

Books

An Open Letter

To New Masses Reviewers:

BEFORE me as I write there is a list of nearly a hundred of you—nearly a hundred men and women who have been, or in the course of time will be, invited to contribute reviews to the *NEW MASSES*. There are novelists and poets on this list, well-known critics, experts on painting and music, historians, economists, philosophers, scientists, labor organizers, journalists and pamphleteers, leaders of the Communist Party. Though I shall be writing you personally, I take this opportunity of greeting you collectively and of saying to you as a group certain things that you may be interested to hear.

There are a few practical considerations that had best be touched on first. Although I have no intention of making a fetish of publication dates, and although I hope you will never sacrifice the quality of your reviews to the demands of the deadline, I think you will agree that timeliness is important in revolutionary journalism. Our comments on books will have greater impact if they appear when the books are being read and discussed. This means that reviews must be written promptly; and if anything suffers in the process, it should be our convenience and not our reviews. Promptness is also necessary in the answering of letters, especially so, because I am handicapped in the editing of this department by living outside New York City. I do not apologize for stressing such points; for efficiency, even on the most mechanical level, is an essential part of the discipline of a revolutionary movement.

But of course what I want principally to speak about is the unusual opportunity in which we have been given a share. In the weekly *NEW MASSES* it will be possible to review all the important books—all the books, that is, that are important to workers, farmers, and intellectuals who read the magazine. We shall, of course, review those books that grow out of the revolutionary movement. We will review them, needless to say, candidly and critically. We shall also review the books that are opposed to the revolutionary movement. We will review them intelligently and discriminatingly as well as searchingly. And we shall review many, many books that, in the minds of their authors and most of their readers, have nothing to do with the revolutionary struggle. We will review them thoughtfully and not unsympathetically, but we will review them from a particular point of view.

The gratifying, the encouraging thing about the *NEW MASSES* is that it has a point of view. We constitute a diverse group. And yet any one of us can speak with confidence of the group's point of view. Every one of us believes that the capitalist system must be destroyed by the power of the proletariat, in

alliance with the exploited farmers, the ruined middle class and the aroused intellectual and professional class. Every one is determined to fight such manifestations of capitalism as war and fascism. Every one is resolved to support the workers and poor farmers of America wherever they are struggling against injustice, starvation, and oppression. And these convictions and this determination are fundamental, the very basis of the attitudes and judgments that our reviews will express.

This does not mean that there will be no variety in the *NEW MASSES* reviews. No dictator is going to impose some narrow and arbitrary interpretation of Marxism upon reviewers. Each one of us will work out for himself the application of the revolutionary point of view. And since our interests, knowledge, and experience are so varied, there is little danger of standardization and monotony. We are engaged, after all, in a co-operative venture, to which each contributes what he can. But we are united in our knowledge of our goal and our determination to reach it.

Moreover, the majority of our readers share our point of view. Some readers of the *NEW MASSES* will undoubtedly be hostile to its purposes; we shall have to be accurate, logical, and well informed, not because we can convert these enemies, but because otherwise they will use our mistakes to fight our cause. Other readers will glance at the *NEW MASSES* because they are beginning to feel a little doubt about the system in which they live; the more fully and fairly we set forth our point of view, the more likely we are to win them to our side. But most of the readers will be sympathetic towards—many, of course, active in—the revolutionary movement. It is to them that we are primarily responsible. That is why we must not be bookish or pedantic or abstract. Our task is not simply to write about books; it is to interpret the intellectual currents and the emotional forces of our time as they are reflected in literature.

"We ought to dream!" said Lenin, calling for a periodical that "would become part of an enormous pair of smith's bellows that would blow every spark of class struggle and popular indignation into a general conflagration." The *NEW MASSES* may not be the most important weapon of the revolutionary movement, just as the literary section may not be the most important department of the magazine; but here our opportunity lies, and here we shall succeed or fail.

GRANVILLE HICKS.

Preparedness—Then and Now

OVER HERE, by Mark Sullivan. \$3.75.
Charles Scribner's Sons.

President Roosevelt on Dec. 8 reorganized and further centralized the control of the

most powerful bureaucratic machine ever assembled in peace or war—the machinery set up under the National Industrial Recovery Act. Frank C. Walker, former attorney for the Anaconda Copper Mining Company and Montana Power Company (subsidiaries of Standard Oil), and treasurer of the Democratic National Committee, was made executive director of the National Emergency Council. By this act Walker had thrust into his hands more power than any other one person in any government in the world possesses—with the sole exception of the President himself. His authority extends over every department of N.R.A. and consequently over the entire mass of the working population. Upon his qualifications for such a post, the working population has not been allowed to pass, even by the limited and restricted use of the franchise as practiced in the United States. Another long step has been taken towards an open dictatorship divested of democratic trappings. The dictatorship of monopoly capital has been extended immensely. American imperialism moves rapidly to put itself on a war basis—for war against its rivals, for war on the revolting colonial peoples, for war on the workers, exploited farmers and Negro masses at home.

The similarity to the war preparations of the Wilson government is too obvious to escape the attention of any revolutionist. The great value of Mark Sullivan's *Over Here—Volume V of Our Times*—is that it furnishes in detailed and documented form the factual basis by which the analogy can be made unshakable. In the opinion of this reviewer a series of articles, a pamphlet, or perhaps a book on the most important aspects of this question, for the widest possible circulation, is a burning need of the working class. Here, however, space does not permit more than one or two outstanding points for emphasis.

Speaking of the way the draft was put over, Sullivan, an enthusiastic supporter of all these measures, says on pages 292-94: "This depriving the draft of the appearance of compulsion, but at the same time getting the advantage of compulsion, is attributed to Secretary of War Baker. Baker, like Wilson, knew the importance of appearances, had

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