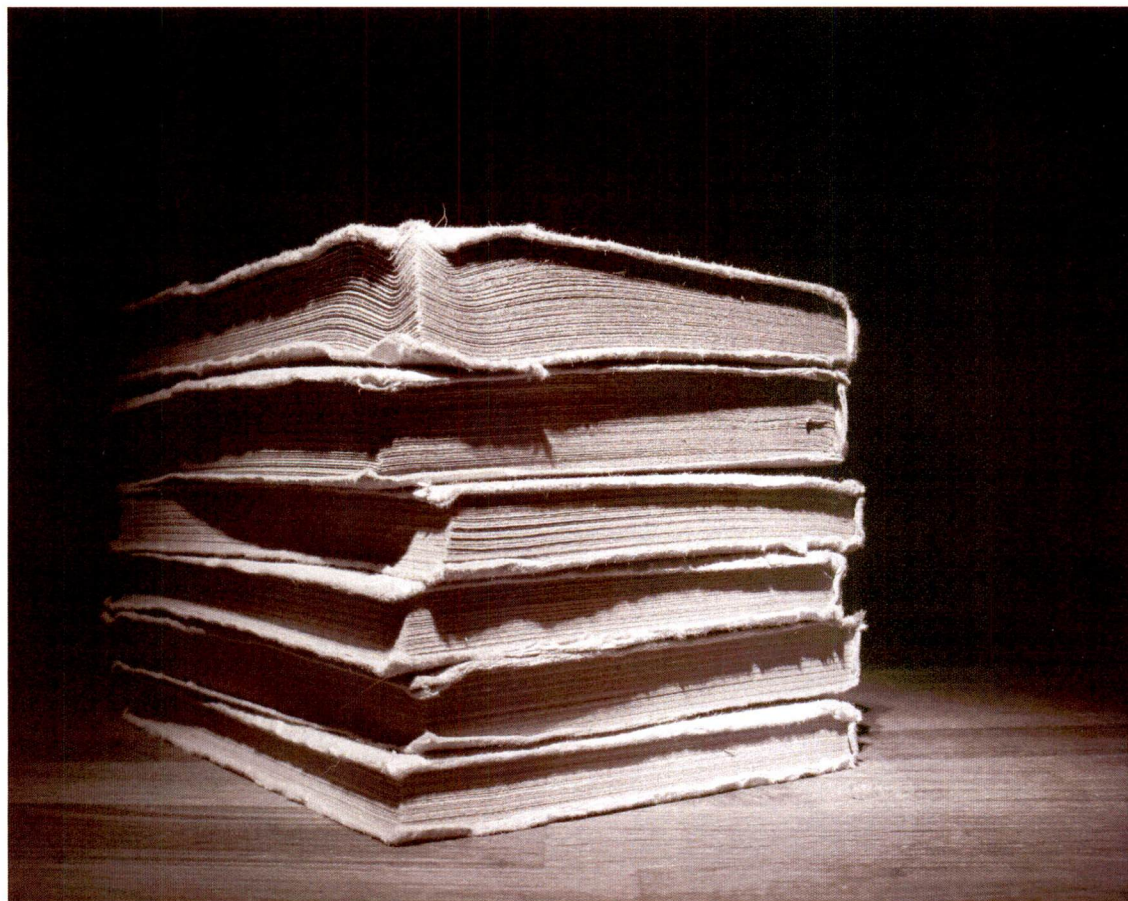


By Paul Strickland

LITERATURE WAR



High fog enveloped the upper floors of many of Manhattan's skyscrapers -- including the Empire State Building, the tallest structure in the world -- in the dying late afternoon of one day in early March. It was still cold enough that people on sidewalks pulled their overcoats tight as they made their way from offices to stores, restaurants, bus stops and stairwells to the subway.

Joe Allman, a reporter for the New York Eagle-Advertiser, was one of them: he had been assigned to cover the launch of the leftist Progressive Masses literary magazine in Lower Manhattan. He hadn't had supper yet, and stopped in to Luigi's cafe for the spaghetti-and-meatballs special. "Pennies from Heaven" was on the radio. He looked at a copy of the Brooklyn Bugle. Its headlines drew attention to articles about Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Friday cabinet meeting in Washington, D.C., and about the Battle of Cape Machichaco in the Spanish Civil War. Franco's Nationalist naval forces had caught up with and shelled a Republican ship, laden with supplies, trying to make its way from France to a friendly Basque port. Twenty Basque sailors had died before the ship surrendered.

As Joe finished his soup the programming

had returned to popular music, now Fred Astaire's popular hit, "The Way You Look Tonight." In ten minutes he had finished the spaghetti main course; paid the waitress a dollar and a quarter, including the tip; put on his fedora; and left in disgust -- not over the perfectly adequate supper but over the implications of the international news he kept hearing and reading everywhere he went. Leadbelly's "Midnight Special" had just started on the radio as Joe closed the front door.

He walked another ten blocks and reached the meeting hall where the Communist Party USA and the allied Progressive Labor Party were holding the launch of Progressive Masses. Joe took a seat in the front row and was soon joined by Easton McTeak of the New York Chronicle.

First on the agenda was a movie showing the wonderful abundance produced by Stalin's collective farms, followed by a call for dedicated people to go over to Russia and help with the harvest. Then Jim Bodner president of the CPUSA local, spoke about how the Soviet constitution recently proclaimed by Stalin guaranteed more rights than any other such document in the world. Next a folk singer performed two rousing pro-labor songs, and finally pro-party