


# New Activity On Cultural Front

By SAMUEL SILLEN

**T**HERE is every reason for confidence in William Z. Foster's prediction in the current *New Masses* that "The next years will show a tremendous resurgence of progressive spirit in every cultural field."

A vivid sense that we are entering a period of re-vitalized cultural activity pervaded two large public meetings held recently in Los Angeles and New York. The Los Angeles meeting on "Art—Weapon of the People" was held under the auspices of *The People's World* and attended by 1,500 people. The New York meeting on "Art As a Weapon," held under the joint auspices of *The Daily Worker* and *New Masses*, was attended by 3,500 people, while hundreds of others had to be turned away for lack of space.



Leading cultural figures participated in both meetings, but what was especially significant in each was the intense interest and responsiveness of the audience. For a progressive cultural movement will be vital only insofar as it is at once spurred and supported by a large progressive audience. Artists will understand their own role much better if they recognize that it is not only they who activate a cultural movement but also the people around them.

If we have learned anything these past weeks, it is that there is a mass audience hungry for vigorous ideas and honest expression. I suspect that too many of us had for a long time unconsciously absorbed one of the basic premises of capitalist culture—that the audience is a passive mass with no real drive of its own and not the slightest conception of what it wants.

The two great meetings in Los Angeles and New York were landmarks for the cultural left. They registered an unmistakable sense of purpose and unity and enthusiasm. They marked a sharp break with a certain complacency and timidity that had for some time stunted our work in this field. They showed that, with growing political clarity, we may reasonably look forward to a new ferment, a new spirit of urgency and confidence, in the progressive art movement.

**B**UT while the next years will undoubtedly show a resurgence of progressive spirit in every cultural field, we shall be making a serious error if we forget for one moment that there will be a tremendous intensification of reactionary efforts in every field. We must assume that in this period the progressive movement will have to move forward against opposition more violent, more conscious, more highly organized than in any previous period of American life.

Reaction can succeed only to the degree that people's minds are corrupted. This implies a double-edged program of reaction: (1) to beat down the cultural movement that strives to express the truth of our lives, and (2) the building up of a corps of writers and artists who will actively propagate lies and illusions in a thousand-and-one forms.

The main reason why our audiences are responding is that they sense the mortal character of the struggle between fascist and democratic ideas now rapidly unfolding in this country. Writers and artists will enlist the enthusiastic support of this audience and will really move along with it only to the degree that they reveal by their alertness, vigilance, and creative vigor that they are totally committed to this battle of ideas and values.

We have the duty not only of reflecting the life of the people; we have also the duty of leadership, of extending people's consciousness. We cannot lag behind reality; we must help forge the future. Our cultural work needs to be raised to a new and much higher level if we are to be the vital force that the struggle today requires.

It is cause for warm congratulations, therefore, that in response to this grave challenge of our day the editors of *New Masses* should launch the magazine this week in a new form as a weekly henceforth devoted to struggle on the cultural front. In this magazine the progressive intellectuals will have an opportunity to advance the cause of a people's culture, to cut deeply into the false philosophies and distorted images of American life, to battle against the crude vulgarity that largely characterizes the commercial media.

Here the short story writer, the poet, the critic, the reporter may look for that freedom and fraternity which he misses so sorely in the monopoly-dominated agencies of expression. In the article by William Z. Foster, appearing in this first issue of the new *New Masses*, Communist intellectuals and all other progressive intellectuals have a program that, consistently applied and thoughtfully amplified, will enable us to speed the "tremendous resurgence of progressive spirit in every cultural field."

It is a pleasure to greet the new *New Masses* as an important weapon in the struggle against the intellectual terror and obscurantism inevitably associated with capitalist reaction. The new emphasis of the magazine is a timely omen of the vital and leading contribution that Marxists will make to the broad cultural movement of the people in the stormy days ahead.