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MICHAEL GOLD

NOTES OF THE MONTH

"The Soviet flag is flying over a greater area in China today than is held by the counter-revolutionary government."

The sentence is culled from a manifesto issued this May, calling for an all-China Soviet Congress in November.

Is there another John Reed in America? We would advise him to hasten to China, to be present at another ten days which will soon surely shake the world. Roar, China! shake the pillars of this capitalist world, until it crashes around our ears, and in the debris we can set manfully and cheerfully to work on something better. We are tired of this vast, horrible machine dedicated only to the making of money. We are tired of caste, of cant and hypocrisy, of cruelty and corruption. The joy has gone out of work; it is commercialized. The joy has gone out of play; it is commercialized. There is no honest friendship under capitalism; there is no love; it is no society of human beings, living for each other's mutual advancement, but a great pack of ravening wolves.

Turn wolf, or starve to death; this is the choice capitalism lays before each individual. We are sick of being forced to make the choice. It has all become a cheap racket; but life is surely better than that. Roar, China, roar!

The Classic Model—

One must read deeply into the body of Marxian literature to understand these great human earthquakes that are shaking the world in China, India, Soviet Russia, and Europe.

The aim is a working-class government that will communize land, factories and every other means of production, and administer them for the welfare of the masses, instead of for the profit of a few thousand millionaires. The political means chosen for this transition is the Soviets. Human history is becoming a conscious planned development. Revolutions are no longer the blind spontaneous accidental affairs of the past. A classic technique has been worked out.

Karl Marx was the Darwin who demonstrated the laws that operate in political upheavals. It was his study of the French Commune that gave Lenin and the Russian Revolution the wisdom and direction to save that revolution from the ignominious defeat that marked the Socialist revolution in Germany.

No bourgeois parliaments, no class collaboration! This is the rock on which the French Commune went down in precious proletarian blood, the rock that Marx charted, that Lenin avoided, and that every real revolution from now on will watch for through the darkest storms.

Nothing can be expected from the upper classes but resistance when there is any prospect of real change. In peaceful times the bourgeoisie will fight economic change by professing the parliamentary "socialism" that is growing so fashionable and safe. In periods of disturbance they will shoot, imprison, behead and torture workers as in the past.

Sacco and Vanzetti—

It is the third anniversary of their murder of Sacco and Vanzetti. Mass-meetings are being held all over America to honor the memory of the "good shoemaker and poor fish-peddler."

The story will never die. It has become part of the new proletarian mythos, that great symphony of blood and tears whose vibrations will yet shatter every throned injustice.

Sacco and Vanzetti were Workers. In cotton mills, steel mills, coal mines, and on the long bread lines of America, behold the Workers! this base upon which the social pyramid is builded! this nation within the nation; this caste of untouchables for whom few writers speak, few scientists think! When there is work, they are harnessed to the great plow of American prosperity, given food enough to keep them fit. When there is no work, they are turned out to starve; the land, the factories, all the tools of work belong to the masters.

Slaves; forty million Americans are wage-slaves! To rebel means to chance the physical death; not to rebel means to die the spiritual death. Sacco and Vanzetti knew the proletarian hell; they were immigrants and Workers. They chose to become rebels against capitalism. For this they were killed by the masters.

It was no accidental slip-up on the part of a few prejudiced judges or district attorneys! it was the normal course of capitalist justice. The Worker who agitates against wage-slavery is always to be punished; he is guilty and dangerous, he is a "mad dog."

Give Us Barrabas!

Every month hundreds of proved axe-murderers, torch-slayers, rapers, kidnapers, forgers, gangsters, blackmailers and other proved criminals are released by pardon boards from American prisons: America respects them, feels a kinship.

But Mooney and Billings are still in jail after thirteen years; there was no mercy for Sacco and Vanzetti; there is no mercy waiting for the six youthful Negro and white Worker-militants who face the electric chair in Georgia; or for the farm workers who led



TOM MOONEY'S MAY DAY SMILE: The courageous fighter, now spending his 13th year in prison, from a drawing by Hugo Gellert, made on May 1, 1930, at San Quentin.

a strike in Imperial Valley recently, and now are serving a term of 42 years; or for the Gastonia strikers.

Hundreds of such cases in America; and each time the capitalist white-collar mob howls for lynching and blood.

A pattern has been fixed; we know what capitalist justice is like; have no illusions; the Workers feel the reality of all this white terror, and swear solemnly: "Our day will come!"

Kitchener said at the beginning of the war: England will lose all the battles, but will win the war. England did not win the war; American plutocracy won it; but we can truthfully say:

Labor may lose all the battles, but it will win the class-war. Labor has seemed to lose every battle, every strike and frame-up for the past hundred years, and yet today there is a Soviet Russia, a nascent Soviet China, a great international labor movement. Labor is doggedly and surely winning its great war for the management of the world.

Proletarian Literature—

Every day this is evidenced, too, on the cultural front. It is difficult for the bourgeois intellectuals to understand or acknowledge this. One of their favorite superstitions is that culture is always the product of a few divinely-ordained individuals, operating in a social vacuum.

We know and assert that culture is a social product; as bees who feed upon sumach or buckwheat produce honey of those flavors, so will the individuals living within a specific social environment give off an inevitably-flavored culture.

It could not be otherwise. Who could expect a Walt Whitman at the court of Louis the Fourteenth? Who, among the cacophonies and tensions of a modern industrial city, would ask a musician to originate bland gavottes and minuets?

But the intellectuals sneer at the idea of a proletarian literature. They will acknowledge the possibility of nationalist cultures; but they have not reached the understanding that the national idea is dying, and that the class ideologies are alone real in the world today.

I believe I was the first writer in America to herald the advent of a world proletarian literature as a concomitant to the rise of the world proletariat. This was in an article published

in the *Liberator* for 1920, called, "Towards Proletarian Art." Mine was a rather mystic and intuitive approach; nothing had yet been published in English on this theme; the idea was not yet in the air, as it is today; I was feeling my way.

But the little path has since become a highroad. Despite the bourgeois ultra-leftism of Trotsky in his *Literature and Revolution*, where he predicts there will not be time enough to develop a proletarian literature, this greatest and most universal of literary schools is now sweeping across the world.

One would not want a better text for a survey of the new movement than this paragraph from the conservative *Japan Magazine* on the situation in Japan:

"It appears that the greatest demand for the year was for proletarian literature, due perhaps to the excitement over the arrest of so many youths and maidens for being guilty of dangerous thought. The result is that henceforth there will be a more clearly marked distinction between the writers of this school and authors in general."

In North China there is the powerful Owl Society, with a string of newspapers, magazines, bookshops and publishing houses, all devoted to the spread of proletarian literature.

Thousands of books and articles on the theories of proletarian literature have been published in Soviet Russia, in Germany, Japan, China, France, England, and other countries. There is not a language in the world today in which a vigorous bold youth is not experimenting with the materials of proletarian literature. It is a world phenomenon; and it grows, changes, criticizes itself, expands without the blessing of all the official mandarins and play-actor iconoclasts and psalm-singing Humanists of the moribund bourgeois culture. It does not need them any longer; it will soon boot them into their final resting places in the museum.

No, the bourgeois intellectuals tell us: there can be no such thing as a proletarian literature. We answer briefly: There is. Then they say: it is mediocre; where is your Shakespeare? And we answer: Wait ten years more. He is on his way. We gave you a Lenin; we will give you a proletarian Shakespeare, too; if that is so important.

To us the culture of the world's millions is more important; the soil must be prepared; we know our tree is sound; we are sure of the fruit: we promise you a hundred Shakespeares.

Dogma versus Law—

We have only one magazine in America: the *New Masses*, dedicated to proletarian literature. And there is no publishing house of standing and intelligent direction to help clarify the issues. Nearest it is the International Publishers perhaps, but this house devotes itself solely to a rather academic approach to economics and makes little attempt to influence either the popular mind or our intellectuals. It is as stodgy and unenterprising, in a Communist way, as the Yale University Press, and similar organizations.

If there were a live publishing house here, such as the *Cent* of Madrid, for instance, it could issue a series of translations of proletarian novels, poetry, criticism that might astound some of our intellectuals. There would be a clarification, too, for some of our own adherents.

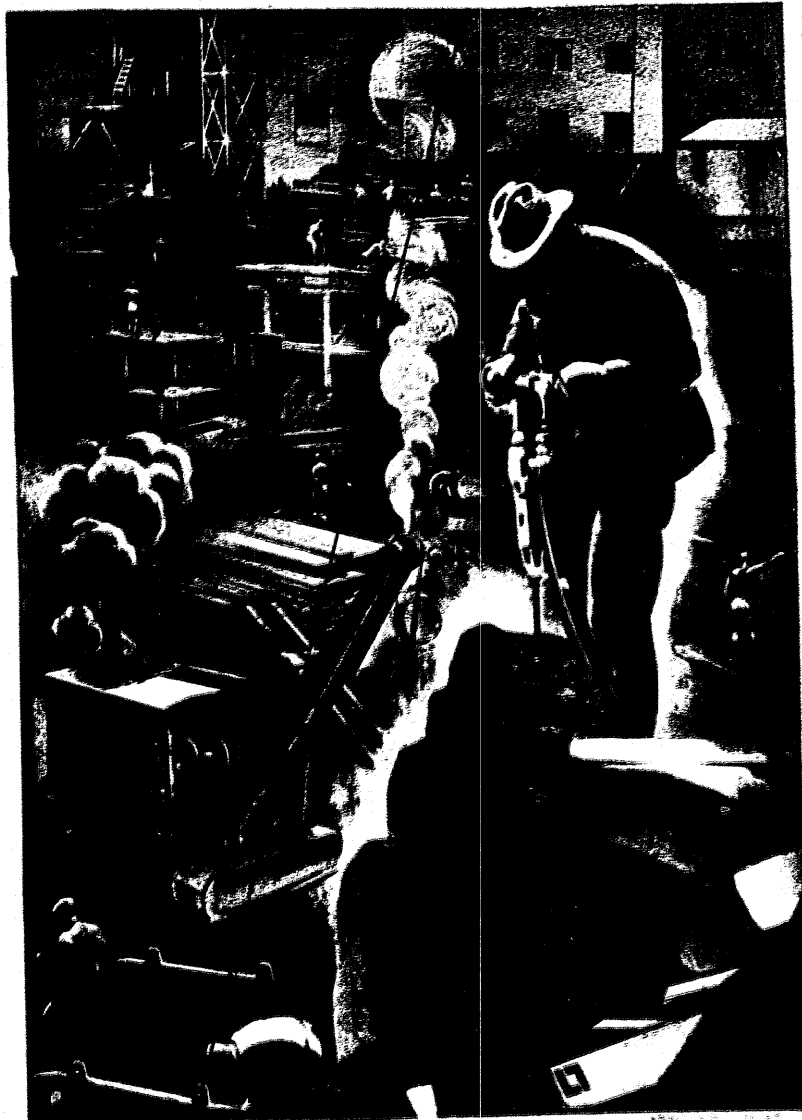
For proletarian literature is a living thing. It is not based on a set of fixed dogmas, anymore than is Communism or the science of biology.

Churches are built on dogma. The Catholic Church is the classic illustration of how the rule of dogma operates. Here is a great mass political and business movement that hypnotizes its victims with a set of weird formulas of magic which must not be tested or examined but must be swallowed with faith.

In Marxism or any other science there is no dogma; there are laws which have been discovered running through the phenomena of nature. These laws must not be taken on faith. They are the result of experiment and statistics, and they are meant to be tested daily. If they fail to work, they can be discarded; they are constantly being discarded.

The law of class struggle is a Marxian discovery that has been tested, and that works, and that gives one a major clue to the movements of man in the mass.

In proletarian literature, there are several laws which seem to be demonstrable. One of them is that all culture is the reflection



THE BIRTH OF A SKYSCRAPER

Louis Lozowick

poetry, much as they would scorn a sloppy workman. Hemingway and others have had the intuition to incorporate this proletarian element into their work, but have used it for the *frisson*, the way some actors try to imitate gangsters or men. These writers build a machine, it functions, but it produces nothing; it has not been planned to produce anything; it is only an adult toy.

2.

Proletarian realism deals with the *real conflicts* of men and women who work for a living. It has nothing to do with the sickly mental states of the idle Bohemians, their subtleties, their sentimentalities, their fine-spun affairs. The worst example and the best of what we do not want to do is the spectacle of Proust, master-masturbator of the bourgeois literature. We know the suffering of hungry, persecuted and heroic millions is enough of a theme for anyone, without inventing these precious silly little agonies.

3.

Proletarian realism is never pointless. It does not believe in literature for its own sake, but in literature that is useful, has a social function. Every major writer has always done this in the past; but it is necessary to fight the battle constantly, for there are more intellectuals than ever who are trying to make literature a plaything. Every poem, every novel and drama, must have a social theme, or it is merely confectionery.

4.

As few words as possible. We are not interested in the verbal acrobats—this is only another form for bourgeois idleness. The Workers live too close to reality to care about these literary show-offs, these verbalist heroes.

5.

To have the courage of the proletarian experience. This was the chief point of my "mystic" essay in 1920; let us proletarians write with the courage of our own experience. I mean, if one is a tanner and writer, let one dare to write the drama of a tannery; or of a clothing shop, or of a ditch-digger's life, or of a hobo. Let the bourgeois writers tell us about their spiritual drunkards and super-refined Parisian emigres; or about their spiritual marriages and divorces, etc., that is their world; we must write about our own mud-puddle; it will prove infinitely more important. This is being done by the proletarian realism.

6.

Swift action, clear form, the direct line, cinema in words; this seems to be one of the principles of proletarian realism. It knows exactly what it believes and where it is going; this makes for its beautiful youthful clarity.

7.

Away with drabness, the bourgeois notion that the Worker's life is sordid, the slummer's disgust and feeling of futility. There is horror and drabness in the Worker's life; and we will portray it; but we know this is not the last word; we know that this manure heap is the hope of the future; we know that not pessimism, but revolutionary elan will sweep this mess out of the world forever.

8.

Away with all lies about human nature. We are scientists; we know what a man thinks and feels. Everyone is a mixture of motives; we do not have to lie about our hero in order to win our case. It is this honesty alone, frank as an unspoiled child's, that makes proletarian realism superior to the older literary schools.

9.

No straining or melodrama or other effects; life itself is the supreme melodrama. Feel this intensely, and everything becomes poetry—the new poetry of materials, of the so-called "common man," the Worker moulding his real world.

of a specific class society. Another is, that bourgeois culture is in process of decay, just as bourgeois society is in a swift decline.

The class that will inherit the world will be the proletariat, and every indication points inevitably to the law that this proletarian society will, like its predecessors, create its own culture.

This we can be sure of; upon this we all agree. Proletarian literature will reflect the struggle of the workers in their fight for the world. It portrays the life of the workers; not as do the vulgar French populists and American jazzmaniacs, but with a clear revolutionary point; otherwise it is meaningless, merely a new *frisson*.

Within this new world of proletarian literature, there are many living forms. It is dogmatic folly to seize upon any single literary form, and erect it into a pattern for all proletarian literature.

The Russian Futurists, tried to do this; they held the stage for a while, but are rapidly being supplanted.

My belief is, that a new form is evolving, which one might name the "Proletarian Realism." Here are some of its elements, as I see them:

1.

Proletarian Realism—

Because the Workers are skilled machinists, sailors, farmers and weavers, the proletarian writer must describe their work with technical precision. The Workers will scorn any vague fumbling