

in the text of his policy statement on the opening day. "Out of humanistic responsibility," it ran, "we Liberal Democrats are co-fashioners of our nation's socialist future." A brave and understandable hope. When Herr Gerlach at last had done, one speaker after another—a schoolmistress, a factory manager, a doctor, a judge, a woman novelist, and so on, all with the common denominator of a tortured soul—delivered variations on the theme of the bourgeois-born citizen turned honest socialist. Invariably there was an aside of unreserved praise for Herr Ulbricht and the Socialist Unity party. In the corridors, humbler delegates expressed furtive alarm at the way the party was going—and the way it had gone since the last conference three years ago, when doubts about

this or that could still be gently aired in public. Some, chiefly those whose businesses had been largely nationalised, frankly confessed to clutching cravenly at the bandwagon in the hope of averting total socialisation.

It would have been instructive to have divined the thoughts of Herr Matern, of the politburo, who attended the first day's proceedings as the Socialist Unity party's representative. Relaxing in a comfortable armchair in the front row, the white-haired veteran communist smiled enigmatically to himself whenever a speaker talked as though the Liberal Democrats were running the country. For a while he was seen to be immersed in forbidden reading—the *Telegraf* of west Berlin. Somebody has to know what goes on.

## ART IN IRAQ

# Artists Yes, Writers No

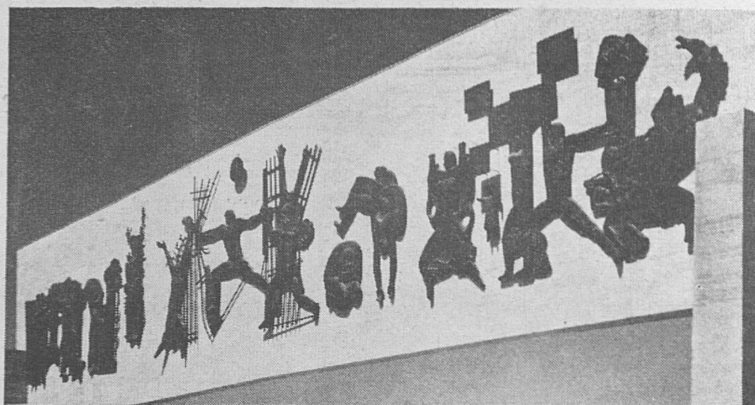
BY A CORRESPONDENT LATELY IN BAGHDAD

JEWAD SELIM died in January, 1961, at the age of only 42. As a painter, sculptor and art teacher he had dominated the intellectual life of Baghdad, just as his frieze of bronze figures in bas relief, commemorating the revolution of July 14, 1958, now dominates Revolution Square. It still stands there, a symbol of the "spirit of 1958" to which this year's new revolution says it means to return after the wayward years under General Qasim.

Selim's work reflected an awareness of Iraq's ancient civilisations and their art forms, as well as expressing his country's aspiration for a new national status commensurate with the past. The theme of the frieze is developed as an epic, unrolling from right to left like the imprint of a cylindrical seal.

It is a revolution of the peasants and simple artisans that is depicted in the frieze. This theme of the dignity and strength of country people is general with contemporary artists in Iraq. Other examples include Khalid al Rhehaf's figure of mother and child in Baghdad's central gardens, and Abdul Rahman al Gailani's frieze at the central bank. Not only sculptors but painters rely considerably on the rural scene for their inspiration, and it was the condition of the peasantry that formed the background of protest in Jabra Jabra's book, "Hunters in a Narrow Street," written during the old regime and mistakenly banned for some months by the revolutionists of 1958.

Among creative-minded men in Iraq it has always been difficult to find evidence of communist thinking, although most of them were critical of the regime of Abdul'illa and Nuri Said with its submissiveness to British influence, and they welcomed the 1958 revolution for its nationalism. In the visual arts they have had little cause to complain; architects and sculptors find scope in the rush of new building, and the tendency to demand fervently and hideously nationalistic themes and styles of execution did not last



long. Painters such as Selim's widow, Lorna, or Faik Hassan, head of the painting department of the Institute of Fine Art, have been moving, without restriction, towards abstract works, which find ready buyers. One can hope that Field Marshal Arif shares Mr Khrushchev's views on art even less than General Qasim did.

In literature, however, the scene is desolate indeed. Baghdad does not, and never did have, a single independent publishing house. Nor, with the possible exception of the monthly magazine put out by the Iraq Petroleum Company, has it even one periodical literary review. Writers have been constrained to seek publishers in Cairo or Beirut, or, like Jabra Jabra, even in London; one consequence has been the suggestion that such foreign prints might be subversive, or at best neo-colonialist. Lacking a forum for their views, intellectuals in the cities are liable to swallow half-digested, inadequately expressed ideas, as difficult for an outsider to weigh up as the fads of a gang of bobby-soxers. Out of this troubled atmosphere suddenly erupt such disturbances as the sit-down strike of university students which put (it is said) nine hundred students, including some 50 girls, and over a hundred lecturers in prison just before the half-yearly examinations last month.

This strike was touched off by the use of troops to discipline some boys in Adhamiya secondary school who resented the distribution of communist literature by the son of Fedhil Abbas Mahdawi, the former president of the People's Court who was executed with General Qasim.

It is believed to have involved, as well, a protest against the phoney election of communist officers to the students' union.

Education has been one of the most favoured sections of public development under the post-1958 regime. There has been a vast increase in the number of places available in both elementary and secondary schools; scholarships abroad have been fully maintained and even extended; plans are far advanced for the construction of the "new university city" at Hindieh, south of Baghdad. The emphasis in this expansion, however, has been on numbers and technical expertise; the aim is to create as rapidly as possible the corps of technicians who will be needed to implement the successive Iraqi economic plans.

Lacking means of self-expression, feeling excluded from the technically-orientated planning for industrial and agricultural expansion, the Iraqi writer or thinker has had reason to complain that he is an underprivileged member of the community. All the intellectuals of Baghdad are now looking forward to the publication of Jabra Jabra's biography of Jewad Selim. What they hope is that the author will use his subject not merely to indicate the relationship of a great artist to the society he lives in, but to show the revolutionary movement under its new leaders, what enrichment it could derive from the men of intellect on its fringes if it would give them a platform in their own country and take notice of what they have to say, instead of leaving them to cry in the wilderness.