

THREE VIEWS ON ART

By

1. A Labour Leader.
2. A Painter.
3. A Sociologist.

THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST TODAY

By J. D. BLAKE

Mr. Blake, Secretary, Victorian State Committee of the Communist Party of Australia, recently opened the Anti-Facist Exhibition of the Contemporary Art Society of Australia at the Athenaeum Gallery, Melbourne. The following article, which represents his Address in a very much condensed form, epitomizes the orthodox communist point of view.

IN the titanic world struggle in which we now find ourselves engaged, it is impossible for any of our people or any section or group of our people to be neutral.

The Fascists aim at the destruction of the national culture of all the peoples whom they set out to dominate and enslave, and there is no room where it rules for such a thing as cultural democracy. The Fascists, indeed, look upon the people as being innately inferior and incapable of developing the mental capacity of aesthetic sense to appreciate the higher intellectual and artistic pursuits.

The days of world Fascism are, however, numbered, and at last the road has been cleared on a world scale for us to push forward to encompass the complete and final defeat of its evil forces.

In this great struggle for world freedom, for culture and progress against Fascist barbarism, it is of vital importance that our artists should play their part together with all the rest of our people.

In the present period of world history, art can only be profoundly creative if the artist maintains and develops the closest bonds of friendship with the people. Our artists must know and understand the deepest thoughts and dreams of the people; the hopes and the aspirations of the people.

The artist must have a deep and profound knowledge of the people, he must understand and share their joys and grief; the artist must feel and reflect the living impulses of the people.

No artist can create anything of significance if he is isolated from the people, or if he tries to escape from the stern facts of the people's war against Fascism. Any artist who tries to find escape from the great events of the day in some ivory tower is doomed to stagnation and artistic impotence.

These days of heroic deeds by the common people are glorious days for the creative artist. I need only remind you that the finest musical composition of our time is the seventh symphony of Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich, created last year amid the thunder of Nazi guns, before Leningrad.

After quoting an old Russian proverb, which says:

"When the guns speak, the muses are silent," Shostakovich declared his views on his art when he said: "Here the muses speak together with the guns."

The work of our artists must strike deadly blows against Fascism directly and above all by reflecting the heroic struggle of our people and our soldiers against Fascism. By every means at the disposal of our artists they must rouse in our people the spirit of faith in the triumph of the great cause for which we are fighting, and summon them to heroic deeds in battle and in labour.

In no sense does this imply a slavish copying and reproduction of people; it does mean that the artist must feel profoundly the innermost strivings of the people if he is to produce really creative art.

The artist must feel in his heart the horror of the abyss into which Hitler and the Fascists are seeking to hurl human happiness and liberty, and the achievements of world culture.

Our art must be armed with the most advanced and humanitarian ideas. There can be no doubt that the noble ideas bound up with the war against Fascist barbarism, of reason against ignorance, of light against darkness will help to create works of art which are fully worthy of the great epoch in history through which we are now living.

The Australian artists whose work is exhibited here to-day are undoubtedly striving in this direction.

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"In any case, art is always 'phony'; it has to be that way. One's business as a critic is to discriminate between the 'phony' that matters and the 'phony' that doesn't."

ADRIAN LAWLOR, "10 in Australia," March.