

NEW

OCTOBER, 1934

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THEATRE



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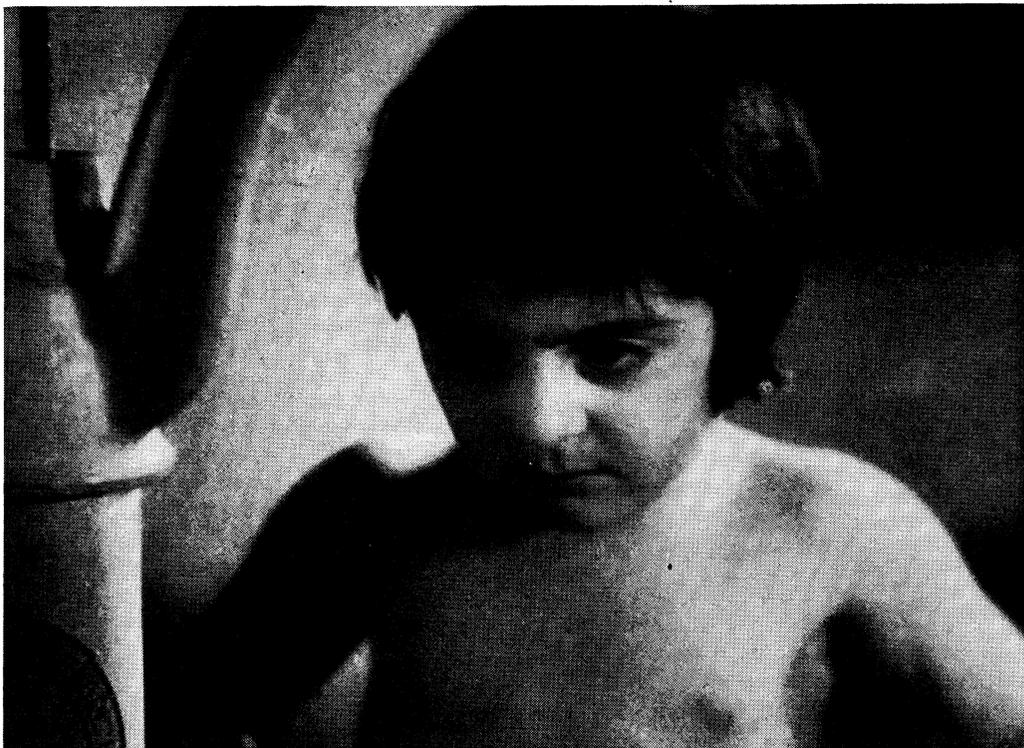
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NEW THEATRE

OCTOBER, 1934

AS NEW THEATRE predicted, without a crystal ball or undue gifts of prophecy, the beginning of the Broadway season has been distinguished only for its futility, triviality, and a few pretentious hits like *Life Begins at 8:40*. The only play so far that merits serious consideration besides the D'oyly Carte Gilbert and Sullivan operettas (which will receive full treatment in the November issue) is Elmer Rice's *Judgment Day*. Although it is our intention to cover Broadway more extensively than before, it seems a waste of valuable space to give more than brief mention to most of the new shows. It is not "Life" that begins at 8:40 along Broadway, but the intensified euphoria which gives the illusion of robust health, like the flush of a tubercular, but masks a dying organism. What can one say about a play like *Lady Jane* other than that it is merely the old Broadway hokum. Again Sex rears its ugly head among the members of the British aristocracy. Do you think a little wifely infidelity in an upper-class British family is a good thing? Or don't you give a damn? What might possibly have been a comedy of decadence becomes sickening propaganda for the *status quo* when the old "muddling through" refrain pops up, and as one of the characters so quaintly puts it: "It's not such a bad old world after all."

NOT such a bad old world after all. On the contrary, quite jolly, if you keep your chin up and muddle through! It makes a sincere and intelligent theatre-goer's heart ache to think of the money lavished on such stupid and hackneyed plays, while "just around the corner" in the terror-ridden textile towns of Rhode Island, New Jersey, Georgia and North Carolina a grim tragedy is enacted as police, militia and "vigilantes" under the direction of the textile kings, jail, assault, shoot and murder \$10-a-week textile slaves who have rebelled a million strong against starvation wages and unbearable working conditions. But such themes that are the stuff and fabric of life itself are shelved for cheap stories like *Tight Britches*, another drama of southern mountain life (all about the would-be preacher and the gal he done wrong, or *vice versa*) that ignores the daily struggles of these mountain folk of which powerful, vital drama could be fashioned. Says the hero in a big moment, "God's in the house tonight!" Even the assurance of divine patronage would not help such plays much. And since even God couldn't breathe a soul into the corpulent



From *Three Songs About Lenin*—A Soviet Production

Directed by Dziga Vertov

bodies and fleshy minds of the real estate men and the stuffed shirts who control most of Broadway, we must turn to other theatres for meaningful drama.

EDWARD REED, in an article *The Organized Theatres* published in the October Theatre Arts Monthly, correctly credits "whatever progress the New York Theatre has made in the last twenty years" as largely the result of the work begun by such groups as the Neighborhood and Provincetown Playhouses, and carried on by the Theatre Guild, the Group Theatre and the Theatre Union. Mr. Reed recognizes that the workers' theatres "have a firm place in the line of organized theatres" and credits the League of Workers' Theatres with being among the most highly organized theatre groups in America. Since we believe that the group idea is the base on which the revolutionary theatres must be built, NEW THEATRE is beginning a series of articles that will make a penetrating analysis of such outstanding groups as the Group Theatre, the Repertory Playhouse Associates, the Theatre Collective, the Artef, and other important workers' theatre groups. In line with our policy of publishing constructive criticism of our own revolutionary theatres, the November issue will contain a searching criticism by Clifford O'dets of Theatre Union's failure (among a host of great accomplishments) to establish a permanent acting company.

While on the subject of Theatre Union, let us remind you that *Stevedore* reopens at the Civic Repertory Theatre on October 1. If you've already seen *Stevedore*, you already know it's too fine a play to miss seeing again. If you haven't . . . you'd better

call up the Theatre Union and reserve seats right away.

AS this issue of NEW THEATRE goes to press, delegates from the various Film and Photo Leagues spread over the country from Los Angeles to Boston are holding a National Film Conference in Chicago for the purpose of building a truly effective national workers' film organization for the intensified fight against censorship and reaction in the Hollywood film, for increased and improved production of workers' movies, and for the organization of film audiences to provide a nation-wide circuit for the showing of 16mm. American and Soviet Revolutionary films. The articles, *From Palmer Raids to Vigilantes* by David Platt, and *Survey of Workers' Films* by L. T. Hurwitz, which appear in this issue, were submitted as discussion reports to the National Film Conference.

ACCOMPANYING Angelo Herndon on his tour of the three working class camps, Nitgedaiget, Unity and Kinderland, were two of the Red Dancers, Ad Bates and Irving Lansky. They performed *Black and White*, a dance symbolizing the unity of Negro and white workers that is well known to working class audiences. The choreography and music were composed by Edith Segal, director of the Red Dancers.

Angelo Herndon said:

"The dance *Black and White* was tremendously impressive. I'm sure that it must have convinced many of the need for the unity of Negro and white workers. I'm eager to see more such revolutionary dances, because I feel that workers are stirred frequently by them more than by our speeches.

"Through the course of our work in the South such dance groups must be developed as another instrument to weld the unity of black and white workers for struggle."



From *Three Songs About Lenin*—A Soviet Production

Directed by Dziga Vertov

THE workers' theatres have earned the right to professional and constructive criticism from NEW THEATRE. In an effort to supply this we shall discuss fully questions of general application which are brought up by specific performances. This obliges us merely to acknowledge other performances which may be no less in merit.

First and most forcefully the September 7th NEW THEATRE Night proved that humorous sketches belong in our theatre. They raise the level of entertainment, balance a program, and have as sure a place in revolutionary theatre as more serious agitational pieces. We must express what we have to say in a variety of ways. *Free Thaelmann!* is a direct speech to the audience about the horror and menace of Nazi government. This is imperative.

But there is value and satisfaction also in seeing a cow-faced puppet Hitler ponderously exposing himself. Bunin has discovered with marvelous accuracy the exact form that suits his dolls, his Fuhrer subject, and his audience: *Schnozzle Durante Interviews Hitler*. "Hi-yuh, Furor! How do you get by with it? I ask myself how do you get by with it! Back home we got a system: we fit the news to print! Haaaa! And we got alphabets." The word is too big for Hitler and his cow face swings dully. "Yessir. We got N.R.A. P.W.A. A.A.A. F.E.R.A. W.W.W.—Q.E.D. And now we got E.P.I.C.... it's Epic!"

When it turns to humor (this is proved again by the vaudeville team of Behrenburg and Jacobson) a skit almost automatically becomes American—not jingoist, but native in the sense in which all culture is indigenous. And the problem of whether the audience will understand disappears. No American audience, workers or otherwise, could miss the meaning of the Red Vaudeville or the Bunin puppets.

SYMBOLISM is a powerful weapon. When it is used with absolute trueness its simplicity makes it inescapable. In their best moments *Newsboy* and *Free Thaelmann!* give us this. But it is a tricky medium. Its very simplicity magnifies a fumble. Any confusion as to meaning not merely weakens but breaks its dramatic hold.

The movement, unrealistic, meaningful, of *Free Thaelmann!* is established in the first part of the sketch as the growth of the workers' movement is described. They are pushing to power in Germany. Over the heads of the crowd a hand raises a silver swastika. It gleams there, slender and evil. The workers cry out with many voices and shrink as one to the ground. The emotional effect of this simple conception is hard to analyze. There is truth in the symbol; logical social truth first, built into dramatic truth. The image contains the centuries-old picture of Perseus holding the evil head of Medusa over a mob, transfixing them.

There follows shortly another picturization which shows how stern the medium is. The crowd rises demanding food. The swastika still dominates. A loaf of bread appears in its upper righthand quadrant. The people clamor. The loaf is turned—there is a mask of Hitler. Seeing this, one follows the idea, but it lacks the impact of the first scene. Why? One's mind following the close condensation of the medium is trying to find meaning everywhere. Why is the loaf placed exactly where it is? Probably because one actor handles both properties and they must both be high to be visible, and he happened to pick up the bread in his right hand. But this is not sufficient dramatic reason. One puzzles and so loses emotional relation to the scene. Then the symbol: bread turning into Hitler. It is an approximation. It is not absolutely clear and true. The workers ask for bread, they are given a bayonet. That would be unmistakable.

Such a change might help another fault, the repetition of devices. As it is, the mask is used a number of times until, at the moment when it should be most important, its effect is lost. "March, 1933: Hitler assumes power!" The crowd falls. It is the movement described before, but, because we have already seen it and all the other elements of this scene, it becomes, by some devious law of dramatic structure, not moving but flat.

These dramatic laws must be applied, experimented with and tried before audiences,

and re-formulated in their application to symbolic presentation.

The program included *In the Life of a Worker*, a dance by Jane Dudley. Not only is this young dancer one of the most brilliantly equipped soloists in the revolutionary dance today, but, despite the rather unpolished presentation it was given, the dance itself is outstanding for its effective telescoping into dance imagery of capitalist exploitation of the worker in agriculture, industry and war.

Other numbers were: *The Great Marriage* by the W.L.T., a scene from *Alma Negra* by the Spanish Art Workers Club, songs sung by Karnot and Robinson of the W.L.T. and a Spanish song by James Estrilla.

NEW THEATRE has taken the Civic Repertory Theatre two Sunday nights a month during the winter in order to show the best productions of the workers' theatres and dance groups in the locality. We shall also have numbers by sympathetic professional actors.

On Sunday, October 7, NEW THEATRE will present the Jack London Theatre of Newark in Hallie Flanagan's *Can You Hear Their Voices*. This play is based on Whitaker Chambers' story of the Arkansas farmer's revolt of 1931. Revolutionary songs and dances will complete the program. There will be two complete performances (matinee 2:40, evening 8:40) at the Civic Repertory Theatre.

NEW THEATRE

Organ of League of Workers Theatres, Film and Photo League, and Workers Dance League.

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IN little towns of Minnesota, farmers will see the Soviet film *Mother* this week. Although some of these villages do not have movie theatres, and the population is spread over the countryside, the masterly organizational work of the United Farmers League and the Workers and Farmers Cooperative Unity Alliance in making up the Motion Picture Circuit has brought these poor farmers Pudovkin's magnificent film, as well as *Potemkin*, *A Fragment of an Empire*, *War Against the Centuries*.

The Farmers' Movie Circuit now makes it possible for some 80 towns and villages in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin and part of Michigan, to see Soviet and workers' films. By the collective ownership of a 16 mm. sound projector and using a old Ford, the farmers have become independent of bourgeois theatre owners and censors, showing the film in a church one day, a town hall the next, in a small abandoned theatre or even a barn. An increasing audience of farmers not only come to the showings but also support the sales of the *Farmers National Weekly*.



It has taken these militant farmers—whose recent strikes and anti-eviction struggles have stirred the nation—to blaze the trail with the creation of the first Motion Picture Circuit controlled by and for the full benefit of the workers and poor farmers.

BLANCHE EVAN'S expose of dance chauvinism which appears in this issue, is a praiseworthy analysis of this trend in the modern dance today; but her implication that the dance is a universal art, transcending all national and class boundaries, and her failure to mention the important distinctions in technique and form arising from class differences, invalidates her conclusion. We do not agree that *all* dancers over the world should clasp hands, and work together, merely because they are dancers, any more than Eisenstein and Cecil B. deMille are blood brothers simply because they work in the same medium. The only way to combat the chauvinism and to achieve the international unity of which she speaks is for the American dancer to ally herself with the only cultural movement that is the sworn enemy of this incipient fascism, the revolutionary working class. For a further elaboration of the relation of dance form to the class basis from which it arises, we refer our readers to Harry Elion's "Perspectives of the Dance," which was published in the September *NEW THEATRE*.

Appeal to Playwrights

By VIRGIL GEDDES



Raphael Soyer

THE young and aggressive blood which always sooner or later determines the future of an art is coming to the theatre today through the channels of revolutionary thought and action. Of this there can be no doubt. Where ten to fifteen years ago there were dozens of "art" theatres throughout the country and a little theatre movement, today there are hundreds of workers theatres not only taking their place but reaching out to audiences, themes and regions of conscious conflicts which the little "art" theatre never touched.

Here the bulk of young, undeveloped talent in America today is getting its theatre education. And it is getting it vitally, imaginatively. It is more determinedly convinced than before that the theatre is a serious art. Only revolutionaries can think this way, for where consciousness of social issues and conflicts is keen there also the theatre assumes importance and life. The theatre is the natural and direct mouthpiece of highly active and acute social problems and these issues are in turn the drama's natural meat.

The little theatre movement in its time contributed values to dramatic art, to be sure, but where it was vague and indecisive as to its function the workers theatres have a clearer reason for being, a militant sense of where they are going.

Obviously, a huge opportunity is offered the young playwright today who can write on the vital issues of our time. For where there are hundreds of workers theatres in America, there are only dozens of scripts on important issues which they can produce. But where the opportunity is great for the newcomers the responsibility is also large for those dramatists who have already had production in a professional way.

Last month an appeal was made in this magazine for scripts for the use of our workers theatres and a prize play contest announced. Whether or not the younger of our professional playwrights are interested in the prize, it is their duty, nevertheless, to assist these groups with plays. Especially does this responsibility rest with those playwrights (including myself) who are primarily interested in revolutionary drama. To quote from last month's appeal: "There is probably not an existing form in the theatrical catalogue which one group or another is not prepared to undertake, nor a conceivable experiment which could not be given form and life." What more could

the alert playwright ask for? Of one thing he may be sure, that a workers theatre group will give his play an audience.

Let us drop, then, such terms as propaganda and see what we, as playwrights, can do to supply these growing theatre organizations and audiences. After all, such terms are more of an accusation or justification of aims than a discussion of content and theatre practice; and on the right propaganda tactics against "propaganda" plays are steadily growing so obvious, even to those who use them, that criticism will have to get down to more fundamental issues to be adequate.

REVOLUTIONARY dramaturgy offers a challenge, and it is the duty of American playwrights to meet this challenge. When the power of the theatre is being used only by the bourgeoisie for making profits, when its use as such is not only perverted but a social crime, the only method of correction is the method of revolutionary action and pressure. But action and pressure are not enough: fresh dramatic intelligence is demanded also. For this reason the more experienced of our younger dramatists should lend their talents to this new dramatic problem.

In terms of the theatre, the threat which the masses are demonstrating today is not only a threat to dying and betraying forms of dramatic art: it is an announcement of the arrival of new thematic material.

When the proletarian masses are rising to power, when the level of intelligence among these masses has taken on a new temper and strength, when the structure of our entire civilization is being altered thereby, all of which are facts of our time, the theatre cannot stupidly take a defensive attitude: it must reach out and embrace, be a part of the offensive vanguard.

The relation of dramatic art to these new masses is, then, the playwright's important problem. To overcome the weaknesses which have long made our dramas impotent and paralyzed the authority of the theatre as an art and a social value the fundamental principles of dramatic art must be recognized, reaffirmed and put into action. This is our dramatists' major task and the only road they can travel today in order to realize this purpose is the route of revolutionary dramaturgy.

Theatre Workers of the World are Unit-ing! Dramatists, see what you can do!

Film Into Fascism

The Road to Hitler Is Paved With Film Stars

By BELA BALASZ

In the following article Bela Balasz continues his analysis of the subtle means used by the film producers of Pre-Nazi Germany to build up systematically the ideology of fascism. In his article in the September NEW THEATRE he pointed out the great need for developing revolutionary film critics who can evaluate and combat the cunning, insidious fascist influences in current films. The American filmgoer will have little difficulty in checking the validity of Balasz's analysis as applied to contemporary Hollywood films and film stars.

IN the past, the ruling classes utilized religion for the persuasion of the masses.

Developed monopolistic capitalism more often uses art and the press. For imperialist capitalism, the film is the most adaptable means, because a wide mass influence is assured and because as one of capital's big industries it is thoroughly controlled economically. In addition, the film, as in the case of religion, functions not only to lull criticism generally, to preach pious patience in bearing every misery, but even more certainly in the direction of fascism. Whether this happens consciously or unconsciously is of slight importance.

The ideological preparation for fascism took place in Germany naturally, in literature as well as in all the other arts. But perhaps not so definitely, so penetratingly as in the standardized production methods of films, where an increasingly monopolized industry admitted less and less the voice of individual or other opposition. Every season a deluge of feature subjects fashioned from the same mould was thrown on the market.

The Ideology of the Stars

However, not only the film theme, but the film star, too, is the product of capitalist monopolized industry. Not only the art of the theatre, but also the personal charm of the featured players became standardized mass commodities. The closeup, a device peculiar to the films, brought out (much more than was possible to the legitimate theatre) the most intimate expression of personality. Chaplin's wistful smile or the passionate glance of Asta Nielson was thrown on the world market as a mass commodity. It was this very popularity of famous film stars that gave them special significance. These stars embodied quite literally definite ideology, which served the purpose of monopolistic capital. Otherwise they would not have been developed by the film industry and could never have achieved stardom. The great fame of certain players of the theatre can be attributed to the fact that they were the very embodiment of ruling class ideology. But these players acted in a variety of plays, in various roles and

guises. The influence of their personalities was equally mixed with the influence of the play. But through the magnitude of the film industry the stars became so overwhelmingly familiar and popular that monopolistic capital could not afford to leave their ideological effectiveness to the mere accident of the various roles which they might play. They became fixed personalities that were most suited to forceful expression of the bourgeois ideology. The scenarios are written with these personalities in mind, and the stars play these same characters in all their films. And even when the costumes, the coiffure, the eyebrow style of a Greta Garbo or Asta Nielson are changed, the physiognomy remains the same.

Love

As I pointed out in my last article, love is unquestionably the chief theme of the movies, just as it always has been in literature and the theatre. But love itself varies greatly, in accordance with social relationships and even more so in relation to the ideological purposes of the ruling class. Film romance reveals, throughout, definite policies of monopoly capital. As Ilya Ehrenberg says, this love is produced in a "Dream Factory," according to a definite prescription and administered like medicine so as to bring definite results. The prescription runs thus: Love, as a force of nature, omnipotent and independent of social relationships; in love, all are equal. In the movies love leads finally either to a rich marriage or, less frequently, to a modest but pure happiness that even the rich can envy. It is the identical recipe used for the romances of pulp literature. The love stories of the film suggest to the petty bourgeoisie a definite standpoint toward the class war, namely, that class differences are not decisive, that there are mightier things which negate them.

The Vamp

In the early movies middle class marriage was holy, not to be tampered with. "The other woman" was the disturber of conjugal happiness, was always a wicked, calculating wanton. She was the rouged, cynical, troublemaking *mondaine*, the misleader, the betrayer of men. That was the "Vamp," as this type was called in America. Why did this other woman always have to be so wicked? Because in the bourgeois film, marriage symbolized *law*. Everything, therefore, that endangered the law was sinful and harmful. To prove this to the petty bourgeoisie was the ideological function of the film vamp in times when the security of the capitalist system and its laws was still unassailed. In the crisis period after the world

war the confidence of the petty bourgeoisie morality came upon critical times. The film met this protesting mood by employing every means to counteract this danger as much as possible. So in the films, the prostitute now appeared as heroine. And, of course, this novelty gave rise to any interminable cycle of the same type of film. The greatest film stars such as Pola Negri and Asta Nielson specialized in playing the glorified, tragic harlot. What ideological policy did this figure conceal? How was she portrayed? In a hypocritical bourgeois society she was shown as the outcast, the despised, but as she was more honest and more capable of loving than others, she was held guiltless of her fate. This *mondaine* embodied a protest against bourgeois society. But if she finds her way back, she is handsomely received . . . a happy ending and all is again in order.

IN this way the shortcomings of capitalist society, its moral hypocrisies were criticized—but not the whole system. Bourgeois society itself not only remained unassailed, but through the tragic sufferings of the trespassing prostitute, made to appear as a lost paradise. The more she aroused the pity of the petty bourgeoisie, so much more valuable seemed the world from which she had been exiled. The prostitute is a "Lumpenproletarian": a demoralized proletarian. She is unwilling to do battle against the bourgeois society which has produced her. On the contrary, she desires to play a notorious role in it.

I wish in this regard to remark that the tramp or Lumpenproletariat ideology, contained in the film figure, Charlie Chaplin, has for its ultimate aim, the function of apologizing for capitalism. This, in spite of the fact that from the standpoint of this engaging vagabond, society is seen in an absurd and hardly flattering light. In many instances in his films, sharp satirical criticism is heaved at society. But Chaplin's whole protest consists only of petty thrusts, pin pricks, directed at bourgeois society's buttocks. And so he disposes of his protest and the protest of his audience. He did not think to change anything by it. On the contrary, his stories seem to denote that one can live quite cheerfully and have one's little joys in spite of the greatest poverty. And though his stories are melancholy, they are never tragic. Pathetic but good natured resignation was the very core of the Chaplinesque poem, "Such Is Life!" As for those others, the more fortunate ones, let them be, Chaplin bears no ill will, does not grudge them their good fortune.

Criticism as Apology

Such criticism of bourgeois society is at its base an apology. The fascist procedure is to suppress, if it is still possible, the discontented anti-capitalistic mood of the masses, by ignoring it, or to appear to stir it up, simultaneously, however, giving it counter-revolutionary impetus. An example of this is the prostitute, glorified as film heroine. In the years of relative stabilization after the post-war crisis, even the tragic protest of this glorified prostitute was silenced. Pola Negri and Asta Nielson went out of fashion. But with the end of relative stabilization, at the beginning of industrial world crisis, the prostitute again arose as film heroine, in a cycle of Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo films. The prostitute type that Marlene Dietrich presented is less sentimental and much more impudent than the Asta Nielson type. It is in a certain sense more "radical." It contains much more contempt for bourgeois society. Indeed, without principle, being merely cynically contemptuous, it bespeaks much less respect for custom and law. Indeed, it has no principles to ignore and is in this sense a prepared fascist form of the *mondaine* heroine; the embodiment of the critical ideology of fascism not yet in power.

Selection of a Lover

Psylander, Conrad Veidt, Harry Liedtke and Hans Albers—four popular stars . . . four types of lovers. They represent four different shades of monopoly capitalist ideology and are the products of four different industrial periods in Germany.

Psylander was one of the first male stars, a product of the Swedish films. He was the correct gentleman, elegant, solid, earnest, manly, his dress and manner sensible and his mode of thinking patterned by custom and tradition; a man possessing poise, a man to marry, a man who could be trusted with a responsible bourgeois position; a hero and the ideological expression of a still confident capitalism.

Conrad Veidt became popular in the post-war period. He was the romantic, expressionistic hero. He typified the escape from reality, which had become insecure. He portrayed Hindoo Mahrajahs and Renaissance cavaliers. He played fantastic artists, adventurers, erratic and mystic beings. In his decadent, unreal expressionistic figure, there arose always, tragic and agonized, an eccentric or abnormal being. Conrad Veidt, the most popular hero of those years, represented flight from reality, lonely suffering and pessimistic defeatism, a world of ruin; a film hero of the German inflation period, of the time of the Spengler philosophy, *Decline of the West*.

This character of Conrad Veidt suddenly went out of style, even though he continued playing other roles and other personalities.

For relative stabilization had arrived. It was no longer necessary to flee from reality to romantic fantasy. It was enough to color or gloss over reality.

HARRY LIEDTKE then became the most popular hero of the German petty bourgeoisie. He was no fantastic figure, no eccentric, but a roguish, laughing, gay, lovable playboy. His occupation and his means of living were never disclosed. He was characterized by dress suit and top hat, jazz, smooth dancing and humorous adventure. He is not solid, strong and elegant like Psylander. This new hero is irresponsible even though he is always found within the frame of society. He shows the petty bourgeoisie (what they themselves wish so much to believe) that life can still be very pleasantly lived in the capitalist world, if one has the money. And that this is not altogether impossible. He portrays heroes without sensibilities and without the slightest ideas regarding moral obligations. For no one respected these obligations any longer. However, Harry Liedtke also went out of style when the short dream of relative stabilization of the capitalist order came to a sudden end and was followed by the new and sharper crisis. The mood of the petty bourgeoisie masses underwent a change. The fascist agitation set in along the whole line and in the film sky a new star arose—Albers. The type, which Hans Albers established and on which his art was standardized, was also the "lover—but of another kind than that of his predecessors.

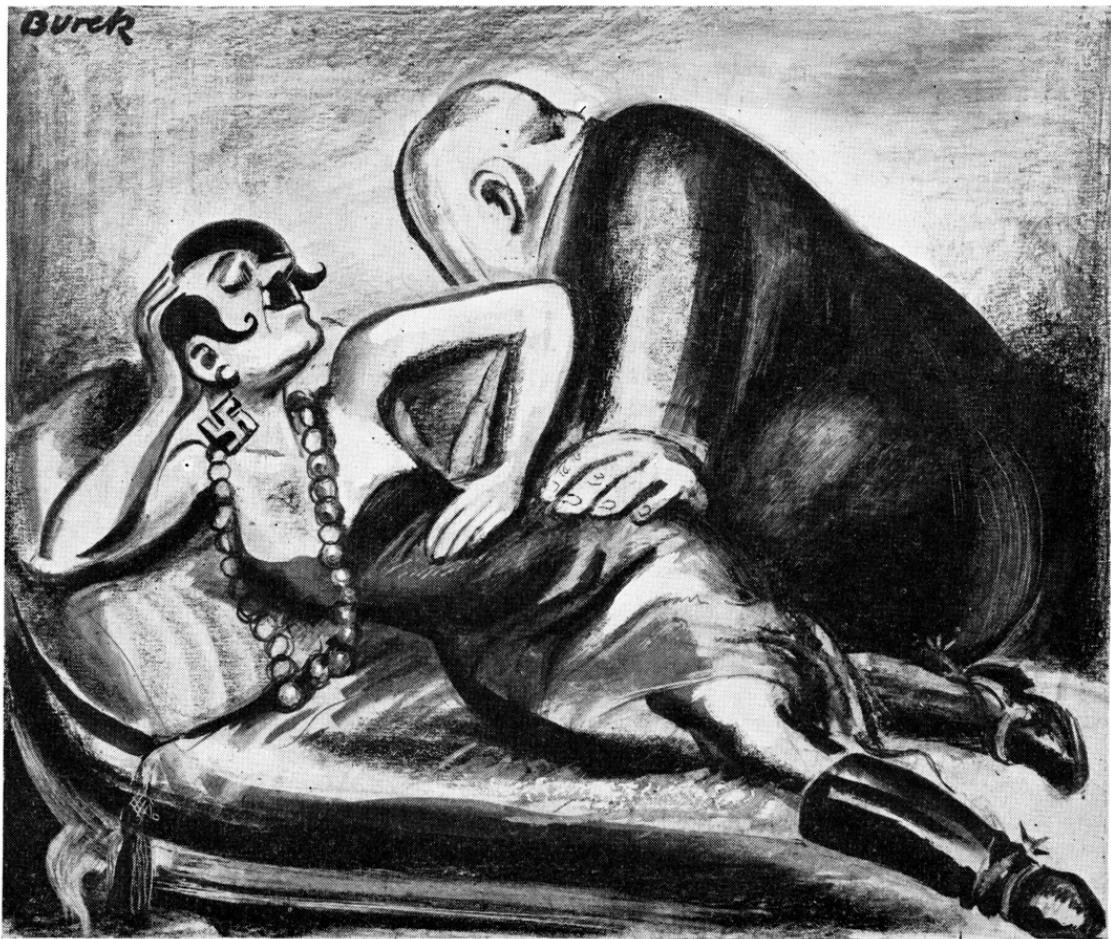
The protesting mood of an aroused or at the very least, disturbed petty bourgeoisie, mirrored itself in the figure of Albers, always in the same way. This new hero of the film public was no correct gentleman. On the contrary, he was always in conflict with the established order, with "democracy" and its guardians and did not stop at crime. He was no dreamer, like the character masks of Veidt, and no harmless convivial playboy of polite society. He was an outsider, a ruthless go-getter, who recognized neither custom, law nor right. He was a man of direct action, depending for solution of his conflicts on his fists. His psycho'ogical effect on the petty bourgeoisie undermined (and that was the purpose) the authority of the existing order (at that time the Weimar Democracy) but without leveling even the bluntest thrust at the capitalist system. The film hero type, Hans Albers, was another product of fascist ideology, when it was still an opposing force. Since fascism is no longer an opposing force, but a ruling power, the hero type that Hans Albers portrayed, has disappeared from the scene, very definitely disappeared. So very much so, that Hans Albers himself had to disappear from Germany. For now even film heroes are compelled to respect Hitler's laws.

And the case of Albers clearly proves that neither these actors nor perhaps even their directors understood the sense in which they functioned. "They don't know what they do, but they do it just the same," says Marx.



Drawing by Jacob Burck

Burck



Drawing by Jacob Burck

It Makes You Weep

An Interview With Stella Adler on Soviet Actors

By JANET THORNE

THERE is a theatrical legend to the effect that a curtain never rises without an Adler behind it, so when Stella Adler reports on the life of the actors whom she saw in the Soviet Union, there is behind her a long knowledge of how actors exist in most other countries.

"It makes you weep, when you think—an actor in Russia as a matter of course has at least forty weeks of *work* a year. And he has a vacation with pay besides. That is, he is paid fifty-two weeks a year. And the bigger theatres all have vacation quarters where they take the actors and their families for summer work."

How do the actors get into the companies?

"Nearly every important theatre has connected with it a technicum—a theatre school. But each theatre is so different from every other in its style that when a pupil selects a technicum he is attaching himself to a particular technique."

Can they just pick a school like that?

"They apply for admission. But the basis for selecting them is so different from anywhere else. In the Comedie Francaise for instance, a girl is admitted to the school because she has a nice body. But in Russia she doesn't have to look like Joan Crawford. (If she does, she'll probably play character parts and old women.) So long as she has two arms and a brain and her teeth—if she has talent she can be admitted. If there is one particular fault, a bad voice, that needn't exclude her. They have three years to work with her, and they concentrate on this.

"The courses they have! I've never seen anything like it: three or four forms of acting work, dancing, acrobatics, plastique, gymnastics, and in the Meyerhold technicum, biomechanics. Their voice work is marvelous, really related to the theatre. I've never seen it done before. In the Meyerhold classes I saw feats of diction performed by boys and girls eighteen and twenty, such as *no* actor I've heard could do. They actually stylize the voice production. They juggle with sounds. It is theatrically efficient speech. There are classes in the history of the theatre, of music, of the other arts; in the Left theatres they also study Marxism, dialectic materialism, social problems, all those things.

"All the time they're in the technicum they're paid. They do the technical work in the theatre's productions. They're the stage managers and stage hands, and build the sets, especially those who are training to direct—but the directors act, too. In their last year they prepare productions of their own, and under the direction of the theatre's



Stella Adler

regisseurs they take out plays into the provinces, to accustom them to playing before audiences in bigger parts. They're used in the theatre's productions in mobs and small parts. Their teachers are the older actors and the directors."

Does Meyerhold, for instance, teach?

"No. His other directors do."

What happens when they graduate?

"They go into the company of the theatre, or if there's no room for them, they go into the provinces and start to work in other theatres in the tradition of the one where they studied. There's practically no unemployment."

But an actor doesn't wander into a town and decide to start a theatre there?

"No, no, no. They're sent out in units, by the Department of Education or Art or whatever it is. It's all planned. But they have a chance to show what they can do. For instance, there are two theatrical clubs in Moscow where the actors go after performances or on their free nights—they work in repertory and there are sometimes several actors trained for one part so they have nights off—and the student actors and directors show their productions there. Goldblatt, when he was a student director, won some sort of competition for the best propaganda play there, and as a result of that production he was given a theatre of his own. It's now the Gypsy Theatre, one of the most exciting in the city. Their costumes . . . !"

What about the costume bills?

"They get what they want. The theatres are self supporting. They're always full. And if they need a particular thing for a production, they get it. When they need fine costumes—they're finer than anything I've seen by the best Paris couturiers. At the Moscow Art Theatre for instance. Be-

cause the best artists work on them. But their equipment! In almost every theatre, two revolving stages or three, and elevator stages. Lee Strasberg and I nearly died.

Do the actors live well?

"Very well. There are three classes of actors, according to their professional skill. A first grade actor might take a second grade part, but never a third. The first grade is paid a little better than the second or third."

What does the difference in pay mean?

"That perhaps a first grade actor can buy a nice mahogany bureau—clothes—nothing to make a real difference between the actors, but a few luxuries. And a first grade actor may have a slightly better apartment, but the size depends on the size of the family. A company usually lives together in a collective."

Do they do their own housework?

"No, all their work is in the theatre. Other workers take charge of the living arrangements—but it's nothing like a servant relationship, the work is simply divided.

"Everything is so reasonable. I'll tell you a story. I went to the opening of *The Marvelous Metal* by Kirchon. Everybody in Moscow—all the theatrical people—were there. And they clapped. And they cheered. And the play *wasn't* very good. I had to say something. I began, bewildered, to one of the directors from another theatre, 'This isn't as good as most of the plays I've seen here.'

"No," he said.

"The acting isn't so good'

He said, 'We know it.'

"Diffidently I mentioned, 'At home this would be a flop.'

"It's a flop.'

"On the stage Donchenko was pressing the actors' hands. Kirchon was kissing Donchenko. The house bravoed.

"It's a flop,' said the director, 'but it's the work of a talented writer in whom we are interested. The designer shows a growing gift. Here are some of our best actors in new roles—not their best, but interesting. There is an audience which will want to see this step in the development of this theatre and these people. The play will stay in the repertory for a while, perhaps two nights a week, later once a month, long enough to reach this audience.'

"So the work isn't wasted. It's seen. It's criticized seriously. Because serious work has gone into it, it isn't kicked and annihilated the morning after. I tell you, I could weep. It's an actors' paradise."



Stella Adler

A Playreader on Playwrights

By JOHN GASSNER

NEW THEATRE has asked me to write on revolutionary playwriting from the standpoint of the professional playreader. The trouble with the theme is that one could write on it indefinitely, and that much of what the playreader could say falls equally within the province of the play-producer and of the public critic. The playreader maintains a precarious footing between the two, exercising the functions of criticism and at the same time serving his masters, the producers, whose sole interest, with rare exceptions, is predominantly pecuniary and egotistical. His point-of-view is necessarily mongrel. It would be a miracle if the average playreader could teach the revolutionary playwright anything.

There are of course exceptions and modifications to be noted, as in the case of the Theatre Guild, the Group Theatre and, naturally, The Theatre Union. But in most instances the playreader is the footman who stands at his master's gate, refusing entry to anything uncommercial. Little wonder he commands no respect; not even his masters hold him in any esteem. One of them, William Harris, Jr., quoted by John Chapman in the *Daily News*, declares: "In the seventy-five years my family has been in the theatre, I don't know of a play that was discovered by a reader." In fairness to the playreader it should be noted that there are a lot of things that Mr. Harris could not possibly have learned. Moreover, for Mr. Harris a "play . . . discovered by a reader" means a play produced on Broadway, and it is more than conceivable that a majority of the unproduced plays sincerely recommended by even his humblest playreaders could not have been half as insignificant and meretricious as the plays he did produce. The playreader is hired to do the dirty work—to be the official bouncer.

One might get to worrying about his soul, but there is no special call for sentimentality here. If he cannot call his soul his own, his plight is that of nearly every employee. If commercial considerations dominate his professional outlook he is what nearly everyone is—a cog in a society based upon economic competition. He can of course blind himself to the realities of his position, as most white collar workers have managed to do. He may be dazzled into blindness by specious contacts with glamorous producers and actors, and a few words with a prima donna on leave from Hollywood may serve as a much needed aphrodisiac in a conspicuously unexciting profession. For the revolutionary playwright it is important to recognize the hopelessness of hammering at closed gates and the necessity of developing a theatre that has room for his work. It is

useless to rage against the playreader, the man who says him "Nay" in a web of flimsy rationalizations, for the voice of the master speaks through him.

However, there is a service the playreader can perform, and he does not have to be one of the elect to render it. No one can paint a more dismal picture of the bourgeois theatre than he. No one is in a position to see it so distinctly without its grease paint and stage lights; for the plays on Broadway seen by the public have gone through at least some process of selection, are few in number (and therefore less overwhelming in their foulness!), and have been fumigated by the combined efforts of director, actor and scenic designer.

THE *bourgeois theatre is dead*. Like a blasted tree it is retaining its leaves for a while, but it is receiving no new nourishment, and when the old leaves fall there will be no new ones to replace them. Year after year playgoers see the work of such established playwrights as O'Neill, Anderson, Behrman, Howard, Kaufman and Barry on the boards, and remark that a young man does not get a chance, that the old-timers have cornered the market. This may be true, but it is not generally realized that practically no one among these unknowns is showing the slightest signs of equalling or carrying further the work of the "old men" of the theatre. The epigones are sterile, and the reason is obvious. O'Neill, Howard, Behrman and the others rose out of the ferment of middle-class development. The American bourgeoisie was discarding provincialism, was catching up with the realism and cosmopolitanism of European literature. Having consolidated its gains on the economic front, it could afford now such luxuries as *Weltschmerz* and introspection, eroticism, tolerance (after a fashion), cosmopolitanism and even self-criticism. Mass production and high-pressure distribution sought to sell the greatest number of material luxuries (many of them useless) to the greatest number of people. The distribution of intellectual luxuries met with greater "consumer resistance" than the latest General Motors gadget, but the shock-brigade of Mencken and Company left wide gaps in the walls of provincialism through which one could now descry the "little theatres" that became arenas for aspiring sons and daughters of the middle-class eager to break a lance against the barbarism of their money-making fathers.

Though the little theatres still dot the country, more or less, they are creating practically no new talent, because there is nothing more that their social milieu can

produce. Thousands of young men and women are writing plays and inundating Broadway with their scripts, but the net result is negligible. They have nothing to add to the work of their predecessors; they cannot pioneer for the intellectual and emotional luxuries of the middle-class. This work was by no means negligible (compare, for instance, the decade 1920-1930 in the American theatre with the decade 1900-1910) but it is finished now. Nevertheless, at the very most, the epigones persist in repeating it. Don Quixotes, one and all, (which they cannot help being!) they tilt at windmills as though they were giants and slay imaginary foes, and wonder why no one hails them as transcendent geniuses. These writers are the pick of the perennial crop of playwrights, the young men who are known as "promising". Occasionally one of them has his play produced, receives, if he is fortunate, the paeans of the newspaper critics, and retires to the purlieus of Hollywood.

WHAT about the vast number of less competent playwrights who are stewing sadly in their own juices? Hundreds of the unproduced plays deal with elementary romantic situations based on the profound formula—X loves Y, but Y loves Z, Z proves unworthy of love, and marries. Add a little romantic background, preferably a southern estate or a penthouse, and the play is finished. Then there are the hundreds of triangle plays, which require no comment, and mystery or detective plays in which justice is vindicated when the tobacco-spitting Texas sheriff bags his man. The Negro is not neglected—the dear happy-go-lucky fellow ever so devoted to his white employer, who returns his affection. In a number of plays the harsh realities are uppermost—prohibition (until recently) and the depression. Prohibition is downright criminal because it ruins our best families, compelling gentlemen to consort with foreigners and crooks. The depression, however, is a blessing in disguise, a visitation of the Lord for the children of the rich who were being ruined with too much spending money. The depression has saved the morale of the middle-class. Russia, bleak land of slavery where women long heart-breakingly for silk stockings and the nobility is oppressed, occupies other playwrights. However, most playwrights prefer to move more safely in the wake of recent successes. The number of plays spawned by *Grand Hotel* is past believing. Collar a dozen miscellaneous individuals, preferably a business man, a senator, an actress and a shady character: get them on board a ship, aeroplane



Broadway Audience

By Adolph Dehn

or rocket bound for the moon, get them in a hotel, a tenement house, a brothel or at a party—and presto you have a play. *Biography, Another Language, What Price Glory? Abie's Irish Rose*—each of these plays (good, bad or tolerable) has its parthenogenetic offspring. Add to this, crazy-quilt plays about mythical kingdoms and kings who are more democratic than their people (for which we have Mr. Shaw to thank), comedies about nymphomaniac daughters of the rich, and romantic biographical plays. The biographical plays present enlightening statistics: nearly a hundred plays on Byron and his loves, and on George Sand and her lovers; and dozens of dramas about such old war-horses as Catherine de Medici, Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton, Henry of Navarre, and Chopin.

My case is complete. The bourgeois theatre is rapidly becoming an arid waste. Its fountains have dried up at their source. There is no one at the source to replace the "old man". New material, a new outlook and a new class of playwrights must be brought into the theatre if it is to survive. New sources of nourishment must be found if it is to be anything more than an overdressed skeleton rattling in a silver coffin. The frequent complaint of producers that they have no worth-while (bourgeois) plays to present is a significant admission. Irrespective of political affiliations, the lover of the theatre must cast his eye in the direction of the revolutionary theatre, though it is questionable whether he can understand the revolutionary theatre without some political orientation.

At present, revolutionary plays are few and far between. By revolutionary plays I mean, broadly speaking, plays dealing directly or indirectly with the dynamic

clash of social forces, plays that see the individual and the society of our time in the midst of prodigious changes, plays that concern themselves in one way or another with the working class as the dynamic instrument of the twentieth century history. Such plays are still relatively rare, and perhaps because they are without precedent they still leave much to be desired. But they are rooted in vital struggles and deal perforce with people who are moving'y and directly real because they are vitalized by conflict and suffering. Neither the conflict nor the suffering is artificially induced—hence genuineness. The agony is heroic, for it is produced by the clash of ponderable forces, not picayune personalities or microscopic slices of a single disintegrating personality. Plays that have the wind-swept power of Athenian or Elizabethan drama, that possess the rush of passion of *Agamemnon, Oedipus* or *King Lear* or the tempestuous side-splitting humor of Aristophanes' comedies become possible. (It would be amusing to see how the classicist, who merely rationalizes his reactionary nostalgia for the past, would react to the suggestion!) When these potentialities are realized the theatre will be reborn.

UNFORTUNATELY, good intentions alone are insufficient. I shall probably be rapped on the head by brothers in the light, but I regret to report that most of the revolutionary plays I have read fall wide of the mark. Too many of them are unexciting. Some of them lose themselves in sheer rant, than which nothing is more tame. The world is set on fire, comrades make long speeches on ideology and methodology, passages from Lenin's writings are read at length, and before you can say Jack Robin-

son the revolution is accomplished. Hub-bub is confused with excitement, and if you reject such a play you are of course nothing better than a low-down fascist. Fortunately, these plays are few. More serious is the problem of plays that lose themselves in the parlor or the shack, that do not come out into the open where forces are ranged against each other. Plays of this nature comment upon the struggle instead of presenting it directly. Still other plays are unexciting because they cover too much ground; instead of confining themselves to a single representative issue, the overeager authors produce an animated cartoon. Many of them have no strong pivotal issue around which the action may revolve. John Dos Passos' otherwise incisive *Fortune Heights* is a case in point; the play has nearly every virtue except that of intensity. Other plays that must remain anonymous since they have been neither published nor produced sin more grievously in this respect. They contain cross-sections of social conflict, but you can peel off tissue after tissue without coming to a core.

Many plays do not individualize their workers, treating them rather as pawns on the Marxian chessboard. The strikers in *Peace on Earth* are an instance of this tendency, whereas the characterizations in *Stevedore* and *They Shall Not Die* set a better example. There is no *a priori* reason why the workers in a revolutionary play should be less alive than the characters in a non-revolutionary drama. Where the play deals with masses problems of balance arise, but these can be solved by a competent playwright. Workers have at least as much individuality as their masters, Fordian super-efficiency to the contrary notwithstanding, and masses presented on the stage can accentuate individuality instead of submerging it. Furthermore, if the playwright who is dealing with masses wishes to individualize some of his characters he can isolate them whenever feasible. John Wexley may have slowed up his tempo, but he contributed greatly to the reality of *They Shall Not Die* by devoting two scenes to Lucy Wells. Individualization can even enhance mass movement and mass struggle. Lucy's life at home, with its poverty and enforced prostitution, is as searing an indictment of social injustice as the Scottsboro case itself, and supports the contention that racial persecution in the South serves as a smoke-screen for economic exploitation. The mass movement principle of revolutionary theory does not, of course, rest upon the assumption that workers always move in herds.

Exception must also be taken against arbitrary manipulation of scenes and situations. A case in point is the assumption in *Stevedore* that the union of white and Negro workers in the South is child's play. Except for the picayune desertion of a single nit-wit, the white members of the union follow their leader, rushing to the rescue of the



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embattled Negroes. I submit that this is not only an unjustifiable oversimplification of a problem but that this weakness affects the very roots of the drama. Insofar as the play represents the thesis of black and white unity it fails dramatically, because it does not dramatize the cementing of the two races, which would have involved a fully realized presentation of how the masses of white workers overcome their prejudices to the extent of coming to the rescue of the besieged stevedores.

Arbitrariness also makes itself felt in some revolutionary plays in the treatment of opponents. In the interests of economy and emotional tone it is too often impossible to give rounded and fully developed appraisals of people on the other side of the class-line. Nevertheless, except where the dominant note is satirical, the revolutionary playwright should avoid weakening his play with caricatures or theatrical villains. Villains may, and often obviously must, appear without further ado as instruments of villainy, but as instigators of villainy they must be amply motivated. The white ruffians in *Stevedore* are unobjectionable, as we do not see enough of them to need complex and rounded presentation of them as separate individuals. On the other hand, the villainy of the sheriff and the district attorney who frame the Negroes in *They Shall Not Die* and precipitate the issue of the play, could be made more dynamic and fundamental by being more distinctly motivated. Caricature for satirical purposes is, as noted, another matter.

ARBITRARINESS also makes itself felt in the attitude of the revolutionary playwright and critic towards plays that present the social issue in the milieu of the middle-class. *American Dream* was such a play, and others are being written with some degree of proficiency. In some respects, in spite of obvious imperfections, the most poisonous attack on capitalistic hegemony, *American Dream* seems to be submerged in a conspiracy of silence. Recently, revolutionary attacks have been levelled at other attempts to deal with the middle-class. It is impossible to treat here in detail with these attacks, which were at least partly unjustified. More credit should have been given to *The Pure in Heart* for its picture of the cesspool of commercialized art and of the frustrated lives and perverted sensibilities it produces. In the case of *Gentlewoman*, Lawson's lesson of the futility of a rapprochement between natural revolutionists and dilettante gentlefolk, his pricking of the bubble of bohemianism (which often serves as a defense mechanism against revolutionary urges), and his presentation of the sterility of upper class society were unjustly disregarded. The *New Masses* review of Virgil Geddes' tetralogy, *From the Life of George Emery Blum*, neglected its Walpurgis-night satire on

respectability when a member of the sanctimonious tribe of undertakers tries to suffocate a client, when the business man Peter Cobb has to drown his wife's puppy before he can get some attention from her, and when, in a weirdly farcical scene, Blum, the undertaker, is elected to the legislature because his macabre disillusionment has given him the appearance of the strong silent man so popular with politicians.

NEVERTHELESS, the revolutionary dramatist who deals with the middle-class runs grave danger of being tempted. Deep calls to deep, and it would be surprising indeed if, steeped in middle-class life, he were not, for environmental reasons, half in love with the people he wishes to excoriate and the life he intends to dissect. This ambivalence gives him subtlety and depth—which some of the more ranting playwrights could use to advantage. But he may go down too far and find himself in a morass of nostalgia and vaporous brooding from which he is compelled to extricate himself with the utmost effort and with a minimum of grace. Lawson sentimentalized his show entrepreneurs and *Schmutzproletariat* in *the Pure in Heart* until his point of view was observed, and in *Gentlewoman* he listened to the siren call of his dazzling

(though unhappily miscast) "gentlewoman" and her generous friends a little too closely, and nearly foundered. And Geddes, in the third part of his tetralogy, became bogged in *morbidezza* for its own sake, obscuring his line of development, a mistake he is now, I believe, rectifying. Only self-searchings and the discipline of dialectical materialism can eradicate revolutionary obscuritism.

Concluding, I have no wish to set up as an arbiter of revolutionary playwriting. If these random ideas can stimulate discussion they will have done all that can reasonably be expected of them. However, only discussion related to actual production can be truly fruitful. Revolutionary playwrights struggling with their problems need, above all, experimental production, and this can be best provided by the workers' theatres that have been showing so much vitality in the past year. If the facilities of these experimental workshops are amplified and they are run, not by theoreticians, but by the playwrights themselves, the foundation for a vital drama will have been established. The workers' theatres should do at least as much for revolutionary drama as the little theatres of two decades ago did for the competent middle-class playwright of today. No true lover of the theatre can afford to remain indifferent to their success.

Theatre of Action

By MARK MARVIN

There is life here on our stage.
the summer wind blows off the choking
prairies,
through empty factories gaping at the sun,
and our rickety stage warped with heat and
time

becomes a mirror to history:

flowing, flowing past,
Muenzer and his peasant hosts, Babeuf,
red comet of another century, and Paris
'71, a shamble where Leningrad was forged!

O come into our hall and see Leningrad
unfold upon the Mississippi's banks, see
the flower of our youth (red wisdom on
their lips)

re-forge the past and mold the present to
their will.

Who are the actors? Bejeweled stars
with orchids in their fists . . . ?

No, simply workers, young and old,
who have idled, hands empty
far too long, but now with opened eyes
assault the world-vast stage of history
the fiery phrase of Marx

a fierce weapon in fierce hands,
hands that have troweled
continents with their strength
and shaped all tools, all shelter,
and all food—and all that stands
steel-concrete witness to the trace of man.
And properties? The overalls are not by
Worth.

We've scanned dustbins, and rusting melancholy
junkyards, leaving to Rockefeller's son
a little while his broad but hollow stages
(pale automatons rattling in a graveyard
scene).

Our principal property cannot be bought
in any of the markets of their dying world:

unmortgaged, and unfettered will
to show all toilers that a graven path
is beaten from this fast-increasing hell
into the real heavens of collectivization,

and a seeing eye! an eye that burns
at every crossroad of the earth,
that ferrets out oppression's stand,
and then portrays in pantomime,
or throaty, deep-felt word,
or singing, shouting, swaying mass
its tireless ubiquity,
its never-ceasing watch.

Ours is a theatre whose deeds
shall echo down the halls of time
the color and flow of the daily clash
as class meets class, and all the passion
of our lives here in the streets,
the factories, and on the ravaged farms
beneath drought-parched trees on prairies
rich with the toil of working men
who starve with the division thereof.
Actor comrades, to your revolutionary posts!
Theatre is a weapon! Draw the curtain up,
and let the drama of the century proceed!

Revolutionary Ballet Forms

By LINCOLN KIRSTEIN

USED in connection with a spectacle, "ballet" has hitherto meant a series of theatrical dances more or less closely connected by pantomime based upon a story slight enough to be a pretext for the presence of a troupe of dancers, but in no way to interfere with the technical display involved. There have been notable exceptions to this, but only as exceptions. Used in connection with the vocabulary of the dance, "ballet" means a grammar of gesture and movement based on five positions of hands and feet, originating in Italy, spreading to France, flowering in Russia. In the course of its four hundred year history it has absorbed from its successive homes local, national and social dances, occupational gestures and innovations from individuals all along the line. As differentiated from ritual, folk, or social dancing, it is preeminently theatrical. Its limits are imposed for the sake of greatest legibility to the greatest number of people seeing it.

The word "ballet" has enjoyed a wide unpopularity in America for the last ten years. Most of the work which could, with an indulgent stretch of the imagination, be called "ballet" here on view, was a dilute or corrupted form of the thing. "Ballet" meant girls in white tarletans derived from Degas or high class movie prologues. Recently when a popular ballet company displayed itself in New York, it aroused considerable intellectual distrust by its financial success, its opposition to the (to us) familiar exhibitions of our own "group" or "modern" dancers, and because few of its productions had anything more than a fragmentary or accidental interest. In spite of this, the word "ballet" is a good one and can still be used for the purposes of discussion.

The Ballet was preeminently a post-Renaissance product. It flowered in the Baroque ornament of Versailles and not until the nineteenth century was it entirely divested of a verbal accompaniment, which final separation did much to accelerate its decline as a dramatic instrument. The grammar, the idiom of ballet developed independent of its uses. The forms and combinations of its steps in the ore, as it were, are one of the great contributions of western culture comparable to the use of polyphony in music, or aerial perspective in painting. Unfortunately the uses to which this language was put, to a far too large extent, were mainly rhetorical. Expressiveness was sacrificed to brilliance, and difficult execution well achieved was canonized for its acrobatics. Ballet awaits a Don Giovanni, or a Hamlet. Its succession is so elusive, depending as it does on difficult systems of notation or hu-



Nijinsky in *Jeux*

man memory, that what seemed great tragedy to the balletomanes of 1850 seems preposterous to us, and we are perhaps inclined to underestimate the intensity of bal'ets like *Giselle* or *Sleeping Beauty*. Perhaps they provided a satisfaction equal to great tragedy. Gauthier and Poushkin thought so. But they have not survived for us, whatever the reason, like Mozart or Shakespeare. We still can be moved by individual dancers performing the magnificent arias in movement, *The Blue Bird* variation, or the pas de quatre from *Swan Lake*; but these in fragments.

The best of ballet has come to us by way of Russia. Italy and France had their dominance, with the attendant glories of Sweden and Denmark. But Russia lavished her full attention and her imperial thoroughness on the western form, combined Italian acrobatics with French grace, and added an immortality of Slav consciousness and abandon. The Russian schools, state endowed, commanded the pick of European masters. The Russian theatres gave a possibility of perfection in production unknown anywhere else in the world. Their sense of the dramatic, of the word-made gesture plus the bodies moulded to elastic steel, make the names of Karsavina, Nijinsky and Pavlova living standards.

Yet before the war the Russian Ballet became international. After the Paris season of 1909, and the subsequent Diaghilev period, Russia was content merely to provide great dancers. The ideas, the direction, were still Russian, but the Russians of a cosmopolitan society, the Russian made a citizen of the world, or more accurately, a Parisian.

In Russia the ballet schools were protected by the Revolution. Lunacharsky saw to that. Except in the winter, due to the lack of food and heat, the schools and theatres were continuously open. The Russians of today are probably the greatest technicians in the world. But the ballet productions in no way compare to the vitality of their cinema or dramatic theatre. The state of choreography in Russia today is not pre-war. It is late nineteenth century. The ballet is extremely popular in both the great State Theatres, but the popular successes are the same successes that delighted audiences of 1894, 1904 and 1914. This is no fault of the Revolution. The Diaghilev ballet carrying with it the greatest creative talent left Russia for good in 1911. What was left after the war, except for Gorski who in Moscow was the great composer of ballets and already an old man, and Golizovsky a real revolutionary, but a special case, was merely middle-aged memories of the stock repertory. Golizovsky is still in Moscow. But due to the extent of the general torpidity of choreography he seems an extremist. It is forgotten that already in 1910 he created innovations surpassing Wigman, and structurally far stronger than Duncan. Now he seems an eccentric. His *Football Player* was a notable success.

IN spite of this, the tone of Ballet in Western Europe has been predominantly Russian. The five choreographers of the International Diaghilev troupe were all trained in the Imperial School at Petrograd, with the exception of the last, who graduated from the State School of Leningrad. When Diaghilev died, his remnants and various brilliant White Russian children in Paris were formed into the Monte Carlo Ballet, which scored such a signal success in New York last season; and which now returns. The Monte Carlo Ballet, creatively speaking, has little to recommend it, although as irrelevant amusement and delight for the sake of unique performers, it can be superb. The ballet dances are, largely speaking, from the Diaghilev Repertory (1909-1929). The few new ballets are an offshoot of his school: the ultimate of the snob Parisian chic of 1930-1933. Its future life is questionable. It has few lively sources from any field on which to draw. Its unscrupulous direction, its overworked dancers, its second-hand repertory and intense commercialism, and the lack of any youthful creative descent makes it an historic echo, but still an echo. It should be seen by all for reference and comparison.

It might be useful to review the great composers of theatrical dances during the



Nijinsky in *Jeux*

last thirty years to determine the future direction of the medium. Michael Fokine as a young man literally revolutionized the principles of ballet when at the turn of the century, in a famous letter to the directors of the Imperial Theatres, he proposed reforms which have determined the whole direction of dancing and which we now accept as commonplaces. He precipitated a Romantic Revolution, drawing heavily on oriental exoticism, on hellenistic Greece, on the great decadent Imperial periods for a decorative and violent subject matter. He also utilized a francophile story book version of Russia itself, and his immortal *Petroushka* is still danced in the Soviet Union, where it can be explained that the Charlatan is the Imperial bureaucracy, the Moor is the old aristocracy, and *Petroushka* is the eternal, unconquerable soul of the common Russian man. And in every sense, *Petroushka* is a masterpiece, a milestone in the development of dance drama. Since the war, Fokine has lived in suspension in New York City. It is hard to believe that the composer of *Fire Bird*, of *Daphnis*, or *Spectre*, *Igor*, and *Sylphides*, is extant at the start of Riverside Drive. This summer, almost as an ironic spectre, his old successes triumphed again, at least from the point of view of big audiences. But there is little else left.

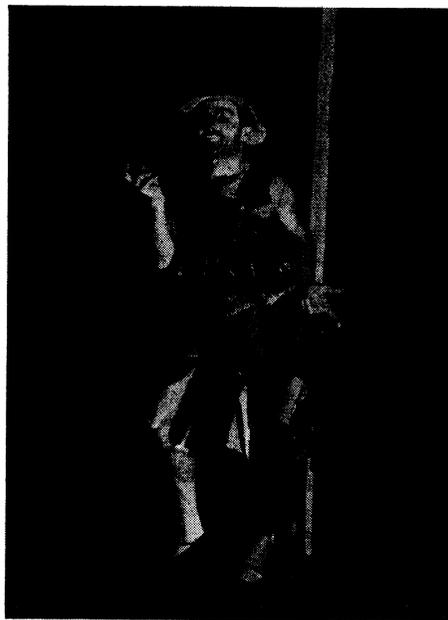
Nijinsky was the immediate and given cause of Fokine's resignation from the Russian Ballet, and in spite of his tragic, unachieved career, it is difficult not to consider him as the single greatest genius of dancing in modern times. Superlative as a classic dancer, before he was twenty-five he reversed classic dancing and established a new species of synthesized movement which has been the virtual source of modernisms ever since. Nijinsky could not support dancing as mere divertissement or attractive amusement for its own sake. In *Faun*, he composed a complete lyric incident in fluid movement, at one blow destroying the atrophied idea of Greece as Phidian Greece, and with the recreation of the monumental archaic, suggested the creation of a simple, direct and profoundly felt modernism which was articulated in greater elaboration in the nationalist, pre-archeological *Rites of Spring*, and realized, in small, in *Jeux*—never to be realized largely in the unproduced but magnificently indicated formal dances for the music of Bach's Preludes and Fugues. Nijinsky hoped for dancing as an expression of human action as intense and direct as possible; unhampered by a precedent, the legible objectification in terms of kinetic essences of the whole nature of human activity. Towards ritual, he proposed a mass dance drama, more important in scope and intention than any spectacle since the Greek ritual tragedy of the Bacchae. Nijinsky's great contributions to dance-composition have not yet been realized, in the excess of emphasis on his own hideous personal disaster. Some inkling of his ideas may be gained

from his wife's biography, but only by inference.

LEONIDE MASSINE was destined by a not very selective destiny to fill Nijinsky's place as choreographer for the Russian ballet. The only one of its composers not to receive the benefit of the rigid discipline of the State School, his education was really based on the classic Spanish dance. The company found themselves in Spain for the duration of the war. Hence, one easily notices a preponderance of abrupt positions in his work, nervous and comic, stemming from the instruction of the great Felix, who grounded him in the initial *Three Cornered Hat*. Massine is an intellectual rather than a spontaneous or musical composer. His *Skazki* or Russian Fairy Stories are ingenious and charming, but the preponderance of his work has been a repetition of his early pantomimic dances, or lately, a visualization of the symphonies of Tchaikovsky or Brahms. This direction can hardly be considered fortunate. A competition is immediately set up with the music which is pre-eminently unsuitable for dancing. The greatest success possible is almost a literary tour de force. Very conscious of what is good theatre, he often misses what is good dancing, and is inclined to repeat a sure-fire hit until it misses. He has become the solitary composer of the Monte Carlo Company, and his creation is centrifugal. Fokine unkindly referred to his Brahms *Choreartium* as "Wigman sur les pointes."

Bronia Nijinska, Vaslav's sister, composed a few ballets for Diaghilev, notably the *Village Wedding* of Stravinsky and *The House Party*. Both stemmed strongly from Nijinsky. A fine dancer herself, she has an unfortunate masculinity which, since she is not a man, is often her undoing. Lately she has attempted a choreographic *Hamlet*.

Georges Balanchine was Diaghilev's last composer. He is the son of the first musician of the Georgian Republic, Milaton



Woizikowsky in *Concurrence*

Balanchivadze, who was signally honored this spring by a jubilee voted to him by the Soviet Union. Balanchine graduated from the State School in 1922. Under the strong influence of Kasian Golizovsky, he risked expulsion from the Academic Theatre by founding his own Young Ballet, among whose number were Tamara Geva and Alexandra Danilova, both now well known to New York. He was dissatisfied with the atrophy of the left-overs of the Imperial Theatres. Practising in a disused factory, he presented finally an evening of dancing, *From Fokine to Balanchivadze*: the history of contemporary dancing. He took a poem of Alexander Blok's and in the forum of the deserted Dveranskiy Sobrani, the old House of Peers, his schoolmates danced the Blok verses while others recited them. It was the first step in an attempt to reintegrate dancing with the old, invaluable elements of poetry and music, the human voice and the melodic, instrumental line.

Balanchine served Diaghilev from 1924 to his death in 1929. It was the period of the disintegration of the ballet. The painters of the School of Paris were considered more important than either dancers or musicians. Novelty was at a premium. Titillation of the super-sophisticated worldly society of Paris and London was the single effect of these few years. Diaghilev himself seemed disinterested. Nevertheless, Balanchine produced ten ballets, two of unusual strength, Stravinsky's *Apollo*, and the *Prodigal Son*, a drama of some religious feeling, based on episodes from a poem by Poushkin, with remarkable scenery by Rouault. On the one side Balanchine revived the crystal classicism of the pre-Fokine era, which he also had endangered in the recent insistence on the unsuspected. In the other he hinted at a curious sincerity, a desire to realize the full possibilities of dance drama.

Since 1929 his history has been vivid, from London, to Copenhagen, to Paris, to New York. At the age of thirty he is the head of the School of the American Ballet. Work done he finds is old as death. The direction of dancing is entirely ahead, and at a different angle from anything previously accomplished. Except—there was the Blok in 1922, and the *Seven Capital Sins* in 1933. Few people who saw it took the *Seven Capital Sins* at anything but its face value. Nevertheless this baffling work by two superb young German Communist artists, Bert Brecht, the poet, and Kurt Weill, the musician, was an important landmark in dancing history. On a bare stage, the classical ballet steps abandoned, under glaring lamps, with no scenic illusion, the chapters in the adventures of one girl in search of food for her family was intoned by her sister and double, Anna-Anna. As each sin was committed, another paper door was smashed. The music, acrid and tuneful, was the equivalent, but never the description of the dancing. An atmosphere of homely tension, desperation



Woizikowsky in *Concurrence*

and personal anguish was invoked, in combination with the monotonous, aching familiarity of the melodies that was both uncomfortable and splendid. Balanchine left Europe, splitting with the Monte Carlo Company, of which he had been co-founder, because he considered their direction retrograde and retardative.

AT present the School of the American Ballet is in a state of gestation. It is attempting on the basis of the Russian State Schools, adapted to American needs, to create an excellent troupe of dancers. This takes time and patience. Balanchine luckily has both. But in the meanwhile he has experimented. He knows ballet as "ballet" is dead. The very word seems mortified. He has found an old word which may have a revived meaning. Vigano, the Italian innovator of a century ago, composed ballets which he called *Choreodrame*: literally danced dramas. The idea of three ballet-divertissements in an evening is through, however persistent. Ballet as innocent amusement is far too little to demand of it. Dancing can be the equivalent of any of the other lyric or dramatic forms. Words, spoken by dancers or by an independent choir in unison, without music or with it; the greater participation of the audience as a contributory factor in heightening the spectacular tension, the destruction of the proscenium arch as an obstructive fallacy, the use of negroes in conjunction with white dancers, the replacement of an audience of snobs by a wide popular support are all part of Balanchine's articulate program. In the rehearsal classes at the School, these ideas are becoming crystallized and closer to production. In his first choreodrame, *Tom*, based on the Stowe novel of slavery in the South, E. E. Cummings has heroically theatricalized that serious historic situation. The spectacle as realized will be more pantomime than dancing, more speech than song, more myth than ritual—but on its way to a closer realization of an enlarged drama, popular in its deep sense.

To understand ballet enough to be able to dance it requires at least a similar attitude of patience and application on the part of a student, as learning how to play the piano. It is a highly technical and specialized form. Its exercises provide equilibrium to the body under unusual circumstances, speed in transitions, a constant fluidity, a capacity for moving in and through the air. There are those who are more fitted to be dancers than others, and some people naturally have an instinctive talent for theatrical dancing. Due to the half-considered reforms by Isadora Duncan, where with her characteristic fine indignation she insisted that everyone could dance, and to the exceeding dilettantism fostered by the central European systems, many young people feel that all they need is the will to do it. In one sense, everyone can dance. Over the next ten or fifteen years an excellent weapon for social solidarity would

be the revival or creation of group dances practised only for fun at occasions when people meet. But these dances, dependent for their effect on a spontaneous ease and simplicity in execution, have nothing to do with theatrical dancing. One reason that dancing has not been taken seriously by the majority of people interested in films and the theatre is that the performances of "groups" or "concert soloists," however intensely well-intentioned, seem thin and only in occasional spots impressive as display. The dance audience in New York and in America is potentially enormous. But they have learned over the last two years to demand a presupposed technique, as efficient as a good musician's or a good actor's.

Ballet is an amalgam. In its purity it is rigid, back-breaking and ridiculous. Even the standard of purity for our century, Fokine's *Sylphides*, is a romantic pastiche, based on lithographs of the mid-nineteenth century, embroidered with all sorts of sudden invention. For every decade, ballet changes. Massine has taken much from Wigman's arsenal. Balanchine's plastic stems from Golizovsky. But the skeleton underneath is strong enough, flexible and resilient enough to support any addition. Naturally a school is as necessary for theatrical dancing in America as it is in Russia. More so, for hitherto we have had none. Just as there are civic symphony orchestras supported by subscription in many cities, with allied conservatories, so can we have ballet schools and companies. The racial amalgam of America provides wonderful material for dancers. Many unusual indigenous combinations can enrich the stream. As for subject matter—the woods are full of it.

THE school founded last year in New York is naturally experimental and in a large sense transitional. It is supported by a few individuals until a large group can be interested. It would be at the present moment disastrous to ally such an undertaking to government funds, even if some appropriation were conceivably handy. The school is occupied in constructing a technical apparatus which will not be the property of any one choreographer. Any instructed or even any convinced person may have a hand at employing the troupe when it reaches a decent stage of perfection. Classes will be given in composition to encourage as many choreographers as can be developed. But ballet is primarily a form against self-expression. It is a controlled design by a designer who has immolated himself in the general pattern, thinking of himself only as each separate dancer in relation to every other dancer.

To consider ballet as necessarily always the toy of rich men or the private pleasure of czars is unwise. So, for some centuries, were orchestras and paintings. When a state is achieved that recognizes its obligation to its members as something more than a stop-

gap distraction, American dancers can afford to learn at state-endowed schools, but not till then.

The last paragraph of a suggestive article by Harry Elion in the September number of NEW THEATRE embodies a major fallacy:

"The workers' dance took over a great deal of the bourgeois technique. In fact most of the leaders in the dance were trained to be bourgeois performers. The workers' dance must free itself from this influence and create a dance form that is expressive of the workers' needs. This form will come as a result of the revolutionary content, providing the dancers free themselves from the idea that all that has to be done is to give the bourgeois dance working class content."

Somewhere Marx has said that revolutions are caused by the profoundest conservatives, those people who wish to conserve the best of those human properties which they have gained and which they are in extreme peril of losing. The government established by these revolutionaries, as in the case of the Soviet Union, is the most conservative, in the best sense, that exists in the world. The form of theatrical dancing, hitherto aristocratic and bourgeois, will change less than it will be amplified. Its most important part, its base, will not be discarded any more than Shostakovitch discarded the form of opera. The workers need a demonstrated subject matter, a dramatized, legible spectacle, far more than they need a new form for its expression. A form is only a frame and a medium, call it feudal, bourgeois or proletarian. It will be a signal service to the revolution if choreographers can give working class content to the preceding form. If that is done, it will no longer be bourgeois but revolutionary.

A Note in Reply

"A form," writes Lincoln Kirstein, "is only a frame and a medium, call it feudal, bourgeois or proletarian." However, neither a frame nor a medium can be used indiscriminately. It is not sufficient to leave the question of form at this point. There are quite a variety of dance forms. These are used by dancers according to the particular school of dancing a group happens to adopt. Revolutionary dance content implies the use of class conflict themes. To express the full meaning of such themes and to allow for its full development as is implied in the presence of conflict presupposes a form that is *structurally dramatic*. I quite agree that the history of the dance furnishes sufficient examples of dramatic forms. But these must be selected and developed to a higher level while static forms must be discarded. The ballet in its early stages was highly dramatic. It later degenerated along with other forms, during the period of bourgeois decline, and salvaged its static features only. Revolutionary content can again revitalize its dramatic or dynamic features. This principle of selection must be applied to all dance forms.

HARRY ELION.

The Theatre Collective

By JACK SHAPIRO

TWO years ago, on the initiative of the Workers' Laboratory Theatre, the Theatre Collective was organized. It is as yet the only stationary theatre in the New York section of the League of Workers' Theatres. And people are asking: What's the Collective doing? . . . Are they ever going to do anything?

The answer to the first question lies in the two years' struggle behind the Collective. Those two years have borne little fruit observable to the outsider, but they have not been wasted. They represent long months of groping and fighting to find a clear direction for the Collective and to find ourselves in it.

The original purpose of the Collective was to produce full-length plays immediately, with amateur or partly professional casts drawn from the membership, under the best directors available. Personalities, tendencies, and motivations pushed and pulled against each other in energetic confusion. Gradually these heterogeneous elements were sifted by experience and conflict. It became clear that the first requisite was clarity and unity of artistic understanding and integrity of purpose.

The Collective found itself in June of this year. It sat down and took stock of itself and discovered these things which it had been suspecting. It had no plays and no sources from which to draw them. The good revolutionary scripts by mature writers would not be available to the Collective on its amateur basis. It had tried to write one play of its own collectively, without much success. Even if it had suitable plays, it had no stable company, no director. It still had in its leadership the people who had been

of real value from the first, and it had a studio of forty young people who had been working under professional direction for months. Among these young people there was some talent and an awakening viewpoint about the revolutionary theatre, a dimly stirring sense of responsibility toward it. The Collective faced the fact that in spite of its productions of "1931" and *Marion Models, Inc.*, it had no theatre. It had, however, in its hands the key to one.

"Is the Collective ever going to do anything?" This question may now be answered with a restrained but confident *yes*. The Collective is doing something now. It is building a theatre.

From its students of last spring the most promising will be chosen and to them a limited number of applicants will be added. These people will be involved in the following program:

Work for Actors

Acting technique . . . psychological, physical, vocal. Technical classes; rehearsal classes.

Work for Playwrights

Beginners . . . Advanced writers . . . Discussion groups, individual critical conference, required attendance at acting and directing groups, trial of intermediate and finished work with the acting group.

Work for Directors

Discussion groups, required participation in the acting groups, practical work on scripts.

Work for Designers and Technicians

Discussion groups, practical shop work on definite problems and jobs, required attendance at directors' and playwrights' groups.

Work for Everybody

Training in revolutionary theory and practice, in correlation with the theatric work, in specialized classes, in direct contact with mass activity at given times.

A fairly comprehensive program. But one thing which the Collective has learned is that the best projects on paper mean nothing without the right people to put them into operation, and the "right people" means people who combine at least the elements of political education with the most advanced theatre experience.

Mary Virginia Farmer, a member of the Group Theatre from its inception in 1931, has withdrawn from her acting life in the professional theatre to direct the entire training program of the Collective, in the realization that the revolutionary theatre holds the only hope for genuine theatre in America. As the faculty for the Actors' and Directors' sections the following of the Group (serving, of course, on a part time schedule) are announced: Lee Strasberg, Morris Carnovsky, Cheryl Crawford, Sanford Meisner, and Lewis Leverette. Elise Reimer-Kelly will direct the voice work. The Playwrights' section will be led by Philip Barber.

The technical method in use in the studio last spring was an application of the methods in use in the Group Theatre, methods based upon the realistic system of Stanislavsky. In its technical growth the Collective will make use of the best methods which the younger Russian theatres have developed.

The problem facing the Theatre Collective is important not only as a single manifestation but as representative of the main problem of the revolutionary theatre movement. That problem is to make use of every truth and aid available from the old theatre, but in a new way—to say new things. We must begin from the very roots of both theory and practice. The greatest requirement, after the necessary intellectual clarity has been arrived at, is patience—that patience which is at the root of all craft integrity. This is more especially true, of course, for the stationary theatre such as the Collective, which aims to build a permanent professional company and theatre organization. The theatres of action can and must move more quickly. They are the advance skirmishers of the revolutionary theatre. But the role of the stationary theatre is not only instigation but also interpretation. To develop that power requires not only insight, but wide education, diligence, time, patience. The reward for the group itself and for the whole revolutionary movement, in submitting to that discipline lies in this: that when it speaks, such a theatre will speak with authority, authenticity, and effectiveness.

Although we heartily endorse the Theatre Collective's program to establish a permanent company on a high technical and artistic plane, we do not feel that any revolutionary theatre group can at this critical hour plan to withdraw from actual work on the revolutionary theatre front. Although the Collective is necessarily a different type of theatre than the Workers' Laboratory Theatre of Action, this does not mean that the Collective can leave *all* the work of playing before mass organizations, at strike rallies, etc., to other workers' theatres. We urge that the Studio work of the Collective include short revolutionary plays and skits for public performances.

—THE EDITORS.



Studio Work from *Aria Da Capo in Red*

Theatre Collective



Studio Work from *Aria Da Capo in Red*

Theatre Collective

Nebuchadnezzar by the Yard

By ROBERT FORSYTHE

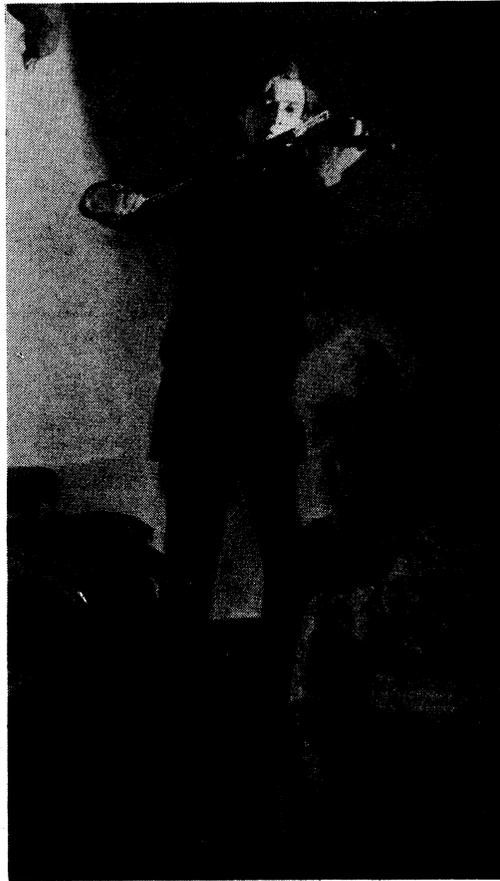
IF AMERICANS can be said to be pre-eminent in any field of the arts, I should say it was in the field of humor. The fact that we are lacking in satire is merely a way of saying that we are not versed in political realities, but in humor, where there is no necessity for anything but the incongruities and exaggerations and under-statements of human actions, we are supreme. This is particularly true in the motion picture.

From the time of the Keystone Cops and Mabel Normand and the early Charlie Chaplin, there has been a steady procession of comedians and an unending output of films which were humorous in varying degrees. I still remember the war comedies of Wallace Beery and Raymond Hatton with pleasure. My admiration for Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton was always well under control but I still have an ache in my heart where Harry Langdon used to rest. There were such minor figures as Raymond Griffith and Douglas McLean who can be remembered now as the forerunners of what may be termed the present Hollywood vogue.

That vogue, if I am any judge of trends, is likely to lead to excesses not known even in the pie throwing days. Frank Capra, in a recent interview, explained his choice of Clark Gable for the male lead in *It Happened One Night* by saying that he didn't want Robert Montgomery for the part because he had been doing similar roles and would for that reason be no treat to his regular audiences. Gable as a comedian would be something to wonder about. I mention this because I am on the point of describing *It Happened One Night* as the film responsible for the new screen humor and I may be doing Montgomery out of an honor belonging to him.

What Capra did in *It Happened One Night* was build up a steadily comic film by focussing on several unimportant but very human incidents and wringing them dry. The scene where Gable displays his technique of thumbing himself a ride has been pointed to as a high spot of the year but in my mind the creek-wading sequence has been the influence which has affected all later films. Gable carries Colbert across the creek and boasts of his father as he goes. It has about it a high quality of irrelevancy. There is no sense to it, it does not belong in the progress of the play, but by the very fact of its indirection and its incongruity it manages to become highly amusing.

In *The Thin Man*, W. S. Van Dyke carries it forward. Both William Powell and Myrna Loy specialize in throwing lines away, in dropping them carelessly as they



Still from *Petersburg Nights*

course about the scene. Often they have no connection at all with the business at hand. Clarence Brown was not long in seeing which way the winds were blowing and in *Chained* he has Joan Crawford and Clark Gable going through sequences which resemble in tone the feeling of *It Happened One Night*. The swimming pool interlude in *Chained* is a counterpart of the creek-wading scene in the former film. Van Dyke continues the fashion in *Hideout* in which the irrelevancy is confined not so particularly to the dialog as it is to the action. The scenes on the farm in which Robert Montgomery as the hiding gangster comes for the first time in contact with such unbelievable actualities as cows and rabbits and chickens have nothing whatever to do with the main theme of the film but are in many ways the most entertaining part of it. However, Van Dyke, remembering the success of the dinner table scene in *The Thin Man*, repeats it in *Hideout*. The kindly farmer and his wife and daughter are not aware that Mr. Montgomery's visitors are cops come to take him off to the *jusgado*. The conversation is very elliptical and genuinely amusing. What the visitors are talking about

and what the farming people are talking about fits in perfectly enough but means entirely different things. Again there is the spectacle of irrelevancy assuming major proportions.

THE danger of it is the ease with which it can be done. Straight comedy of the type of *Once in a Lifetime* or *She Loves Me Not* (I refer in both cases to the stage versions) is hard to do. But the faculty of getting laughs from conversation which has nothing to do with the case is so simple that I fear we are going to be swamped with it. The first time you see it cropping up in a Laurel and Hardy comedy you will know that the deluge is upon us. Anybody at all can write it by the yard. As for example: the hero and heroine are sitting in a swing and the hero begins for no reason whatever:

"Nebuchadnezzar must have been pretty surprised when he saw that handwriting?"

"What handwriting?"

"The handwriting on the wall."

"Oh, I don't know."

"You mean to say old Nebuchadnezzar wasn't the greatest handwriting see-er we ever had?"

"Oh, I don't know...."

"I suppose you think your Uncle Bim's a better handwriting see-er than old Nebuchadnezzar?"

"Uncle Bim's a pretty good handwriting see-er."

"Listen, sweetheart, there never was a handwriting on-the-wall-see-er who could see handwriting like old Nebuchadnezzar. Do you believe that or do I dump you out of the swing...?"

This can go on for hours and undoubtedly will go on just as soon as the writers in the dog houses at Hollywood become aware of the box office receipts for the new polite comedies. When I mentioned Raymond Griffith and Douglas McLean I meant that they represented polite comedy in the days when the chase was still the approved method of ending a picture. I can still recall a comedy in which one or the other of the gentlemen represented a character much like the Prince of Wales at the launching of a ship. He smashes a bottle against the prow, the ship slides down the ways and disappears forever under the waves. It was as near to satire as anything we ever get in American films.

As I say the trouble with the irrelevant type of humor is that it is too easy to do and opens the doors for the insensitive



Still from *Petersburg Nights*

gentlemen who feel they are humorists and prove it by repeating variations of something which might at one time have been funny. You will remember the flood of smart cracks of the "Don't make me laugh; my lips crack" and "you win the fur-lined cuspidor" type. Most Broadway humor consists of variations on a theme and the feebleness of the comedy is only surpassed by the smugness of the comedians. Radio humor is even worse, for the paucity of material is naturally so pronounced that the gag men are compelled to resort to plots. Jimmie Durante, for example, will be transported by ether to Africa and the humor will come from his application of typically crass Pantages gags to the simpler relations of the natives. The incongruity of this is supposed to be hilarious but it is in most cases only painful.

THE Russians have a fully developed satiric sense and the success of *The Marionettes* was an indication of something or other but the barrier of language is great and it is doubtful if a film depending for its laughs upon English titles can be entirely satisfactory. Humor is certainly a subtle thing, if it is humor at all, and it is hardly likely that the full flavor of a situation can be brought across by translation. However, the pantomimic skill of the Soviet actors is highly developed and a sequence in *Petersburg Nights* made me feel that there might be more coming than I anticipate. I refer to the scene where the famous Italian violin virtuoso turns out to be a false alarm. As he begins to play you feel that it is merely a poor depiction of an actor who is going through the motions of playing while somebody else is actually doing it. You rather imagine that you are supposed to accept this as a natural limitation of the screen. The music sounds awful but you are not fully in on the joke until you are shown the man's feet and legs. He is rising on his toes in the fatuous manner of violinists the world over drawing "soul" from their bows and suddenly you are confirmed in your suspicion that the gentleman is a fake. It builds up in the most natural way and is in many respects the high point of a remarkable film.

If I worry for fear the new comic approach in pictures may be overdone, I can't help being hopeful that it will be such a success that Hollywood will forget general ideas entirely. The films I have mentioned might as well have been made on Mars for all the effect they have on modern thought and they are a relief from the ponderous productions which misinterpreted life in such a way that they were not only untrue but vicious. So long as Hollywood makes money from its new polite comedies (in truth, they are often hard-boiled comedies), they are not likely to bother so much with thought, which is always painful to them. As an optimist, I try hard to see good in everything.

Judgment Day

By BEN BLAKE

Judgment Day. A melodrama by Elmer Rice. Staged by the author. Setting by Aline Bernstein. At the Belasco Theatre, New York.

IN his latest play Elmer Rice has taken one step forward and two steps backward. And the step forward is a mighty slight one.

Judgment Day is an exciting melodrama inspired by a tremendously dramatic and important event—the Reichstag fire trial. An attempted assassination of the dictator of a "Slavic country in southeastern Europe" constitutes the art of provocation here, and there are other variations from the actual circumstances of the Reichstag trial. But it is clear from many clever details that the Dictator Vesnic stands for Hitler, his Minister of Culture and Enlightenment, General Rakovski, for Goering, the doped homosexual provocateur Schneider for Van der Lubbe, and the National Party for the Nazis. Rice has done a remarkable job in capturing the spirit of the greatest frame-up in recent history. He shows how the fascists stop at nothing to attain their brutal ends. And thus *Judgment Day* fulfills a certain function in convincing sections of the middle class (those that can still afford the price scale of the Belasco Theatre) how tyrannical and unscrupulous and bloody is the fascism of Hitler.

The play, though it abounds in some of the feeblest of traditional hokum, is generally well acted and well staged. The company plays together well, in the spirit of a true ensemble, with no hogging. No one will soon forget the pathological Schneider (Van der Lubbe)—or the sinister General Rakovski (Goering), whose first appearance is greeted with the laughter of ridicule by the audience, but whose terrible brutality very soon makes an ominous, deadly serious impression. The five judges of the court, each carefully and distinctly individualized, are vividly portrayed, as are the stool-pigeon waiter, the opera singer, and a host of other characters. It is the characters of the two defendants that are weak—and here the fault is chiefly in the author's conception.

For in *Judgment Day* Rice is again the blind, idealistic liberal of the pre-*We-the-People* period. His treatment of a vitally important subject is very superficial, both socially and artistically. And it is precisely his politically liberal attitude that has contributed most to the artistic weakness of the play. For its result has been that Rice, in his "broadness," has not presented the real issues and forces involved, has not recreated some of the most important of the real protagonists, and thus has not pictured the real drama in its truly gigantic proportions. For

all that the play indicates, the fight against fascism is a fight between a few individuals who happen to be lovers of liberty and democracy against a few individuals who happen to be cruel and tyrannical. The leaders of the anti-fascist forces, George Khitov and Lydia Kuman (of the "People's Party"), are the pettiest caricatures of the heroic revolutionists Dimitroff and the thousands of "little Dimitroffs" who are fighting fascism at the risk of their lives in Germany today. The pitiful Lydia, who does-it-all-for-the-sake-of-her-revolutionary-husband, weakens the play greatly, as does to a lesser extent the carefree, collegiate Khitov. Had they been portrayed with fidelity to real life as representatives of the definite social forces and classes that are the leading and irreconcilable foes of fascism—had the voice of the working class of the world been heard in this play—the drama would have taken on added statute. As it stands, the true hero of the play is a liberal judge, half an Abe Lincoln and half a Brandeis, who refuses to be terrorized into agreeing to a verdict of guilty. This is the type of person Rice presents as the key men in the fight against fascism!

ELMER RICE has gone backward. That he is concerned with contemporary social forces, his selection of themes continues to show. But *Judgment Day*, a play which accomplishes the feat of being anti-fascist without being revolutionary or even the least bit radical, is a recession from the social understanding—and its artistic expression—that marked *We the People*, in which he showed convincingly that the same sort of frame-ups exist under the very "liberty" and "democracy" (of capitalism) which he now opposes to fascist tyranny.

Elmer Rice remains a provoking figure in the contemporary theatre. Artistically and temperamentally equipped to become a major playwright, he continues to muddle along without coming to grips with the fundamentals of the themes which attract him. *We the People* was a promise. But *Judgment Day* indicates that the time many of us look forward to has not yet come.

It seems plain that Rice conceives of his audience mainly as the middle class, and that he still accepts the high-priced Broadway scheme of things as the most practical form of producing. But the working class is also interested in his plays, even when weakly treated as in *Judgment Day*.

A permanent company staging social plays at low prices would be in a position to make important contributions to the American theatre and to American life. Elmer Rice is in a position to organize such a company. When will he do so?

Drama in Dixie

By MOLLY DAY THACHER

[These are notes on all I saw in thirty-five hundred miles of the South that could be construed as theatre. The trip was not inclusive, but it was more than representative since the most developed forms, the University of North Carolina Playmakers and the Summer Theatre at Abingdon, are not duplicated below the Mason-Dixon Line. This is not written to point at the artistic poverty of the section, but to uncover, as a study of the kind and quality of a theatre can, the social forces out of which it erupts. Analogies in other sections are plain.]

NEW YORK CITY: The League of Workers' Theatres, with approximately 375 affiliated groups and 5,000 individuals, lists only two workers' theatres in the deep South, one in Texas, one in New Orleans . . . "The terror . . . The low cultural level . . ."

Abingdon, Va.: The Barter (Co-operative) Theatre with a company of New York actors, functions like any summer theatre in the North. Its claims to publicity derive from its location and audience.

The company live in stately colonial halls abandoned by higher education when the local bank was trapped by the crisis. They have rescued from disuse a pleasant and serviceable theatre where Jo Jefferson once played, and which was left empty by a much earlier recession of culture. To the generations now living in this community, theatre-going is an alien practice. And since the middle class and farm and mountain people lost heavily in the bank closing, farm produce is accepted instead of cash, for admission to plays. One piglet, eight tickets.

What is offered to this audience, new to the theatre, newly and deeply involved in a crisis whose nature it does not yet understand? Cute comedies of the urban upper crust like *Paris Bound*, *He Knew Dillinger*, a new farce comedy, etc. These are the contributions of "the only summer stock company south of New Jersey."

Chapel Hill, N. C.: The Playmakers (under the grim auspices of State government by power and tobacco interests) is the outstanding university theatre of the South. As the playwrights of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin turned from English plays and consciously tuned their ears to Irish speech and melody, Professor Koch has set his students to combing the Carolinas for stage material. And they have found the mountain people and the Negroes rich in stories and types and language. Putting these into plays, mostly one-act, they have toured through the South, introducing in many places a comparatively high (though conventional) standard of dramatics, and the idea that the home ground could yield theatrical stuff. This is the tutelage from which Paul Green emerged, the sort of impulse which, with a

much sharper attack, led to the writing of *Tobacco Road*.

As far as it goes, this is progress. But this is almost as far as it does go. Its weakness, and that of similar theatres, is contained in its first approach which builds on the educational and social gap between the authors and the people they write about. It has led to an unformulated, probably unconscious, feeling of superiority; a "studying" of "types" which notes them, however sympathetically, as quaint; an esthetic appreciation of phrases old in the mother tongue, of folk customs deliciously anachronistic. A real art cannot grow down. If this theatre is not to stale, and fall into mannerisms now that its first work is done, it must step down from its note-taking and discover its own place in the life it sets out to describe.

If the playwrights would stage the drama of a university twisted and dominated by industrialists, of professors underpaid and strained by a very literal speed-up, they would give themselves as artists a more honest and a very revealing job. And they might arrive at a real direction for talents bred in the liberal arts tradition.

Strike Song, by J. O. and Lorretto Carol Bailey, is a first groping toward a new perspective. It is based on the Gastonia strike, and presented sufficient historical truth to draw fire from the manufacturers' *Textile Bulletin*. But the authors "did not mean to write a strike play, primarily." They "were more interested in the *people*." (First the interest in the "folk" that is the Playmaker tradition; second the authors' gravitation to material that is commandingly dramatic.) What happened? The material, simply in human terms, is too strong for the accustomed folksy treatment. It is possible to write about life and love, not greatly but in a certain sense satisfactorily, and keep them within the frame of a local color picture, removed, naive, touching, romantic. But when one deals with workers turned out of their company homes, when one must show their second makeshift homes, the union tents, being destroyed by a mob, there is a raw contemporaneity about the fact that does not tolerate detachment. The play becomes a fight between the authors' training and their material. They show skill in the rich, full, representation of the characteristics, the speech, the casual life of the mill people, and the inbred religiosity which confused the strike issues. The material pulls toward stronger situations, demands fuller humanity and maturity, clearer understanding of what the issues are. If next time the authors will let it have its way, it may teach them these things.

CONCORD, N. C.: The Temple is frankly a theatre. When Willie Laurel Olive (who had a "call from God" at a tender age) preaches the Four Square Gospel to the mill workers of Concord and Kannapolis, she stands on a stage. Draped, lush curtains are painted inside either pillar of the proscenium, and real curtains, scarlet, pull between them. The permanent backdrop is a gay seascape with dancing waves like an illustration in a children's book. Against it hangs a cross of red electric lights. The walls of the hall are decorated by the local sign painter, with scenes, labeled for purposes of identification, "Valley Jordan," "Tomb of Rachel," "Garden of Gethsemane." In the Valley Jordan are pale pigs and camels that bulge like sheep. Rootless palms flourish in all the scenes, and separating them are pillars highlighted with a fiery glow.

Willie Laurel stands in a white robe and preaches the second coming of Christ, a stern and vengeful Christ riding to condemn the transgressors. If you follow her, you may join the procession, ride with the saints when they sweep down on white horses! (The babies whimper, and their mothers, hanging on the picture of the glory and the prickly thought of hell fire, hush them abstractedly.) Now on the stage the very Bible stories that the Preacher tells are enacted. The bearded prophets prophesy and fast, the fiery furnace glows with colored flares, or a modern home crashes to catastrophe in Godlessness.

(The Preacher or her assistant plans the play, explains it to the workers who are to take part. They play without rehearsal: "It seems like the Lawd helps them with they parts.")

The Code wage in Southern mills is \$12. ("The actual wage average is \$10.39 a week."—*New York Post*, Sept. 10, 1934.) A mill worker does not take vacations or pleasure excursions nor go often to the movies; nor, after he is seventeen or so, has he much energy for sports. The enforced speed tightens nerves. It makes a woman old at twenty-five and gives a man tense lines around his mouth. It sinks and dulls their eyes until only a lightning crash can kindle them. The Temple meetings are something like that—sharp and exciting, with colors alien to the mill. Here is a promise to return to and return to, a promise that another life is coming in which one will be somehow justified; which will give one rest, glory, unformulated ease from the continuing strain; milk and honey, enough to fill one; ease from the pressure of needs and hungers denied one's life long.

They sing and cry with a bitter sort of hysteria and abandon their coins to the collection box.

Here is an institution which the mill owners (all that exists exists by their permission) never molest.

Charlotte, N. C.: A seedy little stock company has pitched its tent down the block from its rival, the revivalist.

This week: *The Family Sap*.

Next week: *East Lynne*.

Coming: *A Merchant of Venice*.

DECATUR, Ala.: A revival tent spreads its military khaki top over four hundred or so citizens from the polite side of the class and color lines. They murmur to each other and stir the heavy heat with cardboard fans which bear on one side the compliments of the Decatur Marble Works and on the other a highly colored picture of Jesus. Brother Rogers leads the choir of summer frocks in the verses of smug hymns. The whole congregation with surprisingly forced and unmelodic voices repeat the chorus.

This is not precisely theatre. Still a revivalist who can damn it with all the voice tricks of the old-school actor, is a fair substitute. And there are other elements of theatre. The services, extending some sixty nights and reinforced by women's prayer meetings in the day time, wind up in orgies of self-denunciation and "salvation." The half-ritualistic character of this formula is indicated by the drawled observation of a lad:

"Mostly the same folks gets saved ev'y yeah."

There are the beginnings of characterizations. An old local citizen choruses sagely from the Mourners' Bench, "Amen," "That's right, Brother." Brother Rogers plays an Edgar Guest sort of informality to the evangelist's exaltation. He is cheer leader and promoter of the show, privileged to interrupt the flow of the sermon with homely cracks that relieve its passionate intensity. Brother Powell is the star. He looks like one. He plays a troubled leader, deeply concerned in winning these Decatur souls from drink and bridge and parking-in-sin on the highways. A man willing to offer the tale of his own debauched past to lead others after him to salvation. His dark eyes dilate at the congregation (70 per cent women). He croons,

"I'm not a married man, but I hope some day to be."

There are elements here that point back anachronistically to primitive religious-theatrical ceremonies. A little less Anglo-Saxon inhibition, and the chief characters might put on masks and dance, as well as sing, and pray and re-interpret tribal stories. But the theme of this drama lacks the innocence of primitive propitiations.

"If you women would spend less time on bridge and civic affairs, and more time at your home altars, this country would be a fairer place! If you complain of corruption in the Legislature of this State, I say to you, go back to your homes and raise men who will be pure and honest."

It is shudderingly close to the oratory of another thoroughly troubled leader who is screaming for *kinder* (whom he wants for soldiering), *kuche* (though he cannot answer the plain demands of hunger), and *kirche* (because in Germany too, the church can serve to support the tottering order).

This stuff works like a more corrupt theatre: that which serves the surviving bourgeoisie as an escape, dulls their critical sense by congratulating them on their own righteousness, confirms the flattery by petty criticisms of their behaviour within the order that is, reassuring them, so, that it is an order marked for continuance.

"Let us thank God for the homes from which we have come tonight."

In Huntsville across the Tennessee River, strikers and their families turned out of company houses are lying down for the night in the woods.

THE *Black Belt, Ala.*: The home of a Negro share-cropper family. We sit on the porch after supper. The porch tunnels through the frame house, dividing the two bare, clean rooms. The oil lamp gleams yellowly from the floor too near the twisting feet of the six-year-old. (They say he has been backward since the mob beat him in the terror four years ago when his father was helping organize the union.) The four chairs have been carried out for the older people: the tired father, the warm, soft-spoken grandmother, two women neighbors—comrades. The rest of us sit in front on the floor and steps with the children sprawling among us. We sing through the *Red Song Book* that the girl, Ruby, brought back from New York. Jane leads the second part vigorously. She is thirteen, heavy like a farm woman, leader of a Pioneer troop. Deek and the other boys give live support, sweet or deep as they sing. There is dark around us, soft air, trees rising dark against a sky full of stars.

"Wave, scarlet banner, triumphantly!"

The light Italian air, accented by warm husky voices that give it at the first singing their own harmonies, has depth, joy of singing, revolutionary affirmation.

Later they relax into old spirituals—beauty in the voices, a savoring of old harmonies, care in the singing, but the fervor replaced by a relish of something familiar—and foolish.

Suddenly—and here begins the truest theatre I have seen in the South—Jane swings up to her knees, throws her hands

above her head in imitation of prayer-meeting ecstasy.

"I praise and testify that I am glad to be here!"

The younger people giggle.

"Oh, Brothers and Sisters, I praise and testify that my back was achin' me, an' my feet was achin' me, but, praise the Lawd, I come anyhow!"

"Amen, Sister!"

"Praise the Lawd!"

(The pale evangelist of Decatur would have to improvise a special hell for these irreverences.)

Ruby picks up the mockery, "Oh, mah Billy was sick like to die, but ol' Mis' Harn, she brought him some chicken brof, an' the Lawd save him!"

"Mus' be the baby was hongry," says one of the women boldly from the back.

"Ruby, listen," shrieks Jane, breaking away from the scene for a minute, "while you was away, ol' Mis' Johnson made a speech in the union meetin'. She say— inflating her chest, 'Some people been usin' bad words, an' God is displeased.'"

Deek, his eyes dancing, "How come you know how God feel?"

Betty plays the old woman. "Brother, I know. I'se close to God!"

"Is that the truth, Sister Sniper?"

"That's the truth!"

"'En you ask God, an' you fin' out, what the Preacher done with the fund 'at the Share-croppers collected fo' the Scottsboro boys. 'Cause the most people 'round here has got the idea that he plain stole it."

The older people behind us on the chairs are shaking with laughter. Ruby calls her mother, "Come on, testify!"

"Praise the Lawd!"

Most of them are kneeling, laughing, swaying, stretching arms high, turning the hands, till the shadows on the wall vibrate and the sounds go out over the dark cotton patches and into the woods. Jane's knees thump the floor. They follow through the service. They sing, burlesquing unrestrainedly,

"We're down here, Lawd, dependin' on you!

We're down here, Lawd, dependin' on you!

We're down here, Lawd, dependin' on you!

An' we cain' do nothin' till you comes."

We all laugh again, but I say, "That's the thing in a nutshell. Let's write new words to it—

"Lord, we're through, dependin' on you—"

And Ruby,

"Cause we cain' wait, Lawd, till you comes."

Deek leads,

"We been shot down, dependin' on you—"

And all of us,

"We been shot down, dependin' on you,

We been shot down, dependin' on you,

An' we cain' wait, Lawd, till you comes!"

Why Make-Up?

By LEWIS LEVERETT



Helen Hayes "Making-up" for *Mary of Scotland*

ONE of the things that delights an actor when he first starts to act is "making-up." The idea of changing his face and head, and even his hands, strikes his imagination. He enjoys making himself look like someone else, just as he enjoys being someone else on the stage.

And what happens? Usually, the first chance he gets, he collects a lot of sticks of grease paint, some cold cream and rouge and a towel, and maybe some crepe hair, and sets to work to completely hide himself behind it. He slaps on several layers of grease paint, covers it up with half a can of powder, rouges his cheeks and lips mightily, and fringes it all with curly crepe hair.

It is true, he gets used to the materials, but it usually looks like nothing human. He discovers, or is told, that his make-up bears no relation to the part he is playing. So then his problem becomes: How to use the make-up materials in the right way? And at this point the actor should ask himself this question, "Why make-up?" because inherent in the answer is the method.

Obviously, making-up is not done for its own sake. It is part of the actor's technique for completely creating a character. It is a part of the visualization of the character; along with them, it must stem from the inner characterization, and be colored by the particular style of the play.

Suppose you, the actor, are to play Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. Now, you will not make up as you would for Bassanio in the same play.

"Of course not," you say. Well, why not? Because, first, Shylock is not a young man; second, he is a Jew, living at a time

when Jews were a segregated and despised race. Therefore his costume is set within certain historical limits. Also his physical (bodily) characterization is colored by those facts. He cannot stand up straight and face the world as though he were young and the equal of anyone else, as Bassanio can. Both of those things are obvious. But it is also true of the make-up that these facts must be the source material.

He is a Jew, verging on old age, living under given social conditions; he is an important figure, a money-lender who handles huge sums and enterprises; he is not a happy man, on the contrary, he has been forced against his own nature to become hard and merciless, embittered. All of these things must be seen in the make-up. If you merely make up as the traditional idea of a miserly Jew you will have as a result only a cliché, not the face of this particular character.



"Flutter the eyelids against vaseline on thumb and forefinger."

PERHAPS now you will say, "How am I to get this particular face instead of a cliché?" The answer is two-fold.

First, and this is true for every make-up, you must examine your own face and head, in order to decide which of your own features can be used more or less as they are, and which will either have to be altered or blotted out altogether. In the case of Shylock you might choose, we'll say, to keep only your cheek bones, your heavy eyebrows, your high forehead, your own big ears. Then, second, you must decide what other features you must add to these, such as a beard—the style of the beard would have to be determined, along with the costume, by the style of the period for Jews, modified by his age and your own feeling about the

character, perhaps a more semitic nose, done with putty; a wig—he would probably have thin, grayish hair, because of the many worried, even terror-stricken days and nights that all Jews were periodically subjected to then (as now in Germany); a basic complexion—pale, unhealthy, even rich Jews had to spend their lives in the city ghettos; wrinkles—these should not be indiscriminate, they should show not only age but suffering, bitterness, innate kindness.

In brief, there must be a reason for each facet of the make-up. All the reasons put together must equal the complete character. If that is true then and only then will the make-up complete the picture, only then will it be organic.

Whether after you have done these things you will have a good particularized make-up or not is dependent on whether you have created in your mind's eye a picture of the character which really does stem from a study of the play and its background, and the character's own background as indicated in the play. Innate talent naturally has a great deal to do with this. But study and work, and then more work are necessary regardless of how much or how little talent the actor has.

"But," the actor now says, "suppose I am to play Bassanio, and not Shylock. And suppose I am a fairly handsome and well set up young man. Then, if I let my hair grow very long and put on a suitable costume, won't I be alright with almost no make-up?"

The answer is "Decidedly no!" That is a belief held by many juveniles and ingenues and leading men and women, but it is merely an evasion of the acting problem, which is to create a character, not just to exhibit oneself.



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Photo by Valente

WINESBURG, OHIO

By LESTER GLASS

It is true that Bassanio is a handsome young man. But also he is rich; he is a young blood; his nature is romantic and shallow as compared to Shylock's; he despises Jews; he is not a good business man. In other words, he also is a very particular character. In order to play him and to know what he really looks like, the actor has, as in Shylock's case, to study the social background of the play, and Bassanio's particular background as indicated in the play. And here also the actor must choose those of his own features he wants to keep, and those which he wants to alter or blot out. The principal difference here is that it would probably not be necessary to add any features as was necessary in the case of Shylock.

Perhaps by this time it is clear that the purpose of making-up is to present visually, together with costume and physical characterization, a clear and distinct character to the audience.

IT IS impossible here to go into the more practical problems—what materials to use, what colors to combine, how to use effectively the planes of the face, etc., but here are a few suggestions of a general nature that may be of value to workers groups.

If you are playing in a large theatre or hall, your make-up must be clearly and strongly defined so that it will carry to the balconies or rear seats. On the other hand, if playing in a very small hall with the audience right on top of the actors and with little or no lighting equipment, it is still necessary to have the make-up clearly defined, but at the same time must remain subtle. If the make-up is in as bold lines as it should be for a large hall it will be distracting to the audience, and you will destroy the illusion you are trying to sustain.

There is an exception to this, however. And this is true for many Workers Theatre productions. If you are presenting a sketch involving known characters, say, Roosevelt and Hugh Johnson, then, whether in a large or small hall, the actors must use make-ups that are very definite, striking and on broad lines. In a small hall such a make-up would be very apparent, but in this case it wouldn't matter because the audience is mainly interested in being able to recognize the characters. The make-up in this case, you might say, must be out in the open.

A last word to Workers' Theatres. For many of the plays you will want to do make-up is not necessary. Don't use it unless you have to—but then do it well!

Although NEW THEATRE has no interest in drumming up any cosmetic manufacturer, we suggest that the Max Factor pamphlets on the art of make-up (which can be ordered free by writing Max Factor Products, Hollywood, California) be used by worker-actors as study manuals on make-up.

WINESBURG, OHIO. By Sherwood Anderson and Arthur Barton. Presented by Hedgerow Theatre, Rose Valley, Pa., under the direction of Jasper Deeter.

THE history of the little theatre movement is replete with isms, expressionism, stylism, psychological naturalism, etc. More often than not these isms are employed as means of escape from contemporary realities, as escapes from life. Hedgerow, in beautiful suburban Rose Valley, has not only physically escaped from the turbulent realities of the day, its repertoire is remarkable in its irrelevance to the problems of today. *Winesburg* is an attempt to recreate the "reality" of the Middle West of 1900. That Deeter fails to accomplish this is due, in part, to his method of production, and chiefly to the limitations of Anderson's script.

Deeter's "photographic realism" yields only authentic (?) costumes, faded wallpaper designs, hoop-skirts, and other superficial "realities" of 1900. But the hanging of President McKinley's picture in George's room, for example, contributes very little to an understanding of the motivations and inter-relationships of the Willard family and their neighbors.

The basic limitation, however, is Anderson's inadequate picture of the dull, flat, monotonous Middle West where he lived and grew to maturity. Winesburg is like Spoon River, peopled by drunkards, prostitutes, saloon-keepers, charlatans and sneaks. Its inhabitants, begrimed, featureless, grind out vapid lives, enlivened only by a walk to the drugstore, a visit to Ed Hanby's saloon, or the frame hotel with its new furniture just in from Grand Rapids. The whole town turns out for the funeral of the romantic drunkard, Windpeter Winters, who was killed by an unyielding railroad locomotive. Their lives are empty, vulgar. Sex plays a predominant role. But there is also spiritual frustration. From these grotesque, misshapen creatures spring immortal longings, they brood over unfulfilled desires. Beneath the meaningless surfaces, seethes a life of extraordinary violence and intensity. This submerged life is full of drama. But the longings, dreams, and aspirations end in futility and ruin. Desire is thwarted. Desire cannot overcome the inanity of life. Cast in a hostile environment, the individual goes down to defeat. Anderson has given us this picture before, vividly, imaginatively, in *Tar*, *A Story Teller's Story*, as also in *Dark Laughter*. But he has never explained it. Perhaps he has not understood it. Certainly, he has never suggested a rational way of struggle against these chaotic forces.

It is only fair to refer to Anderson's development within the last few years. The impact of the leftward movement of Ameri-

can intellectuals had its effect on Anderson, as it had on Dreiser, Kreymborg and others. But *Beyond Desire*, Anderson's attempt to explain the world in the light of his acceptance of Communism, betrays all too clearly his individual confusion, his half-hearted acknowledgment of the historic destiny of the American proletariat. His "better world" still remains the "good old days" before the monsters Industry, Invention, Machinery enslaved humanity. And now he has renounced his half-hearted revolutionary stand.

If one leaves the Hedgerow production of *Winesburg* wondering what it is all about, the confusion is the result of Anderson's superficial "realism." Preoccupation with sex, mystical ramblings, and unexplained hatred of industrialism as the curse of humankind, indicate an inability to probe beneath the surfaces. Anderson might have probed deeper to find the causes of the spiritual frustration of his Middle Westerners. He might have found it in the incongruities of the Pioneering movement, in the abortive westward onrush of developing capitalism, in the mushroom development of the typical Middle West town. A Marxian understanding of developing capitalism would have diverted his hostility from the Machine Age; he would not have become a philosophical Luddite wishing to destroy factories. He might have even sung of the revolutionary struggle to master hostile forces, to reshape environment. That he was not fated to do.

The Hedgerow cast struggled nobly to give a good presentation in the light of the restrictions of the script. Harry Sheppard, as the ever unsober town philosopher, was outstanding. Deeter's unquestioned ability as teacher and director should be put to better use. One would like to see this Hedgerow group in a play dealing more concretely with the fundamental forces which are shaking the world today.

ALTHOUGH the air is filled with talk of Fall plans, the last has not yet been said on the Summer theatres. A "Broadway" actor, now a Communist, sent us the following gem from a letter written by a former girl friend playing in one of the Summer theatres near Provincetown:

"Dear Mike:

"Fancy you a Communist! Up here where all is calm and peaceful it doesn't seem possible that an American boy like you would get mixed up with such stuff. . . . (a lot of talk of about 'getting ahead' follows). . . .

"I hate to ask you but can you lend me fifty cents for a few weeks? We only get paid \$1.50 more a week than our room and board, and I'm hard up for cigarette money. I know you'll do this for me Mike, as I can't draw ahead here."

Enough said!

From Palmer Raids to Vigilantes

By DAVID PLATT

"The film is the first art that originated in the bourgeois era. None of the other arts exhibit the bourgeois ideology as clearly as the movie."

—Bela Balasz.

IT is as impossible today to over-rate the fascist tendencies of the Hollywood film as it is to over-estimate the same tendencies in the ruling class of the United States, and yet we find film critics who, although they are acutely aware of the political reality, are hesitant and myopic when it comes to analysis of the same tendency when it is found on the screen.

No matter how much we may applaud the splendid technical and pyrotechnical achievements of the best workers in the movie industry, and the general mechanical excellence of the films turned out, all this has no more to do with the ultimate purpose of the movie industrialists than the extraordinary ability of certain well-trained Pennsylvania coal miners has to do with the aims of the coal barons whose business it is to mercilessly exploit their efficiency. The finished product, whether the material is coal, or auto, or a motion picture, is always produced and distributed in accordance with the established aims and needs of the ruling class. When it becomes necessary for that class to introduce fascist methods into the social organism in order to prolong its rule, you can be sure it will not rest until it has clarified and justified its position all along the line in literature, press, pulpit, school, radio, and movie.

In fascist Germany, for example, all provocative acts of violence, such as the recent cold-blooded massacre of storm troop leaders and the unsuccessful Nazi coup in Austria, were given ample justification in the National-Socialist cultural arena where, as in the Nazi film *S.A. Mann-Brand*, unregenerate Communists, Liberals, Catholics, Jews and others were symbolically slain by righteous storm troopers on the altar of God, country and pure Aryanism.

Unfortunately, however, for those in power, the increase of fascism means a corresponding increase in the forces opposed to fascism; their attempt therefore to justify terrorism and mass murder, especially in a medium like the movie where it is difficult to disguise for long the motive of the hand that guides the puppets on the screen, is not always successful. For instance, when *S.A. Mann-Brand* was shown in the proletarian sections of Berlin, the workers thunderously hailed just those scenes in the picture where the villainous "reds" attacked the Nazi marchers, indicating, as the German revolutionary playwright, Friedrich Wolff, re-

marked, that "the German proletarians have begun to understand this nationalist soothing syrup more clearly as a syrup proposed to them at a time when a stream of the revolutionary workers' blood is flowing in barracks of torture."

But terrorism and ruling class soothing syrup is not confined to Nazi Germany. It is visibly present today and has been richly evident in the past in "democratic" America.

A few weeks ago the Pacific Coast General Strike, and now the nation-wide textile strike, reveal the extent to which the American government will act to preserve the profits of plutocrats and plunderers. Here we see lawlessness and disorder on the side of law and order, vigilantes running riot under the protection of riot squads; and the same Catholic priesthood that has been conducting a purity campaign against "immoral" films, elected at the instigation of the Federal government to act as *mediators* (i.e., strike-breakers) in San Francisco, Minneapolis, Alabama, New England, etc.; thereby revealing the true reasons for the recent frenzied crusading activities of the churchmen.

To go back a few years to a period in American history that parallels the present intense anti-labor propaganda of the various cultural media of the bourgeoisie will increase enormously our insight of the potential temper of the motion picture (which has gained greatly in persuasiveness since the introduction of sound films).

It was some time in 1919 after a long series of nation-wide labor struggles and shortly after the notorious Palmer Raids against labor and liberal organizations, that the movie industry, true to its masters, followed with a loud pictorial cannonade against unionism and civil liberties. The dominant theme of the barrage at that time was that labor struggles and strikes were the result of outside agitation on the part of bearded and high-booted Bolsheviki in the pay of Russia, all of whom were sent to America specifically to foment riots and revolution. No film concluded without calling for a union of capital and labor against the common enemy—the vodka-guzzling, bomb-throwing Bolsheviki. In these films, all militants fighting for the right to organize and the right to live were, as they are today in Nazi films, lepers fit only for prison or deportation. In this way they were able to distort the aims and struggles of the labor movement of 1919-20.

Some of the 1919-20 films which we may soon see again (modernized and motorized, so to speak), were:

Volcano—Story of the Centralia case from the American Legion's point of view.

Right to Happiness—Story of a girl who loved humanity with a love so overwhelming that she knew not how to direct her deeds so she became a radical leader.

Americanism vs. Bolshevism—American labor and capital vs. "foreign" reds.

New Moon—An "exposure" of nationalization of women in the U.S.S.R.

Common Property—Contains the incident of an American trooper driving a gang of bearded Bolsheviki out of a village in Northern Russia at the point of a bayonet for nationalizing women.

Bullin' the Bolsheviki—"Tears veil of secret activities of Russian agitators in America. Visual proof that seeds of Bolshevism will not grow in contented soil."

Virtuous Men—Appeals for a united front of capital and labor against the professional agitator.

TODAY in America, the fascist germ that quietly slipped into the corpus of the Hollywood motion picture almost simultaneously with the coming into office of the Democratic Party, has been creeping into the heart of the movies, squeezing out drop by drop what little creative blood is left in that organ after so many years of constant pulsation in the interests of capital.

Each time you go to movie you find more evidence of this pernicious anemia, which can only be cured by a consciousness, on the part of those who attend movies, of the underlying causes and the designed effects of the malady, fortified by militant action against films like *S.A. Mann-Brand*, *No Greater Glory*, etc.; and by support of films made by and for the working class.

But for a long time after the Palmer Raids and continuing up to the first years of the crisis, it was thought that the more dread poisons were confined largely to newsreels and shorts.

There, representatives of government, church, university, big business, etc., would air on the screen their inane views on the tendencies of the age, deplore the immoralities of the time, decry the inroads of radicalism on the youth, and comment on the increasing need for weapons of "defense" while spiritedly protesting the sincerity of their talk about peace. The features that usually accompanied the featurttes were mostly the type of promising sex and sin drama whose tradition was later given more heat by the erotic incredulities of Mae West and her like. As Bela Balasz correctly points out, such films are being used today by the bourgeois film masters, not only to divert but also "to convert," through films wherein "love is portrayed as a power of nature that has nothing to do with social concerns or class contradictions." They also included sentimental tear-jerkers about mother-love

or country brought to a high pitch of upper class consciousness by *Four Sons* and *Pilgrimage*; much glorification of illegal banditry which culminated quite logically in the glorification of legal banditry, as in *House of Rothschild* and *Cavalcade*; an interminable number of detective-mystery-melodramas which "clarified" the exact relation of the "enemies of society," political, as well as criminal, to the "friends of society," the legal and extra-legal forces upholding the capitalist bureaucracy; films which today, more consciously than in the past since the crisis has increased the power and perspective of the guardians of law and order, tend also to "convert as well as divert," wherein we see "how a safe is cracked but not how it is filled," wherein we note about all "the worth and the meaning of private property." There were also periodical stabs at the Soviets side by side with the *What Price Glory* sez-you, sez-I method of recruiting into the Marine Corps, etc.

Up to *Gabriel Over the White House*, the American movie, profoundly rooted in the *status quo* of the Harding to Hoover administrations, was content to repeat the insanities of the so-called era of prosperity where *Hallelujah* was the nearest possible approach to the problems of slave-exploitation in the Black Belt. Where *Crowd* with its false stress on the masses rather than the masters as the enemy of mankind, was the closest analysis of misery in a metropolis. And Chaplin's comedies were most understanding of both the medium of the film and the society that forms his subject matter. But the coming of Roosevelt introduced into films, social analyses more in consonance with the trend of the ruling class which was struggling to maintain its authority over workers who were beginning to discover other ways out of their misery than *Hallelujah* and *Crowds*. It was Roosevelt's presence in the White House which started the Hollywood film industry off on a path which, though sidetracked every once in a while during the past year and a half to make way for Mae West, Bing Crosby and other luminaries, has now clearly regained its stride (with the help of the Legion of Decency) and is now moving rapidly in the direction originally headed—*toward fascism!* Since the crisis the capitalists, like the workers, have developed class-consciousness. Likewise, the Hollywood film has gained class-consciousness to a point where it is today able to express the will and determination of the bourgeoisie better and more satisfyingly than at any time in its history.

A LONG list of films, many of which bore unmistakable evidence of collaboration with the New Deal regime, followed *Gabriel Over the White House*. These were bound in most cases with some current issue in which the government wanted either to paci-

fy the unrest and discontent of the masses, or prepare their minds to accept even more intolerable "New Deal" working conditions.

There were:

Washington Merry-Go-Round. Suggests that the bonus marchers, the same ones who were driven out of Washington by bayonets and tear gas, came to the Capitol not to demonstrate for back wages due them, but to "panhandle easy money" from gullible citizens, and thereby fully justifying the murderous use of armed force against them. Later *Song of the Eagle* appeared with its shameless appeal to the war veterans, the same ones they treated so pleasantly in Washington, to organize themselves into fascist gangs against bootleggers and bolsheviks.

Gabriel Over the White House. Bears distinctly the imprint of F. D. Roosevelt's New Deal for bankers and munitions makers. *Gabriel* calls for the militarization of the unemployed in forced labor camps, increased armaments for war, and the immediate fascistization of government as a necessary measure against the masses. Now another film called *President Vanishes* is in process of production which no doubt will precede another long run of ruthless fascist measures against the working class.

Heroes for Sale. Declares that unemployment is the result of too much machinery, red agitation, heartless bosses, all of which can be overcome by the New Deal and the N.R.A.—that is, if the workers will really give the bosses an opportunity to do something for them.

Pilgrimage. Prepares gold star mothers for the day when they will have to give up more sons for the next world slaughter. Since then we have had *Cavalcade* with its glowing emphasis on the hope and promise of a peaceful life; and many similar films calling for the voluntary association of all classes regardless of strata whose combined strength will rectify and ultimately abolish all economic iniquity, as though the indignities of war, famine, fascism arise out of purely natural causes having nothing to do with capitalism.

Hell Below. A recruiting picture for the U. S. Navy as well as powerful propaganda for increased weapons of war to keep lasting peace. Incidentally Major General John A. Lejeune, then in command of the U. S. Marine Corps, signed an exclusive contract with M-G-M for the production of *Tell It to the Marines* on the ground that the film had immense recruiting value. This information comes from G. Hill, director of the picture, who was a captain in the U. S. Army during the world war and a member of the Marine Corps Reserves. *Come On, Marines* and *Here Comes the Navy* were also used quite extensively in America for recruiting and naval propaganda purposes.

Power and Glory. Glorification of a ruthless exploiter of labor. Power and glory for the giants of industry—blood and bullets for the wage workers. This was preceded and followed by a whole host of films singing the praises of telephone companies, banking interests, bus lines, railroad companies, oil companies, etc., all made with the assistance of the companies involved in the films.

Mad Game. Appeals to the American people to permit themselves to be finger-printed and their homes violated, supposedly as a precaution against crime but really as a means of attacking and deporting foreign-born workers; lobbying for the Dies Bill.

Golden Harvest. A violent distortion of struggle on the farm. The farmers provide the comedy and are represented as being lazy good-for-nothings who have to be forced to fight for better conditions, while their misleaders, who work hand in hand with wheat pit speculators, are portrayed as great heroes fighting a lost cause singlehandedly.

SINCE the above films were produced, distributed and filed away, the Legion of Decency with its campaign against sex and sin has made its auspicious appearance and with it has come a more powerful drive towards fascism. A glance at the titles of forthcoming films is enough to convince us of the changed tone and outlook of the Hollywood movie, an outlook which is duty bound to follow the line of the Roosevelt administration, and which will quickly avail itself of the minutest advance toward fascism. This ability to reflect the will of the ruling class is in evidence in the news-reels. Recent news-reels on the general and textile strikes seek to confuse and prejudice the unorganized masses against the strikers. It is now beginning to have a profound effect upon the feature pictures. In the following films nothing is left undone to convince the movie-fans that (1) without capitalism there can be no civilization; (2) without war there can be no glory; (3) without unemployment there can be no leisure class; (4) without exploitation of labor there can be no heroes of capital; (5) without navies there can be no peace for humanity; (6) without marines there can be no colonies for U. S. protection; (7) without international bankers there can be no successful wars and therefore no successful peace; (8) without rugged individualism there can be no progress; (9) devotion to the plough means prosperity for farmers, and so forth. These and other once potent ideas of the dominant class will be found in: *The Fountain, Earth Turns, No Greater Glory, World Moves On, Of Human Bondage, Modern Hero, The Key, Life of Vergie Winters, House of Rothschild, Viva Villa, Sorrell and Son, Our Daily Bread, Whom Gods Destroy, Merry Frinks, Friends of Mr. Sweeney, Little Man What Now, Clive of India, Scarlet Empress, Cardinal Richelieu, British Agent, One More River, President Vanishes, War Is Declared, Crusades, Life Returns, Here Comes the Navy, Come On Marines*, etc., ad infinitum.

"They attempt to form reality at a time when reality is already so distorted, falsified and forbidding that it begins to speak with its own language against producers, dramatists and directors," writes Friedrich Wolff, speaking of the German film propagandists, who are always equal to the occasion when affirmative ideological generalizations from mass murder and massacre are desired by the "fuehrer."

This is "a stale and ungrateful occupation," says Eisenstein in an open letter to the fascist Goebbels. "I firmly and most profoundly believe that the German working class will before long help you to rid yourself of this tiresome and unprofitable task."

Let the Hollywood master propagandists take a hint from *S. A. Mann-Brand* and the sober reflections of Eisenstein and F. Wolff, before letting loose a new bubonic plague of fascist films that may be turned completely against them by awakened moviegoers!

THE STAR SPANGLED DANCE

By BLANCHE EVAN

THE chauvinistic trend of the modern dance in this country burst forth with unmistakable clarity of intent this year. Down with foreign methods, foreign dance art, foreign-born dancers. Let themes, manner, music, even dance musicians be American. Just how many generations back the dancer's American ancestry must extend, has not been formulated—yet! (How many does Hitler ordain to qualify as a pure Aryan?)

The national modern dance movement has chosen as its spokesman the only so-called modern dance publication in America, the *Dance Observer*; "so-called" because this magazine makes plain its intention of supporting not the modern dance, but only the American manifestation of the modern dance. From cover to cover, the contents refer to the American dance, American theme, American manner, American music. It is even lamented that American modern dancers can't "buy American". In its anxiety to relate the work of the American modern dancer to America, we stumble across the most fantastic relationships.

For instance, in speaking of American theme, we read that the "oldest and most colorful strains in American life have been the most attractive as material—the Negro, the Indian, and the Jew!" And speaking of Jewish life in America, we are given a long list of Chassidic, Palestinian, and racial references, that have as much to do with America as the festival ceremonies of the Tibetan Lamas. Must the American dancer force the legitimacy of the "American" theme to this extent? Must she pick up a book on Indian lore, on Negro spirituals, or on Jewish religious rites if she is to dance America? The only relationship that an American dancer can truthfully establish between herself and these most "colorful" strains, lies, perhaps in this: that her ancestors robbed the Indians of their land, the Negroes continue to be enslaved on the pretext of racial inferiority, and the Jews are still subjected to anti-semitism.

But such an interpretation of America would be far from acceptable. The same article, referred to above, states very definitely that not only shall we dance the American theme, but also that we shall find our best material in the dead and forgotten past.

"Oddly enough", it continues, "all three (the Negro, Indian, and Jew) are only interesting when they act least in accordance with their times and surroundings. We visualize the Negro—open-mouthed, spread-fingered, feet shuffling to the spiritual he is singing; the Indian—rattle in one hand, pine-branch in the other, stamping in a breath-taking rhythm that unites him with

the earth and the elements; the Jew—flowing white beard, a prayer shawl and phylacteries, swaying while he intones his prayers. All three are still existent, yet already belong to the past. This is an ideal combination for the seeker of material for he can study the material when it is no longer agitated by the present." Back to the tranquil past! Back to the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Civil War, the War of 1898, the World War!

Who are our most representative "American-born" dancers? What have they danced about? Two of the latest programs of Humphrey-Weidman, and Graham, yield the titles: "Alcina Suite", "Dionysiaques", "Exhibition Piece", "Dithyrambic", "Ekstasis", "Primitive Mysteries . . . Hymn to the Virgin", etc. What, in their programs reveals America? But wait. We are told that "the manner more than the material would have to be relied upon to be American." What is happening to the ideal of the modern dance? To its prime motive of individuality? Why did it ever bother to revolt against the academicism of the ballet, if it is to be dragged back again into formulae of manner and mannerism?

Let us burst the last bubble of the national-dance war-cry, the native dancer, "American-born". Let us remember for purposes of clarification—and beautiful burlesque—that Picasso, the most typical of the modern French school in painting, was a *Spanish Jew!* Let us remember for purposes of safety, that the modern dance world is limited enough, and that confining it to the American-born would just about wipe it out of existence altogether.

What is left of the American this-and-that in the modern dance? It is obvious that the desire to be American and to express America is being used as a pretext to promote the idea of chauvinistic art—and for no other purpose. Since the modern dance has had its only significant developments in America and Germany, the insinuation is unmistakable: "Down with German methods, German dance art, artists, teachers."

Even the most American of American dancers or critics cannot deny that the pure modern dance in Germany had reached great heights of development while the "modern" dancers in America were still toying with bracelets in Oriental impressions. The new dance left homeless by Isadora's death, was picked up in Germany—not in America. Laban wove the cloth—and Wigman cut the pattern. But Laban and Wigman did not concentrate on their own national German characteristics; they went about with all the scientific and artistic fervor they could command, to clarify and to develop a universal

basis for the modern dance. And they did. The Wigman pedagogy remains one of the few we have in America to-day that attempts to drive to the universal roots of the modern dance, and not to encrust these roots with personal or national interpretations.

Nationalism and art are as incongruous as nationalism and science. The researches of Laban, the artistry of Wigman, the pedagogy of the Wigman method are not German, any more than the theories of Einstein are. The dance, because its body movement is a science and its expression an art, is universal. Accordingly the theoretical problems and their solution are also universal. The modern dance is not rooted in any soil. Its exponents in America are struggling with the same problems as those in Germany or in England: problems of space and time, composition, accompaniment, pedagogy, notation. These are problems that are fundamental to the art, and not indigenous to any geographical area.

It seems extremely probable that in a peaceful, unruffled epoch, an artist would be quite susceptible to both the local and the national color of life. Living in the Rockies of America, theme and manner would naturally not be the same as if he lived in a big industrial city; and they would certainly take on a different character if he went to live in and absorb the life of a foreign country—as the Frenchman Gauguin proved in his Tahitian venture. But in a world so filled with action, where life is not localized, but transmits itself through every vein of existence, not only does the local color lose itself in the national, but the national loses itself in the international, and that, in turn, in the universal. There are rhythms vibrating through the world which a sensitive artist cannot escape: the rhythms of a stark reality, of strife, conflict, change, of submission to destruction, or of the renewal of energy in the search for a better world. The rhythm travels to the far corners of the earth—its waves encompass the artists not only within an art, but within all the arts, and unite them in one powerful surge.

Let American modern dancers rid themselves of their escape in the past. Let them cease to seek and to study that "material . . . no longer agitated by the present." Let them abandon their "patriotic" isolation. Let them open their beings to the strength of the world rhythm. In the spirit of all true workers, let them take their German co-dancers by the hand, and strive together toward the fertile realm of the modern dance. [See editorial page 5.]

The Voice of the Audience

The Dance in Moscow

TO NEW THEATRE:

Everywhere a visitor looks in Moscow people are dancing. The young people gather in the parks of culture and rest and dance the old folk dances till their feet will no longer hold them. Their strong young bodies have an innate sense of rhythm. A director explains the steps to them once. Immediately they claim a partner and dance perfectly, beautifully. Six-year-old urchins sing and dance in the streets. Men and women from all over the Soviet Union make up a program for tourists. They don their colorful native costumes and dance hilariously the old dances created years ago by persecuted minorities.

While I was in Moscow there was an athletic demonstration in the Red Square. The last thing on the program was dancing which they called plastics. Actually it was ballet. However, the whole demonstration was to my amazed eyes a dance. Thirty thousand young people took part. All afternoon they marched in and out of the Red Square singing the inspiring Red Army song. Each group wore a different color combination, transforming the square into a mass of constantly moving color. Especially noticeable were the strong bodies of the girls. They were in direct contrast to the "dieted down" bodies of our own girls. In every city of the Soviet Union some such demonstration was taking place that day one hundred and sixty millions in all.

That is all there was approximating dance in Moscow this summer and it would seem that that plus the ballet done at the opera is all there is in winter. There is no modern dance. All attempts to create one are feeble and die. I talked to a young woman who was desperate about this situation. She is a dancer and feels that she has something to say with her medium, but she can not get the people interested. They know nothing of modern dancing and cling passionately to ballet. No modern dancers have taken their programs to Moscow. When I told people that I did not care for ballet they stared at me in amazement. It is startling that people who have the finest and most advanced theatre in the world should have practically no new dance. At the moment athletics seem to be taking the place of the dance. In the parks you often see a young man and woman doing acrobatic stunts for a very appreciative audience. Anna Sokolow, the leader of the Theatre Union Dancers, danced in the Park this summer. I had left but I am sure she was keenly received. Everywhere you feel the spirit of dance till you think a modern dance will just burst through because it cannot restrain itself any longer. Perhaps this will happen. There is so much material waiting to be used all over the country. The joy that some of our critics have been asking for from workers' dance groups in America is in all movement in Moscow. If we are ahead of them in dance form, they are ahead of us in dance spirit.

—MARYN MYERS.

Nijinsky

TO NEW THEATRE:

The review of "Nijinsky" by Lydia Nadejina, in the previous issue of NEW THEATRE must be regarded as an editorial oversight.

The review takes M. Nijinsky and his wife out of their environment and places them before us as two great, sorrowing individuals who were incidentally the victims of certain circumstances in their lives. The review, far from bringing out the true reactionary character of the book as a story of the glamour and adventure of the Imperial Ballet, of political intrigues that decided the fate of dancers, of the role of the church and the court



New Dance Group in New Theatre Skit
Eastern Theatre Festival, Sept. 21
Civic Repertory Theatre

in determining the character of the then contemporary dance, appeals in a very sentimental, school-girlish manner to "lovers of thrilling fiction, who will find in this book all the elements of an absorbing novel."

The book is clearly an idolization of the old Imperial School of the Ballet, written by a society girl who moved constantly in wealthy diplomatic circles, and for whom the "fulfillment of our dreams" was "the scent of a blossoming garden on a June night, moonlight, mysterious but so infinitely restful."

The entire story of the Imperial Ballet, and, later, of Diaghileff's Russian Ballet is enveloped in a web of intrigues of the aristocracy and of dancers in the Imperial School who, as mistresses of members of the court, played a determining role in many political questions.

Thus, speaking of one ballerina, (p. 11) Madame Nijinsky says, "Kshessinkaya was at home in all the intrigues of high politics too. But she did not want to be left out of the tours of the Imperial Ballet abroad. She quickly understood that the tours were not undertaken purely from artistic impulses, and that they had a far-reaching political significance, and served to bring a friendlier relationship between foreign countries and Russia much more quickly than any diplomatic strategems." Again on p. 73—"At this time (1909), the alliance between Russia and France was pending, and Count Fredericks made a special point of the fact that a visit of the Russian Ballet to France would strengthen the diplomatic and political relationships be-

tween the two countries." This fact, rather than a concern for the development of the art of dancing, resulted in the granting of a subsidy to Diaghileff's troupe.

Perhaps the outstanding lesson of this clearly anti-Soviet account—mourning for the days that used to be—is brought to our attention unwittingly, when the author describes Nijinsky's last dance before his interment in the asylum, "He took a few rolls of black and white velvet and made a big cross the length of the room. He stood at the head of it with open arms, a living cross himself. 'Now I will dance you the war, with its suffering, with its destruction, with its death. The war which you did not prevent and which you are also responsible for.' It was terrifying."

How well this proves our contention, that an artist, in order to be significant, must be in constant contact with life. Today, as in the days of Nijinsky's fame, a contact with life means contact with the class struggle. So long as Nijinsky was under the influence of the degenerate circle of aristocrats and bourgeois artists, led by Diaghileff, his dance creations remained in the realm of fantasy, the subject matter—love. It was only when this great dancer had at last become free of the insidious influence which finally undermined his mental health, that he began to see life in its true color and to reflect this in his dances.

It must be the role of the Workers' Dance League to analyze this question thoroughly and see that all our periodicals help raise the degree of participation in class struggle activities among our dancers. This makes it important that the NEW THEATRE editors be more selective in their material and omit in the future such reviews as *Nijinsky* since its tone, far from being helpful, is positively destructive to our work in that it regards the book from a bourgeois, art-for-art's sake point of view and presents an analysis which is completely opposed to the revolutionary character of NEW THEATRE.

NELL ANYON,
Educational Director,
Workers' Dance League.

From Havana

TO NEW THEATRE:

The subscriber of the present letter wants to tell you two things. The first, I am a reader of NEW THEATRE and therefore an admirer of it, and for that reason want to be a subscriber of NEW THEATRE and you will answer me about the subscription prices. The second is, I have been named Artistic Director of the "Art Revolutionary Theatre" of La Habana, Cuba, which will begin to work briefly. We want to know a list of plays that could be represented here. Also, we need prices and everything such as scenography and choreography details, and so forth. If it can be possible we want to get *Men and Masses*, *We the People* and *Scottsboro*.

We want to study the technique of the theatres of the past, adapting the best of the old to the service of the masses. We want also everything produced on the dance.

The degradation of the bourgeois theatre is accelerating in Cuba and all the world, and the need for a mass revolutionary theatre is intense.

We want to know the prices and everything about short plays (one-act). At the same time we need news about the Soviet theatre and Soviet dance.

Remember that we want to know everything about the workers' theatre because this is the most important art in Cuba today.

All that you can do about it will be appreciated by us.

Revolutionary greetings,
(Name withheld for obvious reasons.)

Building An Audience

By MARGARET LARKIN

THE stationary workers theatre, operating on a professional scale, is confronted with two major problems, the finding of suitable scripts, and the organization of a reasonably stable audience. The first question depends upon the second more than is generally recognized. The audience dictates what the playwright shall say on the stage much more clearly than readers dictate what novelists shall write, or listeners influence what musicians shall compose. A playwright does not aim his play at a vacuum; he writes it for a specific audience. Until the Theatre Union organized an audience of New York workers, playwrights who wanted to deal with social subjects had a practical choice; they had to compromise or palliate for the sake of the Broadway box office, or keep their plays in a trunk. Undoubtedly the most important contribution of the Theatre Union has been to point the way by which a workers theatre can support itself and insure a wide audience for revolutionary plays.

In organizing a stationary workers' theatre, it is supremely important to recognize the necessity of appealing to the masses, organized and unorganized. A theatre which appeals only to workers already class conscious and militant, and engaged in organized struggle, limits its usefulness. A workers theatre should serve as a means of drawing unorganized workers into militant struggle. The Theatre Union has consistently followed a united front and non-sectarian policy. There are people of differing political affiliations on its Advisory Board, its Executive Board, its business staff, and in its audience. Organized labor has used the Theatre Union plays as a means of bringing unorganized workers into unions—scores of workers joined the water front unions after seeing *Stevedore*, for instance. Such a theatre also draws in intellectuals and professional people interested in labor's struggles, middle class liberals, and general theatre goers.

In building its audience, the Theatre Union uses two methods, both adapted from Broadway's promotion methods, filling needs of a workers theatre. They are the benefit theatre party, and the individual subscription. Discounts amounting to about forty per cent are offered to organizations that buy blocks of seats and pay for them in advance. The Theatre Union offers a larger percentage, makes easier terms for payments, and offers a lower price scale than the Broadway theatres. Although benefit theatre parties were arranged by many womens clubs, schools, drama societies, and other groups of regular theatre patrons, the Theatre Union has concentrated on bringing workers groups to the theatre. Before the produc-

tion of *Peace on Earth* an energetic campaign was carried on among unions, workers' clubs, and other mass organizations, both "right" and "left", to acquaint them with the play, and with the plans for the new theatre. Theatre Union representatives thrashed out the question of a workers' theatre with members and officials of labor organizations in many personal interviews. Probably no subsequent workers' theatre in America will encounter quite so much scepticism as the Theatre Union had to overcome. The workers, who deserve the best, always have been given the worst in theatrical entertainment, and this was reflected in their distrust of a project which claimed to be revolutionary in spirit and professional in technique. Before *Peace on Earth* opened, ten theatre parties had been arranged through the first two weeks, not enough to cover even one third of the running expenses. At the early performances hundreds of representatives of labor organizations were invited to see it on the stage. The result was a flood of benefit theatre parties—158 during the sixteen weeks run. When *Stevedore* was in preparation only one reading was necessary. Forty-four benefits had been arranged before the play opened, guaranteeing two-thirds of the running expenses for a period of six weeks.

The benefit system was supplemented by a vigorous promotion campaign in unions and other workers' organizations. The details included a wide distribution of posters and leaflets; sending announcements of the new theatre and its plays to chairmen of meetings; sending volunteer speakers who were prepared to ask for the floor and talk five minutes about the play; furnishing lecturers to cultural groups; enlisting the help of groups that had attended the play, in making contacts with other groups; circularizing labor groups; appealing in the theatre program and from the stage for support for the project; furnishing a picture postcard to members of the audience who wished to inform their friends of the play (as many as 300 a day were mailed by the Theatre Union); collecting and publicizing the opinions of eminent theatrical and literary people, as well as the endorsements of working class leaders. Once the play had been seen, the Theatre Union had enthusiastic cooperation in its promotion campaign from widely varying sources. Many organizations distributed or mailed out leaflets to their members, gave time to the speakers, asked for speakers, arranged discussions and symposiums on the play, etc. About fifty volunteers who had been gathered around the Theatre Union during its organization period, helped in carrying out the promotion work.

Although a workers' theatre cannot base its audience on a subscription system, such as guarantees a run for Theatre Guild plays, it is proper to enlist individual members. "Sympathetic" professional people, intellectuals, and middle class elements generally welcome the chance to subscribe for a season's plays. A cautious beginning is desirable in setting up a subscription system. The new theatre must be financially able to guarantee the productions for which it sells seats in advance. Furthermore, the cost of running the campaign will be smaller in proportion to the results if the theatre waits until one or two productions have established it with some prestige as a permanent organization.

The Theatre Union instituted its subscription plan *after* it became apparent that *Peace on Earth* would run and a second production could be guaranteed. Although it expects to produce three plays next year, its subscription is for two plays—\$5 for a pair of \$1.50 seats for each of two plays; \$3.50 for a pair of \$1 seats for two plays, and \$1 for a 20 per cent reduction on seats. Other membership privileges include free or reduced seats for Theatre Union symposiums, and other activities. A brief campaign of about two months during the early summer produced 1,400 members; this number will be doubled or tripled by an energetic campaign in the fall.

Building a stable audience is a main task in organizing for a workers theatre. Financing, the finding of scripts, the problem of gathering together actors and theatrical technicians in a permanent company, the whole question of relations backstage, the particular problems of a united front applied in the theatre, the adapting of bourgeois publicity methods to the needs of a workers theatre (which will be discussed in detail next month), are unique problems. The commercial theatre does not offer any rule of thumb by which to solve them. The workers' cultural movement is almost devoid of precedents. But the times are in our favor. In the leftward swing, writers, directors, actors, technicians, and people with money to contribute to a workers theatre, can be found. About 300,000 people have seen the Theatre's Union's first two plays—audiences certainly can be found and audiences are the basis of the theatre. Professional groups can be formed and will grow in Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, etc., right across the country. Broadway managers already see a "trend" toward "social" plays—the workers' groups must turn it into a real and vital movement for our own theatre, an instrument hitherto neglected, to help in the building of a better world.

Survey of Workers Films

A Report to the National Film Conference

By LEO T. HURWITZ

FOR the sake of clarity in evaluating the past production of the Film and Photo League and in taking steps to improve our films, it is wise to begin with a restatement of the aims of revolutionary movie production. In a report submitted to the N. Y. Film and Photo League on completion of *Hunger* 1932, I said:

"Film is the most direct, the most vivid medium for documentation and propagandizing in the class struggle. It can maintain direct, day by day contact with the activities of workers and social conditions, dramatize them and vitalize workers for greater activity. Its need and problems have immediate correlation with revolutionary political problems.

"The most important task of the revolutionary movement today is to lead the immediate battles of workers for better working conditions, against the rising fascism, for unemployment insurance, against cuts in relief, against wage-cuts, speed-up, etc., and in so doing to direct the upsurge of the working class toward the overthrow of capitalism. . . .

"In its own field this is exactly the task of the revolutionary movie, to document the daily struggle of the masses and to dramatize these events so that their ideological and political meaning is conveyed, and the effect is persuasive. We must think of our films as having the same capacity as union organizers. We must make our movies in such a way that non-revolutionary workers will realize the necessity of working class militancy and solidarity. We are handling a very important political weapon, more effective at this time than carloads of bullets and machine guns."

With little change, I think, this can serve as an adequate general statement of the task of Film and Photo League production today, as well as a basis for judging the work of the past two years.

It is our responsibility to the revolutionary movement and to the potential power of the films in the workers' struggle, to face critically the condition of our work, to analyze our shortcomings and thereby to advance and bring the revolutionary film to its proper stature in the workers' cultural movement, a position commensurate with revolutionary literature, theatre and graphic art.

From the point of view of quantity we have produced but a handful of films in this past period: a few newsreels in the *America Today* series, composed of material shot by League cameramen and clips secured from the newsreel companies; a two-reel document of the Bonus March; several May Day films; a four-reel document of the 1932 Hunger March; a reel on the Scottsboro Case including the Decatur 1933 trial; the unfinished *Child Misery* and *Unemployment Council* films, the as yet incompleated *Waste and Want*, executed by the students of the

Potamkin film school, and several films made independently by our members (*Sweet Land of Liberty*, *Sheriffed*, *Ernst Thaelmann*).*

There can be little doubt that the number of pictures listed above have been entirely inadequate to the need. Considering only the active demand for films in class-conscious organizations, we have had insufficient films, witnessed by the fact that our distribution agency has had no resort to Westerns, Chaplin comedies and miscellaneous features to supplement its programs of Russian films, and by the fact that the N. Y. League itself has not been able to meet the calls for films placed directly with it. If one further considers our responsibility in producing films for agitational work among non-revolutionary workers, the dearth of films seems even greater. For we have not even touched this field, by far the most important work we can do.

OUR production has been insufficient, also, from the point of view of (1) making adequate comment on and expose of the oppressive measures of the government during this period, the Hoover whitewash of all suffering unemployment, wage-cuts, etc.; the New Deal demagogy, slave-codes, war preparations, crop destruction, fascist development, standardization of starvation under C.C.C., C.W.A., etc.; (2) carrying forward the campaigns of the revolutionary movement to win workers to it: for the Unemployment Insurance Bill, the farm bill, strike relief, union organization, the Mooney, Herndon and Scottsboro defense and so forth.

It is true that these subjects are treated in some of the films mentioned above, and that several of these films are devoted to a single issue, e.g., *Bonus March*, *Hunger* 1932, *Scottsboro*. But even in these cases one film hardly exhausts what we have to say, and when one thinks of the mountains of literature, pamphlets, articles, books, written on these topics the inadequacy of our film-comment seems the more overwhelming.

Among these films are shots and sequences of great power and historic importance, the Detroit Massacre, the Weideman anti-Nazi demonstration, material in the *Hunger* and

Bonus Marches; sections of important documentation of conditions among the unemployed (first reel of *Hunger*); parts of great satiric wit (the congressman in the *Farmers' March* newsreel). But these excellences are fragmentary. While the photography and cutting has improved in this period there still remains a great distance to travel in the achievement of pictures which are cleanly photographed, economically cut and persuasively mounted.

Apart from the quantitative insufficiency of our work, which we must recognize and analyze for the sake of our future work, there is a basic criticism to be made of the approach and influence of our films. As much as we protest the theory that our films are a weapon in the class-struggle, and as much as we have tried to make our films an instrument of propaganda, they do not carry enough propaganda. Nor have they been good enough propaganda. Paradoxically our main weakness has been *too little propaganda*. The test of propaganda is persuasive power, and our films have not been persuasive. This is due largely to the fact that they have presupposed upon the part of the audience a knowledge and sympathy with our point of view. To a class-conscious worker, for example, our May First reels, which show hundreds of thousands of workers mobilized in the streets, may be a source of inspiration and a stimulus to militancy, but to a non-revolutionary worker, unless we clearly and effectively dramatize why these thousands are marching, May Day is another parade of marching, marching and marching. Certainly marching workers cannot be the only item in a one-reel film if that film is to be effective propaganda. Less blatantly this is the fault also of the rest of our films. They *assume* the revolutionary approach, instead of *convincing* the spectators of its correctness. They are neither clear nor simple enough. They do not have the cogency or the persuasion that a leaflet urging the National Guard not to shoot down their class brothers possess. And this is the type of simple eloquence our movies must have.

THE lack of continuity of production is one of the most important factors in these shortcomings. Our film making has progressed by fits and starts. Intense activity for a few weeks on *Hunger*, several months of inactivity before the next film is und wray. Newsreels and documents are made over a long period, during evenings, Saturday and Sunday afternoons, and are sometimes dropped before completion. This inconstant production prevents an accumula-

* Not being sufficiently acquainted with the work of other leagues I speak only of the production of the N. Y. F. & P. League. But since the work of the others, with the possible exception of the Los Angeles League lags far behind the N. Y. League, and since the problems involved are similar, my conclusions should be relevant to all the leagues. Representatives of other leagues should supplement this report with their experiences, problems and solutions.

tion of experience and training required for the making of effective films, and introduces great waste of money and effort. (Needless to say, an organization based on Saturday and Sunday filming cannot produce a larger number of movies). Apart from the financial difficulties in making films continuously—an obstacle not insurmountable—and apart from the faulty distribution of revolutionary films, the main cause for this discontinuity has been the prevalent conception that we can train worker-camera-men and filmmakers by giving them a few lessons in photography and sending them out to cover a demonstration or make a documentary—with the result that we have not yet trained a truly able corps of film workers. Our aim has been to develop as many such camera correspondents as possible. That this is a valid aim is not to be doubted, but the fact that in the past two years, the N. Y. League has not trained any new cadres in film production, and that we still have to fall back on the three or four cameramen who were with us two years ago, should be sufficient reason for us to doubt that our methods have been satisfactory, and to investigate what has held us back.

The problem of training film worker-correspondents is frequently compared to the development of worker-correspondents for the revolutionary press. But the analogy is wholly false. For one thing, film costs and scarcity of equipment require centralized production—a condition which completely differentiates this case from the spontaneous reportage of workers who are in positions to reveal conditions to which newspapermen do not have access. Secondly, film making is a craft which is not an inherent part of every persons' background as is the written and verbal language. It is a specialized work requiring similar training to that needed on the graphic arts for example. The John Reed clubs provide intensive courses for students who intend to become revolutionary artists. And it is the very rare exception that becomes a cartoonist in the workers' press without adequate training in the craft of drawing.

We must drop our notion that everyone interested in the Film and Photo League should become a producer of revolutionary films, and we must make organizational changes to rectify this situation. The League is larger than its production, and there is room for a mass membership of workers, not directly concerned with production, but interested on combatting the growing fascization of Hollywood, and supporting the revolutionary movies of this country and of the Soviet Union. There is also room for concentrated production units whose main purpose should be to produce good revolutionary films—a unit made up of the best talent and providing for the swift training of potentialities. That such a group, a

shock-troupe of full time film workers would step up our production quantitatively and qualitatively can hardly be doubted. One has only to look at the development in play production in the Workers' Laboratory Theatre since the formation of their shock-troupe. During this time the sheer fact that a group of dramatic workers could devote their entire time to working out the problems of the revolutionary drama has advanced the technique and propaganda power of their repertory to such an extent that it now includes such remarkable pieces as *Newsboy* and *Free Thaelmann*.

TO return for a moment to the lack of persuasive propaganda in our films, an important cause, in addition to our failure to accumulate experience through continuous production, has been the mechanical, schematic and unexperimental approach in the search for the proper forms for the revolutionary movie. We have been insisting that the documentary form is the only true one. The importance of the document as expose material relating to working and living conditions, police brutality, the militancy of the insurgent proletariat, etc., cannot be over-emphasized; and without doubt much can be done in mounting to make effective propaganda. (That we have not done this in the past must be put to our inability to work out these problems by continuous and effective experimentation). But to rule out other film forms in which it is easier to build up essential sequences not accessible to the documentary camera-eye is a gross error. At least, we cannot decide until we have tried these forms. Besides the newsreel and the document, other available forms are: the trailer, the enacted short, the combined enacted and documentary, animated cartoon, satiric and didactic.

A further factor contributing to our failure to produce films regularly and continuously has been the snarls of our distribution apparatus. A film as important as *Hunger* 1932, was seen by a few thousand people mostly in New York, despite the fact that the three thousand delegates on the march were eager to have the film shown to their organizations all over the country. Being a topical and timely film, it was necessary to distribute it quickly. This was not done, with the consequence that it has in a short time become so much celluloid. Inadequate distribution results in lack of funds for future production and discourages the makers of the film. It is essential to have widespread and efficient distribution not alone among workers' organizations in the movement, but among workers who have yet to be won over. I am informed that efforts are being made at this time to bring this about.

In conclusion, I should like to make the following proposals for the immediate advance in revolutionary film production:

1—Production shock troupes and training groups to be established in every league—to

be financed by the whole league by means of film showings, donations from sympathizers, affairs, etc.

2—A national film exchange to be set up with headquarters in New York for the interchange of completed films for showing and of newsreel material for incorporation into larger documents. For example, properly organized a large slice of the present textile strike could be covered by various member organizations nearest to the scenes, the whole built into a film in New York and sent out over the country.

3—Contact and produce trailers and other films for organizations like W.I.R., I.L.D., I.W.O., Unemployment Councils, Leagues vs. War and Fascism and Struggle for Negro Rights, etc., in connection with their campaigns, these organizations to bear most of the expense.

4—Contact revolutionary unions to use specially prepared films systematically in recruiting. This might be done by sending out a cameraman and projectionist with organizers to make films and project them to masses of workers on the scene.

5—Stimulate amateurs to produce films with "social content" by providing them with scenarios and ideas. Most amateurs get quickly tired of shooting the wife and kiddies in various poses, and with direction might yield important documentary material, and later be drawn into the league.

Advice From Broadway

NEW THEATRE:

After seeing a great many production by workers' theatres, I am convinced that many of the actors in these groups are not acquainted with the four basic rules of their craft. These are:

1. *Project Your Voice*

At least half the productions I saw were all but meaningless because only the first three rows of spectators heard the lines. Clear enunciation is necessary; loudness does not help.

2. *Don't "Cover Up"*

When an actor is speaking or doing a significant piece of business, other actors must stand well aside so the audience can see him. The director must show ingenuity in preserving a plausible stage picture, despite this convention. As actors cross and re-cross, their correct stage position for delivering lines must seem to occur naturally.

3. *Learn to Listen*

The rank amateur mechanically recites his lines on cue. He must learn to listen to the actor with whom he is exchanging dialogue, he must digest mentally what he hears, and respond with words or action as a consequence. This receptive attitude will give an actor stage poise and naturalness.

4. *Snap Up Cues*

This does not mean necessarily that the actor must reply or react physically on the instant. It does mean that he must show instant awareness of what he has just seen or heard. There must never be a moment of "stage wait" during which an actor is simply blank.

While these rules are very simple, they can be mastered in practice only by a great deal of study and application. The workers' theatre performances will improve 100 per cent if these faults are remedied.

A "Broadway" Theatre Worker

Shifting Scenes

The Movie Front

GOOD NEWS FROM ENGLAND

Since its formation last April, the *Left Theatre* of London, Great Britain's first stationary workers' theatre, has staged two successful productions, Frederick Wolf's *The Sailors of Catarro* (which the Theatre Union may do here this season), and John Wexley's *They Shall Not Die*. The producer and director is Andre von Gysegeheim, of the Embassy Theatre, who studied the Soviet Theatre methods in Moscow. Professional actors, many of whom have joined because of dissatisfaction with the bourgeois theatre, make up its cast.

Our London workers' theatre correspondent writes: "The *Left Theatre* brings revolutionary plays very forcibly before the middle class, for it puts them on for one evening in the West End section before taking them to working class districts. It has not yet gone outside London, but intends to do so.

"The workers' theatre movement in England of late has been concentrating upon improving technique, presenting plays about the arms racket, the splitting of the workers' ranks by social-fascists, etc. It has resulted in a good standard of dramatization of day to day struggles. The technique as yet is comparatively simple, and there is a lack of play material. This latter difficulty is being faced by extension of the movement to universities and other centers where class-conscious individuals can be found with sufficient time and talent to write.

"The *Left Theatre* will undoubtedly help in developing technique. Already its staging of *Sailors of Catarro* has been stimulating. *Newsboy*, first staged by the New York Workers' Laboratory Theatre, has already been received in England. . . . Oh, yes, one play was banned after two performances by the Lord Chamberlain. That hasn't made a dent in our activities, however."

FIGHTING FOR THE FARMERS

Last month *Shifting Scenes* reported the invitation extended to the Detroit Theatre of Action by the mayor of Platt, Mich. Here's an account of the audience reaction to the performance. "Our audience consisted of poor farmers and their children . . . from friends who accompanied us, we found our audience gained something from our performance. One woman said, 'This is the first educational piece of work I have ever seen.' Then one old farmer, upon being informed that we were a theatre fighting for the workers and farmers, replied, 'It's time some one started to fight for us.' However, part of the audience was shocked at our seemingly free use of profanity in the strike skit, and some felt we unduly attacked the Recovery Act, remarking that there was nothing wrong with the N.R.A. Nevertheless, we have started them questioning. . . . The technique of our group is improving, and we are performing for a wider mass of workers, who are beginning to demand our work more and more frequently."

IN CHICAGO

The Theatre Collective is hard at work with early fall activities. *The Incurable* (capitalism) a play written by one of the members, was staged at the Red Election Rally in People's Auditorium. The audience liked particularly a song and dance skit which is part of the play. *The Disarmament Conference*, a combination song, dance and dialogue burlesque, has been in rehearsal in the past weeks. At this writing, it was scheduled for performance at the Anti-War Jubilee.

IN NEW YORK

A summary of the Labor Drama courses at the New York City Summer School for Workers shows such great interest that more extensive courses are being planned for the coming year. A play written collectively from an idea submitted by one of the

students, was an interesting part of the course. "Each speech, sometimes each word, was discussed and analyzed in the class, and after the speech was perfected to the satisfaction of the majority, it was put down until the play worked itself out to the end . . . the theme was a strike in a dress factory."

YOUR SCRIPTS WILL BE READ

A specially qualified repertory play-reading committee, which promises to be an important aid and possibly even a solution of the repertory problems of workers' theatres, met on Wednesday, September 12.

The task of this committee is centralization of play collection and distribution, in other words a reorganized and smoothly working L.O.W.T. clearing house for Workers' Theatre plays. Upon a reading, analysis and selection by this bureau, which carries with it the most experienced viewpoint of Workers' Theatre, mimeographed and, later, published plays will have the benefit of far reaching publicity, by means of a monthly bulletin and repertory listing service. This bulletin will contain concise but comprehensive reviews of plays, a variety of specialized news items on repertory and its production in Workers' Theatres.

Centralized distribution of plays will be aided and abetted by a yearly subscription service, which will entitle subscribers to single copies of all scripts accepted by the repertory play-reading committee, each month.

The play collection plan embraces not only the absorption of the product of groups throughout the United States, the foreign language groups, those of Soviet Russia through I.U.R.T., but also a concentrated drive for the mobilization of all playwrights, who are intellectually conscious of and moved by the vital needs of their history-making times. Therefore conferences, which writers are urged to attend, will take place monthly, the first one on Wednesday, October 18, 1934, at the L.O.W.T., 114 West 14th Street. At these conferences, after a performance of a workers' group, theatre problems and play needs will be discussed in open forum. The decision on each play submitted will be the outcome of the combined opinions of at least six well qualified readers. A limit of three weeks from the receipt of a play to its acceptance, rejection or recommendation for revision has been set and will be rigidly adhered to.

Plans for payment and royalties to authors have been put in motion and will be announced shortly. Public readings of full length and short plays will be held at regular intervals.

And last but not least, a translation division is ready to translate the plays of foreign groups. Write S. B. Dona, care L.O.W.T., 114 West 14th Street, for full information.

IN CALIFORNIA

It is significant that three out of five plays to be produced in Los Angeles are "propaganda" plays. They are *Blood On the Moon*, by Paul and Claire Sifton; *Stevedore* and *Peace On Earth*. (*Blood On the Moon*, an anti-Nazi play, will be reviewed in the next issue of *NEW THEATRE*.)

Our Los Angeles workers' theatre correspondent writes:

"A concert is being planned for benefit of *NEW THEATRE* and as part of our activities in the *Five Month Plan*. The Prolet Dancers, the Workers' Lab Theatre and the W.L.T. 'Shock-troupe,' and several prominent phi-harmonic concert artists are on the program which will be held October 20 or 21 at the Los Angeles Cultural Centre, 230 So. Spring Street. After our first *NEW THEATRE* affair we hope to be able to run one every month."

MOSCOW—*Three Songs of Lenin*, based on three Soviet folk songs has been completed under the direction of the distinguished "documentalist," Dziga Vertov. Tretiakov, Russian novelist, wrote the story for the film, which was enthusiastically received at the recent Soviet Writers' Congress. . . . *Paris*—Rene Clair is finishing his new documentary movie dealing with working class children. . . . *Brussels*—Ernst Busch, famous German Communist singer and dramatic star, is organizing the People's Film Co., a cooperative production unit made up of exiles from Nazi Germany. . . . *London*—Herbert Marshall, back from several years at the Soviet State Institute of Cinematography, will soon engage in workers' film productions.

MEXICO AGAIN

Last month all cinema employees struck in Mexico City against the showing of *Mussolini Speaks*, making it impossible to exhibit this fascist document. In May the same unions and workers' movie groups prevented the showing of Sinclair's distorted version of Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico*. . . . Columbia Pictures have stopped work on Ilya Ehrenbourg's *Red Square* which was to be directed by Lewis Milestone. . . . Too difficult for the Cohn Brothers of Columbia to handle. Make it anti-Soviet?—Bad business. . . . Jeering reception by audiences. . . . Make it pro-Soviet?—Well, after all, that would be going a bit too far. . . . M.-G.-M. has likewise been stumped with their much publicised *Soviet*. Two hundred thousand dollars have flowed under the bridge and they have not yet arrived at an acceptable script. . . . Twenty-one different writers have faced the question: *To be or not to be anti-Soviet*. . . . Motion Picture Workers' Industrial Union is gaining influence among the unorganized movie workers; the "one big union" idea is spreading among members of the craft unions.

MOVIES ON THE LEFT

Newsreels, documentaries and two acted films will be exhibited at the National Film Conference in Chicago, the result of which conference should be an effective national workers' film organization for the systematic production of revolutionary films and the intensification of the fight against the fascization of the movies. In New York *Sheriffed*, made by Nancy Naumburg and James Guy was favorably received as the first American workers' film that has been made with a cast of actors. The "cast" was composed of fighting farmers of the United Farmers League. . . . *Portrait of America* produced by the N. Y. Film and Photo League from commercial newsreel clips was shown on a program of experimental shorts, September 22, at the New School. . . . *Ernst Thaelmann, Fighter Against Fascism* played four days in New York to capacity audiences. The film contains material photographed by German workers' film groups between 1924 and 1933, and other valuable historic sequences, the whole a powerful indictment of Hitler fascism, capable of being utilized by anti-fascist groups in the fight to free Thaelmann.

The N. Y. Film and Photo League announces a lecture and laboratory course in still photography. Registration, Wednesdays and Fridays, Monday from 7 to 9 P. M. at 12 East 17th Street.

WORKERS' FILM CIRCUITS

Of direct concern to all readers of NEW THEATRE is the news that 16 mm. talkie film showings are now within reach of all clubs and groups. Soviet sound films and workers' shorts are available.

Now is the time to build movie circuits that will include every city and village in the country—circuits that are genuinely independent of the church, Hollywood and government censors. Communicate with the film editor for specific information.

Backstage

In September NEW MASSES and NEW THEATRE announced a \$100 Prize Play Contest for short revolutionary plays. We hope revolutionary and "sympathetic" professional playwrights will respond to Virgil Geddes' column on the need for revolutionary plays and set to work at once to do at least one workers' theatre play. It is hoped also that a number of new talents will be brought out by this play contest. Revolutionary short story writers, poets and novelists who are disappointed that their work does not reach a mass audience of workers should try the dramatic form and enter this contest. The workers' theatres promise immediate production from coast to coast of all worthwhile plays. \$50 is offered for the best revolutionary play approximately thirty-five minutes in length, any subject, any form; \$25 is the first prize for the best revolutionary play approximately fifteen minutes in length, any subject, any form; and \$25 more is offered for the best political sketch, maximum length ten minutes. All scripts must be typewritten clearly and double-spaced. Scripts should be addressed to NEW THEATRE Play Contest, 114 West 14th Street.

Our contributors promise some very interesting articles for the November and December issues. Articles by Robert Forsythe, Bela Belasz, Joseph Freeman, Lee Strassberg, Samuel Ornitz, Harry Elion, Mignon Verne, John Howard Lawson, and Virgil Geddes and Michael Blankfort are due.

John Gassner is playreader for the Theatre Guild. Lincoln Kirstein is editor of the *Hound and Horn*, and co-founder of the American Ballet School.

NEW THEATRE'S circulation, the barometer of growing interest in the revolutionary theatre, film and dance, shows a remarkable increase in recent months. Circulation, 2,500 in May, rose to 3,000 in June; 5,000 in July-August; 6,000 in September; and now 8,500 for October. Thus NEW THEATRE in the first two months of our *Five Month Plan* is within 1,500 of the 10,000 circulation goal for January. Already 375 of the 1,500 new subscribers the plan calls for have been enrolled. \$150 toward the \$1,000 sustaining fund called for by the plan has come in from the first "New Theatre Night." The groups are counted on to increase their membership at least 50 per cent, and the Prize Play Contest should increase repertory at least 50 per cent. But the phenomenal rise of circulation does not mean that the theatre, film, and dance groups have met the increases in bundle orders called for by the Plan. Only the New Dance Group, the Workers' Laboratory Theatre of New York, and the Toronto group are way ahead of the Plan.

The 375 groups affiliated with the League of Workers Theatres include approximately 5,000 members (actors, directors, scenic and costume designers, playwrights, etc.). Some of the "Theatre of Action" groups perform five to ten times a week. Other groups perform only once a week. Audiences range from small gatherings in workers' halls and street performances of 100 to 200 workers or farmers, to "New Theatre Night" and "Theatre Festival" audiences of 1,200 and 1,500. Figuring on a low average of one performance per-week per group, and the average audience a conservative 200, this means that *the workers' theatres play to 75,000 workers each week!* And 3,900,000 spectators (participants in our theatre) per year. Add to this the 125,000 people who saw *Peace On Earth* and the 100,000 who saw *Stevedore*, and the figures mount to over 4,000,000 total audience. A long way from the 50,000,000 a week the Hollywood films are said to reach, and the many millions that the bourgeois and little theatres reach, *but still the largest medium of revolutionary influence in America outside of our press.*

FOR more than a decade the German population of America has been without a theatre of any artistic or cultural quality. The need for such a theatre is now more urgent than ever before. The cultural war raging in Germany does not stop at the German border line. One has to decide definitely on one of two irreconcilable fronts. In this period of confusion, bewilderment, and struggle, it is the task of art and especially of the theatre, to take a leading and clarifying stand in the decisive events on which the future of culture depends. This cultural responsibility was the motive for organizing the new German theatre, *Die Neue Theatre-Gruppe*, (The New Theatre Group). Its aim is to dramatize, analytically, the events and problems of life today. Without obligation to any political party, the group stands in the present cultural struggle decidedly for culture, *against* all destructive forces of cultural values, *against* fascism of every kind.

In the utilization of the best traditions of the theatre, in giving all members a systematic artistic and cultural training, and by especially experimenting with new methods and ideas, the group aims at performances of a high degree of penetration and effectiveness. The group plans both full length productions for its own theatre and short productions suitable for the affairs of organizations.

Playwrights, actors, directors, stage designers, technicians, musicians, composers, and dancers are urgently asked to join the production collective

Die Neue Theatre-Gruppe (1269 Lex-

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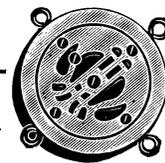
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