

"Partisan Review:" A Revolt Against Stalinism Among The Intellectuals

This week we salute the appearance of a new literary magazine of the left under an old name: the *Partisan Review*. Originally an off spring of the John Reed Clubs under the bureaucratic despotism of the Communist Party apparatus, the *Partisan Review* has undergone a metamorphosis. It has declared its independence of the Stalinists and their literary policies and struck out upon its own. Since to break openly, clearly, cleanly with Stalinism is the primary condition of progress in any sphere of the radical movement and requires not a little backbone, we can only congratulate the editors of the new venture upon their bold decision and wish them well.

Significant Step

This divorce of a talented group of radical intellectuals from Stalinism signifies anew that the most sensitive and searching members of the younger generation can no longer live in the poisoned atmosphere arising from the decay of that once virile movement. They must break out of that prison house of the Dead to breathe fresh air and to make for themselves a place where creative and independent revolutionary thinking and writing can flourish without police regulations and restrictions. In the struggle that has raged around the Moscow Trials in the past year, a distinguished contingent of advanced American intellectuals proved to be more alert to the issues involved and more firm in their determination to fight the Stalinist rule of lies and terror than their less fortunately situated colleagues across the Atlantic. The stand of the *Partisan Reviewers* is a fresh manifestation of the same healthy trend.

According to its editorial manifesto, the *Partisan Review* aspires to be revolutionary in tendency and Marxist in character. The indispensable foundation for any kind of revolutionary Marxist organ, political, or trade union, is a clear and correct policy. One of the principal questions confronting the editors of a revolutionary review is the relation between literature and politics, or, in this concrete case, the relationship between the *Partisan Review* and the existing revolutionary tendencies. What answer do they give to this problem?

The editors counterpose two policies to each other. One is the Stalinist conception which "equates the interests of literature with those of factional politics"; imposes a party line on literature; and sets up a bureaucratic board of censors, armed with police powers, to enforce that line. They categorically reject this "totalitarian trend" of the Stalinist commissars of culture, ruinous to the development of living art and science. So far, so good.

But, in their revulsion against the vicious ideas and practices of Stalinism, the *Partisan Reviewers* have swung over to the opposite extreme. They aspire "to independence in politics as well as in art." What precisely is meant by this? Obviously, they do not intend to ignore the influence of past or present politics upon cultural productions. See the articles on Flaubert's politics and Picasso's contributions. They

collaboration in a common work. Is it not strange that the two should be considered mutually incompatible and hostile? For this misconception, as for many others prevalent among the radical (and ultra-radical) intellectuals, the corrupting influence of Stalinist authoritarianism is responsible. The forms of this collaboration do not matter so much as its real content. Once the necessity of joint work is recognized, it will be easy enough to find the most fruitful conditions for collaboration.

have another end in view. They propose to remain independent, i.e. neutral and indifferent, not toward politics in general, but only toward the revolutionary politics of the labor movement. Is it not exceedingly anomalous for a revolutionary Marxist magazine to proclaim above all its independence... of revolutionary Marxist politics?

But, the editors may protest, we wish to be independent, not in regard to revolutionary politics, but only in regard to its "organized political expressions." Unfortunately, in real life, the two are inseparable. Revolutionary politics does not exist in *vacuo*, but among living groups of people, bound together by common ideas and organized into political parties. Moreover, revolutionary Marxist politics did not begin yesterday. It has almost a century of development behind it.

Which one among the tendencies struggling for supremacy within the ranks of the American working class most clearly and consistently expresses and fights for the ideas, interests, and aims of Socialism and most faithfully carries on the best traditions of Marxism? Which must be considered the vanguard of the revolutionary movement? This question confronts the editors of the *Partisan Review*, and not them alone. They wish, however, to evade a direct answer to it.

Two Wrong Views

The *Partisan Review* was founded, they say, "precisely to fight the tendency to confuse literature and party politics." Not all the confusion on this point, however, is on the side of their antagonist. If the Stalinist sectarians are guilty of identifying literature and politics, the *Partisan Reviewers* are likewise culpable of ignoring, and thus denying in practice, the close bonds between them. Their error consists in mistaking sectarian politics for politics in general. In reality, no such thing exists as "non-partisan politics." Politics may be good or bad, correct or incorrect, proletarian, non-proletarian, or anti-proletarian, but never "non-partisan."

Both the Stalinist conception of the absolute subordination of literature to politics and the *Partisan Reviewers'* conception of its absolute independence are one-sided and false. But there is a third conception which bases itself upon the interdependence of the two. According to this conception, which is, in our opinion, the correct Marxist position, there need be no discord between revolutionary politics and revolutionary literature, but on the contrary, a profound harmony between them. All depends upon establishing a correct working relationship between them and their organized expressions.

What should be the nature of this relationship? Not one of despotism and servile dependence, as the Stalinists demand, nor one of toplofty indifference, and alienation, as the *Partisan Reviewers* think necessary. The normal and natural relationship between a revolutionary Marxist cultural organ and a genuinely Marxist party should be one of fraternal

Cannot Be Indifferent

In any case, the editors of the *Partisan Review* cannot remain true to their revolutionary Marxist aspirations and remain indifferent to living politics. Politics omniates everything in our world, including literature. In order to survive, progress, and become a real force in literature, no less than in politics, it is necessary not to turn one's back upon political questions, but to define clearly one's attitude toward contending ideas and forces. Not indifference but intelligence; not anti-politics but correct politics: such is the Marxist approach to the problem.

The *Partisan Review* experienced the impossibility of ignoring politics even before the appearance of its first issue. No sooner was its publication announced than the Stalinist press launched a formidable lynch campaign against the magazine and its editors. The Stalinists fear the consequences of this defection from the ranks of their intellectual sympathizers; they have already suffered heavily in the past year. No longer able to allow a hand's breadth of independence to their followers, their grip upon the most critical and honest among them is visibly weakening. They must quarantine dissidents at all cost, and in every quarter. Thus the whole frame-up technique has been unlimbered against the *Partisan Reviewers*.

The answer of the editors to these abominable and outrageous attacks is, to say the least, woefully weak. The *Daily Worker*, among other things, assails them as "of the same ilk that murdered Kirov, that turned the guns on the backs of Loyalist civilians in Spain and betrayed the Army's front line, that have been caught red-handed in plots with the Gestapo and Japanese militarists to dismember the Soviet Union." In a word as "Trotskyists." All this merely proves, according to the editors, "the degenerative effect of imposing a Party Line on Literature" and, what "it is painful to us, as radicals, to realize, the intellectual bankruptcy of the Communist Party leadership." One is irresistibly reminded of that brave husbandman, who shouted after a gang of bandits and assassins: "You have killed my wife, raped my daughter, robbed my money, and burned down my house, but don't you dare touch my garden, or I will get mad!"

If an honest but misguided worker or intellectual voices such accusations, it is necessary to explain how false and vile they are. But when a pack of conscienceless scoundrels in the service of the great corrupter and destroyer of the Socialist revolution contrives a frame-up, it is imperative to defend oneself with the utmost vigor and to expose the motives and real roots of this villainy. Does not the timid and

With The Party

Kansas City Local Endorses Chicago Rank and File Convention

The Kansas City, Missouri, local of the Socialist Party has come out solidly for the Left Wing and will send delegates to the Chicago convention on Dec. 31. In a letter sent to us, the Kansas City comrades enclose the following resolution for publication:

Resolution of Kansas City Local Of the Socialist Party

Whereas: the National Executive Committee has separated itself from the members of the Socialist Party by disregarding the dictates of the rank and file and by expelling party members for expressing differences of opinion within the party, and

Whereas: repeated demands to cease these expulsions and this "gagging" of the party have been

disregarded by the N.E.C. and Whereas: the result of this has been to split the party and to allow it to leave the path of the class struggle (as in the recent New York election disgrace) and

Whereas: the rank and file of the party has the inalienable right and duty to determine its own and the party's destiny, Therefore Be It Resolved: that we endorse a convention of the rank and file to be opened in Chicago on December 31, 1937 to determine the future policies of the party.

(Signed) Socialist Party, Kansas City, Mo. C. O'Hara, Secretary.

The resolution was adopted at the last meeting of the local with all votes of those present, except one. Funds are being raised for the delegates.

Attempt to Split Rochester Party Fails

ROCHESTER, N. Y.—The attempt of the LaGuardia "Socialists" James Lipsig and Hans Peters to split the Monroe County (Rochester) Local of the Socialist Party has failed miserably.

After announcing in the capitalist press the expulsion of B. C. Bennem, County Chairman, and other leading officers, Lipsig and Peters issued boastful press releases about their "reorganization" plans. Actually, their "reorganization" activities have re-

sulted in a complete flop. At its last meeting, Local Rochester upheld the expelled officers almost unanimously. The Right Wing "reorganizers" cooped up all of two stalwarts for their "line" in the whole of Monroe County.

Local Rochester is continuing with regular party activity as before. Preparations are being made to send delegates to the Chicago Convention of the Left Wing at the end of the month.

Greetings From India

Greetings to the First Convention of the Revolutionary Socialist Party of the U. S.

May the independent workers party in the United States be the true organizer of the working class. May it become the stimulating force that will awake the sleeping masses in colonial countries. May it help to create

the First Revolutionary Party of India under the Banner of the Fourth International.

Paul Schwabe, Calcutta, India, Nov. 10, 1937.

NEW "CHALLENGE" OUT

The December anti-war issue of the *Challenge of Youth* is just off the press. Buy it now.

ineffective "riposte" of the editors belong "to the petty-bourgeois tradition of gentility," that editor MacDonald sees as characteristic of the *New Yorker*, rather than to the polemical, militant character of Marxism?

Fills a Need

The best critical and creative spirits among the younger generation, imbued with revolutionary ideas and emotions and disgusted with Stalinism, have long wanted such a medium of expression as the *Partisan Review* proposes to provide. This growing company of writers and artists has hitherto lacked an organ free of the intolerable grip of the Stalinist Inquisition, whose fingers reach out in all directions to strangle their talents. The new review comes to fill a gaping hole in the radical cultural movement.

Together with the editors of the *Partisan Review* we oppose a politically managed art and science. We believe that there should be the widest latitude for experimentation and a complete autonomy within their own field for the workers in the arts and sciences. To allow free scope for the struggle of contending liter-

ary and artistic tendencies and their mutual influence, we believe that a revolutionary literary organ should be open to the best productions of living literature, regardless of the special political ideas of their authors. A sectarian policy in this sphere is absolutely fatal.

In allowing itself hospitable, experimental, democratic, the *Partisan Review* has set its foot on the right road. But it is not enough to have a broad circumference; it is equally necessary to have an ideological and political center from which all the rest logically radiates. Such a center is required for the orientation of the magazine amongst the ideas and forces of our time. It alone can give character, strength, and direction to its editorial policy and enable it to become a genuine force among the intellectuals of the rising revolutionary generation.

In breaking with Stalinism and launching upon a new career, great opportunities and perspectives are opened up to the *Partisan Review*. Let it continue to clarify its ideas along Marxist lines, and these opportunities can be richly realized.

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