

# Let's Discuss the Real Issues

by Samuel Sillen

ONE of our readers, a man long associated with the left cultural movement, has addressed a letter to me commenting on the recent series of articles, **Which Way Left-Wing Literature?** The letter reads in part:

"I want you to know that I, and many others with whom I have talked, do not consider your series a contribution to the fulfillment of those objectives to which we have all devoted our energies over the years.

"On the contrary, never since the most sectarian days of the old John Reed Club, when the influence of the RAPP distorted the perspectives of some of the left-wing critics, has the tone of any series of articles on literary criticism been so meretricious and so harmful. I can well understand how you could have been provoked by Albert Maltz's formulations and by some of his omissions. But your intemperate, categorical, pontifical handling of the questions and issues Maltz raised, substituted the method of intimidation for persuasion."



IT IS POSSIBLE to debate the charge. But I believe it would be far less fruitful to debate whether one individual arrogated "coercive authority" than it would be to discuss the real issue at stake. This issue is far more important than the personalities of Albert Maltz, Samuel Sillen, or the writer of the letter.

The issue is the Marxist versus non-Marxist approach to literature and the role of writers today. On this issue every Communist has not only a right but a responsibility to speak with utmost frankness, conviction and loyalty to working class principle. "The worst of errors is the fear of taking a stand," as Roger Garaudy has said. Another grievous error, it might be added, is the tendency to obscure questions of principle by concentrating on questions of tone.

The Daily Worker welcomes the most frank and free and searching discussion—a Marxist-Leninist discussion—of the creative work or the critical work of the left cultural movement. We believe that it is only on the basis of such discussion that we can make progress.

My series did not argue that the literary left was free of faults. It argued that none of our faults could be corrected unless we firmly established in our thinking and work the fact that left literature cannot be divorced from the class struggle, from the sharp rejection of capitalist values, from the perspective of socialism.

Within that framework our failings are numerous, and we can fulfill our responsibility only by recognizing and overcoming them. I can be specific with respect to our own paper, for example. We

have been lacking in leadership to the cultural activities of the labor movement, which remains backward so far as labor theatre, labor art, labor literature, etc., are concerned. The independent role of the labor movement in American culture—the central question for us today—has received little serious discussion in our press. In this respect we have not yet overcome the poison of Browderism.

Another example: We have failed to integrate the talents of our own Communist writers, artists, and so on, into the life of the paper. The gap between our cultural cadres and our Party press has to be bridged. This is only one reflection of the general disorganization of our forces during the period of revisionism.

A third example: We have provided no adequate discussion of the various trends in the cultural field that have been developing since the end of the war. We need evaluations of specific writers. We need to give a general estimate of the various books and plays dealing with Negro life.

TO THOSE who resent a passionate (and therefore "ungentlemanly") concern for correct theory, I commend these words of Lenin to Gorky in 1912: "The bourgeois, the liberals, the Social Revolutionaries, who are not serious with regard to thorny problems and crail after others, are diplomatic and are satisfied with eclecticism, love to shout about the 'wrangling' among the Social Democrats." The difference between the Social Democrats and all of them is that the wrangling has invested the Social Democrats in their group struggle with deep and clear ideological roots, while their wrangling is externally smoothed over, but inwardly is empty, petty and mean. I would never for the world exchange the acute conflict of ideas among the Social Democrats for the sleek emptiness and poverty of the Social Revolutionaries and Co."

It is for great principles that we Communists fight, for life against death, for freedom against slavery, for liberating truth against the gigantic lie on which capitalist society seeks to support itself. We feel these issues deeply, even "intemperately."

In our ranks the writer escapes from the "straitjacket" of bourgeois ideology and sheds the "uniform" of artistic servility. With us there is only one form of "coercion": the coercion of telling the entire truth about life, the coercion of a historic struggle for the liberation of mankind.

There are many defects to be analyzed and acted upon. I hope that in a spirit of Communist self-criticism and self-correction we shall engage in the most frank and serious discussion in these pages.

Let us remember that the solution of our problems requires not a retreat from Marxism, but an ever more vigilant and militant struggle for Marxism in theory and practice.

\*The name of Lenin's party at that time.