



Stalin History's Questionmark

contribution to the movement is nil. His one appearance at a congress of the Russian Social-Democratic party in exile is pathetic; his flimsy attempt at interjecting an idea is rebuffed by the delegates; he relapses into silence. Stalin bides his time.

Gradually he works his way to a position of some prominence inside the Bolshevik party. But again only as an administrator, an organizer; never does he participate in the actual political guidance of the party. The one occasion where it is his task to give political leadership—his editorship of "Pravda" before Lenin's arrival in Russia—is marked by a disgraceful episode: his support of the Kerensky government and his advocacy of unity with the Mensheviks.

Stalin is unknown to the masses of workers at the time. Even the ranks of the Bolshevik party do not know him. He stands behind the scenes, bitterly aware of his own deficiencies and piling up jealous grudges for future times. He works at various administrative tasks; each of his articles is a sloppy paraphrase of Lenin. **No history of the revolution written at the time, no documents of the time mention him in any prominent capacity.**

It is only when the Bolshevik revolution begins its descent that Stalin shows his head. And this coincidence is crucial.

The working class revolution in Russia, according to its leaders, could last only if it had the aid of a successful revolution in a Western industrialized country. Russia was too backward, too primitive, too dependent on the world market and Western technique to reach Socialism by itself. This aid from the West did not come. The revolution in Russia is exhausted. The Civil War, the pinch of the capitalist encirclement, the rigours of War Communism—all add up to tiredness and lack of enthusiasm.

BUREAUCRATIC GROWTH

This takes the concrete form of bureaucratism in the state, the growth of a parasitic group acting as a leech on the body of the workers' state. Here Stalin comes into his own. He builds up his organizational apparatus by flattery, threats, intimidation. **Stalin fits in with the mood of the times, and the mood of the times is personified in Stalin: the retreat from independent thought, the bureaucratization of men and ideas.**



"The Grapes Of Wrath"

There are certain emotional experiences which leave you so strongly affected that you know that they will never quite be erased from your memory. "The Grapes of Wrath" is such an experience.

It's no use trying to be restrained, or to make polite critical reservations. Perhaps for the first time, Hollywood has produced a picture which is splendid movie art, absorbing emotional experience, and burning social theme all in one. And it's something to be thankful for.

* * *

The Joad family lived in Oklahoma, working as sharecroppers. But they were no longer needed. The machine had come to take their place; tractors to take the place of hands.

Where are they to turn? They have no money, they have no work. They come across some handbills distributed by California landowners advertising berry-picking jobs. They decide to go to California. What else is there to do?

IN THE DESERT

Somewhere in the great Southwestern desert an old, dilapidated truck limps along the road to California. Household goods and people are piled high above the groaning auto springs. The Joads have begun their trek to . . . jobs.

It's a peculiar family, the Joads. Born and bred on the soil, they are a typical American share-croppers family. Ma Joad is the pivot of the family. A strong and heroically courageous woman, she keeps the family together and going. Pa is a decent sort, but weak and increasingly helpless. Grandpa: a splendid sketch of an old farmhand, full of salty good-humour and devotion to his soil, who had to be made drunk before he could be made to quit Oklahoma. Tom Joad is the hero: young, embittered, sullen; he has already served a jail sentence.

And with the Joads comes preacher Casey—the lovable, fighting priest, who is later to be murdered by vigilante thugs. (In passing, three cheers for the producers for allowing that fine actor, John Carradine, to play this role as a change from his usual

villians.)

The Joads reach California and settle in a road camp. The camp is invaded by a company agent who tries to get cheap labor. A scuffle follows in which Tom beats up a policeman. The family moves and Tom has to hide.

The Joads finally get work, but they are unaware that they are acting as strikebreakers. During their first night on this farm, Tom wanders out beyond the farm grounds to find out what is going on. They go to a meeting of the strike committee. The meeting is raided by cops and vigilantes. Casey is killed; Tom in turn kills Casey's murderer.

A BETTER WORLD

The Joads move on, hurriedly, stealthily. They reach a government camp, but that isn't much better. Tom feels himself more and more a burden on his family; his being a "fugitive" puts the whole family in danger. He finally decides to leave the family. In one of the great scenes of the picture, he tells Ma Joad that he is going. "Wherever there are people fighting for a better world, I'll be there," he tells her. Tom has found his purpose in life and though the movie is not as explicit on this point as the book was, we know that he means the cause of the workers. The Joads pack up and move to another job—quite aware that this is only temporary and that the struggle is still ahead.

* * *

There isn't much use in going into much more detail. It's just a great picture, that's all. The performances of Henry Fonda as Tom and of Jane Darwell as Ma are splendid pieces of sincere realistic acting. The sensitivity and passion of Fonda's acting, especially, gives the whole picture a glow of life that is unforgettable. Likewise, the performances of the minor parts are all excellent.

One leaves the theatre proud of the knowledge that such a picture can be made and ashamed that it is made so infrequently. One feels like telling everybody on the street to go in and see "Grapes of Wrath." You've just got to see it.

The Story of the Socialist Youth