

HOW TO COMBAT RACISM

Dorothy Canfield Fisher urges every individual to do his utmost toward lessening "the idiocies of inculcated racial prejudices." . . . A New Masses symposium.

IT IS safe to assume, isn't it, that all moderately intelligent and informed people of moderate good will know that race prejudice is a conditioned reflex, not an innate basic biologic instinct. It would take too long to set down the many proofs of this. They are perfectly familiar to historians, explorers, ethnologists, anthropologists. As far as that goes, to ordinary persons with good sense who have ever watched the complete unconsciousness of racial differences in a nursery school where young children of different races play together.

Furthermore, it is fairly safe to assume, I think, that a large number of people nowadays, not especially learned, just reasonably well informed, know something about conditioned reflexes and how they are created. Pavlov's dog, whose mouth watered first when, accompanied by the ringing of a bell, meat was presented to him, and then by simple association of ideas, just at the sound of a ringing bell—that animal is familiar to ever so many of us. But familiar to millions more, are such homely conditioned reflexes as the one caused by a disagreeable aunt Gladys, who forever after left the name of Gladys—quite neutral in itself—so associated with scoldings that you hated the very sound of it. Or the pleasant one associated with the clink of ice in a glass which, whether you take a drink from that glass or not, makes you feel cooler by its association with agreeably cold drinks in the past.

We all know a good deal about how human beings are "conditioned" to like or dislike things, not because of anything in the nature of the things, but because of association of ideas connected with them. We understand in a rough-and-ready, folk way the mechanism of producing such associations and conditions. My contention is that thus to know about the mechanism of producing likes and dislikes, aversions, and attractions, puts upon us some—*much!*—responsibility for turning that knowledge upon ourselves, to uncondition ourselves, if we have fallen into harmful or shameful or dangerous reflexes.

There is no more harmful or shameful and dangerous conditioned reflex than that of racial prejudice; none which more poisonously limits, narrows, and embitters human life. It is shocking to submit to it passively. Not to combat it, *in our own personalities*, by such methods as are known to any modern mother who wants to uncondition a child of a conditioned reflex against getting bathed. If her baby has had some experience which has left



Dorothy Canfield Fisher. One of the most popular novelists in America, Miss Fisher is the author of more books than can be enumerated in this space. Among them was the anti-fascist "Seasoned Timber," published in the early part of 1939, which dealt with an unsuccessful attempt by anti-Semites to force their prejudices upon a college and town that cherished democratic traditions.

him with a panic fright at the sight of a bath-tub filled with nice soapy water, she does not resign herself to his living dirty the rest of his life, a slave to that chance conditioning. She simply starts in to provide another set of emotional associations which will cancel out those which have made him afraid of soap and water. We will be much dirtier than any unbathed child if we do not struggle to cleanse our minds of racial prejudices, not born with us, but carefully inculcated in us in our childhood, by our families, by the people living next door, by the children (who had acquired it in the same way) on the playground with us.

Other people—economists, social welfare workers, journalists, people in politics, publicists—sending in suggestions to the symposium of NEW MASSES, will lay all due stress, I know beforehand, on constructive proposals to combat the horrible threat to our country caused by racial prejudices. Bold, creative, devoted selfless work must be done along such lines. But from me, a mere novelist, perhaps the most useful suggestion will be to cry out that changes in law enforced from the outside, while necessary, will accomplish little if we—each individual one of us who has the sense he was born with—do not turn upon our own natures all that we can learn about how to lessen the idiocies of inculcated racial prejudices.

I was for some years president of the American Association for Adult Education, a fine, active, intelligent, and useful organization, much needed in a country where the formal classroom education of so many citizens ends in the early teens. But much as I admired the splendid citizens working to spread the gospel of lifelong intellectual activity, I could not but be amused by the way in which all of us who were engaged in running the Association were set upon bringing adult education into the lives of other people—not our own. Continued study in the years of maturity for wage earners, clubwomen, businessmen—yes. But somehow never for ourselves, the Officers of the Association for Adult Education.

A writer of fiction is, by definition, concerned primarily with individual human lives, rather than social, political, and legal measures. It seems fitting for me to speak up for the proposition that each one of us not only support, as a matter of course, all large scale efforts to combat race prejudice; but that we pledge ourselves to carry on, each within his own heart and mind, a steady, personal, reconditioning campaign. DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER.

Mrs. Fisher's article is part of a symposium "New Masses" is presenting on anti-Semitism, anti-Negroism, and other forms of racial incitement. Articles in this symposium have already appeared by Louis E. Martin, editor of the "Michigan Chronicle," Earl Browder, and Marion Bachrach, executive secretary of the Council for Pan-American Democracy. The next article will be by Rep. Samuel Dickstein.

The editors of "New Masses" regard the rising tide of anti-Semitic, anti-Negro, anti-foreign-born activity as a direct menace to the war effort. We are convinced that subversive fifth column groups are involved in this activity and are doing everything possible to exploit backward prejudices in the interest of the enemy. The Detroit outbreaks were only an explosive manifestation of a condition that is latent in many parts of the country. In an effort to combat these fifth columnists "New Masses" invites its readers to write us about the situation in their own communities. Let us know whether efforts are being made to stir up racial strife and who is behind those efforts. Let us know what the authorities are doing about it, if anything, and what the feelings of average people are. Please make your letters as factual as possible.—The Editors.

UNDER COVER

SOMEWHERE in your town a man walks with Hitler. You may or may not spot him, for he doesn't wear his swastika on his sleeve: the rendezvous is secret and the blinds are drawn but he is there and sooner or later he'll be calling on you, I'm afraid. I pray he won't but unless you do something about it, and fast, he'll drop by. In Detroit his calling card was a revolver. In Washington he bowed himself in with something called the Smith-Connally act, which he beguiled a majority of our lawmakers into passing. I have just traveled with him through 544 pages of a book called *Under Cover* (E. P. Dutton and Co., \$3.50) by a young man named John Roy Carlson, who, for *Fortune* magazine, sentenced himself to four years in America's political underworld. It was not a pleasant journey, traveling through that book, but I advise you to make it. It may save you trouble later. Mr. Carlson saw the American fascist in his lair: it was not a pretty sight.

It will pay you to look at the record, but don't shrug it off. Don't say "Crackpots." Mr. Carlson observes that they said that in Weimar Germany when Hitler was dashing about in his dirty trench-coat. I know that for many, perhaps most, Mr. Carlson's evidence will be met with a shrug of incredulity. It is hard to believe what you haven't witnessed, or felt in your own bones. It is hard for a white to know the heartbreak of a Negro whose sons are hunted like game in our fourth greatest city; none of us can envision the tragedy of the European Jew, two million of whom have already been slaughtered by Hitler. You cannot dream up the infinite pain the European feels watching his children waste into skeletons before him. But all that is far off and away? Don't be too sure.

MR. CARLSON tells you of men walking the streets of our country who plot these things for you and your children. Don't think they are visionary. You can't shrug away Beaumont and Chester, Los Angeles and Detroit. Mr. Carlson warns you not to let anybody sell you the bill of goods that the fifth column had nothing to do with these outbursts. I agree with him that it is high time we lose our fine objective calm and get mad. I've felt that for a long time, and tried to say it several weeks ago in these pages, discussing the Detroit insurrection. I want to say it again and again and again with other Americans who are saying it until we see our nation totally aware and acting upon the awareness. I don't think we see it yet.

Not, Mr. Carlson warns, while we allow such subversives as Lawrence Dennis at liberty to do his dirty work. Despite some arrests all too many still roam the country like mad dogs. Why, the writer asks, should Dennis be footloose "because he is a friend of important senators, representatives, businessmen, newspaper publishers?" And Mr. Carlson pertinently asks: "Why must America at war continue to be the victim of Goebbels' taunt: 'It will always remain the best joke made by the democratic system that it provided its deadly enemies with the means of destroying it.'"

The Goebbels' of America see the joke. Follow them through *Under Cover*—the Christian Fronters, the Klansmen, the Coughlinites, the Silver Shirts, the Bundists, the America Firsters, the high and the low. See how they fit in a pattern, observe them exchanging experiences, help each other grow, or hide, see how they established their unity against democracy. Mr. Carlson followed the swastika trail all the way up Park

Avenue and into the Halls of Congress. Goosestepping through the book go Senators Walsh, Nye, Wheeler, Reynolds, and Congressmen Fish, Hoffman, Dies. Senator Walsh said to Carlson, then masquerading as the editor of a fascist sheet: "Don't you find that the more people you ask the more you hear that we should not have gone into this war. . . ." Walsh, chairman of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee! Nye: "I respect Lawrence [Dennis] very much. He is fine stuff. I see him frequently." You'll meet not only legislators (God save the mark) but respectable industrialists: James H. Rand, Jr., president of Remington-Rand, Lamot du Pont, J. H. Alstyne, president of the Otis Elevator Co.

FORTUNATELY for America, it is not too late. These are a minority—the Lamot du Pont capitalists total less than half of their class; the Coughlinites and the whole caboodle of fifth columnists are a minority throughout the country. But remember this: they turn out more than a hundred papers. They spread the hate-the-Jew, hate-the-Negro, hate-the-union, hate-the-President doctrine until a sizeable part of our people are infected. They get a big push from the big circulation of the Hearst-McCormick-Patterson press. Remember this: a recent private poll showed that two-thirds of our country had imbibed the anti-Semitic idea, that one-tenth of our country is actively disseminating it.

Year after year we of NEW MASSES have spotlighted their plottings. We began back in 1934 with John L. Spivak's trail-blazing series. Now let Mr. Carlson tell you:

"After four years in the Nazi underworld, I've summarized Hitler's program for the subversion of our democracy and the overthrow of our capitalist order." It includes—and he lists some dozen categories of which I repeat the most significant: "Anti-Semitism to serve as a social dissolvent; Red-baiting to serve as a screen for Nazi propaganda . . . the pitting of group against group, race against race, religion against religion to break down national unity . . . the adulation of Hitler as the deliverer from, and of Nazism as the panacea for, the evils of Communism, Judaism, unemployment, the national debt and anything else you choose to name. . . ."

Do you recall Earl Browder's article in the July 6 issue of NEW MASSES? You found the same warning there. And Mr. Carlson is far from Mr. Browder. As a matter of fact he would do well to study the Communist program: he would learn, I am sure, how dead wrong he is when he touches on that subject.

SPACE does not permit a fuller discussion of this book. I am writing this to suggest that what Mr. Carlson saw become known to all democratic Americans. I know how right he is, for I have met these creatures before. I knew it several years ago when I interviewed a man called Killer Dean, trigger man of the Black Legion in Detroit. "I got my orders to shoot," he said, "and I shot. It was my duty." Recently I met the breed again in Congress when I heard a legislator say he didn't want his son in the army taking orders from any Ginsberg. I met the European prototypes of these gentry in a city called Madrid where they dropped bombs on the heads of babies 2,500 feet below. I saw the civil war there; and I saw how Hitler organized it. He got away with it there; he got away with it in France; and he hopes to get away with it here. His panzer divisions and his Luftwaffe won't save his skin; but anti-Semitism, anti-Negroism, anti-Communism might. That's what Mr. Carlson has to say.