

# Wants to Know Where Is Left Wing Literature?

Dear Editor:

The heated and almost violent discussion generated by Albert Maltz's *New Masses* article, *What Shall We ask of Writers*, has gotten off to a wrong

start and it should be shifted into different channels soon if only to save wear and tear on tempers. My own is being drawn pretty thin and the next person who asks me, "What do you think of the Maltz piece?" should not be surprised if I spring up and bite him.

Not too many months ago I wrote a letter to my wife from Okinawa in which I asked rather rhetorically, "What's wrong with our left-wing literature? What has happened to it? Where is it?" I still think it is a good question, and needs considerable discussion. But now that I'm home I find myself plunged into a rough and tumble debate on "What Is Wrong With Maltz?"

I think they are two separate and distinct questions and that it is time to separate them.

Howard Fast in his article, "Art and Politics" in the Feb. 26 *New Masses*, writes, "... whether or not we like it, the position of left-wing writing—or Marxist writing—in America must be stated in terms of the Maltz position: that is, it must be stated as a refutation of certain theoretical postulates Maltz makes."

Why? Why must we elevate the wrongheadedness of Maltz—and his piece contains some of the most frightening and disgusting arguments I've seen in a long time—to the position of serving as a springboard for the entire discussion of left-wing writing?

True enough, there has been not only a trend toward liquidation, but actual liquidation, and the entire left-wing cultural movement has suffered from it. But I have talked to many people since I've been home, including a considerable number of writers, and I have not found one who is very happy about the situation. Certainly I have found no one ready to hall and follow a new apostle of this tendency. Rather I have found them all breaking their heads trying to get to the roots of the reason for liquidation and how to correct it.

## WANTED DISCUSSION OF FAULTY CRITICISM

The discussion is so over-due that many greeted the Maltz piece because, in providing a basis for his utterly false and reactionary theoretical conclusions, he did make some valid charges against the shallowness and emptiness of much of left-wing criticism. They were ready to excuse and overlook Maltz's theoretical conclusions in order to get their teeth into his tactical criticisms, just as a hungry man may sometimes seize upon a bone from a garbage can and gnaw at it, dirt and all. And believe that, if the sin of the *New Masses* was offering such a bone, the sin of the *Daily Worker* was in reacting to it so intemperately that those who hungered for what little meat it offered were thrust into the uncomfortable and confusing position of

seemingly defending Maltz against the criticism of the party.

When I say that Maltz's article smells bad, I mean it is my firm belief that there is enough Marxist integrity in left-wing literary circles for agreement on these two basic concepts: 1. The writer and the politician, the artist and the citizen, cannot be separated. A man writes an editorial with the same head he uses to write a novel. 2. James T. Farrell cannot be defended as an artist and excused as a Trotskyite. If Maltz wants Farrell evaluated as a writer, then let him subscribe to the *Partisan Review*—or let him read the *Saturday Review of Literature* which invites Farrell to sing its requiem for Theodore Dreiser, as vilely disgusting a spectacle as I've seen in recent years (and incidentally, I do not remember seeing any comment on it in the left-wing press.)

In all the discussion so far, and in all the talks I have had with individuals, I have found no one yet ready to defend Maltz on these points. As a matter of fact, the vehemence with which these questions have been tackled in the press is a little insulting to most of us.

I think that the discussion so far pretty well takes care of *What Is Wrong With Maltz*. Let's switch it over to the question that really bothers us: What do we do now to develop a flourishing left-wing culture in general, and a left-wing literature in particular?

And we may take as a starting point the charges that Isidore Schneider listed in the Oct. 25 issue of *New Masses*, and the seven positive and immediate needs for left-wing literary movement enumerated by Samuel Sillen in the fifth of his series of six articles in the *Daily Worker*.

It is my conviction that we need no further protection against the confusions and wrongheadedness of Maltz; what we need is a thrashing out of our own past mistakes and present weaknesses.

LAURENCE EMERY.

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