

REPORT TO OUR READERS

By THE EDITORS

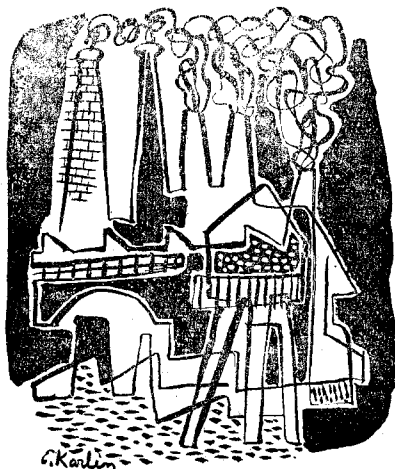
THIS is an interim report. For the past few weeks NEW MASSES has been publishing letters from readers about the magazine, many of them sharply critical of our work in the recent period when we embraced Earl Browder's ideas concerning a postwar capitalist utopia. Readers may have been wondering whether the editors were seriously facing up to the problem of correcting mistakes and revitalizing the magazine. Let us assure you that the process of self-criticism is painful and difficult, but we are making every effort to examine our work seriously and searchingly. Nor is the mere recognition of errors sufficient. There still remains the struggle against the vestiges of wrong thinking and wrong habits of work. And there is always the danger of losing one's balance, of forgetting that even in the period when NM was weakest, it nevertheless made valuable contributions in many fields. In the future too we must avoid tossing out the baby with the bath-water.

Besides, we cannot limit ourselves to eradicating what is bad: there is still the problem of making correct policy breathe in the pages of NM as the flesh and blood of American life. There is still the problem of permeating the very roots of our thinking with Marxist science, of giving every article and cartoon fire and strength and excitement.

Frankly, we don't know all the answers, but we're trying hard to find them. And we must have the help of our readers if we are to succeed. The editors are now holding a series of meetings which are also being attended by a number of contributors. After Labor Day we expect to hold such meetings with our readers, though because of physical factors we must continue to depend on mail as the major means of involving our readers in these discussions. Three of the ideas that were emphasized at the last meeting of our editorial board were the need to develop genuine Marxist independence of thought; the magazine's role as a cementer of the alliance between labor and the middle class and consequently the importance of closer ties with both the labor movement and middle class organizations; and NM's task as an educator in socialism. Some of the questions to be taken up at forthcoming

meetings are the role of Marxist theory in the magazine's work, NM's activity in the field of culture, the development of self-criticism as a continuous process, the strengthening of ties with our readers, and the problem of manpower, that is, of writers and artists to contribute to NEW MASSES. (The latter problem has for several years been perhaps the toughest we have faced; we appeal once again for cooperation from writers, artists and readers.) And all the time, of course, history is on the march. Reconversion, spreading unemployment, the tensions in Europe and Asia—these and a hundred other questions must be dealt with at once.

OUR patterns of thought and action must conform to reality not only in the sense of eliminating the wrong conceptions of the past, but also of avoiding new distortions that may prove just as damaging. We share with our readers the belief that Joel Bradford is one of our most valuable contributors, but it seems to us that some of the ideas in his column elsewhere in this issue err in the direction of ultra-leftism. His statement that the war has been just "because it was the struggle of the world proletariat against the Axis bourgeoisie, and only for this reason could other proletarians unite with 'their' capitalists, who, in turn, were forced to unite with the world's first socialist power," is too narrow a characterization. This was primarily what Marxists call a national war (even though it also contained elements of class war as well as of imperialist war) because it embraced the interests not of the workers alone, but of all classes, including the bourgeoisie.



Eugene Karlin.

If in the war of 1914-18 Lenin was able to speak of its progressive national element as represented by the struggle of Belgium and Serbia—an element which would have justified support of that struggle had it not been engulfed in the larger conflict of imperialist powers—how can one overlook the predominantly national character of the gigantic war against the Axis, in which the very existence and democratic achievements of large nation-states were at stake?

Mr. Bradford's comments on the American Communists also appear to us one-sided. He sees evidence of incapacity in the fact that the Communists had to make three efforts before they could produce a proper resolution; others might see in that fact a genuine effort to rid the movement of the remnants of non-Marxian thinking and a genuine respect for the opinions of the rank and file, who submitted some 5,000 amendments to the original draft resolution. And Mr. Bradford seems to demand a kind of humility of every Communist who was mistaken in the recent period—which would mean close to 100 percent of them—that would result in paralysis of action. Surely he would not want that.

We think it good, however, to be able to thresh out such differences and eventually arrive at common agreement. In this connection the letters we have been getting from readers—unfortunately, we don't have space to print all of them—have proved very helpful. Some of the criticism has hurt even though we have had to recognize its essential truth. Some of it has seemed to us extreme and not very constructive. What we need now are more letters that will help in our own "reconversion" job: that will tell us what readers like and don't like among the features of NM and what improvements they suggest. And we want, too, letters that will tell what is happening in various parts of the country and will reflect the experiences and thinking of average Americans. Not a few of the letters we have received have impressed us with their authors' writing skill: we want more of such non-professional writers to feel that this is a magazine where their efforts will be welcomed, that they too can help give NEW MASSES that depth and richness we are striving for.