

Movies, TV and...

by david platt

On Freedom of Artists to Explore, Practice, Investigate, Experiment

Following are excerpts from the article by leading Communist cultural workers which the column discussed yesterday. The full article appeared in the January issue of "Party Voice".

THERE are some who contend that the Communist Party has made no contributions at all to the development of an American culture that serves the interests of the American people—but we cannot agree. To argue, as some do, that our entire past is a tapestry of error, is to be blind to the modest but genuine role our party has played in the struggle for a vital, humanistic culture in our land. In the early thirties, for example, when artists were literally starving, none fought more tenaciously than the Communists for government support of WPA projects where writers, directors, musicians, actors and artists could be gainfully employed. As a result the production of cultural workers available to masses of people enriched the entire spiritual life of our nation. We projected the idea of the artist's social responsibility and proposed that an inexhaustible source of material lay in the experiences of the common people of the land—and the best creative minds of America, finding our teachings confirmed in life, adopted, for a time, this cause as their own. Through their works, and in articles, such nationally-renowned writers as Steinbeck, Richard Wright, Erskine Caldwell, Hemingway, Wolfe and others, revealed their indebtedness to Marxist thinking. Nor is it accidental that Theodore Dreiser, the foremost novelist of his generation, declared that the logic of his life led him to join the Communist Party.

BY the same token, the political work of our Party in that period and thereafter exercised considerable influence in moving intellectuals into activity around the broad social issues affecting all the people. When Spain was invaded by Franco, Hitler and Mussolini in 1936, we were instrumental in convincing the vast majority of the writers in America that the interests of American democracy required support of the Spanish people. When the shadow of Hitlerism fell across Europe, we helped move the greatest talents of our epoch to speak out against the perils of fascism. And when war finally came, Communist writers, film makers, artists and theatrical workers contributed their talents to mobilizing our entire people for victory. The support we enjoyed is a matter of record, and our influence upon the progressive, humanist culture of the period, is too well known to be denied. And yet, it seems to us now in retrospect, that there were at all times a number of contradictions in our ideas and activity which impaired our ability to best serve the interests of the people and intellectuals. In political terms, one of the contradictions was this: while, at all times we fought for what we considered to be the best interests of America, at many critical junctures we subordinated these struggles to the tactical needs of the world socialist movement led by the Soviet Union. . . .

IN THE field of culture—along with Soviet and other Communist theoreticians—we developed a premise of distinct but limited validity: Art is a weapon—and exalted this into a principle that injured our own creative work and our influence with American cultural figures. Actually, it seems to us, this slogan has validity in the sense that art inevitably plays a role in the battle for the minds of men. In this sense, it is, of course, a weapon. However, art is not the same as politics. Yet, in practice, we tended to interpret the slogan to mean that all the works of an artist must fit the immediate political program of the Communist Party. We insisted, in other words, that every cultural work play a politically programmatic role—and that culture serve as a handmaiden to politics. In doing so, we now believe we established a standard incommensurate with culture. Yet we demanded of our own and sympathetic intellectuals that they conform to the concepts we maintained. To make matters worse, we insisted that the content of genuine works of art in this period could be best expressed only in a particular form which we called "socialist realism." Here, too, we believe that the idea of socialist realism has, or can have, a definite validity for many artists. What we did, however, was to make adherence to this concept (or to our interpretation of it) a standard by which culture was to be judged. Even a casual survey of the history of culture demonstrates that such a theory and practice had to clash with the facts of cultural life, and with the needs of artists and the people. The result is that those cultural figures who did not embrace our concepts of culture found little or no encouragement in our ranks. On the contrary, they tended to be alienated by our insistence that they create by the standards we had set, whether they could honestly embrace them or not. In short we left no room for common struggle in the area of cultural production with non-party artists. The fact is that non-party artists often cooperated with us in politics despite disagreement and hostility in the field of cultural production. It inevitably followed that, given the enormous pressure by reactionaries in our country during the cold war, our self-isolation in this area made it easier for many intellectuals to capitulate completely to the enemy. But the great body of American cultural workers who sought primarily to express themselves as honestly as they could and still make a living in their fields, were only alienated by our dogmatism. . . .

AS TO our proposals for the future, these are the opinions we hold. First, it seems to us, the Communist Party—as it responds to the dynamics of change—must nail to its mast the banner of the freedom of the arts. . . . In the last ten years the freedom of all American cultural workers has been sharply restricted due to the incursion of McCarthyism. As a result, the cultural welfare of the entire nation has been sharply undermined. Even today, despite the eclipse of McCarthy and a definite liberalization of the atmosphere, artists are still blacklisted for their opinions. . . .

Undoubtedly, the sharpest restrictions upon artistic freedom lie in the continuing denial of employment to talented Negro artists, especially in TV and the films—and in the failure of these media to present materials that reflect the reality of Negro life in America. . . . In combatting these major restrictions upon artistic freedom—restrictions which derive from monopoly control of the media of mass communication—the Communist Party must frankly admit that it has restricted artistic freedom in its own ranks, and must make a clean break with these practices once and for all. It must recognize that although art is a creative reflection of the material relations in society, it is not the same as politics, that it has laws and life of its own, and that nothing stifles culture so much as the demand that it conform to a line, regardless of what that line may be. It must recognize that a

Recalls His Visit To the Homeland Of Bobby Burns

Editor, Feature Section:

Here's to Bobby Burns, my favorite lyric poet. Yes, more than Shelley and Keats and others I love well. For all Burns songs come out of the hearts of the people, the every-day toiling people around him.

Bobby Burns is universal. Carl Sandburg tells how Lincoln loved him. Young Abe began rhyming himself, after reading Burns as a teen-ager on an Indiana farm. And 40 years later he still admired Burns so much that he felt humble before him. "I can't frame a toast to Burns," he told the Burns Club in Washington during the Civil War. "I can say nothing worthy of his generous heart and transcendent genius: thinking of what he has said I cannot say anything which seems worth saying."

Burns is universal. But, of course, he is first of all the national poet of the Scottish people. I saw that during a two weeks' trip through Scotland in '39 at the close of the Spanish war. I slept in a different worker's house almost every night during that trip. And folks were talking of Burns or singing his songs almost every night. And the workers' meetings I attended used to open and close with songs from the great national bard. "Scots who ha' wi Wallace bled," was one of the favorites.

The Scottish workers loved Burns as one of themselves. And they were proud of his devotion to the common people. They used to tell me how Burns hailed the French Revolution again and again when it was dangerous to do so during the British Government terror of the 1790's. When King Louis' head fell Bobby used to give his friends this toast: "Here's to the last verse of the last chapter of the last Book of Kings," with obvious reference to George III. But Burns did more than toast the French revolutionists. For he was accused by his enemies of smuggling caronades (small cannon) to the fighters in France.

So here's to Bobby Burns, the great people's poet, again.

ART SHIELDS

'SEE IT NOW' LOOKS AT BURMA

"Burma, Buddhism and Neutralism," will be the full-hour presentation on "See It Now," Sunday, Feb. 3, over the CBS Television Network (5:00-6:00 P.M.). High point of the broadcast will be the participation on the program of U Nu, Chairman of Burma's governing political party, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League.

To draw their television portrait, Edward R. Murrow and Fred W. Friendly, co-producers of "See It Now" sent reporter Paul Niven and veteran "See It Now" cameraman Bill McClure on a three-month, 2,000 mile tour of Burma.



I wonder if she does the Cha-Cha as good as she is dancing the waltz. For "Los Tropicales" will be playing both on Feb. 9th at Chateau Gardens at the DAILY WORKER BALL.

democratic, humanist culture inevitably advances the cause of all humanity—and that the artist should be encouraged to create by his own standards, subject to the friendly criticism of his peers and the final judgement of the audience. . . .



ROBERT BURNS

'This is n of go

ONE HUNDRED and ni Ayrshire, Scotland, Robbie Bur his life—lived mostly in poverty have made him beloved of all grapher, says: "He belongs to t Beethoven, Shakespeare, Remb

What was his outlook on l "Whatever mitigates the others, this is my criterion of go at large, or any individual in it,

That theme runs through t the best expressions of it may b Waste Our Prime"—of which he

The Golden Age v Each man will In harmony we all And share the In Virtue train'd, e Will love each And future years That Man is go Then let us toast The reign of Peace

World Famous Arrives Here fo

The first Czechoslovak chamber music quartet to perform in the United States will arrive here January 29 for a two-month tour of this country, with additional engagements in Canada. In its 30-odd concerts the most popular chamber group in Czechoslovakia will appear in a score of states in every section of the country. The Colbert-LaBerge Concert Management of New York has arranged concert under the auspices of universities, museums, music societies and clubs. The opening engagement for the Concert Society of New York, will take place February 3.

The members of the Quartet, ranging in age from 28 to 37, are Antonin Kohout, cellist; Milan Skampa, violist; Jiri Nevak, first violinist; and Lubomir Kosticky, second violinist. All are graduates of one or more of the famous conservatories of Czechoslovakia. Their musical experience as a group since 1943 has taken them to almost every country in Europe, and their performances — they average 110 concerts annually — have brought them fame and awards accorded only the finest musicians.

Convinced from their own experience and the example of the Nuvo Quartetto Italiano, that playing from memory produces music technically superior and gives the