AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHIC PUBLISHING CO.
353 NEWBURY STREET
15
BOSTON, MASS.

March 19, 1945.

Mr. Eliot F. Porter,
469 Maple Street,
Winnetka, Ill.

Dear Mr. Porter:

We do not publish much correspondence from the readers of AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY, because the volume of it almost every day would overtax any space which we could give to it, but a large part of my correspondence is devoted to clarifying questions and opinions from readers in regard to editorial policy.

As to the specific question you raise in regard to an article of Mr. McKay's, while I perhaps would not have expressed the thought in exactly the words he uses, I passed his writing editorially, because I am in substantial agreement with his position. But, if he had expressed diametrically opposite views, I still presumably would have passed his article, because our department editors are supposed to be competent to express logical opinions.

I do not deny the right of artists to portray socially devastating facts, as well as intrinsically pleasing ones, provided they do it with truth and sincerity and with that vision of moral uprightness which belongs to genius. What I do object to is the exaggeration which seeks to impose a political (in the widest sense) belief of the author upon the minds of the beholder without regard to the arguments on the other side. I think a careful study of the history of art would show you that no great painting is an appeal to the passions of men and certainly class warfare is one of the passions. You instance Goya. He is purely a literary painter, ignored by his own time and resurrected by the critical dilettante of a later age. The fact that he was a superb technician does not lift him above mediocrity.

Your examples from literature are most inept. The English writers whom you cite did, in some cases, rise to moments of genius, but their political writings, which you mention, are empty and sterile, and it would never have been preserved in the memory of man if it had not been for the passion for collected works and the inclusion therein of every scrap of interesting material.

I appreciate the fact that we are in the midst of not only the greatest war in history, but of an impending social revolution which is going to cause a tremendous change of social values and an infinite amount of suffering and sorrow to people who, under the present regime, would perhaps live happy and useful lives. Evils exist in our social structure and as in

AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHIC PUBLISHING CO.
353 NEWBURY STREET
BOSTON 15, MASS.

the case of social reforms they will be ruthlessly extirpated without regard to the consequence. Perhaps it is possible by the dissolution of the capitalist system to produce a more even distribution of what property survives the catastrophe. But my own conception is that the impending social revolution is based upon a fierce demand for rights and a complete ignoring of duties. There is only one way in which property to divide may be produced. It must be wrested from the soil of the earth by agriculture or mining and by the transportation and fashioning of the resulting products. The present revolution savagely attacks most of these forms of industry and proposes the making of easy jobs and economic independence by government fiat and by an organization of industry which puts a premium on short hours, featherbedding and every device intended to discourage honest labor and the hard work which is necessary to wring an existence from a stubborn and capricious nature.

There has never been a time in the recent history of mankind when the food production of the world was sufficient to satisfy the needs of all its inhabitants. Famine is always present somewhere and making life easy for the workingman will not produce the food and comforts, such as automobiles, bathtubs and radios, which are so urgently demanded. The grandios plans to bring all peoples of the world up to the American standard of living by free distribution of the products of America throughout the world mean a leveling of our high standard down.

So, I am not in sympathy with some of the aspects of the social revolution, because I believe its ardent advocates look only at one side of the picture and do not foresee the inevitable consequence of their acts. Consequently, AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY has preferred to proceed on the plan of helping our readers cultivate a hobby which may give them some measure of relief from the horror of current events and its pages do not reflect much of the grimness of the times which we are experiencing. We would rather adhere to the majority of experience of mankind in the past artistically and to urge our readers to perceive and perpetuate pleasure rather than sorrow, happiness rather than misery, uplift rather than destruction. We are perfectly willing that any photographer may use his pictures as propaganda and may, as in all political debate and discussion, select his subjects as he will to further his own arguments, but we deny that suppression of facts on one side or the other or falsification is any part of the appanage of art which must be based finally and forever on truth.

Yours very truly,

AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHIC PUBLISHING CO.

F. R. Fraprie

F. R. Fraprie/McC