

Correspondence

"Daniel Boone Belongs to Us"

TO THE NEW MASSES:

Mike Gold's recent review, "Daniel Boone Belongs to Us," means more to me than Mike may realize. Here is the reason why: My people live in the Ozark Mountains, in Arkansas. They, along with others of their kind, left Tennessee and Kentucky some time in the 1830's. Among these pioneers who came westward were the descendants of Daniel Boone. This is the way that my grandmother told the story to me: "There were four families of us that came down here together—the Boones, the Nortons, the Harps and the Swains. It took about four months to make the trip. There were no roads and the menfolk had to go ahead and blaze the way. The journey was a slow one as the oxen's feet were always sore and the wagon wheels wearing out. We used tar pole wagons and it was necessary to cut down saplings and renew them."

They settled in the mountains because the water was pure and because they were not troubled by "skeeters." It was not safe to live in the river bottoms in those days. Bear, deer, 'possum and 'coon were to be found in abundance. They took up claims wherever they pleased and tilled only the best of the land, hence the word "squatter." It was years afterward that the government forced them to homestead their land. This is the way that Daniel Boone's grandchildren fared one hundred years ago. I shall tell you how they are making out today.

These people are the kind that southern aristocrats and the Negroes refer to as "poor white trash." Today they are the sharecroppers that till the soil for the "wiser heads" that imported Negroes and developed the fertile fields of the Mississippi and Arkansas valleys. Some of them remain in the hills, but their conditions are no better than those that went away to slave for the plantation owners. They might be better off were it not for the fact that they were chiseled out of all their timber lands. They sold giant oak and walnut trees for one dollar per tree and the lumber companies in turn sold them for two or three hundred dollars. This was during the war and lumber was high. Their condition is just about the same as the feudal serf. The youngsters never go to school and even if they could there would be no clothes to wear. Even in the best of years there were families that could not afford shoes. I know the Boones. They were among the most destitute of all those impoverished people. You are right, Mike. Daniel Boone belongs to us.

CORBY PAXTON.

Marine Workers Industrial Union,
San Francisco.

Scottsboro Exhibition

TO THE NEW MASSES:

"We, English seamen from *S.S. Hartbridge* protest against brutal treatment of nine Scottsboro boys. We demand their immediate release."

Similar telegrams from striking Swedish marine workers, from South African Negroes in semi-slavery, from 7,000 French workers and intellectuals massed at a Scottsboro demonstration, from workers in Germany, England, Ireland, Australia, Holland the U.S.S.R.—from every country on the globe; some few asking—most of them demanding—the immediate release of nine innocent Negro children.

This, however, is but a small part of a vast display of expressions of working-class solidarity, now to be seen at the John Reed Club of New York, at the International Scottsboro Exhibition. Here we find in documented form the protests of the aroused world proletariat against the bestial treatment of the Negro masses.

Ruby Bates' letter to her friend, Earl, the docu-

ment that gave the lie to the obvious frame-up of the lynch courts is here in photostatic reproduction.

During the middle months of 1932 Mother Ada Wright and Louis Engdahl made their famous tour of Europe. Every leaflet and article from every major city of Europe is exhibited here—along with the result—several pounds of telegrams. There are also two documents—both from the Police Department of Halle, Germany. One, a grant of permission to Mother Wright to speak at a meeting—the other, revoking that right and received just three hours before the authorized meeting was to open. The German ruling class suddenly realized the significance of this Scottsboro demonstration as part of the fight against Fascism in its own country.

There is hardly a city or town, regardless of size, in the United States that is not represented by leaflets, books, newspapers, plays, songs, poems, or drawings.

JOHN REED CLUB OF NEW YORK.

430 Sixth Avenue.

Why They're Striking

TO THE NEW MASSES:

There are several reasons why the Southern textile worker deserves the special consideration of those interested in the working class movement. The greater number of employed, the wage differential, and the lower standard of living, distinguish the Southern textile worker from the northern. Perhaps the most unenviable distinction of all is that a particular disease, pellagra, affects large numbers of southern workers and their families, and almost never the northern worker.

Pellagra is a disease that has long been known to be associated with a very low standard of living. The precise cause, however, has only been discovered during the past 20 years by investigations in the textile mill towns of the South, where the number of cases has always been very great. Pellagra is now known to be a "deficiency disease," i.e., a disease due to a lack of essential foods in the diet, such as milk, eggs, green vegetables, fresh fruits and meats, particularly liver. These foods contain the vitamins that are indispensable to health; that will prevent and cure pellagra.

There are diseases which produce a more rapidly fatal ending than pellagra, but few which can match it for gruesomeness, in its well developed form. It attacks the skin, mouth, intestinal tract and the nervous system. The skin of the face and extremities becomes reddened, thickened, scaly and hard. Sometimes large blisters form. There is severe diarrhea, agonizing burning of the mouth, tongue, hands and feet. Ulcers form in the tongue, and saliva drools from the mouth. Severe cramps and tremors occur in the muscles. When they are not completely prostrate, the patients shuffle along in a tottering way due to intense dizziness. Control of the bladder and bowels may be lost. Mental symptoms are prominent, and range from apprehension and severe melancholia, to profound dementia and acute deliria, requiring confinement in an asylum. If nourishment containing the essential vitamins is not given early, the disease progresses to a fatal ending.

The diet and living conditions of the textile worker are particularly suited for the development of this disease. The average diet consists of "fat back" or salt fat pork, molasses and corn bread. Fresh dairy products, fruits and meats which are necessary to prevent pellagra are infrequently found on the table of the Southern textile worker. The cost of milk is prohibitive in many regions. Mothers have been known to suckle an older child as well as the new-born because of the high cost of milk.

The cause of the disease is known, its prevention

and cure is a simple matter, yet the number of cases of pellagra in the South has remained high. In the North a physician may not see a case in his lifetime. In the South thousands of cases are seen every year. The U. S. Public Health Service reports that in 1930 there were 24,747 cases of Pellagra, with 7,146 deaths. Two-thirds of all deaths were reported from six states—North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas. In North Carolina, for the seven years from 1924 to 1930, the number of deaths increased from 273 to 1,002. These are the number of cases and deaths "reported." The Public Health Service admits that the reported cases represent only about 50 percent of the actual number, a discrepancy undoubtedly due to laxity and incompetence on the part of mill physicians and public health authorities. In 1931, 27,807 cases were reported. Statistics for the last two years are incomplete, but it is not difficult to surmise what they will show.

HERBERT GERRITT, M.D.

"Yours for the United Front"

TO THE NEW MASSES:

I recall the many powerful working-class cartoons produced by Robert Minor.

This was before he became even more active by speaking and writing on his return from Russia where he had seen the new government of Socialist Soviet Republics planning and working for the future.

He saw a new order, a new hope coming to life where once had ruled a decadent monarchy. With the same power that he put into his early work, Bob Minor continues to fight for the working class and against the monarchy of money—whose other name is capitalism.

After it is all over we say of a man: "He put up a good fight," and to Bob we say while he is still with us, "You are a brave fighter for the working class." Yours for the united front,

Bethel, Conn.

ART YOUNG.

Facts and Figures

TO THE NEW MASSES:

John Phillips, reviewing the *Economic Handbook of the Pacific Area* in your August 14 issue, asks, "But what is the purpose of this compilation?" In no spirit of ruffled middle-class-consciousness, but as one responsible in part for the publication of this book, may I answer your reviewer with a sentence from an earlier paragraph of his own review? "There is no question that the vast quantity of information gathered in this handbook is very valuable to students of the Far East." Purpose enough.

Your reviewer, in spite of such a handsome beginning, went on to call the facts and statistics collected in the handbook "dead and meaningless." It is not his inconsistency which disturbs me as much as it is his logic. He assumes that the absence of interpretation connotes an imperialist or capitalist interpretation. This is an assumption common enough in all polemics, but dangerous as the devil to all good (including Marxist) thinking.

The statistical material in this handbook was prepared from every authoritative source available. Some of it was Soviet, some Siamese. The fact that there are no figures about Soviet China is a problem which worries us as much as it does your reviewer. We would like to find some.

In Lenin's letters to his family, published in Moscow in 1931, you will find references on nearly every page to the delight with which he landed on some new book which had factual data which he could interpret. It is an attitude which contrasts sharply with that of your reviewer. Before long someone, and probably a Marxist, is going to write a book about the Pacific area which will be like Lenin's *Development of Capitalism in Russia*. When he does, he will turn to books like this, grateful for facts without emotion into which he can put life and meaning.

JOSEPH BARNES.

Books

Dahlberg's New Novel

THOSE WHO PERISH, by Edward Dahlberg. The John Day Company. \$2.

READERS following the career of Edward Dahlberg know that he is a fellow-traveler who has been constantly drawing closer to the revolutionary movement, that he has been engaged in revolutionary activity from time to time. Those who have heard him as a lecturer affirm his support of the proletarian revolution know to which camp he belongs. And yet because neither his *Bottom Dogs* nor *From Flushing to Calvary* were revolutionary novels, there has been uncertainty as to Dahlberg's position as a writer. Could this novelist who as a critic stands opposed to the proletarian fiction of so talked about a writer as, for example, Jack Conroy, himself produce a novel entitled to be called revolutionary? Could Dahlberg's talents which have thus far been confined to recreating cross-sections of decay, broaden and deepen enough to penetrate to the forces actuating his characters? Between the covers of his third novel *Those Who Perish* are the answers to these questions.

It is a brief book covering little more than a year in the lives of employes and directors of the Jewish Community Center of New Republic, N. J. Of the four chief characters, three begin as members of the middle class and all four are Jewish. No immediate struggles of the working class against its exploiters; not a strike, not a clash between workers and police! Can a novel be revolutionary and fail to deal with such express material?

Regina Gordon, middle-aged educational director of the Center, has received a letter from Zurich, advising that her cousin's body "the fingers scissored, the chest a network of splinters tattooed with the Hakenkreuz sign, had been returned in a black Swastika coffin to his parents," and his father thrown into a concentration camp. Almost overnight sensational reports of the Nazi anti-Semitic terror flash before New Republic Jewry the Hitler phenomenon; and, of course, the directors of the Community Center, as self-constituted spokesmen for New Republic Jews, meet to remedy the situation. President Harry Rosenzweig (one of the directors of the New Republic Manufacturers' Trust Company), an American Russian Jew who has always been snubbed (according to the Jews' own racial hierarchy) by American German Jews, although not entirely displeased that German Jews are being taught "a lesson," nevertheless is sure that something ought to be done—and is all for the Jewish boycott. Not so Joshua Boaz, executive director of the Center, Zionist, and Regina Gordon's lover. When a ubiquitous rabbi thunders the usual "We Jews are being persecuted because we have always been the torch-bearers of culture," Joshua

Boaz thinks of all the manufacturers, insurance agents, Jewish delicatessen-store keepers, the hardware dealers and the Babbitt-like merchants "who were being oppressed because they were the torch-bearers of culture." A suave speech by an itinerant representative of the United Jewish Committee manages to sell the directors the boycott:

"We must not help Communism. In the long run the Communists will be more dangerous to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness than Hitler." Etc., etc.

Life goes on in New Republic much as before, for isn't Hitlerism still three thousand miles away? . . . But the idyl of Boaz's life is interrupted when his cousin, Eli Melamed, comes to borrow \$500. Melamed hasn't had a job drumming for expensive perfume for two years. Hearing from Boaz that "Franklin Delano Roosevelt is a cross between Woodrow Wilson and Eugene V. Debs . . . quite without Debs' guttersnipe characteristics which radicals always seem to have," Melamed confesses that Communists in general embarrass him, their street affairs being too "brassy and exhibitionistic" for his sensibilities. Convinced by his creditor that the New Deal "is already beginning to percolate," Melamed steps forth into the business world anew—and as months go on that world is just as unconcerned about him as ever. By a series of representative experiences, Dahlberg traces the declassing of this once successful member of the middle class, uncovering the diversities of his emotional experience during the gradual frustration of faith in the *status quo*. Unable to identify himself with the forces of revolution, his body a bundle of exposed nerves, Melamed finally overcomes racial self-consciousness and offers himself "to his own people," his further frustration following.

When Boaz learns of Melamed's death, he has already suffered too much to care. Regina, brooding on the Nazi persecutions to a point of near hysteria, comes to understand the problems of racial groups; she attains to an affirmation of a new society, the Socialist world. The inevitable clash with her lover sends him reeling into a physical breakdown and herself striving with the need to identify herself actively with the forces endorsed by her mind. Unlike Melamed, Regina knows where her fighting forces belong; but like him she is unable to transcend the remnants of her past experience: the sense of personal pain eventually relaxes into the inactivity of nostalgia, despite her one violent outburst against a propaganda film shown in a theatre owned by one of the culture-bearing Community Center directors!

Racked by the promise of futility all around him and giddy to possess Regina once more, Boaz goes to her, offering a future with him in Palestine. Regina:

"What will you do in the Promised Land? Be a parasitic country squire on a lemon grove, and live off the usurious interest on money loaned to the Cholutzim? Exploit the Arab workers as all good Zionists do, and leave the unemployed Jews to live off the climate as they do in California? . . . Go back to what? As if there were anything to return to except this cemetery society. . . . Away—where to? . . . Would you like to watch a procession of workers in Peiping having their tongues torn out of their mouths by Chiang Kai-shek's storm troopers? . . . You are tired and you want peace . . . but there is no peace for us. . . . We must stay and struggle against the murderers for the tomorrows of our little children."

And when Boaz charges that she wants him to be a Communist, she replies finally: "As for myself, I propose to fight this grave-digger's menace to the finish. . . . We must stay here . . . here and struggle . . . Otherwise . . . we will perish."

* But she is not equal to her decision. When the sick Boaz falls dead after their embrace, she appraises the situation. She poisons her daughter and herself.

It is clear that Dahlberg, having penetrated the problems involved in his material, has propounded the revolutionary solution. Approaching the necessity for Communism from the problem of anti-Semitism, he has presented a revolutionary treatment; and on this basis *Those Who Perish* must be included as revolutionary fiction.

Within the confines of his novel Dahlberg broadly indulges the prose which has come to be recognizable as his idiom. Based on the indivisibility of all the elements of personality—from obvious physical characteristics to subtleties of undeliberate movements—Dahlberg's method of character-portraiture follows in centrifugal pattern: the concrete action of a character is supplemented by the change in the physical personality which this new action has effected. Thus the protagonists are continually evolving. To this method Dahlberg's often brilliant imagery adds a quality of delight infrequent in literature today. One danger of Dahlberg's style lies in its overabundance of figures of speech which sometimes become a barrier to communication, and a certain limitation to the framework to which the images refer. And yet the economy of his writing is clear in that few paragraphs often suffice for etching an episode or a character.

Those Who Perish shows a deepening and a growth. No longer content to write at the expense of his characters, Dahlberg's vituperation has now become channelized in the directions consistent with his political beliefs. And to his former range must be added something that comes as a surprise: a pity and tenderness illuminating the impotent muteness of Melamed no less than the denuded sensibilities of Regina. Furthermore, unlike his second novel, *Those Who Perish* maintains a steady drive of interest.

Dahlberg has limited himself, however, to characters unable to accept the revolution in an active sense, who live and die outside its