imperialism desperate before its narrowing horizons, die-hard idealism resorts more and more manifestly to the cult of brutality, violence, and fascist anti-humanism. This cult of the brute is not a departure from, but the logical correlative of, the velvety, world-evading cults of mysticism.

An inevitable expression of aggressive idealism is the cult of the brute. The superbrute is superman! The brute-cult has captured every mass medium of bourgeois "cultural" expression. In detective stories, murder mysteries, comic strips, popular "science" magazines, pulp magazines, radio programs, movies, and children's comic magazines and radio hours, violence, kidnapping, horror, rape, murder are the spiritual fare offered the people. American bourgeois culture has reached its lowest depths in its systematic spiritual debasement of our children. The bulk of the nation's cultural forces, potential creators of great novels, poems, dramas, music, art, which could enrich the life of the people, are sacrificed on the altar of the monopolist brute-cult!

Entertainment in the mass cultural media, while continuing the pattern of escapism, aims to brutalize the sensibilities of people. Inherent in most escapist writings, films, and radio programs have always been approval and support of the *status quo*. But today, in the hysteria of the fascist offensive and its attendant aggressive idealism, the ruling class depends less and less on escapism in the old sense, rushing to fill the vacuity of escapism with the most reactionary content.

A clear manifestation of this policy is to be found in current detective fiction, in the award of the \$3,000 first prize in the 1946 *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* contest to H. F. (Gerald) Heard for his lurid atomic mystery, v "The President of the United States, Detective" (published in March, 1947). In this phantasmagoria, projected into 1977, not the old-patterned men from Mars, but the "Commissar of Commissars" of a

Mongolian empire of which the Soviet Union has become part (and which is throughout referred to as the U.S.S.R.), plots the destruction of the United States by a monster tidal wave, to be loosed by atom-energy melting the frozen tundra and the Arctic Sea ice-field. But the Commissar of Commissars is outwitted by the President of the United States, Detective, *l*, who displays great powers of Sherlock Holmes deduction and an enormous fund of "scientific" knowledge. The President-Detective orders bombs dropped on the Greenland Ice-Cap, re-shaping the world in the American way! After most of the world is inundated and the U.S.S.R. set for annihilation, a "New Land" emerges from under the vast load of ice, fertile and rich in all resources. The President thereupon proclaims to the world in a radio-television broadcast:

"...Therefore I now claim for you this New Land and lead you to this, the Path of Peace—you the free peoples for whom I, the President of the United States, stand as Trustee. I appeal to you, have I not acted as the new Moses leading you into a land which this very day I have ordered to be unveiled—at the very moment we needed it most. And I now name this New Land the Territory of the United States—the central homeland of the democratic peoples of the Earth."

Here we have escapism in its newest, most streamlined manner—flight with jet-speed into the ultimate in the ' Truman Doctrine: subjugating the world, in the name of democracy, as the Territory of the United States!

In the sphere of films, under compulsion of the nation's wartime needs, there was a slight increase after Pearl Harbor in non-escapist Hollywood motion pictures. The scantiness of that increase was brought out in an analytical survey of Hollywood's war product by Dorothy B. Jones, a former executive of the O.W.I. in Hollywood, as follows: "of a total of 1,313 motion pictures released during 1942, 1943 and 1944, there were 45 or 50 [less than 4 per cent]

which aided significantly, both at home and abroad, in increasing understanding of the conflict." But even this small trend toward mature films could not long be maintained.

The war was not yet over when the film magnates had

begun saying, "Let's forget the war." As reaction developed, escapism in films, characterized by saccharine romanticism, not only re-established its full norm, but began to take on new aspects. We need note only the terrific increase in the number of escapist motion pictures whose theme is brutality, graced by such titles as *The Killers*, *Murder My Sweet*, *Dillinger*, *Born to Kill*, and of such serialized radio programs as *Gang Busters*, *Moll's Mystery Theatre*, and *Murder at Midnight*. Their social morale is typified in the high mission of the protagonist in *Born to Kill*, who lives to "fix it so's I can spit in anybody's eye." If in an earlier day there was an attempt at least to connect crime with social environment, as in *Public Enemy*, *Dead End*, and, however tenuously, the whole cycle of prohibition gang-war films, today's gangster films seem to be made for no other purpose than to shock and to brutalize.

The effect of such narcotic culture is to instill in men, women, and children the idea of cheapness of human life. So what if you come in a mob and hang a black man on a tree? So what if you kill six million Jews or if you drop two atom bombs a day on those foreigners? What we have here is a conscious policy to channel social discontent and human frustration, for which capitalism is responsible, into anti-social, anti-human attitudes and acts to perpetuate capitalism. And what we have here, further, is the systematic vitiation and degradation of vital mass art forms, both with respect to democratic, human content and with respect to artistic values.

Listen to the indictment of the directors of our radio industry pronounced by Lee DeForest, inventor of the Audion tube, which made modern radio possible:

"What have you gentlemen done with my child? He was conceived as a potent instrumentality for culture, fine music, the uplifting of America's mass intelligence.

"You have debased this child, you have sent him out on the street in rags of ragtime, tatters of jive and boogie-woogie, to collect money from all and sundry for hubba hubba and audio jitterbug. You have made of him a laughing stock to intelligence, surely a stench in the nostrils of the gods of the ionosphere... . Soap opera without end or sense floods each household daily... . Murder mysteries

rule the waves by night and children are rendered psychopathic by your bedtime stories. This child of mine, now thirty years in age, has been resolutely kept to the average intelligence of thirteen years. Its national intelligence is maintained moronic, as though you and your sponsors believe the majority of listeners have moron minds....”

### CULTURE IN THE SERVICE OF RACISM

The most vicious expression of the brute-cult is the racist propaganda and practice of Negro-hatred fomented and legalized by the white ruling class and defended by Bourbon-minded ideologists.

The brute-cult does not consist solely in idealizing the brute. It seeks to degrade the victim in order to justify the rule of the brute. In Nazism we saw these two aspects totally revealed.

The Nazi Brute proclaimed that *it* was Man, and the rest of mankind brute. In its white-supremacy form, the brute-cult would force upon us a conception which creates an image of the Negro that puts him beyond the pale of humanity.

As reaction, rampant, advances its fascist anti-humanism, we find an increase since the war's end in anti-Negro content in the monopoly-controlled mass amusement products.

On the screen, under the war impact, we saw the disappearance to an extent, in feature pictures at least, of the stereotyped Negro. But on the whole, the movies made no positive affirmation of the Negro character, of Negro life and achievement. Today, Hollywood has practically reverted to its old pattern of discrimination, caricature, and stereotype. The Negro screen actor is forced to choose between portraying disgusting caricatures of the Negro people and not working. It was at the end of the war that Walt Disney's offensive, Uncle Tom-spirited *Song of the South*, was released. In the monstrosity called *Captive White Woman*, a mad "scientist" creates a wild Negro girl by injecting the blood of an ape into a white woman.

Such depiction is inevitable from a ruling class that will not permit the cultural affirmation of a people it oppresses.

The treatment of the Negro in radio programs was characterized as follows by Oliver Harrington of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People at the PCA



Radio Conference on April 19, 1947:

“In dramatizations and newscasts, Negroes are seldom mentioned except in the presentation of unfavorable facts out of context. Although it is not impossible for respected Negro organizations to secure air time for the presentation of Negro achievement programs locally, it is virtually impossible to secure time for any program dealing with the denial to Negroes of even basic rights which are guaranteed to all citizens of a democracy.”

Further, the statement estimated that of the 30,000 employees in radio no more than 200 are Negroes, and these mostly in the position of menials and manual laborers. With the exception of a few vocal ensembles, the radio networks give full-time employment to no more than 25 Negro performers.

A shocking exposé of the discriminatory practices in the art and professional fields are the following facts made public at the conference of the Cultural Division of the National Negro Congress, held in New York in March, 1947:

In the book publishing houses in New York not one Negro is employed in an editorial capacity. Not a single Negro is employed in any symphony orchestra in the United States. There are no Negro musicians in the orchestras of any opera or ballet company. There are no Negro singers engaged by the major opera companies. Likewise, the ballet is closed to Negro dancers. There are no Negro technicians in Hollywood, no Negro cameramen, carpenters, writers, musicians, film cutters, or laboratory technicians, and, of course, no directors or producers. The only category of employed Negroes in Hollywood is that of actors, and this for the most part to perpetuate the stereotype and sub-social status of the Negro.

In the theatrical sphere, training facilities for Negro actors are seriously inadequate. Negro directors on Broadway are almost non-existent, while Negro playwrights are still all too few. Discrimination in some areas of theatre work is practiced or tolerated by the unions in these areas. This is particularly true of those still dominated by reactionary leaderships, such as the stage-hands local of the I.A.T.S.E., A. F. of L., which has a Jim Crow local policy confining employment of Negro stage-hands only to the few theatres in Negro communities. Among

other theatre workers, such as company managers and house managers, the unions involved — all A. F. of L. — have not yet waged a fight to break down the anti-Negro discrimination policy.

The outright racist bias in films and radio programs, as well as the discrimination against Negro cultural workers, draws ideological sustenance from a certain type of academic writing dealing with the sociology and the history of the Negro people.

The white chauvinist bias increasingly crops up in a number of historical and biographical works, as, for example, those dealing with the Civil War and Reconstruction periods. These works proceed from a generally reactionary and mystical philosophy of history. Perhaps the most typical of such distortions of history is Avery Craven's *The Coming of the Civil War* (1942). For Mr. Craven, "The fact of his [*i.e.*, the Negro's] status as a slave may, in the main, be ignored," and "The patient Negro, meanwhile, went on with his tasks generally unconscious of the merits or the lack of them in the system under which he toiled. The weather and the fields brought enough trouble without his borrowing more." This is the conclusion of the chapter, "By the Sweat of Their Faces" (a deceptive title), in which Craven, with great academic "detachment," conjectures: "The outbreak of civil war prevented the South from demonstrating what American Negro slavery might have become in a more complex social-economic order." Extending this logic: if only Hitler had not been defeated, we might have had the extreme pleasure of finding out to what Utopian lengths Nazism could have carried us.

Though some note of a vulgar economism enters the work, the essential thesis is that the Civil War was the result of the "fanaticism" of the Northern abolitionist and the Southern fire-eater, with the emphasis on the abolitionist as the knave. The idea is expounded that Lincoln, as the tool of the Radicals, forced the Southerners into firing on Fort Sumter, an apparent act of aggression. This treatment of Lincoln has an analogue in the Hearst school of history which seeks to make Franklin D. Roosevelt the virtual hurler of the bombs on Pearl Harbor, the instigator of the war for his own "nefarious" purpose, to secure his re-election.

In the sphere of sociology, a major work on the Negro question requiring discussion is *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, whose author, Gunnar Myrdal, is Secretary of Commerce for Sweden and has served as economic adviser to the Swedish Government and as member of the Swedish Senate for the Social-Democratic Party. The underlying thesis of this work is that Negro oppression is not decisively rooted in social causes, but that the problem is basically a "moral," a subjective, one:

"The American Negro problem is a problem in the heart of the American. It is there that the interracial tension has its focus. It is there that the decisive struggle goes on. This is the central viewpoint of this treatise. Though our study includes economic, social, and political race relations, at bottom our problem is the moral dilemma of the American—the conflict between his moral valuations on various levels of consciousness and generality." (p. XLIII)

And further:

"...The important changes in the Negro problem do not consist of, or have close relations with, 'social trends' in the narrower meaning of the term but are made up of changes in people's beliefs and valuations..." (p. 998)

Accordingly, we are asked to believe that the oppressed status of the Negro people is basically not chargeable to objective existence in the economic, social, and political conditions of present-day capitalist America, but to men's minds and hearts, to subjective attitudes and beliefs.

Viewing the Negro question as a moral dilemma, that is, as a "human nature" problem, Myrdal takes as the philosophical basis for his conclusions the renunciation of materialism and the adoption of idealism, together with a pragmatist, pluralistic theory of knowledge, which leads to the impossibility of discovering the fundamental causation of social phenomena. Hence, whatever may be the reformist answers of the Social-Democrat Myrdal, the Negro "problem" is actually placed by him beyond the possibility of a real solution. And it is not accidental that the book contains concessions to the slanderous myth of Negro "inferiority." First published in 1944 as the

outgrowth of a study sponsored by Carnegie Corporation and republished in 1946, the work has had considerable influence, being used widely as a required or suggested text in college courses in sociology.

### *SUPERMAN AS ANGLO-SAXON*

Racism and the hate-cult seek to impose anti-Semitism and contempt for the foreign-born and the nationality- groups as an ideological test of Americanism.

In general, there has been created in all the art forms of America a pattern of Anglo-Saxon supremacy, a Nordic fictional abstraction as the highest type of American by which all must measure themselves. Rarely on the screen or in radio is a member of a nationality-group presented in a heroic role. On the contrary, the Italian, the Jew, the \$ Negro is likely to be the stock villain, the comedy-butt, or the menial.

This pattern was described in a report made in 1945 by the Bureau of Applied Social Research of Columbia University at the request of the Writers' War Board, on the basis of a survey of eight nationally circulated American magazines for the years 1937 and 1943. The magazines examined were the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Colliers*, *American*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *True Story*, and *True Confessions*. Out of 185 stories examined, with 889 identifiable characters, 90.8% of the characters were Anglo-Saxon. There were 18 Negroes and 10 Jews. The survey leads the Bureau to conclude:

"In frequency of appearance, importance in the story, approval and disapproval, status and occupation, and in traits, the Anglo-Saxons receive better treatment in these stories than minority and foreign groups, both qualitatively and quantitatively."

Analyzing the motivations and the conduct of the non- Anglo-Saxon characters, the Bureau points out:

"The behavior of these fictional characters could easily be used to prove' that the Negroes are lazy, the Jews wily, the Irish superstitious, and the Italians criminal."

In its Digest of the data prepared by the Bureau, the

Writers' War Board declares that "the constant repetition of racial stereotypes was exaggerating and perpetuating the false and mischievous notion that ours is a white, Protestant Anglo-Saxon country in which all other racial stocks and religious faiths are of lesser dignity."

The Digest thus summarizes the key facts in the Bureau's report:

"The attitude of both authors and editors was shown by the repeated assignment of 'heart' (or sympathetic) motivations to Anglo-Saxons. They were conspicuously concerned with romantic love, marriage, affection, emotional security, adventure for its own sake, patriotism, idealism and justice. In contrast, 'head' motivations were made largely typical of minority characters. They showed interest mostly in money, self-advancement, power, and dominance.

"The evidence is clear. American short story writers have made 'nice people' synonymous with Anglo-Saxons. Such characters are written as intelligent, industrious, esthetic, democratic, athletic, practical, frank, lovable ... the non-Anglo-Saxons were usually pictured as the 'villains', domineering, immoral, selfish, unintelligent, cowardly, lazy, sly, cruel, stubborn, non-esthetic, weak."

The exponents and statesmen of this dominant-race arrogance strive to destroy the centuries-deep cultural roots of the diverse nationality-groups, who, with the English stock, have built and now make up America. Anglo-Saxon chauvinism is a definite culture-pattern of American imperialism. Our bigots and chauvinists of twenty and forty years ago used to assert, falsely, that "this is an Anglo-Saxon country." It was not then; it is even less today. This outworn demagoguery is revived today as part of the fascist offensive, which reflects on the domestic plane the foreign policy of world domination.

American cultural life is the poorer for this forcible Anglicization. Culture in America will not fulfill itself until all nationality-groups are socially enabled to develop their cultural expressions and thereby contribute to the development of our nation's culture as a whole freely and democratically.

## Chapter 2

### MASKS FOR IMPERIALISM

Rightly to understand the role of reactionary tendencies of thought in literature and the arts, we must see their relationship to the main ideological drives in the political sphere.

The strength of world democratic forces and the basic democratic-mindedness of the American people compel reaction, in the present post-war period, to advance its political ideas in terms which commingle virtuous pretension and outright aggression.

*BOMB 'EM AND BURN 'EM!*

Foremost among these ideas in the foreign-political sphere is that of "Western Moral Culture," which is merely a moral fig-leaf for the not so moral political policy (with its economic motivation) of the Anglo-American-dominated Western Bloc. Its imperialist content was evident in John Foster Dulles' West European Federalism scheme and in Winston Churchill's invitation at Fulton, Missouri, to Britain and the United States to "walk together in majesty and peace."

At a meeting of leading intellectuals from six European countries, held in Geneva in September, 1946, known as *Rencontres Internationales de Genève*, the moral culture of the "West" was extolled in anti-Communist context. This divisive propaganda was injected even more centrally at the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at Paris in December, 1946. The Soviet Union was not represented at either of the gatherings. From day to day the air gets thicker with the unction of the "moral culture of the West" as against, of course, what Kipling called "the lesser breeds without the law." The morality of this Western culture is matched only by the culture of this Western morality. Both reflect the strategy of holding France, Italy, and as much as possible of Germany and the rest of Europe as pawns in the game of Anglo-American — in the final analysis, American — imperialism.

One cannot help commenting on the dwindling resourcefulness of the bourgeois ideology which is compelled to croak

stale Spenglerian warnings of eruptions of Eastern barbarians. In this connection it is well to bear in mind the contributions made to imperialism's arsenal of anti-Soviet ideology by that ultra-European, Trotsky, whose counter-revolutionism resorted to such racist epithets as "Stalin the Oriental," "Asiatic bureaucracy" — all designed to train the guns of "Western Moral Culture" against the heart of the Socialist State.

The concept of "National Sovereignty Surrender" is another sanctimonious idea with which reaction has been operating. According to this thesis wars are caused by the existence of sovereign nations; hence the need for World Government. This ideological pattern, which capitalizes on the peoples' desire for peace, is designed to conceal the imperialist source of war and thus exonerate imperialism from responsibility for making war, and to lay the basis for subjugating national states under Anglo-American domination in an anti-Soviet "Federal Union."

The reactionary "world government" idea, which has captivated the minds of many Americans, including scientists who abandon scientific attitudes upon leaving their laboratories, is a noble facade to conceal a projected world structure under Anglo-American imperialist domination. In the control of this projected "World Government" Wall Street would be master.

This is the ideology of the Truman Doctrine.

The Truman Doctrine is the attempt to put the Luce-Jordan "American Century" aim into practice as a "democratic" bulwark against Communism. Atomic interference calling itself the Good Samaritan!

The most outspoken expression of American World-Empire-mindedness is the ex-Trotskyite James Burnham's *Struggle for the World*, which has been widely promoted in the bourgeois press. In that book we read:

"It would have to be recognized that peace is not and cannot be the objective of foreign policy.

"The U.S. must be prepared to make an open bid for world political leadership.

"In world political relations the procedure would have to be quick, firm, sufficient intervention, not nonintervention... .

“Finally, this policy could be put into practice only if the U.S. is and is known to be able and ready to use force... Power must be there, with the known readiness to use it, whether in the indirect form of paralyzing economic sanctions or in the direct explosion of bombs. As the ultimate reserve in power, there would be the monopoly control of atomic weapons.”

In this complete “positive program” – *Bomb ‘em and Burn ‘em!* – presented to imperialism by a supposedly civilized professorial mentor, we get the full implications of the Truman Doctrine.

The first phase of the strategic plan for world domination and outright intervention is the building up of a fatalist attitude among the people to World War III:

The Soviets will attack. (We have it from Bullitt himself.) War between us is inevitable. Let’s take the war to them. Let’s get out our atom bombs and let’s put the screws on labor and the Reds and tie the nation to the war machine!

#### *SOAP OPERA: STATION NAM*

In the domestic sphere the leading ideas of reaction can be summed up in the over-all advertisement of “the American Way of Life.” This patriotic commodity, highly touted by the National Association of Manufacturers and the so-called House Committee on Un-American Activities, brands as “Un-American” everything that opposes the tradition of the slave market, the hanging of the Haymarket martyrs, and the class murder of Sacco and Vanzetti.

Prominently displayed in this “American Way of Life” is the “freedom” façade, in which are vaunted: “free enterprise,” which, spelled out, means freedom of monopoly to strangle enterprise and fleece the people, freedom to enslave at home and abroad; and “freedom of labor,” with its cant about the “right to work.” Congressman Hartley, be it remembered, called his slave labor bill ‘labor’s bill of rights’!

To these we should add the ideology of “free science” (free, that is, from concern with society).

The main spokesman of this ivory tower science, the British professor of physical chemistry, Michael Polanyi, whose



influence in American scientific circles is considerable, pleads "for the academic seclusion of science." "Irresponsible privacy, solitary habits, non-conformity and eccentricity" – these are for him "the breeding ground of independent men."

The false slogan of "free science," by its conservatizing effect on scientists, renders difficult their resistance to the appalling militarization and regimentation of both science and scientists in the United States.

In no real sense, therefore, is it a question of "ivory-tower science," since such counsel to scientists to be "above" the people and its struggles means in actuality alliance with the \* monopolist exploiters of science against the people; it means in the final analysis their surrender to atomic imperialism.

In February, 1947, the War Department made public its program for the maximum possible utilization of every scientist and engineer in the United States. And the report of the Truman Commission on Universal Military Training <sup>v</sup> reveals the appalling extent to which imperialist militarism is advancing with its total plan.

Reaction's "American way of life" must have its "democracy" pose, whereby "democracy" is used as was "Socialism" in Hitler's "National Socialism." In Germany, where there were 13 million Communist-Socialist voters, fascism resorted to the demagogic expedient of adopting "socialism" in its anti-socialist code. In the United States, where the people, since the founding of our nation, have been reared on the principle of democracy, the bi-partisan fascist offensive of our ruling class operates behind the mask of "democracy."

Under the protection of this calculated confusion, the enemies of our people's welfare, rights, and culture have let loose an unparalleled drive of Red-baiting. The attack, under this smoke-screen, is aimed at all the democratic

forces of the people, and at the dignity and essential rights of the cultural worker. What began as a witch-hunt against the German Communist and anti-fascist refugee, Gerhart Eisler, and against the general secretary of the Communist Party, Eugene Dennis – timed to coincide with the hearings on the anti-labor bills – instantly extended into the un-American Committee's blitzkrieg against progressive artists and writers in Hollywood and throughout the country.

As a chief ideological tactic, the assassins of democracy render themselves hoarse shouting their “anti-totalitarian” shibboleth. The purpose of this shibboleth is:

a) to slander the Socialist democracy of the Soviet Union and the new peoples’ democracies of Europe and Asia;

b) to drown out the truth about fascism by confusing it with fascism’s relentless enemy, Communism, the staunchest defender of democracy;

c) to deter the development of a Socialist-conscious working class in the United States and to weaken the struggle of the people to safeguard and extend their democratic gains;

d) to make the world believe that the United States enjoys immunity from the contradictions inherent in capitalism, is capable of pursuing an “exceptionalist” course free of the convulsions to which capitalism is everywhere subject, and is exempt from the ravages of decay and from the nemesis of socialism;

e) to conceal the limited and precarious nature of capitalist democracy and to present it as the one and only democracy, as democracy *in excelsis*—exemplified by legal sanction to lynchers, by the frenzied legislative effort to strangle the trade unions, and by the attempt to apply the Japanese fascist “law of dangerous thoughts”;

f) to hide from the people the record of the Communists’ consistent defense of bourgeois democracy, despite its formal character and its limitations, from the onslaught of fascism; and

g) in the name of this “anti-totalitarianism,” to carry out a policy of world-scale imperialist expansionism, of inciting civil wars and giving armed aid to reaction, of sowing the seeds of a third world war, and of driving to fascism to further this policy.

The “anti-totalitarian” shibboleth is thus reaction’s specific ideological technique for its political gangsterism. The word *totalitarian*, taken from the jargon of fascism, has become the chief ideological weapon of all pro-fascists, and of many of their dupes. It asserts the monstrous lie that Communism and fascism have a fundamental identity. There is much evidence that it is the policy of many large capitalist newspapers that the word *totalitarian* be substituted for the word *fascist*, in news

and editorials alike.

### *ROGUES, RODENTS, AND RENEGADES*

This technique is most shamelessly evident in the gutter-culture of anti-Sovietism, anti-Marxism, and Red-baiting. In radio, a commentator breathing a friendly or plainly objective word about the Soviet Union is driven off the air. In motion pictures, from six to eight anti-Soviet films are being planned.

In books and magazines you may write of the farthest fair-land, but to be assured of publication, you would do well to give your wicked fairy at least a Russian accent. And you may outrage your reader's concern for truth, but if you sneer at socialism and dialectical materialism, if you assassinate your Communist characters with slander, if you traduce the subject of your biography when his name is Karl Marx or Joseph Stalin, then your intellectual depravity will be blazoned forth as a new realism, on the order of Koestleriana. Then your bestial cynicism will make the name Orwell the symbol of noble satire, your betrayal of the working class will be sung in the praises of your renegade "confession" novels and autobiographies, and your stool-pigeon soul, be you as low as Frederick Woltman, will not fail of reward at the hands of a Pulitzer Prize Committee.

Imperialism in its war on culture, as in its war on peace, has no assassin so loyal as Trotskyism.

Reaction, knowing well the value of Trotskyism as a disorienting and disruptive force in the working-class and general people's movement, will make increasing use of Trotskyite agents in the cultural field as the democratic forces make progress in consolidating their power. It is a notorious fact that Trotskyites and kindred souls among White Guards, counter-revolutionaries, police-spies, labor-haters, Red-baiters, warmongers, and fascists have been put into key positions in bourgeois publications and publishing houses. From such strategic posts they exercise a spiteful and poisonous influence upon literary output, suppressing through pre-censorship meritorious work by authors who will not bow to imperialism and fascism. Trotskyites are increasingly found in the literary departments of magazines and newspapers, where, in their position as editors and critics, they practice literary lynching of progressive,

and particularly Marxian, writers. These professional anti-Sovieters eagerly hail “organized hypocrisy” *d la* Valtin and Budenz. Trotskyism’s cultural depravity must be recognized as a serious danger to America’s democratic culture.

## Chapter 3

### TOWARD A PEOPLE'S CULTURE

The drive by American reaction arouses against itself counteracting forces of the people throughout the world. These popular forces are impelled by ideas that express the striving for lasting peace, for genuine democracy, for the elimination of monopoly, for the people's democratic control of industry, for economic security, for social advance. These forces understand and applaud the firm stand of the Soviet Union in behalf of world peace. The newly risen peoples' democracies, though war-wasted and hungry, have refused to yield to the economic and diplomatic bludgeonings of Wall Street imperialism. In the face of the "totalitarian" shibboleth and the virulent Redbaiting by American imperialism, the Communist parties in those countries continue to grow in influence as the recognized and trusted leaders of the people. The Truman Doctrine, fatuously offered as a dove of peace, was instantly known throughout the world as a bird of very evil omen. Upon his return from Europe in the spring of 1947, Henry Wallace told the American people: "But from Europe you see American intervention as it really is.... Everywhere I had to defend America against growing bitterness."

At home the monopolists' idea of the American way of life is meeting increasing resistance. Organized labor and the people as a whole press forward with their democratic idea of an American way of life. The Taft-Hartley slave labor bill roused the entire trade-union movement to protest against what CIO President Philip Murray warned was "the first real step" toward fascism. The phenomenon of Wallace is not that of an isolated individual. In his voice is the resentment of many millions of Americans against the abandonment of the progressive Roosevelt policies on the domestic and foreign-political fronts.

The people are far from accepting everything that reaction hurls into their faces. The contradictions of capitalism engender and bring into motion progressive forces also in the field of culture. The colossal monopoly control of the cultural media generates growing conflicts between the monopolies and the cultural workers in their employ. Reaction has not won over

the main body of cultural forces to its side, although the danger is present that it may succeed; vigilance is still the price of liberty.

Let us remember that reaction is compelled to accompany its demagogic drive with economic pressure and ever increasing terrorization. Among the professional people there is a strong Roosevelt tradition, with which reaction is compelled to reckon. We must dispel any notion that reactionary pressures in economic and political spheres automatically produce reactionary tides among the cultural forces. Reactionary ideas are one thing; but since they are out of keeping with the movement of reality, the opportunity is favorable for exposing and defeating them. The progressive cultural trends, even though they may still be minority manifestations, need to be seen beyond their apparent dimensions — as expressions powerful enough to break through reaction's control of the agencies of propaganda, of press and pulpit, books and broadcasts, magazines and movies. Furthermore, we are part of the world struggle. While, on the one hand, fascists the world over are encouraged by American imperialist policy and propaganda, the American people will be increasingly influenced by the democratic forces and the progressive ideas of the people in all other countries.

This means that the Marxists and all progressives in the cultural field have great scope for winning masses of professional men and women to a real consciousness of their interest, as cultural workers and as part of the people's struggle. The social responsibility of the artist can be aroused.

#### *CULTURAL AFFIRMATION AGAINST RACISM*

In no single area of struggle on the cultural front have the democratic forces registered such gains as in the struggle against racism. Occurring at the very time when fascist-bent reaction is intensifying its racist offensive, these gains in the cultural field reflect the militant mood of the Negro people in its forward movement to end lynch-law and <sup>fc</sup> Jim Crow. They reflect, too, growing Negro and white unity in the struggle.

We see great advances in the acquittal of the framed Negroes in Columbia, Tennessee; in the election of a Negro city councilman in Winston-Salem, largely through organized

labor's support; in Actors Equity Association's fight to discontinue anti-Negro discrimination at the National Theatre in Washington; in the break-through against Jim Crow in major league baseball; and in the increasing Negro and white unity against racism in the universities.

Of outstanding significance culturally is the appearance of Sinclair Lewis's novel *Kingsblood Royal*. This powerful and inexorable indictment of white supremacy by one of 4 America's foremost novelists and a Nobel Prize recipient, reflects the significance that the Negro question has assumed in the eyes of America and the world.

An important gain in the recent period has been the partial victory over Jim Crow in the Broadway theatre, in contrast to films and radio. This advance has been ^ manifested in the increasing number of serious Negro themes that have been given a positive and dignified treatment, both in productions with all-Negro casts and in productions with mixed casts. These gains have come about as a result of struggle. The need continues.

In noting the considerable progress against Jim Crow in the theatre, with respect both to content and to production, we need to bear in mind that the theatre is a far less monopolized cultural medium than are the film and radio. Secondly, the theatre is considered to be a more specialized > sphere of propaganda, as distinct from the mass media of films and the radio, in which the ideology of reaction is most concentrated and systematically controlled. (Honorable exceptions are such rare national radio programs as WCBS's *One World* series which were given by Norman Corwin and that network's valuable documentary series on vital social issues.)

The cause of the Negro people has acquired an added weapon in its theoretical arsenal, with the publication of Herbert Aptheker's booklet, *The Negro People in America*; a critique of Gunnar Myrdal's fundamental *An American Dilemma*. Aptheker's Marxist critique is a fundamental refutation of reactionary idealism and mysticism as applied specifically to the history, economics, and sociology of the American Negro.

An important step toward the affirmation of Negro culture is the establishment of the Cultural Division of the National Negro Congress, in March, 1947, at the Conference for Free

Expression in the American Arts, which was called by a group of Negro and white cultural leaders, with wide endorsement. The reports to the Conference centered about two main issues, the employment status of Negroes in the various cultural media and the portrayal of the Negro people through each of the media. In relating its program to these two major issues, the Cultural Division, as a first step, has set up chapters in seven spheres of the arts and professions and is preparing to publish the Conference reports in what promises to be a most comprehensive study of the actual status of American Negro culture and cultural forces.

The greatest single symbol of the achievements and the developing militant struggle of the Negro people for liberation is embodied in Paul Robeson, who has dedicated his great talent as singer and actor, his outstanding intellectual capacity, his remarkable personality, and his superb quality of leadership to the anti-fascist fight on every front. With his roots deep in the people, Robeson, as man and artist, is the living refutation of every type of anti-Negro fabrication and the affirmation of the profound social and cultural capacities of his people.

That the reactionary forces recognize this is evidenced by their vicious attack on him, both as a Negro and as a socially alert, active citizen, at Peoria, Albany, and elsewhere. More important, the recognition of Robeson's leadership by progressive elements is demonstrated by the great struggles which have been organized around him in every community in which he has been attacked, as well as the great support given him by people of varying shades of democratic opinion wherever he has appeared in his nation-wide crusade. It is a tribute to him and the great dignity with which he moves, whether under fire or in carrying the fight to the enemy, that the harder he hits, the more prestige and stature he acquires among an ever-broadening public, despite the Red-baiting and anti-Negro viciousness to which he is subjected.

When one considers how many potential Paul Robesons are robbed by bias of opportunity for fulfillment, one realizes what the oppression of a people means in terms of the cost to culture, in the deepest sense, both to the oppressed nation and to the oppressing nation.

American culture will be fettered until it truthfully



presents the Negro people in its strivings and its development.

Those of us who read Arna Bontemps' *Black Thunder*, which appeared in the middle 'thirties, a novel of the thwarted slave rebellion of 1800 known as Gabriel's Conspiracy, were moved by its impassioned recapture of that unconquerable urge to freedom which transcends the hour of its frustration. The challenge of the militant Negro tradition was accepted with Marxist insight by Howard Fast in his novel *Freedom Road* and Theodore Ward in his prize-winning play *Our Lan*.

The same tradition marks such recent works by Negro and white authors as W. E. DuBois' *The World and Africa*; Henrietta Buckmaster's *Deep River*; Barbara Giles' *The Gentle Bush*; Shirley Graham's *There Once Was a Slave* and Edmund Fuller's *A Star Pointed North*, both novelized biographies of Frederick Douglass; and such plays as *Deep Are the Roots* and *On Whitman Avenue*.

Still to be written are works reflecting the emergence and growth of the Negro proletariat in the organized labor movement during the past decade and the developing coalition between the labor movement and the Negro people's movement in common struggle. (Such works, of course, would be enriched by taking into account the initial development of a mass Negro proletariat during the Great Migration from the South beginning with World War I.)

The culture of the Negro people must be allowed to rise to the heroic heights of its potentialities. The slanderous Negro stereotypes must be banished forever from book, stage, screen, and air to America's shameful yesterdays.

The tragedy of the Jews in Europe, the heartless cruelties of imperialism as exemplified in the treatment of the survivors of Nazi fiendishness, and Britain's shameless and cynical juggling with Palestine, have doubtless enhanced the awareness that anti-Semitism is a danger here, and a ready weapon of fascism. Therefore, with regard to the struggle against anti-Semitism, a definite progressive trend is to be noted in post-war literature. Novels with themes against anti-Semitism and conducive to sympathetic understanding between Jew and Gentile are among the most widely read in the nation—an unprecedented phenomenon. Notable among these are Laura Z. Hobson's *Gentleman's Agreement*, which, with *Kingsblood Royal*, tops

the list of best-sellers; Sholem Asch's *East River*, likewise a best-seller; Arthur Miller's *Focus*; and the volume of translated selections from Sholem Aleichem, *The Old Country*.

To this list of fictional works helpful in the struggle against anti-Semitism should be added Arthur Laurents' play, *Home of the Brave*, as well as the important film, *? Crossfire*, and the screen version of *Gentleman's Agreement*. These two films, however, do not constitute a trend, particularly in view of that anti-Semitic disfigurement, *Abie's Irish Rose*, and other films with similar character cliches.

A valuable contribution to Marxist clarity on Jewish issues is the lively monthly, *Jewish Life*, which has set, for itself the task of stimulating the creation of a progressive Jewish culture in the United States. Moreover, the creation of such an American-Jewish culture should encourage non-Jewish progressive writers and artists to come forward, in their works and on the social scene, against anti-Semitism.

The action of the National Institute of Arts and Letters in expelling William Hunt Diederich, sculptor, for compromising the Institute with anti-Semitic propaganda, demonstrates that the writers and artists are at hand for the fight against anti-Semitism. The National Institute of Arts and Letters has broken ground. It now remains to widen the field.

America needs a Zola to cry out *J'Accuse!*

In surveying the cultural advance in the sphere of the anti-racist struggle as a whole, we should avoid overestimation. With the exception, in varying degrees, of the books by Marxist authors, the works discussed belong to the level of critical, not yet revolutionary, realism. Even though in some, as in *Kingsblood Royal*, the expose rises to powerful social indictment, the critical axe fails to strike at the ^ root cause of the social inequality it attacks. Often this represents a kind of compromise that the writer feels compelled to make in order to get the work before the public. The anti-fascist trend is definitely diminished in its scope by the systematic policy of reactionary publishers and producers, who, forced into some recognition of the forward surge of progressive awakening, calculate that a small concession will lull both audience and artist into the delusion that the struggle can be relaxed. More profoundly, however, the shortcoming we have noted reflects the fact that

without Marxism the critique can supply no real solution. Only through Marxism, which reveals the true relationship of social forces, can the basis for hopeful and integrated struggle be established. Marxist writers have the responsibility of advancing the anti-racist trend in literature to its full potentialities.

### PROGRESSIVE STRAINS

Apart from the fight against racism, it is difficult to point to actual trends of democratic content in creative work of the post-war period. Yet in a variety of spheres individual works of significance have been published which compel attention.

There are a number of books that deal understandingly and honestly with the problems of American labor, especially in the historical field, exploring the officially neglected aspects of labor's role in the nation. Examples are Philip Foner's *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, Richard B. Morris' *Government and Labor in Early America*, Jonathan Grossman's *William Sylvio*, and Howard Fast's novel, *The American*. Contemporary trade-union life is presented dynamically in non-fictional accounts in Elizabeth Hawes' *Hurry Up Please It's Time* and Richard Boyer's *The Dark Ship*.

However, it is still true that in the sphere of fiction, as in the arts generally, far too little is being done today to reflect the struggles and the contributions of labor in American national life, either of the past or the present.

A number of recent works of wide range contribute to a constructive understanding of the Soviet Union. Prominent

among these are Kahn and Sayers' *The Great Conspiracy*; John Somerville's *Soviet Philosophy*; and *The Soviet Impact on the Western World*, by, Edward Hallett Carr, Wilson Professor of International Politics at University College of Wales and editorial writer for the London *Times*. The list, which could be considerably extended, furnishes a rebuttal against the present anti-Soviet hysteria of Anglo-American imperialism.

On the stage, apart from the pro-Negro plays already noted, the post-war seasons have yielded few progressive productions. There stand out Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, the musical, *Finian's Rainbow*, and the staging of the Soviet play, *The Whole World Over*, by Konstantin Simonov. On the screen, four major Hollywood films deserve to be mentioned, namely, the

film showing awareness of the problems ^ of the veterans, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, Charles Chaplin's masterly satire, *Monsieur Verdoux*, *Gentlemen's Agreement*, and *Crossfire*.

Among foreign-language films shown here since the end of the war, the notable picture of the Italian underground, *Open City*, has enjoyed the longest run, which is still continuing since its American premiere in February, 1946. The popularity of this great anti-fascist film attests to the hunger of the American public for motion pictures of honest content and artistic excellence. The wide acclaim given this film, in which the hero is a Communist, whose martyrdom in the cause of freedom is acknowledged with religious fervor by a Catholic priest participating in the underground, speaks eloquently for the American people's basic understanding of profound human values and their receptivity to progressive, realistic films. This further points up the engineered character of Red-baiting.

A notably progressive phenomenon in the cultural sphere was the protest of atomic scientists against military control of nuclear energy and research. The significance of this event is fully measurable in the light of the specious cult of "free science" (the analogue of art for art's sake) with which the bourgeoisie has sought, not unsuccessfully, to rivet the scientists' endeavors to its own class interests.

The recognition on the part of atomic scientists of the profound implications of the discovery of nuclear energy and of continued nuclear research propelled them into vigorous social struggle against military control. "These scientists," declared Professor James Franck, Nobel Laureate, in February, 1947, "...had imagination to foresee that even if they were the winners in that deadly race to construct the bomb their freedom as scientists and that of pure research would be gravely endangered... . We are trying to atone in part for our previous sins, our lack of interest in social problems."

That the protest of the scientists proved ineffectual was largely due to its technocratic isolation from the general people's movement, to its deflection into the reactionary utopia of "World government," and to the corrupting power of monopoly capital. This experience holds a vital lesson for all the cultural forces, namely, to connect their struggle with the people's progressive movement. For Marxists the need is ever more

present to broaden and intensify Marxist education in the cultural field.

### *INDEPENDENT FORMATIONS*

The democratic movement has today a major political-cultural force in the Art, Science and Professions Council of the Progressive Citizens of America (PCA-ASP), with its eleven divisions representing the arts, sciences, and professions. The PCA program demands the return to, and extension of, the progressive aspects of Roosevelt's foreign and domestic policies. It stands for peace on the basis of American-Soviet-British-French unity and strengthened democratic forces in the United Nations. PCA has taken a clear stand against the imperialist Truman Doctrine and its various apologists. It directs its fight against anti-labor legislation, for full rights of the Negro people, and for the defense of democratic culture.

From the electoral viewpoint, PCA is an instrument for the coalescence of the independent political forces in and outside the existing major parties (with main stress on the Democratic Party) for a Presidential ticket in 1948 around which the people can rally.

PCA-ASP is beginning to translate the over-all political program into the specific art or professional sphere for each of its divisions, so that each may create its own cultural forms. Such integration is vital to the mobilization of the cultural forces for democracy and peace, both as citizens and as artists and members of the professions. Many of PCA's activities and aspects of its program are finding increasing expression in the professional trade unions and other organizations, contributing to forging the necessary link between professional people and organized labor.

There is today a growing trend toward independent progressive cultural activities and organizations throughout the country. We can help promote this movement more effectively if we learn from the experience of the 'thirties, when the democratic cultural upsurge consequent upon the Great Economic Crisis spent itself. The vital workers' cultural movement of the first half of the decade was, as everyone recognizes, tremendously stimulated by the Communist Party. Vigorous independent groups developed revolutionary art forms in many

fields of expression, appealing, however, to limited audiences. The advent of WPA cultural projects meant the emergence of a new cultural potential based on new, wide audiences. The Left art groups threw , their forces into the Federal projects, helping them to flower with their creative ideas. When funds were withdrawn from the government projects, the progressive cultural activities found themselves without a base, having failed to maintain their working-class identity and to root themselves sufficiently among the trade unions during the period of Federal support and wide Democratic Front audiences. On the other hand, in failing to build the basis for a working-class and people's culture, the labor movement has deprived itself of a vital weapon in its present struggle against reaction.

The role of the Communist Party in encouraging and helping the development of working-class and independently progressive cultural expressions diminished during that period, and further in the succeeding years. This lag reflected the opportunist, liberal-bourgeois orientation which had begun to evidence itself in the Party during the Democratic Front stage and which eventually had its full expression in Browderite revisionism. Thus, while, on the one hand, there took place a broadening of cultural activities led by Communists, the cultural workers were deprived of systematic and effective Marxist guidance, a fact that was true of the Party's work in all fields.

The present situation offers favorable factors for building independent cultural activities of the people, based upon the labor movement. For the cultural workers the program, broadly speaking, embraces the demand, realizable only with the aid of labor, for government-subsidized cultural projects, democratically administered. It would, however, be a costly illusion to put forward expectations of a restored governmental cultural project of either the extent or the democratic features of WPA, which was integral to the New Deal policy. The fight for a Federal fine arts bill and like measures on State and local scales demands the struggle for ^ people's control to prevent their uses for reactionary ends. Hence, the professional demands cannot be divorced from the political struggle of the cultural forces and the people.

The situation today, realistically speaking, calls for

emphasis on independent cultural activities of the people's forces. In no sense, however, does this mean surrender of the WPA heritage and the slogan of government subsidies, or lessening of efforts to influence in a progressive direction the cultural productions within the framework of existing bourgeois forms.

Independent cultural activities are today on the increase; some, already existing, have gained a considerable base and influence. Examples are, in the field of education) institutions like the Jefferson School of Social Science (New York), the Abraham Lincoln School (Chicago), and the California Labor School; in the arts, Stage for Action, People's Songs, Contemporary Writers, and the increasing use by trade unions of the radio and 16 mm. films.

An encouraging feature of this trend is United Electrical Workers' (CIO) 52-week radio series of news commentaries and other programs, and the top-talent radio shows which the American Federation of Labor conducted against the Hartley-Taft anti-labor bills.

A major democratic-cultural task for labor, which it should integrate with its general anti-monopoly fight, is

support of the development of community-group establishment and democratic ownership of Frequency Modulation (F.M.) radio stations. Such community-groups can embrace trade unions, veterans, small businessmen, Negro organizations, fraternal societies, and progressive groups and individuals generally. The political and cultural potentialities of such community-group F.M. stations are great. Monopoly, through sabotage of manufacture, the imposition of prohibitive costs, and bureaucratic chicanery, stands in the way of wide-scale development and popular acquisition of F.M.-tuned receiving sets and broadcasting stations.

The anti-monopoly struggle around this vital issue demands that labor take the initiative in alliance with other progressive forces, to smash this Big Business conspiracy against the people by fighting to obtain popular ownership and use of F.M.-tuned sets and stations. Labor can encourage and actively support the nation-wide development of community-groups for the democratization of F.M. radio.

The close integration of the people's independent cultural

activities with the working class can never be fully effected if the labor movement serves only as audience-base. The position of the working class in culture, as in politics, cannot remain solely at the receiving end. Labor must itself be represented in the independent cultural activities through direct trade-union cultural undertakings in a variety of forms. Labor must develop from its own ranks working-class writers and artists, while it strives to win to its side writers and artists from the middle classes.

Both these interrelated objectives call for a concrete, practical approach on labor's part toward the problem of developing a people's cultural movement. To begin with, an economic basis must be provided the cultural movement.

Trade unions must more than in the past develop resources for the economic support of cultural workers and activities. The practical application of these resources in support of the people's culture would be in trade-union theatricals, choruses, dance groups, orchestras, radio programs, 16 mm. film showings, literature, art exhibits and purchases of works of art. Labor should extend practical support to the various people's active cultural units, whose inspiration to the workers in their struggles has won for them affection in many labor communities. Shall the labor movement fail to utilize at last the experiences of the Federal Theatre, when dramatic groups were brought into enthusiastic communities in outlying regions, which had never known theatre? Or the dramatic groups of the New Theatre League throughout the country which aided the unions with their talent, often under great hardships, particularly during strike struggles?

The lessons of the past in relation to present tasks point to the need for labor's participation in helping to establish a permanent people's theatre in every large industrial city; in supporting pro-labor mobile theatres capable of responding quickly to current issues and of performing before trade unions and communities; and in stimulating the growth within the trade unions of cultural expression through the theatre.

The people's independent cultural activities must be guaranteed with a broad labor and general community audience-base. Obviously, such a broad audience-base demands great emphasis on the need of writing for the people, painting for



the people, composing for the people. Creating culture for the people, just as it does not mean creating for intellectuals only, does not mean writing "down" to the people, as in the often-seen combination of political slogan and streamlined advertising technique. It means creating as part of the people, raising the cultural level of the people, and in the process rising to new heights of creativeness. Trade-union and progressive groups could be organized, not only as consumers of cultural products, but as groups to exert democratic pressure upon the film industry, radio directors, bourgeois theatre producers, publishers, art galleries, etc., and to fight the censorship imposed by reaction. All this would integrate on a positive, material base the people's cultural movement with the common mass anti-monopoly, anti-fascist, anti-imperialist struggle.

Independent cultural undertaking means especially providing adequate publication facilities for progressive writers, including Marxist authors, artists, and scientists, if our need for such cultural output is to be satisfied. There is need of enlarged facilities for the publication of generally progressive and Marxist literary fiction, poetry, drama, the essay, criticism—both in magazines and as pamphlets and low-priced books. There is need of a people's publishing house.

In this connection, one major cultural gain for Marxism and for the people's movement as a whole is the advent of *Mainstream* upon the American literary scene.

*Mainstream* is more than a magazine. In the short period of its existence it has shown itself to be a potential mobilizing force in the struggle for a people's democratic culture, as indicated by its sponsorship of the conference of Marxist cultural workers and its "Artists Fight Back" rally.

In fulfilling the need long felt for a Marxist literary quarterly, *Mainstream* has undertaken to help clear the air of the fumes of confusion emanating from its bourgeois and Trotskyite contemporaries. Under the editorship of Samuel Sillen, the magazine has begun to win a place in the progressive cultural community of America. We hope that in addition to creating a body of significant Marxist writing in all provinces of literature, *Mainstream* will stimulate works by American Marxists on basic literary theory.

As part of the contribution of Marxist cultural expression

to the people's forward movement in culture, we should note the growth of *New Masses*, under its able editor, Joseph North, toward being a full-fledged cultural-political organ. This veteran fighter, the oldest existing Marxist publication in the United States, has for over a third of a century, championed social progress and Marxist culture. Its struggles have made possible such a conference as we are holding today under the magazine's co-sponsorship. But *New Masses* has a future as well as a past, and its future is bound up with progressive culture.

## Chapter 4

### THE MARXIST COMPONENT

That which philosophically distinguishes Marxist from non-Marxist writers and artists is their adherence to dialectical materialism, which, extended to the sphere of social development, provides the only basis for the science of society – historical materialism.

Historical materialism proceeds from the understanding that social existence determines social consciousness, and not conversely, as is contended by philosophic idealism. Social existence, for Marxism, is *concrete* social existence. It involves, not abstract "Human Nature," metaphysical Man, but mankind engaged in the process of production, with its corresponding social relations, at a given historical stage of its development.

In their joint work, *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels stated:

"Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., but real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their forces of production and of the intercourse corresponding thereto, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness ("*das Bewusstsein*") can never be anything else but conscious being ("*das bewusste Sein*"), and men's being is their actual life-process. If in all ideology people and their relationships appear, as in a *camera obscura*, upside-down, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as does the inversion of objects on the retina from their direct physical life-process."

Marxism corrects the inverted appearance of "people and their relationships" in the *camera obscura* of bourgeois ideology, with its *mystique* of the transcendent individual, the cock who (in George Eliot's words) thinks the sun has risen to hear him crow. Marxism reveals social ideas as the intellectual production deriving from men's relations in the process of material production. It reveals ideas as being historically determined and enables us to see them in their rise and in their role in the struggle of the social forces. Thus, Marxism has nothing in common with the sterile "economic determinism" with which

its "learned" foes never tire of confusing it. "It does not follow from Marx's words," says Stalin, in his *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, "that social ideas, theories, political views and political institutions are of no significance in the life of society, that they do not reciprocally affect social being, the development of the material conditions of the life of society. ... As regards the *significance* of social ideas, theories, views and political institutions, as regards their *role* in history, historical materialism, far from denying them, stresses the role and importance of these factors in the life of society, in its history."

The Marxist conception of history reveals the dominant ideas in a class society as the protective and protected thought patterns of the ruling class, against which the ideas of the rising class are pitted in struggle. The reality of the antagonistic class relations is blurred by bourgeois "objectivism," which fails as a scientific approach to knowledge because it is unable to disclose the concrete forms of the conflict in and through which the social process unfolds itself. For the pseudo-objectivist in the working-class movement social phenomena assume the quality of insuperable forces, thus inducing acquiescence toward the existing exploitative system. The effect of such "objectivity" – the philosophical stock-in-trade of Social-Democracy – can be only to rob the exploited class of activating perspective of its historic course and of the inevitability of its Socialist goal. This pernicious "objectivity" can serve only to rob the working class of self-affirmation and of zeal in struggle.

The ruling class of our day presents the reigning capitalist ideology as "pure," eternal, supra-class ideas guiding all men as dispassionately as the stars do the mariner. But the heaven of bourgeois ideology is a cloud-reflection spread over bourgeois earthly interests. In such a world the Marxian theory, further developed and enriched by Lenin and Stalin, representing as it does the generalized experience of the proletariat in the course of the class struggle, is both science and weapon.

Not to see the weapon in Marxian theory is not to see the theory. For the power of theory resides in its "organizing, mobilizing, and transforming action" (Stalin). The transformative principle of Marxian theory is inherent in practice: "The philosophers have merely interpreted the world variously; the

real question is to change it." Marxism, therefore, means partisanship. In asserting that all philosophies are of necessity partisan, Marx made a revolutionary contribution to the understanding of the social origin and significance of theories. Marxist partisanship is in behalf of that class whose emancipation will dissolve the class character of all society, and, hence, will eliminate partisanship itself, in the class sense. Marxism, therefore, is able to attain the objective truth of social relations and movements. The partisanship that emanates from Marxism unites theory and practice, integrates the spirit of the scholar and the artist with the spirit of the fighter for democracy, peace, and socialism.

A basic principle of Marxism-Leninism, the integration of theory and practice, finds its fulfillment in the Party of social transformation—the Communist Party. Ideological unity alone, Lenin stressed, would not suffice to bring decisive victory to the working class; ideological unity requires to be consolidated by "material unity of organization." The Party is indispensable to the working class because, as *The Communist Manifesto* states, the Communists fight not only "for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement."

Although Marxism is the "science of the emancipation of the working class," it is not the concern of the working class alone. For the working class is that social force which possesses the capacities to rally around itself all the forces whom capitalism oppresses, and which, by breaking its chains emancipates society as a whole from exploitation and oppression, from sordidness and degradation. This is the theoretical basis for the joint struggle of the working class and its allies, including the cultural forces. It is the theoretical basis for the integration of working-class Communists and Communists stemming from other classes in the monolithic Party of the working class. It is the theoretical basis for the common endeavor under the banner of Marxism between Communists and Marxists not yet in the ranks of the Party.

## OUR CULTURAL RESOURCES

In disclosing the historical roots and the role of ideas in social development, Marxism further provides a scientific understanding of the nature and function of art in history, which cuts the ground from under all idealizing approaches to art, all conceptions of art as something inherently independent of social reality and the class structure of society. Marxism shows how, as a form of social consciousness, art has its source, ultimately, in the practical activities of men, which involve their social relations within the given mode of production. It shows, further, how as a movement in the sphere of the cultural superstructure, art is related in dialectic interaction both with other forms of thought and with the economic base itself from which it arises. On this basis, Marxism is able to reveal the historical roots, the content, and the role of changing cultural formations in the social process. The place and the role of culture and the creators of culture thus assume in Marxism their true importance in society.

By mastering Marxism-Leninism, we discern the reactionary weapon in the cults of the irrational and the decadent; we equip ourselves to combat even the subtlest influence of such aesthetic demagogies upon the people and upon the creators of culture. In mastering Marxism, we learn to know and to use the cultural resources of the people as a weapon against fascist anti-humanism, thus defending both culture and life itself.

To know the cultural resources upon which we can draw is to realize that the progressive ideas dynamically opposed to the ideology of reaction in the cultural field issue from the deep democratic wellsprings of the American people.

The cultural flow of the American common man derives from his sensitive regard for democracy, as that concept is embodied in the Bill of Rights; from his profound sense of the dignity of man, of the necessity for freedom of conscience and for the separation of Church and State; from his perception of the social usefulness of culture. This is the basic idea-content of the best in American culture through the generations. And it is this idea-content that the monopoly-administered mass "culture" strives to pervert. Our task as Marxists is to fight for the maintenance and extension of this powerful and significant

tradition and to give it a concrete sense for our times.

Known to all is the social, constructive attitude of the American people toward scientific endeavor. They have seen what science has done toward the building up of America. The colossal militarization of science is against the grain of the people.

The idea of internationalism is a cardinal feature of progressive Americanism. It shaped the consciousness of our nation at its founding. Jefferson, Paine, Franklin—these are names that should be raised as banners today in the fight for the abandonment of the imperialist Truman Doctrine, in the fight for peace and our cultural interplay with the peoples of the world, with the peoples of the newly-risen democracies, with the peoples that are creating a Socialist culture in the Soviet Union.

Let us always be mindful of the long-established and deep-felt trust-hating tradition of the American people, and its reflection as a major theme in American literature. As economic and spiritual victims of the trustified arts, the cultural workers today can and should be reached, to take their place, through their creations and through organized movement, in the anti-monopoly, anti-imperialist coalition.

And the magnificent traditions of labor's struggles—the great proletarian traditions of battle for the right to organize and have union recognition, to strike and picket, to bargain collectively, to assert itself through political action with its organizational resources, to choose its leaders by its own democratic will undictated by the State; to conquer labor's rights! *There's* an epic, the greatest of all in America, that has still to be done by poet and novelist and composer and film-maker.

The bourgeoisie, in its hatred and fear of the working class, has methodically tried to keep labor "in its place" in its literature and art. The man in overalls is seldom the protagonist of novel, film, or drama; and even in the rare cases in which he is, his role is usually distorted. In the study of Hollywood war films for the years 1942-44, referred to earlier, we read as follows with respect to films dealing with labor's war job on the home front:

"Production-front films were not only few in number

[1.7 per cent of the total film product]; they were also poor in quality. The story of the American worker has always been one which- Hollywood has dodged, and the heightened interest in production due to the war did not counteract this tendency."

As Marxist writers and artists, who understand labor's role in the nation, we have the task to bring out the significance to the nation of labor's advances, and at the same time to inspire the working class to a greater consciousness of its position as the leading social force in the people's antifascist struggle, to the consciousness of its basic Socialist objective. We have the task to gather the masses of writers, artists, and scientists to the side of labor in common struggle; to win them to the understanding that on this firm alliance depend at once their interests and the very existence of a people's democratic culture. We have the task to help them draw the full conclusions from their struggle that the basic solution of their problems, their final emancipation from the oppression and the debasement to which they are subjected, will be achieved only in a Socialist America.

Thus, while Marxism offers the guiding principles for the fullest utilization today of the entire democratic cultural heritage, in the dynamic, dialectic sense, this struggle is not the exclusive concern of Marxists. The heritage of the people must be reclaimed by the people.

To know the forces that must be mobilized we must know them concretely, we must know their present strength and their full potential. We must know especially the position of the American working class among the social forces involved in the cultural struggle.

#### *LABOR'S CULTURAL RESPONSIBILITY*

The status of the American working class with respect to its cultural tasks differs markedly from that of the working classes in other capitalist countries, and certainly in the new peoples' democracies.

Post-war Europe has been swept by a great cultural tide of the Left. The deepened general crisis of capitalism has inevitably been accompanied by a profound cultural crisis. The



national treason of the Munichite and collaborationist monopolists left Europe's intellectuals the choice: either complete cultural degradation or advance in the people's movement led by the working class, the most consistent defender of the national entity and its cultural values. The assiduous efforts of the reactionary classes to restore their dictatorship over the liberated nations, with the aid of American and British imperialism, have had the effect of further consolidating the alliance of cultural people with the working classes. Writers, artists, scientists, and professional people, in great numbers, have come to identify themselves with Marxism. Large numbers of them, including most renowned figures in cultural life, have taken their place in the Communist Parties. This is a current development of the greatest significance in France and Italy. In the newly risen democratic states of a new type, where power is in the hands of the laboring people and State measures have opened the gates of learning to the masses, a cultural renaissance is in the process of developing. In Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria, thousands of young people of the arts and professions, as well as many of the outstanding older intellectuals, form an integral part of the people's democracy struggling to consolidate its strength in the face of bitter hostility of the imperialists abroad and the reactionaries within.

In the United States the ruling class cannot long remain a Canute holding back the mighty world-wide progressive cultural tide. Evidences of the American people's cultural counter-forces have already been dealt with. However, American monopoly capital, bloated with war profits, still possesses immense material resources for curbing or diverting the democratic current. Its tremendous propaganda agencies are still able to influence and disorient far broader sections of cultural forces, with far greater effectiveness, than reaction elsewhere is capable of doing. Its vast technological and commercialized cultural media are able to absorb and buy up the talent of men and women of petty-bourgeois and working-class origin more readily and on a far larger scale than is possible for reaction elsewhere.

The working class, notwithstanding its tremendous gains in organizational strength in the recent period,

notwithstanding the militant and victorious struggles it has waged on the economic front, notwithstanding even the advances it has made toward independent political action, is still not class conscious. An atmosphere thus permeated with bourgeois ideology furthers a continuation of the cultural nihilism of the labor bureaucrats, whose traditional attitude toward working-class culture and, for that matter, to culture generally, can be summed up as *bread and circuses* (or its modern equivalent).

But even the CIO, the progressive trade union center, notwithstanding good beginnings by some individual affiliates, has advanced far too slowly toward using the weapon of culture in behalf of the working class. There has not yet been established in our labor movement a positive and constructive attitude toward the role of culture in the life, the struggles, and the aspirations of the workers. Hence, the real basis is not yet present in our labor movement for attracting and utilizing considerable cultural forces from the working class and from the people generally.

In the absence of a unified, class-conscious labor movement, with a vigorous and rich political life, the working class does not effectively draw into alliance the people of the arts, sciences and professions; for it fails to come forward as their champion in their struggle against economic and spiritual victimization by monopoly capital. It is easy enough to be scornful of those who commercialize their talents. But let us remember that the labor movement as yet offers, not only no economic alternative to creators of culture, but not even a welcoming attitude.

In the absence, still, of a mass Communist Party leading vast sections of the working class and the people, the Marxist cultural workers have not yet achieved sufficient connection with the cultural forces generally or with the labor movement; have not yet accumulated sufficient experience, which comes with organization and struggle; and have not yet achieved that degree of clarity which comes with mastery of Marxist-Leninist theory.

These considerations attest the common need of the working class and the cultural forces of the nation. The struggle will not be won on the ideological front alone; but it cannot be won

without an effective struggle with the weapon of ideology. Marxist cultural workers can help American labor overcome its lack of class consciousness. As the advanced section of the people's cultural forces, they can fulfill the social responsibility expressed by Stalin in the concept of artists as "engineers of the soul."

This is no abstract demand. On the contrary, it is charged with concrete and decisive meaning. To the extent that the artists gain awareness of the present gulf between the American people and its rich cultural potential they will be impelled to bridge the great divide between their natural audience and their work. When the artist realizes fully that his social, political, and artistic relations are interwoven in an inseparable unity, he will know that a breach of that unity truncates his effectiveness and, in the face of the fascist offensive, jeopardizes the very values for which he lives. He will then synthesize his activities as citizen and artist.

#### *ON THEORY AND PRACTICE*

Decisive in relation to all our tasks is mastery of Marxism-Leninism, which arms us to withstand the permeation of bourgeois ideologies into our own midst. As Marxists, we must always be mindful of the fact that we live in the environment of the most powerful capitalism with highly organized agencies for transmitting bourgeois ideas into the labor movement, and even into its vanguard.

For example, the method of bourgeois sociology, with its sheerly empirical approach to social phenomena, focuses the mind on particulars disconnected from the social system in which they have existence. This method also pervades the bulk of bourgeois literature. How often we come upon novels or short-stories, even by some Marxist writers, that reflect this influence! A picture will be shown us, let us say, of a given working-class family succumbing through poverty to corruption. The author can swear to the factual basis of his narrative as he has chosen to tell it; but do his facts correspond to truth? The American working class is neither decadent nor doomed; although not yet class conscious in its mass, it is the healthy, ascending force in our society — a class that knows how to wage struggles, and to win. What set-backs it may sustain are

relative to the absolute course of its advance. Facts about an isolated working-class family depicted in terms of defeat and demoralization do not convey the truth about the class from which it has in the story been arbitrarily dissevered. The author has failed to see – what a grasp of Marxian theory would have taught him to see – that fact in isolation is not the same as truth, whether in sociology or in art.

The Marxian approach to the representation of reality involves as a primary necessity the understanding of essence and appearance. It involves an understanding of the principle which Lenin puts first among his sixteen elements of dialectics: “the objectivity of investigation (not examples, not digressions), but the thing itself in itself.”

What would be the essence of such a given example? Not the superficially viewed, disjointed pseudo-reality of degeneration of a working-class family, but the deep-going, integral reality of the advancing movement of the class, that is, the really representative, essential example.

In no sense does this mean a pollyanna version of reality, or an attitude of concealing that which is true but unfavorable. Shall imaginative writing rule out negative aspects, shortcomings, and even elements of degeneration in the life of workers? To say that it should is to distort both reality and art. But on reading depictions of such shortcomings, we have the right to ask: What is the nature of the author’s thought behind the negative aspects he discloses? What is his dominant attitude to the life he describes? Any author who proceeds from a sense of social responsibility must be prepared to answer this question. Especially does this apply to the Marxian author, for whom the presentation of social life can admit of no dead objectivism, no beyond-class standpoint on the social earth of class society. Without being called upon to set forth the ultimate solution of every social problem he raises, he must be prepared to show wherein his picture differs in ideological implication from that of the reactionary writer whose portrayal of corruption in the single worker-family seeks to induce the notion of inherent corruption of the class. The differentiation will be manifest if he perceives and makes clear that the basic onus rests on the social cause – capitalism, and not on its class victims. He will be able to show the differentiation only, however, if the eye

that viewed the life of the working-class family was the historical eye of the working class itself; if through him the working class critically, *with regenerative intent*, evaluated one of its family components.

Marxism, with its insistence upon the highest standards in the content and form of creative expression, shows the way to a significant art.

Unfortunately there is a tendency among certain Marxist cultural workers to underestimate, if not disregard, theory. Others study it in the light of a "political task," but out of context with their artistic work.

Those given to such departmentalization may even pride themselves, sincerely, on their diligent studies in Marxism. However, when in that activity which is most uniquely theirs, namely, their cultural creativeness, Marxian theory is not present because it is in the "other" compartment—the theory compartment—then Marxism is present in neither. The test of an artist's Marxism is whether the dialectical world outlook takes on life in his creative work.

In the literary discussion of 1946, the liquidationist approach to Marxian aesthetics was refuted and Marxism consolidated its positions on the literary front. Samuel Sillen's articles in the *Daily Worker* contributed particularly to the clarification campaign on the issue of art and politics. The discussion left, however, some unfinished business. For, while we must continue to wage the struggle against all remaining influences of Browder-revisionism on the progressive cultural front, we must also sound the danger of Leftist sectarianism. It is a struggle on two fronts, against opportunism of the Right and "Left" varieties. Marxist theory is not in existence to separate Marxists from the people, but to weld them with the people. With the class enemy, Marxists put their differences in the foreground; with allies and potential allies they put their common aims in the foreground. Thus, we should be guilty of a most costly sectarian error if we adopted the attitude that all or even most of the writers, artists, scientists, and educators who give expression to reactionary ideas in any of the ideological trends we have here discussed are now and henceforth confirmed reactionaries, to be abandoned to the enemy. We must distinguish between them and those writers who are conscious and

deliberate reactionaries. It would be truer to say that the majority reflect reaction's influences and pressures. It is our responsibility as Marxists to do better than we have done in imparting Marxist theory to broad sections of artists and professional people to spur and facilitate their recognition of the writer's, or artist's, social responsibility, without which he will fall prey to reaction. We Marxists must recognize that to win people to the fight for democratic culture means more than hanging the shingle of Marxism over our shop in the hope that someone will wander in; it means *struggle* to win them, with Marxist understanding, program, and methods of work.

## Chapter 5

“...ADVANCE TO MEET THEM...”<sup>1</sup>

The great value of this conference lies in the fact that it brought together for the first time in many years artists, writers, scientists, and educators from many parts of the country, having a dual bond, as cultural workers and as Marxists. This assemblage, let us hope, will aid in developing among cultural workers in all spheres a heightened consciousness of community of interests and increased association and cooperation toward realizing a broad, progressive cultural movement.

### GRASS ROOTS

For the Marxist, the achievement of such a movement means, of course, that he must never separate himself from the people. He must constantly learn from the people and gather his strength from them. But he must always be attuned to the dialectics of learning from the people to guide the people. We must bring into clear, sharp consciousness the vast but as yet unconscious strivings of the masses. We must take note of the bourgeois-inspired resistances, conscious and unconscious, among the masses to Marxism. Hence, as Lenin stressed in *What Is To Be Done?*, “all subservience to the spontaneity of the labor movement, all *belittling of the role of the 'conscious element'* [i.e., *the Marxist Party...*] means, whether one likes it or not, the growth of influence of bourgeois ideology among the workers.”

Of course, too, tempo of action is necessary in our work. We cannot lag behind. In the struggle on the cultural front as well, the race is to the swift. But mere speed without timing, without clear direction, without the eye on the constantly known goal, will not win the race for us. It may lead us into detours and blind alleys. Then haste itself will have turned into its opposite.

When we speak of relating ourselves closely to the people, let us remember that the people extend beyond the populations of New York and Hollywood.

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<sup>1</sup> Summary remarks closing the conference.

It is a fact that for many years there has been a relative over-concentration of artistic activity, a cultural hegemony, in these two cities – monopoly's production centers of commercialized culture – with the rest of the country serving as a sort of cultural hinterland. This hinterland happens to include, besides the rural communities, also the main centers of the industrial proletariat, as well as the South, where the greatest need for progressive cultural expression actually exists. The writers and artists in these regions who are not employed in mass cultural channels lack also a sufficient community basis for sustenance, as well as for publishing, performing, and exhibiting. We must own that our Marxist cultural organs and our cultural leadership in New York have not made the efforts they should have to cultivate, encourage, and search out existing and potential writers and artists in the industrial centers and regional areas, where economic support of cultural institutions and organs of expression is, to say the least, not so readily obtainable as in New York. More still, there has been an insufficient editorial receptivity to the cultural contributions coming in from the rest of the country. We have not even begun to delve deep for the cultural treasures to be found among the people.

It is still necessary for our New York cultural workers to get out of their Manhattanic inbreeding, to go to the industrial centers and regional areas, to develop a living communicativeness with the whole people.

But, above all, the entire problem will remain unresolved, so long as it is not recognized as involving at its core the question of leadership. More cultural forces of leadership calibre must be sent out from New York to the other districts, and vice versa, in line with a planned process of decentralizing the leadership and encouraging the development of a number of regional Marxist-guided activities and centers.

#### *"STYLE IN THE WORK"*

The best of cultural programs will remain pipe-dreams so long as the human factor for their execution is not adequately drawn upon and mustered. Concern for sensitive assignment, cultivation, and encouragement of forces is essential to establish and maintain fraternal connections with broad sections of writers, artists, and scientists. It cannot be over-stressed that



our cultural movement suffered and continues to suffer from wrong and impermissible attitudes and methods of work.

Nor should we underestimate, in this connection, the injurious role that Browder-revisionism played on the cultural front. It would be a mistake to see the harmfulness of revisionism as having affected only the political and economic spheres. Actually, it will take much time for the cultural field to recover from that grievous harm.

Browderism undermined the very basis of a working-class and people's culture by surrendering leadership to the "enlightened" monopoly capitalists. For, clearly, one cannot accept the leadership of a class, or a section of it, without following its ideology. With a perspective of class peace, of a crisis-less capitalism, and of a peaceful imperialism, what becomes of the theoretical front, of the struggle of the classes in the realm of ideas? And what becomes of Marxist ideas in the sphere of culture? The answer, as events tragically showed, is liquidationism. This is what happened on the cultural front. With Marxian values abandoned, position after position was either given up or else essentially weakened. Despite some continued activities, the demobilization to all intents and purposes was both ideological and organizational. This reflected itself in the lack of any really critical evaluation of content and form, as well as in opportunist methods of work, with their blighting effect on cultural personnel. For the Marxist-Leninist "style in the work" can be practiced only by a movement that guides itself by Marxist-Leninist principles.

### *SELF-CRITICISM*

The issue of attitudes and methods of work demands a further comment on the manner in which the discussion of an un-Marxist thesis on literature and politics was conducted in our press, in the early part of 1946. The discussion achieved clarification of basic questions pertaining to literature and society. It reaffirmed for our movement the principle long corroded by opportunism that the writer has a social responsibility. It reaffirmed the unity of politics and art, the synthesis of the political self and the artistic self in the progressive writer; thereby it offered a basis for his participation in the organized activities of

the movement, integratedly with his work as artist.

At the same time, the gains of that discussion were but partial. The discussion coincided in point of time with the educational campaign of the reconstituted Communist Party to destroy the remaining influences of revisionism, of which the false literary thesis was the cultural swansong. Thus, the situation called for a profounder, a third-dimensional analysis of the underlying principles of Marxist literary theory as a guide toward artistic creation in our movement.

That discussion would have been deepened by a thoroughgoing statement of the failure of our movement to give clear and consistent guidance and thoughtful attention to cultural forces through the years. As it was, it gave an impression at times of being conducted in a sectarian and doctrinaire fashion. Precise political characterization of error in cultural theory is necessary; but it has the effect of mere name-calling when such characterization is not clarified by convincing and helpful analysis.

Our literary and art criticism too often evidenced a lack of sensitive approach to the problems of the artist as artist, to the aesthetic principles through which he operates. In our proper concern with subject matter, we often showed that concern one-sidedly and slothfully at the expense of form. This made for a lowering of standards in literary and art creation, as well as in criticism, with the result that the writer or artist could not develop any profound respect for our Marxist guidance. He would begin to feel that the needs which the movement could satisfy were solely the needs for political expression, while his artistic needs remained, in our movement, unsatisfied. Often, he would go elsewhere for the guidance he felt he needed, and thus would fall under influences hostile to Marxism and to his own artistic integrity.

At the basis of this faulty approach was insufficient understanding—unfortunately not yet overcome—that a struggle must be waged constantly against a two-fold danger with respect to the relation of form and content. The struggle on the cultural front requires its own art of strategy and tactics. It is a struggle, simultaneously, with necessary shifts in relative emphasis according to changing situations—on the one hand, against the vulgar, mechanico-materialist view, with its

minimizing of form, and, on the other, against the idealist disruption of reality in art, of the unity of form and content, by its absolutizing of form. According to the mechanists, content is everything; according to the idealists, form is everything. The solution for Marxists cannot, of course, be an equation of the two. The solution is, rather, an interpenetration, in which content is primary, determining form, but cannot be achieved without form. Every significant content requires its specific, relevant, and revealing form. Without form there is no art; but form alone cannot be offered as art. Form and content comprise a dialectical conflict and unity of opposites.

Art functions through its own laws, within the relative autonomy of the cultural superstructure, which determine its formal values and the interrelationship of its form with its content. In this dialectic interaction the original idea-substance, the ideological "raw material," is transformed through artistic integration.

Marxist understanding can give proportion, completeness, and balance to the art it informs. While in itself not a furnisher of talent, it can give to the work of art significance by the emphasis on the primacy of content, by the illumination of the "laws of motion" of the society we live in, and by the inspiration with the epic world-transforming ideas of our age. It need not and should not be crudely and arbitrarily voiced, at stated intervals, and in arid passages which destroy all artistic form and unity.

Art remains, as in Milton's day, "simple, sensuous and passionate."

It became a pattern with us—and again we cannot yet speak solely in the past tense—to accord acclaim, almost unqualified, to a novel or a play or a motion picture that was politically on the positive side. (Not infrequent were the instances of mis-acclaim.) I remember well the words of a notable American poet who said to me shortly before the war, after reading a laudatory review of his work in our press: "I appreciate the praise in the *Daily Worker*; but, really, I get no little praise in the general press. What I expect from a Communist paper is a critical analysis with Marxist standards, even if it should hurt—the sort of thing I cannot get in any other paper." That was a sincere statement. Others have felt this need. To the extent that

we fall short of meeting it, we fall short of making Marxism felt in the field.

At bottom, this shortcoming implied an opportunistic approach to the question of the intellectual's place in the working-class movement. There was a tendency to view his contribution principally, if not solely, through his direct public commitments as a progressive-minded citizen, with far too little concern with his capacities for contribution through his own cultural medium. Such a one-sided emphasis could arise only from a belittlement of the essential meaning of culture for the class struggle and for the people's democratic movement. This belittlement of Marxian values in relation to the artist's creative work lessened the potential in his political participation, which tended to remain on the level of anti-fascism, without development toward the idea of socialism.

On the other hand, we have also erred repeatedly in indulging in that unbalanced, superficially negative evaluation which has earned for itself the name of "sledge-hammer criticism."

Thus, in passing judgment on works by enemy writers and artists, we would seek easy victories by means of dogmatic assertions that reactionary consciousness in an artist necessarily cancels out his artistic qualities. Such naive assertions are, of course, a vulgarization of the Marxist position. Indeed, the struggle against reaction in cultural expression would long ago have been won, were writers like T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Jeffers, and Werfel bereft of artistic expression through their reactionary consciousness. The cultural degradation, which occurs especially in the mass media, proceeds unevenly with respect to the varying social strata. For the bourgeoisie must make full use of art as a weapon in its struggle to maintain itself in power.

The reactionary view blurs the artist's social vision and distorts in his consciousness the true relationship of human beings in the society of which he writes, thus limiting his artistic creativeness in the significant sense of the term. For an artist cannot presume to stimulate intelligence while at the same time stultifying it without paying a heavy penalty. Deficiency in content inevitably impairs the aesthetic whole of the creation. As capitalism passes from its ascendant epoch to its

declining, imperialist stage, it abandons its former historically progressive values in ideology as a whole; it increasingly degrades the values in its cultural expressions, which reached classic heights in the pre-imperialist era. Capitalism in its monopoly stage constricts and hinders the productive forces, not economic alone, but also cultural. With the intensification of its general crisis, this tendency of cultural constriction becomes more and more pronounced as cultural destruction. Yet, it would be wrong to deduce from this that reactionary essence in art makes impossible aesthetic quality, sometimes of a high degree, even in capitalism's declining stage.

Our literary and art criticism has at times been unbalanced also with respect to works of progressive content in which ideological shortcomings must be noted. In many such instances we have tended to lose sight of the sincere endeavors that have gone into the creation of a work whose value, despite weaknesses, is basically positive.

Marxist criticism should be broadly human in its approach to artists and their work. This applies no less to the Marxist artist, even though the movement properly makes higher demands of his work.

Such demands, needless to say, are properly made of the Marxist critic himself. The Marxist critic has the responsibility of evaluator, guide, and stimulator. Stern always in regard to principle, he must work to surround the progressive writers and artists with a moral atmosphere of helpful guidance which will make Marxism an indispensable force in their eyes. He has to approach his work as seriously as the conscientious writer approaches his. He has to be grounded in theory and must make himself a strategist in its application. He must write responsibly; he cannot function impressionistically or subjectively; he cannot make his judgments in a vacuum, without regard for the march of events. The Marxist critic can, by the sound application of theory, create literary criticism that is distinguished creative writing.

#### *ARTIST AND AUDIENCE*

Among the many valuable ideas and proposals to come out of this conference is the emphasis on building a labor-audience base for a people's culture. Such an organized audience

would not only inspire, encourage, and support progressive culture created by the independent people's forces, as well as by the existing commercial media, but would also imbue its own organizations with the spirit of cultural creativeness. With Walt Whitman we say of America – the America of the people:

“If its poets appear it will in due time  
advance to meet them....”

But, as Marxists, we must go beyond the usual conception of how the people meets its poets. We must avoid the error of speaking of the people, of the working masses, in terms exclusively of “audience.” The larger vision of Marxism should aid us in seeing the all-round and many-sided creativeness inherent in the working class.

That creativeness is destined to have its unfolding, not only through labor when labor, at last emancipated, will be a means to self-fulfillment, but through art itself. The social process toward this realization is to be seen today in the Socialist Soviet Union, where “work is a duty and a matter of honor.” In the Soviet Union the artist has achieved a fully-integrated place in the life of the people. In the newly-risen peoples' democracies, where the best cultural forces are enthusiastically participating in building the national life on new foundations, increasing numbers of writers, artists, educators, scientists, and members of the professions are winning the esteem and the love of their people. Only where the people rule can the artist indeed become the People's Artist.

What should be for us Marxists a constant guide in our cultural efforts is the great value attached by Karl Marx to the development of the cultural capacities of the working class. When his adherent, the tailor Eccarius, wrote an article on the tailoring trade of London, Marx said of it: “Before the proletariat fights out its battles on the barricades, it announces the coming of its rule with a series of intellectual victories.”

How many of us, Marx's disciples, follow his example with regard to our American Eccariuses? Have we our Eccariuses? Yes. Do we know them?...

For the working class, culture is a matter of struggle, a matter of heroism. Heroism is the very breath of the working class. It is the driving force of its daily struggles, the sustaining

power of the striker, the union builder, the Communist, the working-class mother, the Negro fighter for freedom. We should err as creators of culture if we saw heroism only in great dramatic unfoldings of the class struggle, if we failed to see it in the seemingly prosaic weekdays of the worker's life and struggles. Neither the romanticist nor the narrow empiricist view, but only deep insight into the *essential nature* of the working class, will save the artist from moods of defeatism in the face of set-backs or sharp turns in the struggle. With such insight comes the understanding that there are no absolute defeats in the historical movement of the working class. For every Marxist, as for Marx, the defeated Communards of 1871 remain the heaven-stormers.

The spirit of enthusiasm which pervaded this conference sprang from the realization of the vital need to defend democratic culture and to develop widespread independent activities of the people. Such enthusiasm is good, and very good; but let us not go back to our home states with an illusion of a spontaneous democratic cultural upsurge. A people's movement can be achieved; but it will take work to stimulate its formation, to guide it, to help it realize its vast potentialities; our role as Marxists is clear. We are toilers for the cultural affirmation of the people.

Cultural endeavor means, in the first place, that our work itself must be produced in the light of Marxian understanding. It means effort as creators as well as activity in organizations and in campaigns; no cultural endeavor is integrated save through such activity. We cannot expect to win cultural workers over to our position through the logic of Marxism simply. We must demonstrate by our own creations its efficacy and power. To the extent that we write significant novels, biographies, short-stories, plays, poems; to the extent that we paint compelling pictures, produce potent works of sculpture, compose outstanding symphonies, and sing meaningful, inspiring songs; to the extent that we produce effective Marxist literary and art criticism; to the extent that we base our work on Marxism as educators, scientists, historians, psychologists, and workers in other professions—to this extent shall we illuminate Marxist principles for the arts and the sciences. Just as, in the factory, the worker who is to be a leader must be a good

craftsman, so, too, the Marxist cultural worker, to exert leadership, must win respect for himself through his work in his art or profession.

#### A SIGNIFICANT ANNIVERSARY

There is something symbolic in the fact that this conference of Marxist cultural workers is taking place in the year of the hundredth anniversary of the founding of Marxism. The meaning for us of this centenary is manifold. If, however, we should wish to extract a valuable principle of guidance for our work from this centennial occasion, we should set ourselves to emulate a certain high quality in the attitude of Karl Marx to his literary labors. That quality was once stated by the co-founder of Marxism, Frederick Engels, in words that we should hang as a motto over the portals of our consciousness. The words of Engels were:

“If these gentlemen only knew how Marx thought his best things were still not good enough for the workers and how he regarded it as a crime to offer the workers anything less than the very best!”

Who, upon reading the *Communist Manifesto*, or the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, or Marx’s work of works, *Capital*, is not compelled to admiration by the power and beauty of the structure and the language, and by the concern and toil that went into the production of such masterly form? How many of us—let us ask ourselves—work with this motto, giving of our best? How many of us are not satisfied until that which we give to the working class, to the people, to ourselves, is our best? We speak of art as a weapon; but for art to be a weapon, it must first be art. We can fight best with the Marxian theory of aesthetics when that theory is combined with a Marxian application of aesthetics.

Further, Marx’s teachings hold for us the lesson to broaden our connections, to guard against sectarianism, and to avoid the attempt to “monopolize” Marxism. The English Catholic poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, wrote to Robert Bridges, in 1871, the year of the Paris Commune:

“I must tell you that I am always thinking of the



Communist future.... I am afraid some great revolution is not far off. Horrible to say, in a manner I am a Communist."

The Poet Laureate to be never answered this letter. The breach in the friendship of the two poets was presumably because of the words, "I am a Communist." It is not entirely unlikely that some, in the name of Marxism, would leave such a letter unanswered, also, though for another reason— the words, "horrible to say." Clearly, purist "Marxism" is a far cry from pure Marxism.

There are many such non-Communists in the cultural spheres, possessed of a bias against Marxism, who, under the impact of changing events, shaken by insecurities and assailed by doubts, find themselves admitting, in flashes of clear-eyed earnestness, to a degree of kinship with Communism. Though they may temper that thought with a "horrible to say," it is for us to recognize in the very hesitancy of such admissions the first penetrations of the mind beyond the circumference set for it by the existing order, the first faint apprehensions of a new world to be striven for. And it is for us to lay bare for such people the irrational in the "horrible to say." We must help those minds in flux to become minds in transition. Let us speak out to these thousands who, without being fully aware of it, are gravitating toward Communism. Let us not be miserly with our Marxism. Our Marxism? It is ours only when we pass it on.

Let us break through with it to the people.