

Says Full Discussion Necessary

By ISIDOR SCHNEIDER

Sam Sillen has criticized New Masses for not accompanying the Maltz article with an editorial refutation. Had that been done it would have violated the decisions of a series of meetings by the staff and writers of New Masses, which had rejected such procedure as likely to inhibit and prevent full and conclusive discussion.

My article in New Masses reporting on these meetings called on writers for a discussion in the pages of the magazine. In response Maltz sent in his article. Despite some disagreements with the contents, all the editors of New Masses felt that the article would lead to a useful expression and interchange of ideas from which correct conclusions would be arrived at. Had Sillen expressed his disagreement in New Masses in the frame set for the discussion, I believe it could have been carried through with the results first anticipated.

Maltz explicitly denies an abandonment of Marxism and of the concept of art as a weapon. Sillen might fairly set out to demonstrate that the abandonment is implicit in Maltz's position; but it is not fair to conclude that Maltz had already abandoned it. As for Maltz's analysis of shortcomings in left-wing criticism, Sillen in his article also admits weaknesses, but leaves it at that, does not even specify what they are, or how they are to be overcome.

FULL DISCUSSION NECESSARY

A correct and full analysis of implications in Maltz's position can only be achieved in a full and open discussion. There is no possibility of that in Sillen's position which cuts off discussion just as it begins. Its peremptory prosecutor's tone in the opening sections carries dangers similar to those which prevented a discussion of the Browder position and made it impossible to see its mistakes and dangers in time.

The premature conclusions on Maltz's articles were arrived at by pulling passages out of context. I will illustrate by an example from Sam Sillen's article to show how a conclusion can be put in his mouth that he explicitly rejects.

Sillen uses a quotation from Zhdanov, advocating tendency writing. In the traditional European sense of the phrase, tendency writing means schematic writing. But Sillen is thoroughly familiar with Engels' position on tendency writing because it is given at length in *The Novel and the People* by Ralph Fox, a book used by Sillen in his course at the Jefferson School. Engels expresses withering scorn for tendency writing and urges writers to avoid it.

I could conclude from that that Sillen rejects Engels; also that he advocates schematic writing. But elsewhere Sillen explicitly rejects schematic writing. In the same way, by excavating parts from the context, Sillen draws conclusions from Maltz which Maltz himself explicitly rejects.

Here I want to say that I do not approve of building a case in the way that Sillen does on quotations from authorities. A case built more on specific and immediate data better answers our immediate problem. In addition, such excessive resort to authority in itself creates a bureaucratic atmosphere.

BOUNDARIES OF OPERATION

Summing up the discussion so far, the Marxist creative writer must operate within two boundaries. One is the line separating the working class movement from the enemy classes; the other is the line separating creative writing from schematic writing. It is to chart the ground within these boundaries that the discussion was started.

It would be polyannish to say that



Valerie Black, who plays the title role in "Anna Lucasta," which breaks the all time record for all-Negro shows when it plays its 641st performance at the Mansfield Theatre on Saturday afternoon, March 2. It surpasses the 646th performance-record established by "Green Pastures" which played at the same theatre in 1930 and '31.

There's Work To Be Done!

Editor, Daily Worker:

The time is here for a complete restatement of dialectical materialism in terms of literature and art. As a practicing writer, I have over a period of years become extremely impatient with critics and criticism generally. I have worked on the principle of getting things down as accurately, honestly and completely as possible and let the "literary canons" take care of themselves.

However, this is not enough. While it provides something like a method and objective in writing it provides no method of evaluation. For that, Marxist science is necessary, and I have been heretofore at a loss on how to apply it. However, I'm beginning to see the light. I should like to see, for instance, a history of English or European literature written from the Marxist viewpoint, illustrating in its judgments and evaluations the dialectical process.

The curse of our time is fragmentation—literature, art, science, etc., chopped up into fragments and considered by themselves as separate entities.

I am encouraged by what seems to be a new interest in the problems of art in our press of late and I hope that something will come of it. Why not start a movement to collect material, or at least a bibliography, so that we seekers can know where to look?

ARTHUR J. KRAMER.



Richard Dyer-Bennett who will be presented in a concert at Town Hall next Saturday evening, March 2. The concert, presented by Ted Zittel, begins at 11:15 p.m. Mr. Zittel has worked up a series of unique concerts, offering them to midnight crowds.

only good can come out of the discussion as it has been conducted. It will be healthy only if we carry it on in the calm and comradely atmosphere in which it was conceived. Overexcitement and heat have been injected. Heat can consume and destroy, or it can generate energy. We have that choice before us. Let us now convert the heat of this controversy into intellectual energy and apply it in a continuation of the discussion in the spirit and on the level in which we began it in New Masses.

Our Literature Must Be Rooted In the Struggles of Mankind

By A. B. MAGIL

ALBERT MALTZ'S article in the February 12 New Masses, "What Shall We Ask of Writers?" asks a great deal, indeed. What gives it a deceptive plausibility is that he begins by criticizing sectarian errors which in one form or another were actually committed by the American Communist movement in its approach to writers and writing. The unwary reader forgets that most of these mistakes belong to the past and have not existed for years. And he is beguiled into overlooking the fact that the biggest error of all, the one that is still very much alive, isn't mentioned at all. I refer to the virtual liquidation under Earl Browder of Communist leadership on the cultural front and the dissolution of the Marxist approach to culture. Far from criticizing this trend, the Maltz article exemplifies it.

There is no virtue in error of any kind. But let us remember that sectarian errors, serious as they are, have been made by an immature movement or by immature individuals in the course of the effort to establish in the work of writers and artists the great liberating truth of the Marxist world outlook—a combative truth that opposes the fundamental lie of the capitalist outlook, no matter what alluring ideological garb it may assume. This Marxist truth, even when imperfectly apprehended, has been a source of strength and creative richness for the best writers of the '30s, including Albert Maltz.

MUST BE VIEWED AS WHOLE

I want to speak to those who may not yet see clearly what is involved. I, too, made the mistake of considering Maltz's article eclectically, weighing the good and the bad and striking a balance. But this is to see the features and not the face. The articles must be viewed as a whole: in what direction is it going? Is it moving toward or away from the integration of the writer with social reality whose fulcrum is the class struggle?

It seems to me that Maltz develops his criticism of past error so one-sidedly that it becomes converted into new and more dangerous error. This is the dialectics of the transformation of partial truth into full untruth. To object to a narrow, oversimplified interpretation of the doctrine, "art is a weapon," is one thing; to "broaden" it as Maltz does is to provide a cure that is far worse than the disease. To say that a writer making a speech and a writer writing a novel are performing two different functions is to state the obvious. But to deduce from this as a guiding principle that these two acts have no necessary relation with each other is to cleave art from society and the artist from social responsibility.

It is in his discussion of the Trotskyite writer, James T. Farrell, that Maltz projects as on a screen the essential meaning of his ideas. I think it a mistake to debate this issue on the ground Maltz himself has chosen; that is, his insistence that there is not always a direct, immediate and full correlation be-

tween a writer's politics and his art. He has provided his own proof of the impossibility of the literary isolationism he advocates.

All of us are encircled by capitalism, and capitalist ideas beat on us with a thousand hammers, often subtle and soundless, that seek to break down our Marxist convictions, our identification with the working class struggle, our faith in socialism. What happened to the entire Communist movement under Earl Browder's leadership has by no means been completely overcome. And Albert Maltz's article, as well as the original reaction of myself and other New Masses editors, shows that to reject the capitalist ideology which Browder represented in the political sphere is not in itself a guarantee that we will not open the door to it when it comes dressed in other clothes.

One final word. Sectarianism is no better antidote to revisionist influence in the literary field than in any other. We don't refute the attempt to separate art from politics by a counter-attempt to equate them. Literature is not a mere branch of sociology. It has its own laws of development within the general social laws which Marxism has discovered. Samuel Sillen, to whom all of us are indebted for his challenge to Maltz's position, has suggested a number of problems that require discussion and action. We want not a sloganized literature, but a humanized literature, which can only mean a literature rooted in the life and aspirations of progressive mankind.

I am not a mind reader, but I think this obscuring of Farrell's political identity has a meaning. In the very act of reconciling himself to Farrell, the writer, Maltz is no longer able to expose and condemn unreservedly Farrell, the Trotskyite. I am not accusing Maltz of sympathy to Trotskyism. I am merely saying that his false, anti-Marxist thinking about literary problems is dragging him, perhaps without his being conscious of it, away from the political beliefs he has long held.

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