GO LEFT, YOUNG WRITERS!

By MICHAEL GOLD

Literature is one of the products of a civilization like steel or textiles. It is not a child of sterility, but of life. It is always the mirror of its age. It is not any more mystic in its origin than a ham sandwich.

It is easy to understand the lacquer of cynicism, smartness and Ritzy sophistication with which popular American writing is now coated. This is a product of our sudden prosperity, the gesture of our immense group of nouveaux riches.

The epic melancholy of Dreiser, the romantic democracy of Carl Sandburg, the social experimentation of Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, Mark Twain, Edgar Lee Masters and other men of the earlier decades, is as dead as the Indian's Manitou.

We are living in another day. It is dominated by a hard, successful, ignorant, jazzy bourgeois of about thirty-five, and his leech-like young wife.

Just as European tours, night clubs, Florida beaches and stream line cars have been invented for this class, just so literature is being produced for them. They have begun to have time, and now read books occasionally to fill in the idle moments between cocktail parties.

They need novels that will take the place of the old fashioned etiquette books to teach them how to spend their money smartly.

Ernest Hemingway is one of the caterers to this demand.

The liberals have become disheartened and demoralized under the strain of American prosperity. Are there any liberals left in America? I doubt it. The "Nation" was the last organ of the liberals in this country. It has been swinging right in the last few years. When it surrendered itself body and soul to Tammany Hall in the last campaign, I think it performed a logical suicide.

Its editorials now read like, the New York World. Its book reviews and dramatic criticisms are no different in viewpoint from those in the New York Times or Tribune. In fact the same group of writers fill the columns of both liberal and conservative press, and no one can detect the difference.

There isn't any difference.

There isn't a centrist liberal party in our politics any more, or in our literature. There is an immense wave of right-wing which accepts the American religion of "progress." The conservatives accept it joyfully, the liberals "soulfully." But both accept it.

There is also a left wing, led in politics by the Communists, and in literature by the New Masses. Will someone inform us if there is something vital between these two extremes of right and left?

This is in some ways a depressing situation. Can there be a battle between such unequal forces? Will it not rather be a massacre or a lion carelessly crushing the rabbit that has crossed his path?

No. The great mass of America is not "prosperous" and it is not being represented in the current politics or literature. There are at least 40 million people who are the real America.

They are Negroes, immigrants, poor farmers and city proletarians and they live in the same holes they did ten years ago. Upon their shoulders the whole gaudy show-palace rests. When they stir it will and must fall.

It was the same in Rome, in France, in Russia; it is the same here.

Let us never be dazzled by appearances. The American orgy has been pitched on the crater of the historic social volcano. This volcano is as certain to erupt eventually as is Mount Etna.

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With default, the liberals have presented us writers and revolutionists of the left wing with a monopoly on the basic American mass. We have a wonderful virgin field to explore; titanic opportunities for creative work.

Let us be large, heroic and self-confident at our historic task.

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The best and newest thing young writer can now do in America, if he has the vigor and the guts, is to go leftward. If he gets tangled up in the other thing he will make some money, maybe, but he will lose everything else. Neither the Saturday Evening Post or the Nation can any longer nourish the free heroic soul. Try it and see.

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When I say "go leftward," I don't mean the temperamental bohemian left, the stale old Paris posing, the professional poetrizing etc. No, the real thing; a knowledge of working class life in America gained from first hand contacts, and a hard precise philosophy of 1929 based on economics, not verbalisms.

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The old Masses was a more brilliant but a more upper class affair. The New Masses is working in a different field. It goes after a kind of flesh and blood reality, however crude, instead of the smooth-perfect thing that is found in books.

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The America of the Working class is practically undiscovered.
From a Labor Mural By Hugo Gellert

Hugo Gellert, one of the New Masses artists, has been realizing a dream he has had for years. Recently, the Proletosco, a co-operative society of left-wing workers, opened an immense new cafeteria at 28 Union Square, New York. Gellert was given the contract for designing and decorating the interior.

He has created a cafeteria that is probably the finest example of modern art in America. Several art magazines have written it up, and the art critic of the racy New Yorker reviewed it with more enthusiasm than he has given to the most fashionable exhibitions, The cafeteria does a rushing business, and caters to about 2,000 people a day. It is not only a restaurant, but a worker's club. And Hugo Gellert, one of the leading revolutionary artists of America, has given this cafeteria the bold modern beauty of the worker's movement. Everything is in harmony with a central design—lamps, tables, floors, ceilings. On the walls Gellert has painted a massive fresco of American labor—miners, workers, women workers, miners, the inside of a steel mill, Sacco and Vanzetti, John Reed, Lenin, the other symbolic and real figures—ten feet tall.

This cafeteria is worth a visit. It is the first large demonstration in this country of that union of art and labor which is the keynote of Soviet Russia.

IGNORANCE AMONG THE LIVING DEAD

By Josephine Herbst

A rejection that is a plain rejection never made me sore. It's all right to be told that it doesn't pay to print stuff like that and think of our audience and we'd like to do it but it can't be done and anyhow I don't like this stuff, what's it about anyhow. That's all right. It's a business. But when somebody swelled up with being connected with publishing begins to tell me how to remodel my works, not mind you to sell them, but to better them, I see a good deal of red. Where do they get off I want to know? Who gave them the authority to remodel anything? Now your stories are too bitter, what they need is more emotion as if this country wasn't already rotten with emotion authors. You have fine characterization but more tenderness is what you need. Page the Ladies' Home Journal and that tender button, the Bookman. Your women and men are really too depressing, think, not one character is a hopeful forward looking character. The Russians I suggest timidly, Marcel Proust, and maybe Balzac. But that's a different thing altogether, another age, another side to the face on the barroom floor. What we need today is EMOTION AND TENDERNESS AND MOTHER LOVE. Especially a return of that and of the more wholesome things. And the next thing you do, why not try to make it less—well, less sordid.

Where does this sense of omniscience about writing come from? From the demands of the trade of course, from notions of publicity and what's what. Nobody knows what that is. The dark horse steals in unheralded always to the surprise of the throng. But really, you are too hard. For a woman, you are too, shall I say, bitter about life and I can't understand why you should be. People do have good times you know, and look at the happy couples you see around you!

CHECKER

Inasmuch as he was nephew of the president of the Bonner Lumber Mill, he was a checker with twice our pay. It was not that, but his liquor cost more to help him forget our troubles,