

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

By SANORA BABB

IS THIS controversy on the level of Maltz's intention? The Maltz piece and "Background to Error" by Isidor Schneider (NM, February 12) are inseparable evaluations of the same subject; if Maltz failed to include the vital points of Schneider's conclusions, it is certainly not because he is unaware of them. I was pleased to read in Schneider's piece not a "reply" but an addition; not an attack, but a development. This seems to me the spirit in which Maltz wrote and the spirit in which such questions should be discussed. My disappointment, and I hope I am wrong, is in the quiet conclusiveness of Schneider's piece. There are profound and searching things still to be said. It is my hope that the subject has just been opened for exploration.

Here was a statement of condition and problems I have heard over a period of years from many writers, and readers, who look to Left literary criticism for guidance and enlightenment with sincere respect. Here is a challenge to richer thinking, which would more nearly approximate the classic springs from which it flows. From this there will come agreement, disagreement, but most of all an exchange of thought and analysis which will stimulate writers and critics and further develop the literary criticism of the Left and, in turn, literary criticism in general.

There is no denying that the influence of the Left, on the whole of American writing and criticism—and life—none of which can be separated, far

outreaches its minority voice. This is true precisely because it is in the main stream of history, is on the side of human progress. Although it would be foolish to think there are no errors and limitations, it is expected that here less than any place else will be found a tolerance of these faults. Here, there is no room for smugness, that dangerous, unthinking self-satisfaction which causes one to sit in the same place for a long time and then get up and walk backward with considerable speed. This condition is to be seen easily on the other side of the class fence. It must be noted as quickly and clearly on the Left side, even though many problems and pressures take up the immediate time of everyone concerned. (It is all right to explain the reasons, but it is not all right to make excuses.)

I like Albert Maltz's piece because it puts forward some very real criticism which must be—not answered—but explored. The very fact that a writer of Maltz's history and integrity is bothered by these questions is important; it becomes still more important when it is known that he speaks for many others, who perhaps have not given it the thoughtful concern of formulation. It required pride in his allegiance, sincere interest in his usefulness as an artist, deep concern for the progress of the Left, and the courage to speak. I am impatient with the irresponsible name-calling and careless labeling I have heard and read since this piece appeared. This is a sad revelation of the poverty of thought which leads to an inability

or reluctance really to consider what Maltz wrote. I don't believe for one moment that Maltz's piece "shows dangerous trends," or that he is a "renegade," or that he is "too much concerned with writing"! (Why not? The printed word carries weight: a serious approach to his work reveals a sense of responsibility; a progressive writer is concerned with a world view. Maltz nowhere advocates preciousness or isolation, just the opposite!) He admits the good, tackles the faults and attempts to *begin* an analysis which will result in improvement.

Added to other quick judgments is one that "Maltz must have gone Hollywood." This is not in the nature of a personal defense—Maltz needs none. His ideas were not expressed on that level.

But, just for the record, this glib and utterly untrue conclusion belongs in the category of the ones mentioned above, which only reveal that very little thought has been given to the ideas expressed in both the Maltz and Schneider pieces, which complement each other, and I hope will serve as a basis for further dignified discussion.

Better writing will doubtless result in better criticism, but such a discussion can be stimulating and beneficial to both writers and readers, and give to the creative field the same breadth of vision that is true of the political. Something is lacking or these two points of view would be so well integrated that the narrow clumsiness of the one would not exist.