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# NEW THEATRE

**DRAMA**

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## Prospects For The American Theatre

Opinions by

JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

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Kurt Jooss---the skeleton on the green table

An Interview by EDITH SEGAL

# NEW THEATRE

VOL. III

NO. 2

*Credo*

**I**T'S a bold and inclusive statement we make, yet one perfectly capable of demonstration. We are the critics. Who are We? We are Everyman. In our ranks stand longshoremen, clerks, coal miners, doctors, cooks, poets, laundresses, professional reviewers, steel puddlers, lawyers, starving idle people—all kinds of people.

We take our prerogative, as the courts of last resort. And we mean to use it, in these columns and in the theatre. Our seal of approval and our roar of censure shall mark the fate of the future American drama. Perhaps you will listen to us, brothers Producer, Director, Actor, Playwright, Designer. We take our rightful place as an integral part of the theatre. We are the Audience.

*Scientist as Artist*

**L**ARGE numbers of persons who make up theatre audiences need training, just as other

## 1934

persons who go into a dramatic production need training. One wouldn't begin to produce a play with untrained actors, or one directed by a dumb man.

As audiences receive more attention and training they will become better critics. Eventually they will drive the paid reviewers from their mock-ivory towers.

We, as audience, are ready to stand or fall on the incontrovertible principle that we are part of the production.

Hopeful signs appear everywhere on the theatre horizon. The audience in *Peace On Earth* takes part in the proceedings on the stage with animation and gusto. In *Men In White* the participation is infinitely less apparent.

Recently we attended a eurythmic symposium by Paul Boepple, at the American Dalcroze Institute, 9 East 59 Street. Mr. Boepple, who is director of the institute, was giving a demonstration of audience participation in music. A happening there gave us joy, because it indicated that the most untrained member of an audience may be its most active factor.

Among the many musicians sat a mathematician who had never studied music and harbored some contempt for the art. He came merely to accompany a young woman. The man in question works for an insurance company, carefully working out mortality tables, by all the devices of higher mathematics.

Mr. Boepple offered the project. He presented four measures of music, then four measures of a further development of the initial four, and then the audience was told to clap hands

on the first beat of the third four measures. In the entire audience of more than fifty musicians, this mathematician was the only one to catch that initial beat correctly.

Of course he had used his highly developed mathematical sense to work through the complex eurythmic pattern. But this presents us with a breath-taking vista for the theatre. We must develop our present capacities and use them in our dramatic ventures.

*Fruitless Paris*

**T**HE Paris theatre seems to be as moribund as Broadway. This is revealed in nothing so much as the escapism, the denial of life as people live it today, in the themes of its major dramatic offerings. It must be a cynical producer who can seriously offer to petty bourgeois play-goers a revival of that prosperity farce, *Abie's Irish Rose*.

Jacques Duval, represented by two current offerings, is the author of the most widely attended play. It deals with Russian emigres, who, having been reduced to hiring themselves out to the bourgeoisie for their livelihood, are nevertheless revealed as superior to their superiors. The feudal aristocracy, persistent deadwood in an advanced capitalist society, is still being made palatable to us.

In his other play, *Priere pour les Vivants*. Duval chooses despair as his motif. His hero, a white-collar worker, he reveals as a sordid human being from birth to death.

Two other plays, *L'Amour Gai*, by Steve Passeur, and *Alfred Savoir's* new play, *Maria*, both give dissertations on love and the eternal triangle. Love, it appears, is an emotion born

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## NEW THEATRE

somewhere in the clouds, and has no connection with anything earthly.

### *The Hitler Blight*

“WE are comrades, Soldiers of a new idea. Banner bearers of the theatre. Priests of the world,” orated Herr Otto Laubinger, member of the Propaganda Ministry of the Nazi government, at the recent meeting of all German actors for their “political co-ordination”. Such are the words, clothing the facts of a throttled German theatre.

The Berlin theatre, once the most vital in Europe, is empty. There is a dearth not only of plays, talent and enthusiasm but of money and desire to attend on the part of audience.

The theatre-goer has the following choice of an evening in the theatre. Two plays of Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Julius Caesar*; two “national” plays, *The State Chancellor* and *Men Made of Earth*, and Schiller’s *Maria Stuart*.

Such complete emasculation of the forces of production of any art has rarely been seen. Communists, who propound the

## NEW THEATRE

Organ of the League of Workers Theatres of the U.S.A. (Section of the International Union of the Revolutionary Theatre), Workers Dance League, and National Film and Photo League.

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essence of the new and developing art, those Jews who were at least masters in a decadent art, and liberals who make up the artistic technicians of capitalist society—all these have been thrown out of the theatre of Nazi Germany.

These are the facts. Let Herr Goering take note of them.

### *Pamphlets*

THERE appears to be such a wide ideological development between two pamphlets by Virgil Geddes, *The American Theatre and Toward Revolution in the Theatre* that one feels it unfair to pick flaws in the first after having read the second.

In the first, Mr. Geddes speaks like the unhappy eclectic, urging the re-establishment of “spiritual values” and venting bitterness on the over-lavishness of stage-designing. In the second, a partial recognition of the class-struggle seems to have clarified the situation of a decadent and corrupt theatre to him.

“The one sin in the professional theatre (which is also the bourgeois theatre, the commercial theatre, the pseudo-art theatre) is sincerity.” If Mr. Geddes had gone one step further, he might have said that since truth is to be found only in the circumstances of life, truth is becoming more and more unpalatable to the bourgeois producers in the most crucial crisis of capitalist society.

And again, in stating the plight of the modern-day dramatist, he says: “The artist is not inspired by poverty and denial, he is poisoned and distracted from his purpose.” Mr. Geddes might have added that in general a playwright becomes a success in proportion as he corrupts himself to the pleasure of the producer. It must not be forgotten that “box-office” means profits and profits implies exploitation of dramatist, actor, worker and “art” itself.

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GREETINGS from

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# Kurt Jooss

*The Skeleton on The Green Table*

DEATH is a terrible and tremendous and majestic thing," said Kurt Jooss as we sat in his dressing room at the Forrest Theatre. "Death is bad because it has no sense. That which happens in the middle scenes would not be bad if the last scene were not on the Green Table, if there was a reason for it all. The tragic effect, the hopeless effect is only of the Green Table, is only that in the end of the ballet nothing is changed."

Kurt Jooss's ballet, *The Green Table*, which enjoyed a remarkable success in New York, opens with a satirical dance of the diplomats at a peace conference. This scene ends with a pistol shot, a signal for war. The following scenes, *The Farewells*, *The Fights*, *The Refugees*, *The Traitor*, *The Brothel*, and *The Survivors*, all end with the figure of death as the victor. The last scene is a repetition of the first, showing that nothing has changed.

"Is the war profiteer also a victim of death?" I asked him, as this was not clear to me when I saw the ballet. And asking to be excused for his poor English, he answered, "the war profiteer is too bad that death takes him. The profiteer has not a heroic death."

I thought, due to his mystical and abstract interpretation of death, that Mr. Jooss believed in an after life, but he chuckled when I suggested it. "Are you a pacifist?" I asked. "They have fought against me that I was a weak pacifist. No, not at all. I am not a weak friend of eternal peace. But I am not a friend of war that is born on the Green Table. I do not know who is a gentleman" (referring to the diplomats) "but I do not think they are.

Themselves they do not go to war and are not touched. But I do not think that war or a real heroic fight between man and man is bad. The great war was not a matter of man to man. It was a matter of 'gentleman to gentleman in black' and all others were material for them. I feel that there could be another war like this, prepared on the Green Table and fought by other people."

"What sort of a war would you consider justifiable?" I asked him. "If really one kind of people or one nation has a real fight against the other, it must be fought. When people have nothing to eat, war is justifiable. I am not against death, not at all."

As we spoke, Mrs. Jooss came in. She is Russian by birth but has spent most of her life in Germany. She assists Mr. Jooss both in direction and in costume designing. She does not speak English and could not participate in the conversation. However, when I asked Mr. Jooss the next question, he turned to her for approval after giving his answer. "Do you think the Russian revolution was justifiable?" I asked. "Yes, of course, they had to have air. The nobility had a right to fight, also to try to save themselves. If everybody would be really human there would be no need for war. But it is not so."

ALTHOUGH Mr. Jooss seems to know and approves of the Russian revolution, he did not record this fact anywhere in his ballet, which was based on the great war. And although he seems to dislike *The Gentlemen in Black* because "they make others material for them," he does not seem to indicate in his ballet

that these gentlemen represent the war profiteer "who is too bad that death takes him." And did not these war profiteers and gentlemen in black pile up millions during the last war, while death at their command—cruelly and unmajestically destroyed millions of workers and peasants?

Mr. Jooss believes that "the dancer must be a contemporary, he must reflect the world he lives in, because unlike other arts, the dancer's art dies with him." Mr. Jooss is proud of the fact that he is young and that his dance is of today. And of course to be contemporary and reflect the world he lives in, the artist must be well posted, if he is, as John Strachey says, "to create the comprehensive image which alone can make articulate the momentous times in which we live."

Then we turned to problems of method. "What part does your group play in creating the dances?" I asked. "I can only work with a group that is an ensemble of artists, I cannot work with dancers who do only with their legs and arms. I must have individuals who know why they are doing a movement. Therefore my first work with all my dancers is to work into their minds the feeling for the relation between movement and inner movement, to motion, to spirit, to art, 'gemut,' the psychological side of a man. Then you have the closest relation between feeling and inner movement and body movement. This is the point which is most unknown and which must be first with all dancers. This is what we work on at our school.

Speaking of the future of the dance, he said, "I think for dance as an art there is a great future. I must think so. It can become a very important theatre art in the future because we have with dancing a better medium to speak than words. If we use words we can be mistaken, not so much in the in-

tellectual sense but in the inner sense. I think always real dancing has this close connection between inner and outer movement. It is not possible to lie in this art. Either it is true or it isn't good. This is my conviction, also with my dancers. If anybody is not true in his feeling of any part or situation, he has not good movement. Every true movement is motion taken from the feeling which comes through life experience."

Mr. Jooss has been a pupil of Laban, One of Mrs. Jooss' assistants is preparing to record *The Green Table* in Leban script. This method is taught at Mr. Jooss' school in Essen, Germany. Kurt Jooss has been the ballet master at the Municipal Theatre in Essen for four years. "Are you going back to this theatre?" I asked. "Under Hitler no Jew can be employed by the State. Our musical director, Fritz Cohen, and several members of my troupe are Jewish. As a municipal troupe we can no longer perform. However, as a private group, nothing can prohibit us from performing."

Mr. Jooss refuses to be labeled any kind of an "ist." "The Communists in Essen criticized me. They said I was a Communist and that I was a coward because in my ballet I did not say what I really think." In Essen they probably felt as we do, that Mr. Jooss' *Green Table* is weak, is ineffective as a means of fighting war, because it does not show the direction for one to take to achieve the end he merely intimates. Probably they resented the fact that Mr. Jooss has neglected or ignored great historic events which altered the complexion of the world scene since the armistice.

"They were not right. I am not a Communist, neither am I a Nazi. I am a Kurt Joossist."

— EDITH SEGAL

## Prospects for the American Theatre

FOR several years Broadway has been on the rocks. Established artists, critics, directors, producers, and others agreed that there was a fundamental crisis in the American theatre as there was in American industry as a whole. Furthermore, the crisis was one not only of theatre economics but also of theatre art.

Thus matters stood — until two months ago.

Then along came a number of plays which, to the surprise of most theatre people, rapidly became "box office" success. Apart from musical plays (which have in many cases attained a high technical level and which need separate treatment), there came *Ah Wilderness*, *Men In White*, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, *Sailor Beware* and a long list of others.

At once the critics and the "wise" guys turned tone. Gone the concern with the "art" of the theatre. Money was pouring into the box offices and when money is coming in, all's well with the dramatic world. What matter that most of the plays are thoroughly insignificant artistically? What matter that the plays are superficial, trivial, or positively anti-social (*Sailors Beware* is a "swell recruiting play for the Navy") in a land of hunger and threatening war? The money is coming in! Recovery! "Hurrah for the NRA!"

But—the dramatic gentlemen are counting their chickens a bit too soon. A few technically competent plays by no means signify a rejuvenated theatre. The box office stream will thin to a trickle, soon enough. And all the miraculous "faith" of the bourgeois critics will not be enough to keep the thousands of actors, artists, stagehands, directors, and playwrights from the terrors of sustained unemployment.

Here NEW THEATRE's questionnaire on Prospects for the American Theatre becomes increasingly important. For the replies will undergo the test of time. And soon it will be possible to see which theatre craftsmen, which estimate of the situation, and which viewpoint offer the soundest and most realistic appraisal of the prospects for the American Theatre.

The questionnaire was sent out the past summer to as many leading members of the profession as we could reach at the time. Twenty-seven people cooperated with replies in this pioneer endeavor to get a cross-section of the American theatre minds today. All shades and extremes of opinion are represented.

THE replies in this, the second of three sets, contain too many interesting features to be treated analytically. They will be dealt with later. It is particularly timely, though, in view of the present Broadway flash-in-the-pan, to note the opinion of an experienced man of the theatre, the actor, J. Edward Bromberg, as to whether the American theatre will recover. "There will probably be sporadic spurts upward from time to time. But real basic recovery, involving healthy conditions: economic, artistic, etc., will probably never be achieved again." This opinion is concurred in by several of the other commentators, assuming, as is natural, that it refers to the kind of theatre that now prevails in the United States—the bourgeois theatre.

In this connection, a most significant development for the future of the American theatre is the announcement made in this issue of the Second National Festival of the League of Workers Theatres of the U. S. A., to be held in Chicago in Ap-

ril 1934. It is the revolutionary theatre, the theatre of the masses, that is young and vigorous and growing rapidly in these United States.

NEW THEATRE hopes that the replies to the questionnaire will result in a reconsideration of values throughout the American theatre. We expect that such a reconsideration will confirm the need for a new American theatre, basing itself unequivocally upon the masses of American workers and farmers, and that it will add many new forces to the growing revolutionary theatre movement.

1

Do you believe that the American theatre will recover from its present decline? Why?

2

A—Serve as an "escape" from life?

B—Reflect contemporary social conflicts?

C—Should it exclude class struggle from its themes?

3

Which outlook upon life offers the greatest creative stimulation for the dramatist of today?

A—Conservative?

B—Fascist?

C—Liberal?

D—Revolutionary?

4

Do you believe that the trend indicated by such plays as *Steel*, 1931, and *We, The People*, is a factor making for a better theatre or a worse one?

B—Can revolutionary plays (of the type referred to above) succeed on Broadway?

5

A—Is there need for a workers theatre in America—a theatre consciously reflecting the viewpoint of the revolutionary working class?

B—Have you seen a performance by a workers theatre group?

C—Do you believe that the workers theatre holds any promise for the future of the theatre in America?

6

A—To what do you attribute the tremendous vitality of the Soviet Theatre?

B—Do you believe that this theatre marks an advance of theatrical art?

C—What, in general, if anything, can the American Theatre learn from the Soviet Theatre?

PAUL GREEN

1

Yes. Because the human spirit by virtue of its nature must continue to express itself in its vital living forms, and the theatre is one of those forms.

2

The theatre is not interested in questions of "escape from life" or "contemporary social conflicts" or any other special



aspect of existence. It is and always should be concerned with the exhibition of man's character, his struggles, and his creeds of value—or if we are speaking of comedy, man's spirit of playfulness. Does this sound too certain?

3

In view of what I have said above in 2, your question 3 has no real excuse for being.

4

A—It is impossible to decide yet. If they were good plays—yes; if not—no.

B—They already have succeeded.

5

A—Yes.

B—Yes.

C—Yes.

6

A—To the awakened vitality of the Russian people.

B—Yes and no.

C—Very little if any. The American theatre must rise from the insides of the American people themselves. | We might be stirred by the example

of the Russian people, but the matter of self-expression is always integral and identical with the nature of a people itself. Therefore in true realist sense we can learn nothing from the Soviet theatre. We can only learn it from ourselves.

GEORGE SKLAR

1

Yes. Because already new forces—groups like the Theatre Union and Theatre Collective are entering the American theatre with a vital realistic viewpoint and challenge—groups which will deal with the American scene in terms of the social and economic forces at work in it—in terms of the worker; in terms of the class struggle.

2

A—No. The theatre is vital only when it faces the realities of the time it exists in—only when it clarifies, interprets and seeks a solution for those realities.

B—If the theatre is to face reality at all it must portray the social conflict of its time. For in them are crystalized the forces at work in its society. Because the class struggle is almost inevitably the springboard from which these conflicts arise, it cannot be excluded from such a theatre.

3

Revolutionary—in the others lie nothing but acceptance and resignation—for a decaying status quo.

4

A—Better.

B—Yes—if the price scale is adjusted to reach of the workers. However, if Broadway remains the exclusive expense resort of the bourgeoisie, they can't.

5

A—Decidedly.

B—Yes.

C—The only promise.

6

A—To its integral association with the life and society from which it stems.

B—Yes—insofar as it correlates vital content with form—insofar as it adds vigor and importance to its expression.

C—More than anything it can, and must, learn that the theatre must not be aloof from life, but on the contrary, should face and deal constructively with its problems, and contribute to the building of a new and better society.

LEE SIMONSON

1

See "The Stage is Set"—Part 4, Chaps. 1, 2 and 3. The "ifs" are discussed fully there. Also, Part 1, Chap. 4,—last part of same.

2

It can successfully do both A and B at the same time. They are not necessarily exclusive in the same epoch. The theatre of the class conflict can produce as many stereotypes as sentimental "escape" dramas, or sociological ones.

3

Any can be a creative stimulus to the creative dramatist. Origins do not determine aesthetic values. They simply determine the ease with which the audience will "get" the dramatist's intention, i. e.: by sharing his assumptions.

4

A—The trend is as old as the hills. They weren't very well written plays.

B—I am not a professional prophet. Consult any astrologist or fortune teller for a dogmatic answer. Not beyond the bounds of possibility if . . .

5

A—Certainly. Let them "roll their own"; make their own theatre, as other bourgeois groups have done, and stop insisting on its importance before they have made any sustained effort to organize it.

B—Only if they get over the idea that vital drama is self-produced by orthodox class dogmas.

6

A—To the fact that it was a tremendously vital theatre before the Soviets.

B—Haven't seen enough of it to judge. Some of it is. Much is formula.

C—Technique, and the humility of the artist before the problems of realization.

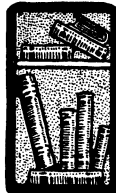
JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

1

Yes. In periods of bourgeois decay, such as the present, the commercial theatre is likely to display considerable activity, for two reasons: (a) Inflation causes the upper middle-class to spend money freely. (b) The mental confusion and the complicated inter-play of social forces cause people to seek "escape from life" in the tawdry exhibitions of the commercial theatre. Meanwhile the revolutionary theatre will develop along separate lines, as revolutionary thought grows and broadens.

2

The "escape from life" is characteristic of the bourgeois theatre. Obviously genuine proletarian drama must be concerned with contemporary social conflicts and must be largely concentrated on the class struggle. However, I feel that it is a mistake to think that there can be any compromise between the "escape from life" school and the proletarian theatre. As the class struggle grows, the line of demarcation



will become broader and clearer. On the one hand, the theatre of the bourgeoisie will display considerable activity, becoming more cynical and more fantastic. On the other hand, the revolutionary theatre must develop its own audience and follow its own destiny.

3

Revolutionary.

4

A—This is of course a factor making for a better theatre, altho none of the plays mentioned above are genuinely revolutionary in thought and content.

B—No. A revolutionary theatre must create its own audience. It is impossible to educate the Broadway audience to accept proletarian material.

5

A—Yes.

B—Yes.

C—The theatre is an essential weapon of the class struggle. Proletarian art in America is in its infancy. The next ten or fifteen years will see a bitter intensification of class struggle and the flowering of a real workers' theatre.

6

A—The creation of a new society obviously brings about a revitalizing of theatrical form and content.

B—Yes.

C—Every American dramatic craftsman should make a careful study of the Soviet theatre. It must be understood, however, that an American proletarian theatre must draw its life from local themes and local problems. We must develop our own form of propaganda and our own means of expression.

J. EDWARD BROMBERG

1

There will probably be sporadic spurts upward from time to time. But real, basic recovery, involving healthy conditions: economic, artistic, etc., will probably never be achieved again.

2

A—No.

B—It should reflect contemporary conflicts but the inclusion of the class struggle theme is not always directly necessary. In other words, it is possible to depict current social life

without the "class struggle" these assuming paramount importance.

3

Today, as always, a complete understanding of all the various "outlooks-upon-life" offers the greatest creative stimulation for the dramatist. But does not this attitude in the final analysis resolve itself into a deeper kind of revolutionary spirit.

4

A—Ideologically for a better. But inasmuch as these plays exert very little effect on contemporary audiences, they only contribute to the theatre's decline.

B—No!

5

A—Yes.

B—Yes.

C—Yes,—provided first it becomes a theatre!

6

A—The premise on which this question is founded is unorthodox unless particular theatres in Russia are mentioned!

B—Those theatres in which spirit and craft have formed a true amalgamation—have certainly contributed to the advance of theatrical art.

C—It can learn that a different society is necessary for this type of theatre.

ALFRED HARDING

1

It is the one art which preserves the personal contact between art and the audience which which was originally present in all of them. It has survived every other catastrophe in every other age. Why not this?

2

The theatre does both of these things and many others. I do not believe it ought to center its attention on either of them or on any other single attitude to life. It would be as foolish for the theatre to exclude class struggle as to concern itself solely with it.

3

That depends upon the individual dramatist. Some will respond to one stimulus and some to another. Of them all the revolutionary writer seems most likely to forget that he has a story to tell.

4

A—They aren't enough to constitute a trend. Those three, in my opinion, may have been good indictments of society, but they were not good plays.

B—Only occasionally and—I am afraid—accidentally.

5

A—First catch your revolutionary working class. Then give it a theatre and theatres for all the other classes, too.

B—Yes.

C—Not as a class. The theatre is bigger than any classes or sects or sexes.

6

A—To the absence of competition from newspapers, magazines, books, etc., and other pastimes of more literate and more mobile peoples and to the enlightened and enthusiastic support of the government.

B—It hasn't been in existence long enough to tell. Probably not.

C—Its outstanding feature, I suppose, is the subordination of the individual to the welfare of the whole. But that is something with which the American theatre has been familiar but which, on the whole it has, to this point, rejected.

EMJO BASSHE

1

There will be an artificial spurt paralleling the artificial spurt in industry and business. It will last for a short period and then again resume stitching its shroud.

2

The class struggle and all its ramifications should be and must be a part of all drama and the theatre.

3

Revolutionary. Not a single drama (or new form of theatre) has come out from the fascist countries. The conservative theatre is half-dead. The "liberal theatre" is simply biding its time until it can become the conservative theatre.

4

A—A better and more vital theatre.

B—Not unless a huge audience is organized beforehand and the rent and expenses are reduced to the minimum.

5

A—Without a doubt—yes!

B—Yes.

C—It certainly does. But it needs organization, direction, boldness. It underestimates the size of its audience, its forces, and the power of the theatre to carry the class war cry to the workers.

6

A—To the October revolution! The workers of Russia gained freedom and everything it implies. The theatre belongs to them—it is theirs to write for, act in, build, rebuild, sing in, dramatize their past and present struggle and the dream—fast becoming a reality—of the future. What "vital workers theatres" are there in Italy? Hungary?

B—In every respect. It has become an art—not a collection of little ideas and accidents. And not a single theatre in the world has been able to show an equal advance nor has it been able to imitate or emulate the Soviet Theatre.

C—They've tried to copy the Soviet technique to make money and they failed. They'll fail in every attempt they make—more than thousands of miles of water and land separate the two theatres. There is a gulf not to be bridged so easily.

(NOTE—The third and final set of replies will appear next month.)



# Scenery: *The Visual Machine*

## PART TWO

**I**N analyzing the script on which he is to work, the designer must first of all seek out the basic conflict around which the action revolves. This conflict should be stated with relation to the concrete elements involved — at least as definitely as “Science versus Business” rather than in terms of abstractions such as “Human hopes versus material necessities.” In other words, the conflict should be stated in a clearly Marxist manner, the analysis bearing inward upon concrete details rather than outward upon generalities. This major conflict should then be analyzed scene by scene. It will be found that in each scene some separate phase of the struggle comes to the foreground; that is, in each scene two predominant and opposing elements are locked in combat.

When this becomes clear, the designer’s conception of the battleground also becomes clear. The same history which has caused the struggle has also caused the physical appearance of the battleground, as well as the physical properties of the weapons. In this sense the appearance of the setting is symbolic of the play. The designer, as well as the dramatist, however, must be on his guard against the cult of abstract symbolism, which is vague, unhistorical and meaningless. The physical appearance of an operating-room is a result of the war between medicine and disease, and the antiseptic focus of such a room may be restated even in constructivist terms. This is a different thing from putting a lot of operative instruments or an operating table on the stage, or from giving the scenery knife-edge lines.

A competent scenic designer must have great reserve of general culture as well as a know-

ledge of contemporary scenic work to draw upon. This all too obvious detail is too often overlooked by many aspirants, who have the cruel experience of producing one fine set of ideas after which they are unable to go further.

Conflict is present in all drama, whether tragedy or farce. To translate the historical significance of the locale of the conflict into a visual machine for the projection of a play is the task of the scenic designer. This craft problem, which in actual practice is mathematically evolved,—that is, the designs are drawn to scale and dimensioned,—serves the necessities of the theatrical performance, from the designer’s point of view, may be stated as follows:

The acting-area, (which is always more or less temporary), is the visual point of focus of the spectators. Some of the spectators are close to the actors, others are farther away, and all are watching the acting-area with abnormal, keen expectation.

From this formula the two paramount duties of the designer become evident: the audience must be able to see the play; the audience must not be made inattentive through monotony, repetition, delay or fatigue.

In theory this seems obvious and simply enough; but actually these duties constitute the whole problem of stage-craft. I shall give some ordinary examples related to the play of action.

The designer must work constantly with reference to sight-lines. A sight-line is the compass of vision of any given spectator. In a standard theatre the designer must take into account the line of vision of individual spectators located at the very edge of the stage platform, in the boxes, in the rear or the sides of the orchestra, and in

the front, rear or the sides of the balconies. The consideration of these sight-lines automatically imposes upon the setting certain laws of construction which must not be violated.

As a very simple example: In a hall where the seats of the audience are on a level floor, the actors and the setting should be placed on a platform, otherwise the spectators in the rear may see little except the heads and shoulders of the players.

Settings, costumes, make-up and properties must have a poster quality so that even the farthest spectators have no trouble in distinguishing what they are. In the plays of action (agit-prop), for instance, armbands, police clubs, bags of money, etc., must be exaggerated in size.

To avoid monotony and repetition, variety of action must be provided for in the ground plans and elevation plans of the setting. The setting, always within the framework of the play’s ideology, must be ingenious in the composition of its masses and in the direction of its lines. For the same reason the setting should have more than a single level, unless a single level is deliberately intended. Variety in levels is obtained by the use of platforms, stairs, ramps, galleries, etc. At the same time, whether the setting is static or dynamic in composition, its elements must be balanced or the audience will become fatigued.

**F**OR plays of action, if platforms or steps are not obtainable, benches, chairs or desks may be used to step on to or to step down from. A Theatre of Action troupe entering a hall should notice what there is available for this purpose. If the play is given in the street, perhaps park benches, the steps of a building, or the back of a truck may be used. The lighting of a play must also be varied in focus, intensity and color, in accordance with the intention of the play.

# Stage In Review

## MEN IN WHITE

Staged by the GROUP THEATRE, at the BROADHURST.

It is usually possible, even under the crudest conditions, to get a certain amount of dynamic lighting. One portable electric bulb with a home-made reflector can work astonishing changes in the appearance of a setting.

Too much glare of artificial light tires the eyes of the spectators. The light must be concentrated on the actors, with little more than reflected light on the setting, and no light on the audience—unless some special effect is intended.

Nothing annoys an audience more than delay. It is the designer's business to make his scenery function smoothly and quickly; for this purpose a great amount of ingenuity is required of him. He must take into account every conceivable difficulty of building, transportation and assembly; he must not design anything unless he knows how it is to be built, and it goes without saying that all scenic designs must be architecturally drafted to scale. Particularly useful is the semi-permanent setting, so called because the bulk of the setting remains standing throughout the play, while there are minor changes for each scene.

To permit a quick and easy handling, scenery and properties must be built in the simplest possible manner. They must be as light as possible, and if bulky, must be made to fold or assemble by means of pin hinges or bolts. There is a particular "feel" or psychology of lightweight, portable structures which is well known to the professional designer and stage carpenter. Among the basic units of scenic construction are: the drop—a tuut sheet of canvas hung from a batten; the flat—a wooden framework with canvas stretched over it; and the parallel—a folding platform. These forms are the cogwheels of the visual machine.

—MORDECAI GORELIK

**M**EN In White, despite its almost flawless production and the ravings of the town critics, is merely good Broadway theatre. Put on by the Group Theater, which goes through the play clicking like a fine, well-oiled unit, it is thrown against some of the finest settings (by Morecai Gorelik) that Broadway has seen in many a moon.

The plot falls into one of the oldest patterns known on the legitimate stage: the hero, a young struggling physician of promise, is torn between the girl he loves (who has wealth and can assure him a good practice from the start) and his desire to become a great surgeon by the slow and painful process of giving years of intensive study and research before he starts to climb.

The play, despite its Broadwayish implications, throws a few neat punches. Where the author misses his great chance to stage a knock-out is during the scene where the directors of the hospital meet to discuss the next year's budget. The subject matter of that scene contains red meat.

In the sure hands of a good revolutionary playwright this scene could have been made the core of the play. How? Well, here are these directors, these house physicians. They sit about and complain that because of the times it is getting hard to wangle money out of the rich patrons. The few punches of the play come in at the sequence during which one of the directors states perfunctorily that as long as the economic system is what it is, hospitals will have to

fawn before the rich. So far so good. The author, however, does not develop this point further, he drops it like a hot potato. The rest of the scene is given over to arguments as to why the promising young interne should be appointed assistant chief of staff. To be sure, the whole play which should swing round like a wheel about this scene, has vast revolutionary implications, but the implications are so faint that one is almost led to believe that they had been slipped in by sheer accident.

**T**HERE is no bitterness against the social system which allows wings of a fully equipped hospital to be closed for lack of funds while the poor swarm at the entrances for medical attention. There is no protest at the reading of the report which reveals that the staff has been reduced, that expenses have been cut through the bone and out of the other side of the budgetary limb. The doctors and directors sit listening lifelessly. The scene is mild. There is no clash, not even the quiet fury of understatement to bring out any strong point concerning the fate of the hospital; everything hinges about the boy and girl. What has gripped most Broadway reviewers by the throat is the faithful presentation of the operating scene where the doctors are shown washing their hands, putting on their masks, handling the knives. This scene is good, faithful pantomime and nothing more. It is good news-reel stuff. But it hasn't the guts of real drama.

However, Broadway being Broadway, even a few punches swung intentionally or unintentionally in the right direction, is something not to be dismissed with a wave of the hand.

—OSKAR JOHNSON

## PEACE ON EARTH

by GEORGE SKLAR and ALBERT MALTZ. A THEATRE UNION production at the CIVIC REPERTORY THEATRE.

SOMETHING new and significant has made its entrance upon the American stage with the launching of the first production of the Theatre Union, *Peace on Earth*. The authors of the play have virtually plunged into the social-political whirlpool and have emerged to say something vitally important—a rather risky procedure for those who would invite the plaudits of the average reviewer.

*Peace on Earth* is to some extent the story of Peter Owens. It is more properly an incision into the threatening war situation, from which it derives its real significance. The scene of the play is a New England college town. The workers on the waterfront are on strike against a shipment of munitions. The struggle penetrates the college. A student gets into trouble through an indiscreet speech. A movement for free speech develops in the college. Peter Owens, professor of psychology becomes involved despite a manifest reluctance and some amusing notions on his part as to the proprieties of professional conduct.

Once involved, however, ensuing events and his own basic honesty conspire to draw him further and further into the anti-war struggle.

The last act is unusual. Peter Owens is in his death cell awaiting execution. War is imminent. But with it all comes a clear triumphant note, a revolutionary prophecy. For, as he is being led to his death, an anti-war demonstration of workers is heard outside, clear and uncompromising.

*Peace on Earth* is therefore more than the story of Peter

Owens. It is the drama of social problems and forces of momentous importance, — the story of greed-enmeshed capitalism, of sterile, hypocritical pacifism, of impending war, and of revolutionary determination to struggle against it. It has no pretensions to being a detached work of art, and its grim forecast (the time of the play is "in a year or so") is something to ponder seriously.

There are many splendid individual performances. But often in the play there was a diffusion of dramatic means—which we can't go into here and now. The revolutionary theatre and drama are still in early stages. There is no doubt that towards its further development *Peace on Earth* is an important contribution. — JACK SHAPIRO

●  
CHAMPAGNE, SEC; a Peggy Wood Vehicle, at the 44 Street Theatre.—This operetta, an adaptation of Johann Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*, breezes tunefully about the stage for three acts (with the orchestra sweating hard); the stars lift their eyes toward the balconies, the supers wear heavily embroidered costumes and about a hundred bottles of stage champagne are consumed. Yowsah! Though the tunes are tuneful—especially the waltzes—and the principals are principally good, this whiff of old Vienna leaves one rather sad and mournful as the final curtain falls.

●  
SAILOR, BEWARE! Produced by Courtney Burr, at the Lyceum Theatre, N. Y.—A wise-cracking, bawdy farce which would make a "swell recruiting play for the Navy"—and which the Navy will no doubt exploit for propaganda purposes, on local stages and screens. Plays like this—"just plain funny"—though they may be by intention, help make it easier for the military machine to whoop things up for the next war.

## LET 'EM EAT CAKE

Book by GEORGE S. KAUFMAN and MORRIE RYSKIND, Music by GEORGE GERSHWIN, Lyrics by IRA GERSHWIN, staged by GEORGE S. KAUFMAN, at the IMPERIAL.

LET 'Em Eat Cake might have been written and produced to prove the correctness of Joseph Freeman's forecast, made last summer and published this month in the replies to the theatre questionnaire. Freeman, a veteran Marxist critic, wrote:

"The Broadway theatre is likely to develop very vigorous plays out of the crisis, clever in their technique and reactionary in their message. . . The technical skill of Broadway will make them dangerous, and by the time they are revamped in Hollywood for the millions of movie fans, they will constitute a tremendous force on the side of the ruling class. . ."

*Let 'Em Eat Cake* is the technique of the American musical play at its highest: A clever if farcical book and lyrics. Music that makes full use of popular strains and yet fits the sense of the lyrics as has not been done since—and in many instances, including—Gilbert's team-mate Sullivan. Costumes that are often works of satirical art (the long white beards of the Union League members). And excellent sets, by Albert S. Johnson, imaginative yet substantial, conveying not merely the atmosphere but often even the character of the scenes. Furthermore—still on the plus side—the choruses fitted into the scenes functionally.

LET 'Em Eat Cake revels in all the "vices" for which the workers theatre has been constantly attacked. It is full of political propaganda. The opening scene centers around a parade of signs bearing election slogans, more or less political

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and pretty funny. The lyrics are mostly political satire and propaganda, with a few romantic ones, inevitably. And it is all very effective. People active in the revolutionary theatre (particularly in the theatre of action) could benefit tremendously by studying the technique of political propaganda as used in this play.

And yet it is exactly its good technical qualities that make the play—whatever the authors may have intended—extra-pernicious. For instead of the propaganda of realities which is a major factor in the revolutionary theatre, it smilingly distorts the most important social realities of these days. The hunger and misery of the millions of unemployed are the subject of "laugh lines." The ex-President of the U. S. A. John P. Wintergreen and his political allies are the sufferers. The poor fellow's wife has to make blue shirts to sell to keep the family alive. A blue-shirted fascist "revolution" led by the same ex-President and his ex-officeholders, establishes the "dictatorship of the proletariat!"

**T**HE Communists become under the oh-so-clever pens of Kaufman and Ryskind, replicas of the unshaven, wild-eyed, cowardly trouble-makers systematically concocted by the bourgeois press in general, here typified in the character of Kruger, well played by Philip Loeb.

There is another highly significant feature: The cynical authors have progressed from the gentle anti-parliamentarian satire of *Of Thee I Sing* to a picture which, with malice towards none, mirrors a class and a class society in an advanced stage of rottenness from decay. Graft, insincerity, stupidity, lechery are reflected in the play as accepted elements of bourgeois life in America today. Even the President of the United States (John P. Tweedledee) is included in this

picture. The only decent major character in the whole play is the ex-President Alexander Throttlebottom, decent no doubt out of sheer imbecility—he hasn't enough sense to be a con- niver—pathetic and lovable in his naivete and good nature (lovable, I suspect, because of the brilliant human acting of Victor Moore rather than by the authors' intent).

Let 'Em Eat Cake succeeds in "holding up the mirror" to the ruling sector of society. It mirrors something more. Kaufman and Ryskind probably worked merely on the principle, as a friend of mine who knows them suggested, of "anything for a laugh." But life can be ironical. Their play, in its actual distortion of political and social forces, in its treatment of Communists, of elections, in its special satirical tone, its gently spoofed blue-shirt "revolution" of pretty girls and dashing uniforms, is more than mockery. The dark shadow of fascism has been cast upon the curtain of the stage. — BEN BLAKE

**THREE AND ONE**; Harris production, at the Longacre Theatre.—Three and One is a trivial comedy portraying three half brothers in love with one woman. The plot is the essence of inconsequence. Just an old triple decker bedroom farce, serving as a vehicle for risqué dialogue, abounding in "lousy" and "stinker."

**GROWING PAINS**; a comedy of youth by Aurania Rouverol, directed by Lubin, settings by Herbert Moore, lighting by Sol Cornberg.—Much could be done through this play. But the author wasn't in a mind to do it. She speaks of dogs—oh yes, and adolescents.

**DOUBLE DOOR**; a melodrama, at the Shubert Theatre.—Double Door is based on the Wendell case, somewhat. It is a well set play, competently acted and correctly cast.

# March of the Movies

THE increased politicalization of the motion picture industry reflects the economic crisis and follows the official mobilization of the industry by the N.R.A. and the Roosevelt administration. The *Film Daily* recently reported: "In recognition of the value of the film industry in reaching millions of people daily, the movies have been mobilized by the N.R.A. through Frank R. Wilson to propagandize facts and purposes of the N.R.A. administration. Shorts will be made by screen stars depicting the New Deal. John C. Flinn, who was with Paramount in charge of Liberty Loan propaganda in theaters during the war, has been chosen to create the machinery whereby the industry can function and cooperate with the government."

This mobilization has gone beyond the use of the obvious shorts and news-reels. Even musical comedy films have become carriers of political propaganda. The particular instances are Karl Freund's *Moonlight and Pretzels* (Universal) which winds up with a phoney depression tableau eulogizing the Roosevelt administration and the N.R.A., and Warners *Footlight Parade*, whose climactic dance sequence turns out to be a pro-N.R.A. Roosevelt demonstration. At the same time M.G.M. released *Turn Back the Clock*. It would have been an amusing comedy if Ben Hecht and Edgar Selywn hadn't tried to combine Hollywood wish-fulfilment with a political history of the United States through the World War and finally the "success" of the New Deal. Fox Films followed this with *The Man Who Dared*, an excursion through a highly falsified biography of the late Anton Cermak, Mayor of Chicago. The picture—originally

called *The American*—is a political Horatio Alger fairy tale; *From Coal Miner to Mayor*. The role of the gruff and un-American looking Cermak is played by Preston Foster made up to look something like President Roosevelt. Political racketeering is blamed on the Republican party. The film actually puts all the blame for Chicago's reputation and financial position upon the "rotten politics" of the other party. In fact, if we are to believe this film, Cermak and the Democratic party try to clean up the city, pay the teachers, prevent coal strikes, and generally reform the capitalist system. In short, this movie continues the fable of how the poor son of an immigrant working man made good in the land of opportunity and is finally an idealization of the Democratic party and the New Deal.

Paramount also falls in line. Not with an out and out New Deal film but a Fascistised topical film. They asked Cecil De Mille to make *This Day and Age*, an effective (because it is well-constructed melodrama) plea to organize our younger generation into lynch mobs like Hitler's Storm Troops under the pretense of cleaning up gangsters.

Hollywood is always ready to pounce upon red hot and sensational news. The recent victories of the Chinese Communists are already known in the film capitol. Fox Films made *Shanghai Madness*, the first American motion picture actually calling "those dirty yellow bandits" Communists. In fact the words "Communist" and "Soviet" are heard from the screen about a dozen times. The plot of this film is no different than that of *Shanghai Express*, *The Roar of the Dragon*, etc. The Red Chinese leaders are

Harvard graduates and wear Russian caps, Russian blouses, and even long Russian beards! The followers are dirty, wild looking, unorganized mobs of coolies. Our American (Spencer Tracy) hero wins a medal from the U. S. Navy and the daughter of an American capitalist for wiping out a Soviet fortress, with a 3-inch cannon.

THE continued intellectual bankruptcy of the film industry, is reflected in the number of film versions of the products of an already dead stage. Current today are film versions of *Dinner At Eight* (MGM), *One Sunday Afternoon* (Paramount), *Good Bye Again* (Warners), *Bitter Sweet* (British), and *Berkeley Square* (Fox).

LIKE a breath of fresh air comes *The Patriots*, a Soviet film, produced by Mejrabpom (Moscow), directed by Boris Barnet, and distributed by Amkino Corporation, into an atmosphere that smells of the decaying corpse of the Hollywood film. *The Patriots* was written and directed by Boris Barnet—his first sound film and his second film to reach these shores. In 1929 we had the pleasure of witnessing Barnet's comedy with Anna Sten, called *The Girl With the Band-Box*. It would take greater rhetoric than mine to do justice to this picture. It is a profound and vital film.

Superficially, one can say that *The Patriots* once again covers the same ground as Eisentein's *Ten Days and Pudovkins The End of St. Petersburg*. Actually it deals with problems that were only suggested by the other two directors. That is, the role that the semi-proletariat, or the "average" man, played in the revolution and the



rising of class consciousness as a result of the World War. The importance of *The Patriots* is, that although it tells the story of events during and immediately after the war, it expresses the present epoch in the Soviet Union. One does not feel merely that here is a film depicting the development of imperialist war, but the final reels imply the struggles that were to come in the civil war and in the present fight of the workers.

*The Patriots* is an intensely human film. Here are real people, alive, breathing, struggling. Here is finally the kind of movie which we have had hints in *Golden Mountains*, *Road to Life*, *Men and Jobs*, and *Shame*. Once more we have a clear-cut indictment of imperialist war. Here is a small provincial town with its workers—some fully class conscious, and most of them not at all so—stirred to patriotism for the fatherland by the coalition of the bosses and the social revolutionaries. Then the long dreary years of war, famine, disease, dirt for those at the front, and the prosperity for the boss and social revolutionary at home. The Kerensky regime comes into power but the war continues. Finally the disillusionment and the fraternizing with the German soldiers. At home international solidarity is brought about by the meeting of the German prisoners with the Russian workers. There is more, a great deal more. It must be seen. The film is episodic and meaty like a huge well-knit novel. All of the episodes are strung together masterfully and the result is clarity.

There are faults. But they are very minor faults of construction, not of conception. The early portion of the film has been tampered with in preparing the film for the "American market." Barnet has borrowed liberally from Ekk

(*Road to Life*), Yutketvitch (*Golden Mountain*, *Shame*), Ermler, (*Shame*), and Macheret (*Men and Jobs*). But he has not imitated. He has made use of their experiments successfully. The use of sound and music are at all times splen-

did and brilliant—but not so blatant that all one remembers is technique. Barnet has developed into a mature and important director. He has given us a film that we are tempted to call a great one.

—IRVING LERNER.

## Workers Study the Film

ON Monday night, November 13, the first workers film school in America began classes at the new headquarters of the Film and Photo League of the Workers International Relief, 116 Lexington Avenue, New York City. The film school is named for the film theoretician and critic, Harry Alan Potamkin, whose death last July removed one of the ablest and most prolific of writers from the film field. Training will be provided for aspiring film critics and technicians. Potamkin lectured at the John Reed Club, Film and Photo League, the New School for Social Research, the Y.M.H.A. and at numerous workers' clubs. But he always looked forward to the day when the workers film movement in this country would develop to the point where it could have its own school.

His Outline for a University of the Cinema published recently in *Hound & Horn*, is testimony to his repeated arraignment of the narrowness and even impudence of the old guard critics. Potamkin pointed out that not only were these critics unacquainted with the history and the development of the industry and art they were writing about, but they were actually often ignorant of the barest element of film technique and production.

The Harry Alan Potamkin Film School will be a workshop school in the various phases of the motion picture planned so that the workers who attend the school will not sit and listen

to lectures, but will be a participant. There will be a lecture-discussion class on the History of the Movie, a study of the technological, economic and social development of the motion picture, tracing the rise of the movie from the peepshow days to the present movie-palace. Special lecturers will discuss War, Banking, Labor Unions, and Censorship in relation to the film. A lecture-discussion class in the history of the Soviet film will be led by Nathan Adler assisted by Joshua Kunitz and Joseph Freeman. This class will study the movie industry of the Soviet Union from its very beginning right after the Revolution to its present status as the producer of some of the greatest films of the day.

Not only the physical growth of the industry will be studied but the theories and films of Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Dovjenco, Vertoff, Barnett and Kaufmann will be discussed in their relationship to the social revolution which has made their work possible. Also, there will be practical work in movie technique and production. Study of the mechanics of the movie camera, lighting, laboratory, projection, etc., will be preparatory to the production course which will embody film structure, scenario, editing.

Various theories of film construction will be analyzed, but it will do what no other school in America does, it will co-operatively produce a documentary film. The class in film criticism taught by Samuel Brody and Irving Lerner, will be a



thorough survey and analysis of past and present film criticism. This important phase of the movie will be studied after the students have been prepared in the classes devoted to history of the movie, technique and production.

The repeated technical and artistic shortcomings in the workers' film productions of the past two years have been ascribed to the fact that this period has been in the main a period of *organization* in a field, attended by lack of equipment and the search for an adequate medium (question of newsreel, short and documentary forms; 16mm or standard size, etc.). There appears progressive improvement in effectiveness of the 1932 one reel National Hunger March film over the two reel 1931 Hunger March film, of the 1932-3 reels on local struggles of the workers of New York over the 1931-2 Western Pennsylvania and Kentucky Miners Strike film. Yet the workers film movement of America is poorly prepared to film the historic period in which we live.

In the opening of the Harry Alan Potamkin Film School, the New York Film and Photo League made a signal advance in the short history of its development. The Film School departs from the sporadic methods of the past. It is a declaration of the *necessity* for *organized practical study* of the problems confronting workers in the film movement. — TOM BRANDON

•  
Funny

The Theatre is a funny business and the people in it have a grand time laughing at and with it. They have to own a sense of humor to stay in it. —Brock Pemberton in *The New York Times*.

We take it you mean the audience, Dr. Pemberton.

# The Dance

A program of dances which are drawn from social conflicts will be given by several outstanding groups of the Workers' Dance League, at City College Auditorium on January 7. The groups are participating are well known to thousands of workers, students, and artists. Unheralded by commercial publicity, they have been dancing for some time at hundreds of affairs for every conceivable occasion of the revolutionary movement. No introduction is needed for the New Dance Group, New Duncan Dancers, the Red Dancers, the Rebel Dancers of Newark, and the Theatre Union Dance Group. These groups stand for dance art that is socially conscious.

From their program we shall be able to gauge the development of the revolutionary dance. On Broadway and in the concert field there has not only been no development, but stagnation and decay. The dance of bourgeois society is dying. Vulgarized inevitably by commercialism, the bourgeois dance loses all value as art. A well known concert group (Doris Humphrey's) driven by economic necessity, is now performing in cabarets. The more sensitive, intelligent and gifted dancers, especially of the younger generation, have turned from this deplorable condition of bourgeois "art" and have allied themselves with the working class in whose freshness, vigor and courage they find inspiration. Nourished with the ideals of the fighting working class, a full blooded realistic art is rapidly developing.

These young dancers bring enthusiasm, a keen awareness of the life about them, they also bring training, technique and unusual talent. From every es-

tablished school of dancing the more outstanding young dancers have formed or joined revolutionary dance groups. And that is only natural. What dancer who loves the art, can continue to dance the generally effete, stagnant content of bourgeois dancers, even though they have established reputations. The thinking dancer realizes that dance art to be significant must express the force of living reality, and that only by allying the dance with revolutionary ideology can that reality be optimistic. It is not surprising therefore that we find most promising talent from every school among Workers Dance League groups.

These dance groups will present a program refreshing to those who are tired of the ideological confusion and despair of current professional performances. To cheer us the New Dance Group will do a satire on the "Blue Eagle." And very timely also will be their dance satire Charity. The Theatre Union Group will dance the Anti-War Cycle which was first performed at the anti-war congress in New York recently. Scottsboro will be given by the Red Dancers. The New Duncan Dancers is doing a new dance inspired by the heroic death of Bruno Tesch, the young German worker, who with several other Communists was recently beheaded by the Nazis. The name of this dance is If Need Be, We Give Our Youth. This group will also do a dance celebrating the success of collectivization in the Soviet Union, called Kolkhozniki. The Rebel Dancers of Newark have also composed a new dance especially for this recital. There is no doubt that at this recital the new dance art of the masses will show its strength.

— MIGNON VERNE

## Brief Dance Reviews

Edwin Strawbridge Recital, Washington Irving High School—Most of the program was a composite of abstractions, languid duets with Valeska Hubbard and some group folk dances. *I Danced With a Mosquito* and *Funeral March for a Rich Aunt* were most popular with the audience. "Cute," remarked two nearby flappers, and "cute"—no more, no less—they were.

In only one of his dances, *Prelude to Revolt*, does Edwin Strawbridge show any awareness of present social conditions. He executes some strong vigorous movements, yet appears to lack any clear conception of what he is aiming at. Strawbridge, too long accustomed to saying nothing, finally finds it difficult to really express himself.

Shan-Kar and Company, Carnegie Hall.—Shan-Kar returned for a short tour this season and presented once more the traditional royal dance art of India. Definite and mature in style, the dancing was subtly executed. This art with its upper class features has no relation to the life of the exploited people of India. It has mere museum interest.

Teresina, Town Hall.—Teresina, brilliant Spanish dancer, with a performance of well-chosen Spanish dances that had the vitality and artistic timbre of a traditional folk art.

Martha Graham, Guild Theatre.—Content of Miss Graham's dances was for the most part her personal recreation of religious emotions of primitive Christianity. Only in such of her dances (not performed on this program) as *Heretic* and *Strike* do some of Miss Graham's sharp movements have a realistic vitality. Miss Graham's work would be truly powerful

if she used her talent and her group to express the more important aspects of present-day life.

Sophia Delza, Civic Repertory Theatre.—Miss Delza has some important embryonic ideas and a wide outlook. This performance showed a confusion on the most vital issues of contemporary life, as well as an immature conception of dance technique, choreography and thematic material. Her failure to present such dances as *Labor and Organization* effectively was due to her dissociation from these problems. We look forward to her closer contact with the revolutionary dance movement.

### *Workers Dance League*

THE New Duncan Dancers, though comparatively new to the W.D.L., have made rapid progress since their organization in October. Built around an original nucleus of six experienced dancers, the group has expanded to a membership of over thirty and now includes, besides the performing group, a beginners class. The performing group also acts as teachers. To date, they have a number of performances to their credit—the most important being at the Daily Worker affair and the Recognition Rally of the Friends of the Soviet Union, both of which took place at the Bronx Coliseum.

The heterogeneous character of the New Dance Group membership is apparent from the following occupational classification. This very diversity is an encouraging indication of the ever broadening appeal of revolutionary dancing among the masses. There are: 6 sales clerks, 1 shoe worker, 1 needle trade, 1 food worker, 1 social worker, 1 dress designer, 1 pro-

fessional housekeeper, 1 dress cleaner, 6 office workers, 1 milliner, 4 students, 1 laboratory technician, 1 artist, 1 hairdresser, 2 beauticians, 1 physical therapy technician, 15 teachers, 2 lawyers, 1 model, 1 chemist and 1 sailor.

As a result of the Teachers and Leaders Conference held by the Workers Dance League several months ago, resolutions calling for the formation of a Teachers and Leaders course were adopted. The course aims to present a survey of work essential for the development of leaders and teachers eager to do work in the revolutionary dance movement. It plans to cover both theoretical and practical work. The curriculum follows

Theoretic training in Marxism—A. B. C. of Communism, Marxism in art.

Theoretical training in the Dance — Development of the dance as an art form, dance pedagogy, accompaniment to the dance, music percussion, voice, and physiology.

—Practical training in the schools of Dalcroze, Duncan, Graham, Humphries, Wigman and Breect; practical teaching, problems in direction of dance projects.

The Nature Friends Dance Group originally started as a technique class for body development and ballet; practical teaching, forming group. According to their report to the W.D.L. council, this performing unit has served as a splendid propagandist agent for the Nature Friends organization. Other beneficial results of their dancing experience, according to this same report, have been the development of self confidence and freedom of bodily motion, plus an appreciation of the values of collective work. At present the group is planning dances, in which any number of people can perform at any one time, and is also beginning work on solo dances.



## Dance Group In A Trade Union

APPROACHING its first anniversary is the Needle Trades Workers Dance Group which has grown from a dance class into an effective performing group. The group is a section of the cultural department of the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union and as such receives a partial subsidy from its parent organization. The membership is drawn from every source connected with the needle trades, shops, opposition groups, union members, etc. The Union provides free quarters.

For some time the members of this group worked on technique and small dance themes suggested in their daily activities. One development was a theme called *The Picket Line*. There was difficulty in working out group compositions dealing with the struggles of needle trades workers, which could be presented at union affairs as a definite part of the union educational program. The acquisition of new workers after projects had been started made evident the need for uniformity in training.

The problem accentuated the basic organizational principle of the Workers Dance League, "groups must be mass in form with a collective leadership." A request to W.D.L. for another instructor was answered and then proceeded a reorganization of the group into an elementary and an advanced section. This has worked well and both membership and artistic results are growing.

The executive committee which consists of an organizer, a secretary, an educational director, a treasurer, and the two dance leaders, plans all the work in a collective manner and brings its suggestion to the membership each week. Once a week there is a discussion hour which follows a talk by an outside speaker. Recently there was a

fruitful examination of the role of the revolutionary dancer. These informal forums have proven invaluable in stimulating creative work.

The two dance instructors draw up a plan of work. They then work out in practice the technique necessary to express the themes decided upon. At present the group is working on a dance drama of the life of young needle trades workers. In the various scenes, it deals with various problems that make up the life of those in the needle trades. The scenes are:

1. In a workers' home (morning)
2. In the boss's home (morning)
3. In the shop
4. Speed-up, accidents, discharge
5. Strike
6. On the picket line
7. The A.F.L. misleaders and the boss's henchmen
8. The settlement committee
9. N.T.W.I.U.—The leader of the needle trades workers.

All the themes are suggested and developed into dance form by members of advanced group with the help of the dance instructors and with the ideological assistance of a union representative.

NOTE:—The Workers Dance League has particularly chosen the report of this group as one that will be of great help in organizing new groups and in building those already formed but which are in the early stage of development. The organization of groups in the trade unions is important. These groups can draw a homogeneous membership to help the union by expressing their particular problems in dance form and performing these dances before audiences of workers and strikers. Much can be learned from the method of work here outlined, although it may often be necessary to modify it. Where sufficient instructors are not available to permit two to one group, one instructor can lead both groups with the assistance of a sub-leader (an advanced dancer in the group who can be trained as a leader).

## Correspondence

Philadelphia:—

Dear Comrades:

I shall bring the subject of starting a dance group to our membership at the next meeting. You state in your letter that you believe that you can help us organize a group in Philadelphia from among the people you know. Thank you again for your kind cooperation.

Comradely yours, L. W. —  
*Philadelphia Office Workers Union.*

ED:—We expect Philadelphia inquiries to come pouring into our office. Join Now!

Philadelphia:—

We want to join the W.D.L. We need more dances. Ideas on dances, and on how to work are in demand. We want to ask you to help us, but we are still in a daze.

Comradely, E. D. — *Philadelphia Dance Group.*

ED:—If you wait until your problems are solved before you permit us to help you, what will we do with all this time on our hands? Please call us now. And send in your money for membership cards. 25c a year per person.

Boston, Mass.—

"We did the first part of "Strike" called "Walk Out" last night at the club. It was received enthusiastically and everyone remarked on our improvement. Last week we worked on the theme Unemployment.

Comradely, J. S. — *John Reed Dance Group.*

ED:—We like your determination to work out your themes in the face of all your difficulties. How about writing up some of your ideas and using stick figures for illustration? We are sorry about not having enough

space to print your description of your dance, but if we had a careful copy, we could have it mimeod and sent out to other groups. Good work! Let us hear more.

P.S.:—We have not forgotten that you asked for the script of Charity. We shall try to prevail upon the New Dance Group in New York to take a day off to write it up.

Wilkes-Barre, Pa.—

Dear Comrades:

We would like you to send us all the information possible on the organization of the Red Dance Group and also on all working class dances.

Comradely yours, E. C.

ED:—We want many more such letters. Send them on!

Newark:—

Several weeks ago Comrade Nell Anyon addressed the dancers on the importance of joining the W.D.L. As a result we are now 100% W.D.L. In her talk she stressed the importance of active participation in the Dance Section of *New Theatre* — contributing reports of development, writing articles on the dance, spreading the sale of magazines in Newark and suburbs and showing how to approach non-sympathetic workers and dancers. Later, Comrade Anyon gave a talk on the club members and their friends on the development of the dance in America and its importance as an expression of revolutionary culture.

We should have little difficulty in selling at least 25 magazines monthly. Let us have a bundle of the next issue.

We have organized a group in Elizabeth and are starting one in Paterson.

ED:—Good stuff, Newark—Imagine our growth if all other groups would work like that. Give them competition, comrades!

# National Theatre Festival

For the second time in the history of the workers theatre movement of this country, delegates and groups from all over the states will meet, discuss their problems and plans, show by performances the progress in their work, and lay plans for future work. This will be the second National Workers Theatre Festival of the League of Workers Theatres. It will be held in Chicago, in mid-April.

The plan for the conference and the competition was discussed and accepted at both the Eastern and the Mid West Regional Conference. Preparations have been started from coast to coast. Preliminary competitions are being arranged to select the best groups from the various cities that will send groups to the National Competition in Chicago. Groups are mobilizing all their members; sections, all their groups, for this festival. The National Office is doing its utmost to assist the various sections, and it is hoped that all the groups will submit reports.

The Eastern Conference, held this summer, did not have the immediate results that were expected. Most of the groups needed a period for reorganization, and it is only about one month since the groups started to carry out the plan of the Eastern Conference, which is published in bulletin form.

Two membership meetings of the New York groups were held, and a committee of 10 volunteers was organized to carry through the preliminary competitions in cooperation with the New York Section Executive Committee. Two meetings of this volunteers' committee have been held, where sub-committees were formed and put into action. All language groups, also the drama sections of workers clubs and the independent

theatre groups will arrange and carry through their own preliminary competitions, select groups for the semi-final, and then final competitions. Two groups, one English speaking and one foreign language will be sent to Chicago from New York. The Jewish preliminary competitions will be held on February 4, at 2 P.M., at the Manhattan Lyceum, 66 E. 4th St., N. Y. The semi-finals will be held on February 11 and 18, and the final on the last day of International Theatre Week, February 25.

Preparations are being made to establish New Jersey as a section of the League of Workers Theatres, and to carry through the preliminary competitions between the New Jersey groups, instead of having the groups from New Jersey compete with the New York groups. A meeting of two representatives of each group in New Jersey will be held in Newark Sunday, January 28. Leo Tepp, 128 Scheerer Ave., Newark, N. J., is directing the work in his state.

No reports were received from New England district and Philadelphia.

The greatest achievement of the Mid West during all its history has been the successful Mid West Conference, held in Chicago. Sixty-four delegates, representing 38 groups from Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, Cleveland, Tri-Cities (Davenport, Rock Island, Moline) Commonwealth College, and farmers groups from Northern Minnesota and South Dakota, met for two days. They discussed problems of the revolutionary theatre movement, and started preparations for the national festival. Delegates from mass organizations, such as unemployed councils, Jewish workers clubs, workers' cultural federa-

tion, Communist party, and also the Chicago Workers School, promised their support.

One of the outstanding reports of the conference was given by Nils Bruce, organizer of the Farmers School On Wheels, on the farmers movement and the revolutionary theatre.

The Mid West Conference made history in the revolutionary theatre movement of the United States by organizing the First District of the league of workers theatres. All groups promised to start preparations for the National Festival immediately after return to their various towns. As a whole the conference was carried through in excellent spirit, doing away with the feeling of the groups, that all initiative and leadership has to come from New York. Groups in the Mid West should write for further information to Alice Evans, c/o Ettinger, 3837 Lake Park Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

The Los Angeles section of the League of Workers Theatres, recently organized as the successor of the Los Angeles Dramatic Council, seems to be the best organized and best functioning of all the sections. According to the latest reports, preparations for the National Festival are in full swing, preliminary competitions and the Western Regional Conference will be held during International Theatre Week, on February 17 and 18, in Los Angeles. These preparations will be utilized in organizing a Western District of the League of Workers Theatres.

Already, the Los Angeles section is sending out organizers to San Francisco, San Diego, and other cities, and delegates are expected from groups as far as Seattle, Washington. A campaign to register all groups with the National Office, is being carried on, and all groups have until February 1. All groups in the Western Region

should get in touch with V. Cutler, 2702 Brooklyn Ave., Los Angeles, California.

These reports show that good work has been done during the past few months, in almost all sections. Those sections and groups that have not started their preparations as yet, must fall in line soon, or they may have to miss what promises to be the greatest Workers Theatre Festival ever held in this country. All groups must pay up their dues, or they will not be permitted to compete in

Chicago, even if they should win their local competition. The questionnaires sent out by the National Office must be kept on file, and sent back in time. The preparatory work must be utilized to publicize the workers theatre movement. The support of local mass organizations must be secured, and reports sent in regularly to the National Office. Material on the competition, time and character of plays, etc. is ready, and will be sent out from the National Office. — ANN HOWE

## A Theatre Advancing

HAVING been away from New York City for more than a year, the writer can the more readily notice the progress of the workers theatre movement. It has been rapid and in the right direction. The two programs recently presented, the first under the auspices of the Theatre Club of the Workers Laboratory Theatre at City College and the second of the New York Section of the League of Workers Theatre at the New School for Social Research,\* reveal a remarkable growth in artistic maturity of one of the pioneer groups in the field, the Theatre of Action of the Workers Laboratory Theatre. The Theatre of Action's presentation of excerpts from *World's Fair* and its rollicking show dealing with the municipal election campaign in New York City, were received enthusiastically by surprisingly large audiences on each occasion. The lively sale of librettos of the election skit in the lobby of the New School was a tribute to its authors and producers. The Workers Laboratory Theatre was acclaimed by the severest critic of any theatre, the audience.

The secret of this success is not far to seek. The Workers Laboratory Theatre has recognized the value and acquired the

knack of presenting its plays in the vernacular and of making them entertaining first of all. It has abandoned the slogan-ridden script in favor of swift and racy colloquialisms, and the barren "agitprop" clichés give way to native theatrical idiom. Of political content the group sacrificed nothing, its skits being as clear-cut in their revolutionary ideology and as unmistakable in their propagandist intent as an "agitprop" play ever was.

The plays also possess the virtue of timeliness and the technical advantage of mobility. Both *World's Fair* and *Who's Got the Baloney?* (the name of the election skit) can be given on any platform with or without the benefit of an equipped stage. But the effectiveness of the propaganda contained in these two pieces is greatly enhanced by the use of satire and broad comedy and by the employment of clever and striking stage devices. Both the comedy and the staging have in them something of the native brand of popular theatre, the wisecrack, the doggerel rhyme, the current rage in slangy expression and the knock-about farce and horse play. These "lowbrow" ingredients are framed in such familiar and racy forms as the show-booth with its loquacious

barker and its fake wonders of the world, the unpretentious "harmony" quartet of the inferior vaudeville brand, the line chorus, and the "small-time" vocal solo with all its mannerism and absurdity. Shamelessly borrowing its tunes either from the rich store of popular airs of the Farmer Grey variety or from the inexhaustible treasures of the Gilbert-Sullivan repertory, the librettists of both shows managed to make their lines fit both the rhythmic pattern of the music and the political message of the day. The result is altogether delightful as entertainment and very effective as agitation and propaganda.

In the World's Fair the N.R.A. and its exponents come in for a good deal of ridicule. The librettist of this series of skits (why is not his name mentioned in the program? and why this affectation of withholding the names of the directing personnel? The idea of the collective theatre by no means includes the obliteration of the individual leaders) clearly knows his politics, and his sallies against the N.R.A. are well conceived and aptly aimed. The demagogic trickery of the N.R.A. propaganda is cleverly brought out in the skit called *The House of Cards*, and the crazy logic of capitalism which considers good crops a misfortune finds fitting expression in the very droll skit of the *Four Professors*.

The New York City election skit deals with the candidates of the various bourgeois parties and their "baloney."

**T**HE treatment of the Socialist party candidate, Solomon, leaves much to be desired. He is too much like the rest of them, and his line of "baloney" does not even in words differ from the political hokum of O'Brien, La Guardia and McKee. This is not good "socialism," for if anything does distinguish the Socialist party politicians from their bourgeois

colleagues, it is their lingo. While the phrase "who's got the baloney?" is fetching in itself, the image employed to symbolize the political "baloney," a big, red sausage, does not add to the clarity of the skit. In order to give a literal illustration of the workers' refusal "to take the baloney," the librettist and the directors have resorted to an altogether illogical device of the sausage being passed from one candidate to the other until it reaches the balking workers' candidate.

But these flaws in the script and in the production are trifling as compared with the general political effectiveness and the high entertainment value of *Who's Got the Baloney?* The Workers Laboratory Theatre is to be congratulated upon its new "hit," all the more so because it shows the continuing tendency of this group to exploit the rich resources of the American popular theatre in its search for a mass form for a mass theatre.

This tendency away from sloganized agitprop stencils and in the direction of live, truly popular and truly entertaining revolutionary theatre, is characteristic of the whole workers theatre movement in its present phase. The success of the Workers Laboratory Theatre will serve both as a model and an encouragement to those groups which are determined to make the overdue step in the same direction.

Other items on the two programs brought out both the strength and the weakness of the "agitprop" plays at their best. *Eviction*, a mass recitation by the Bronx Drama Group of a poem by A. M. Suhl, departed somewhat from the familiar type of mass-recitations by introducing the element of stage properties, business and local color. The able direction of the piece gave the poem a semblance of perfection far greater than it contained. This

effort proved the futility of the poem and the mass recitation as a form for dramatic presentation. Less pretentious but more effective was the performance of the familiar *Scottsboro* mass recitation by the Theatre of the Workers' School. Its electric lines, its vigor and vehemence of delivery and the utter lack of "theatre" aroused the resentment of the audience against the *Scottsboro* frame-up. Within its limits and on special occasions this form of mass recitation still is an effective propaganda weapon.



Two other playlets by the Workers' School group were very feeble, showing the agitprop theatre at its weakest. The director of this group, John Bonn, says that these skits are the result of his attempt to break away from "schematicism" and an attempt to portray real characters and real life. He chose poor material for his initial venture upon the new road. Both the skit about the American expert crop destroyer coming to the Soviet Union to do business, and the scene in a German restaurant where a capitalist, a worker and a representative of the middle class each with equal enthusiasm hails Hitler as the champion of his class and the arch foe of the other two classes, lacks real characters in plausible situations.

Doubly handicapped by the schematic nature of the characters and by their own lack of sufficient training, the performers were anything but impressive in these skits. The first step in breaking away from the schematic theatre is to discard schematic plays. The play is the thing in the revolutionary theatre also. This criticism applies to the *Brownsville* and *East New York Workers Drama Groups* in their presentation

of an artificial piece, attempting a portrayal of German workers. The groups possess, in the main, good acting material, but their choice of plays is unfortunate and the direction is literal, muffing excellent opportunities to enliven the proceedings by bits of song and gayety.

On the program presented at the City College there was also a scene from 1931 by the Theatre Collective and two dances by the New Dance Group. These items were reviewed in another issue.

An interesting feature of both programs is their audiences. Obviously, these were largely composed of white collar groups. That the workers theatre has attracted these elements is a significant sign. Young workers theatre groups can attract paying customers and send them away satisfied. But only by extending the proletarian clientele of the workers theatres can they really become a powerful weapon in the struggle of the working class for emancipation from the profit system. It may not be premature to warn the leaders of the workers theatre groups against the danger of orientating their work mainly upon non-proletarian audiences, however sympathetic those may be. Having overcome some of its earlier defects, the workers theatre movement should now set before itself the goal of reaching a wide worker audience.

— NATHANIEL BUCHWALD



#### PUBLIC READING

A public reading of John Henry, a revolutionary play of Negro life based on a traditional hero of American Negro folk lore, will be given on Sunday evening, January 14, at 8:30 o'clock, at 42 E. 12th Street, New York City.

# International Scene

*England, Norway, Switzerland, at Workers Theatre Olympiad*

WE are still too close to the Olympiad to understand the tremendous value of this event. Sufficient time has not passed to draw final conclusions from the vast variety of impressions, facts, problems, and ideas which appeared at that concentrated theatrical world-show. Especially for the American workers' theatres, which were not represented on the Olympiad the process of clarification, self-criticism, reorientation, and materialization of the effects will be less marked.

We need to know about the individual Olympiad productions for three reasons: To get a clear picture of the present status of the international workers theatre movement. To view the whole history of the workers theatre through concrete examples of active groups representing the various stages of development, and to recognize our own position at the present moment. To understand our own problems, mistakes, and achievements better by seeing them more objectively in the work of other groups.

These points naturally influenced the arrangement and the conception of the reviews of the groups. The reports are not arranged according to the actual order of performances. The dealt with separately, as their Soviet groups and the groups from the capitalist countries, are problems and conditions of work are different. The review of the groups from capitalist countries appear in historical, critical order, representing periods and stages of development. Divisions have been made as follows:

#### A. Capitalist groups.

##### I. Agitprop Theatre

1. Mistakes (Norway, Switzerland, England).

2. Craftsmanship (Holland)

##### II. Theatre of Action (broadening from old-style agitprop)

1. Seeking new methods (Denmark, Belgium, France). 2. Using new methods (France, Czechoslovakia)

##### III. Related Arts (Dance groups)

#### B. Soviet Groups

##### I. Agit-Brigades

II. Professional and semi-professional

NORWAY—The Oslo Workers Theatre presented a play on birth control. A correct selection from the viewpoint of mass approach; it explains the class struggle as it appears in the private life of the worker (not from the usual political, economic angle). It appeals to the working class women, a task the workers theatres are neglecting.

As a realistic play, its effect depends on the presentation of real characters with flesh and color, with all the attributes of their social and emotional background. A task which requires training and experience on the part of the players, and certain knowledge of the theatre, if not talent. The members of the group did not have these prerequisites.

On the stage appeared not the characters of the play, but a number of sincere, militant, politically developed workers in the costumes of workers, lawyers, judges and other persons who spoke sentences which were not their own. That piece of reality, which should have carried, implicit in it, the message of the play, did not come into existence. The performance was artistically, and therefore also politically, a failure. The group failed because of its fundamentally wrong attitude towards theatre. Instead of relying on

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its own (still raw) creative power and selecting its repertory and staging accordingly, the group ignored its limitations and tried to imitate the professional theatre.

However, even during the preparation of the production, the group recognized that it was attempting something beyond its capacity. It also found its adequate style and method: to use types instead of realistic characters, to show symbolic actions instead of seeking to create the atmosphere of realism. But these workers did not reach complete conclusions. Instead of selecting a more appropriate play, or of changing the style of production, they compromised by adding symbolistic form elements to the formerly adopted realistic style. The representations of the bourgeois class had to speak their realistic language behind baby-face-masks (which was mentally and physically false). At the end of the play (not organically growing out of it) was presented the message of the play in a powerful and convincing mass-recitation.

The Oslo Workers Theatre failed in its Olympiad performance. But, from its own production, from the example of the other workers' theatres of the world, from its discussion with the judging committee, it gained clarity, not only seeing its errors, but also finding the path of its future development. The group has good human material, which should carry out the artistic and cultural program accepted at the Olympiad. The Oslo Workers Theatre ought to show marked progress by the arrival of the second Olympiad.

SWITZERLAND — The Swiss group showed two presentations: a short revue on the history of Fascism in Germany, and an agitprop potpourri on the need for a united front. In the anti-Fascist revue, there was a red pulpit on one side

of the stage, from which one of the players delivered a serious political narrative, critical speech in blank verse, illustrated by the parade of the players, wearing masks of Braun, Bruening, Hindenberg, von Papen, and Hitler. Their lines were primitive, and so were their recitations. Theatre as propaganda? This was propaganda, but bad, because it was not theatre. The Swiss group, however, is well advanced. It does not try to achieve things beyond its possibilities. These players do not imitate mechanically. They rely on their own creative abilities. They use no other means than those of which they are master. But their means are too limited, too inexpressive.

The strength of the group lies in the fact that there is no wrong method, no erroneous theory to hamper it. All that is needed is expansion of knowledge of the theatre, development from primitive technique through training and experience. The way is open for organic growth towards standards of an effective workers theatre.

ENGLAND — The Red Front and Red Players, appeared with two performances each, Class Against Class (anti-Fascist), Capitalist Rationalization (a bad adaption of Tempo-Tempo), Social Service and Invergordon (on the British Sailors' Strike).

The plays and the productions of these groups are primitive. It is not the naive primitiveness of the Swiss group, which at least creates a personal appeal to the audience. It is a conscious primitiveness, a stubborn self-imposed limitation to the most restricted means of expression, without any attempt to use these few means in the most expressive and interesting way. The theory of primitiveness is correct, as long as it is applied to the beginning of a new theatre movement, as a transitional method of work in

order to get the best results out of the still primitive forms. But it becomes absurd when accepted as the principle of theatre as a whole.

**H**OLLAND—The Dutch group Seven Provinces, which performed an anti-religious play and a revue contrasting life in the Soviet Union with life in capitalist countries, was an example of perfect agitprop theatre. The productions were of highly developed craftsmanship, revealing knowledge of the material at hand and admirable cleverness in using it. The group did not undertake anything that was beyond its abilities, but there were no lost opportunities. Mass-movement, dance, songs, music, masks, etc., were combined into a well balanced, dynamic, vivid production.

The political import of the play was not carried directly to the audience by speaking political editorials or mass slogans, it was completely transformed into dramatic action.

The Dutch group achieved the highest possible standard of the stylized, small-scale, amateur political theatre. It showed highly developed craftsmanship, but at the same time revealed weaknesses inherent in each kind of craftsmanship, lack of courage to dare to do something extraordinary, to search for new ways, to explore unknown territory. The Dutch group will have to make a beginning in this direction in order to develop beyond this one style of workers theatre. There must be a wider development of form, and search for new material.

Other groups undertook this new method at the risk of temporary failure, a risk that can mean only greater contributions to the growing workers theatre as a whole. — JOHN E. BONN

*(Next month, the exploits of these groups will be discussed more fully in a second and final article.)*

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