

## A FESTIVAL - THE ARTS AND THE LEFT

### SOME IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION



For some time now there has been many vague discussions about organizing a Communist festival or a left wing arts festival. Ideas have been discussed by practising artists, Communist Party members and people involved in various cultural groups. There has been one meeting called to discuss these ideas but only a few people turned up. At the meeting, we realized the immensity of the problem and the need to make certain organizational and political decisions. The following notes are an attempt to provide a basis for further discussions.

The faviour ideas which have come to light include:

1. The CPA Tribune Fair should be enlarged to include discussions and cultural events. It was envisaged that a festival of one or two days duration be incorporated into the Tribune Fair.

This would afford two purposes - that a more cultural and 'exchange' atmosphere would enhance the Tribune Fair, and the diversity of patrons at the Fair would provide a basis for such a festival.

The festival could invlude a wide range of activities - current radical theatre, art exhibitions, films, a rock dance, musical entertainment and poetry reading.

It was also proposed that these be coupled with discussions about the history of the Party and its interaction with practising artists over the years. Presumably such exchanges would lead to greater communication now about the role of the Party in expressing culturally the needs and problems of the working class movement.

Such a festival would be organized under the auspices of the CPA and be based on the 1977 Tribune Fair at the North Melbourne Town Hall.

2. Another idea was that a large left wing festival of the arts be organized. It could be like an alternative Moomba, including many performing artists and fine art exhibitions, yet incorporating the visions of revolutionaries. This would be more of a mass oarticipation festival which could span over a considerable period of time. It could include theatre performances at work places and universities, art exhibitions and competitions at schools and factories, and could culminate in a weekend get-together of performances, exhibitions and discussions in either a hall or a city park. It would require the participation of many trade unionists, community groups, ethnic minority groups, performers and artists.

If widely promoted such a festival could encourage the participation of trade unions in helping to foster the arts amongst their members.

It could illuminate the role of the media and cultural establishment in its promotion of 'status quo culture' and 'art for art's sake'.

It could be organized by a broad coalition of artists, trade unionists and political activists. Alternatively it could be organized in conjunction with the May Day Committee.



3. The third idea is to hold a festival at which left wing performers, artists and other involved activists could show each other what they are doing and discuss their politics. It could take the form of both a festival and a seminar.

It could include theatre performances, painting/drawing/sculpture/photography exhibitions, films, music and poetry readings, a rock dance.

These could be combined with discussions or workshops around such things as:

- the radicalization of people through revolutionary or protest songs;
- the use of street theatre, film and video in the workforce;
- how do radical painters and sculptors see their work? How does the art establishment and art market influence the direction of their art?;
- radical film makers and directors in the developing Australian film industry;
- cartoons and social satire;
- views on recent Australian radical literature, photography, etc.

The festival would not be audience-entertainment orientated, but directed more towards the search for a radical cultural expression.

Many radical artists are at the moment working in a vacuum; there is no movement or meeting point for artists to discuss their work or ideas. The festival could provide the impetus for on-going communication between individuals and groups.

For example - younger radical painters, those who used to exhibit with the Melbourne Realists, and women painters influenced by the feminist movement. Or there could be quite a fruitful exchange between APG Community Theatre performers, women's theatre group, street theatre groups and New Theatre which in its heyday, had considerable political impact.

Unlike the 'alternative Moomba' idea, it wouldn't maintain the division between audience and entertainer but basically be for practising artists.

And unlike the Tribune Fair idea, it would be of a much broader nature, encompassing many ideas and groups which the Party hasn't got contact with at the moment. (Unfortunately, unlike the French or Italian CPs, the CPA does not have the membership or resources to hold an equivalent to the Unita festival.)

The festival (idea No.3) could be organized by calling together interested people who could lend their specific expertise to organizing such an event. Although initiated by Communists, the Festival would not be under the auspices of the CPA. However, this is a complex problem which would need further discussion, as would the questions of finance, venue and date.



It seems to be putting the cart before the horse to organize a full scale arts festival "for the masses", when most of us are not aware of what is going on and we are still asking ourselves - "what relation has our art to the revolutionary movement in Australia, 1976?".

The end result of the division between artist/worker and art/politics in capitalist society is our present cultural festivals - Festivals of the Arts.

Art has become a trivialized, pretentious commodity that is not integrated into our lives.

This division is exemplified in the left movement by the lack of dialogue between political activists and revolutionary artists.

There is an obvious correlation between how we express ourselves as artists and the advancement and growth of the revolutionary movement. I think this is the problem to which we should be addressing ourselves.

Lyn Hovey..

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