

# WORKERS' THEATRE

MAY  
1931

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W O R K E R S T H E A T R E

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The Workers Theatre magazine is published monthly by the Workers Laboratory Theatre, section of the Workers International Relief Cultural Activities Department, for the publishing of articles by all workers dramatic groups.

## BASIC PRINCIPLES

by

Albert Prentis

Workers Laboratory Theatre

It was in April 1930, a short while after the Wall St. crash, that some of our 'best minds' came forward and told us that there are unmistakable signs on the industrial horizon that the entire depression in this country will be over in two months. A year has since passed--a year of layoffs, of wage-cuts, of evictions, of hunger marches---and May, 1931 is here. Yet the depression is worse than ever, in fact it is so bad that even capitalist economists do not expect recovery before 1932. And meanwhile the masses are suffering:

Times of depression are critical times for the entire working-class. By virtue of its economic hold upon society, the capitalist class during such periods attempts to harass organized labor by pitting unorganized labor against it; by playing up race hatreds; and in such times the capitalist class tries to subjugate the unorganized worker more and more by layoffs and wage-cuts. The worker attempting to protest is jailed if American, deported if alien, or lynched if negro.

This makes it imperative upon the part of organized labor not only to combat such tactics, not only to close up ranks to present an invincible front but it must also utilize these times of depression to show and convince the unorganized masses that the greedy ruling classes need the workers only so long as they can squeeze profits out of them. They must be made to see that clearly and only then will the attempt to organize these masses be realized.

To aid them in this work, the organized workers must evolve or develop various media by which they can reach the unorganized. Since the latter are not likely to come voluntarily to be organized, these media must be of such nature as to be able to penetrate wherever these workers are situated; they must have a mass appeal, must be based upon mass psychology and have great effectiveness at the least cost. The Workers Laboratory Theatre is such a medium.

That it may be at its maximum usefulness, a workers theatre must be based upon three principles. First, it must awaken to class consciousness leading to organization; second, it must go to the masses rather than wait for the masses to come to it; and third, it must have a mass appeal. These three principles must govern the playwright, the director, the technician, the actor. Together they will determine the technique for an efficient, utilitarian theatre. In passing, we may state that these three principles also determine the 'content', the 'form' and the 'style' that our intellectuals talk about so much and understand so little.

Whether he is writing satire or serious plays the playwright should keep these points constantly in mind. He must endeavor to point out either directly or by implication, but unmistakably, that immediate goal--organization. Then he must call for settings which can be easily constructed and carried about from place to place. And lastly, the play must be written in the dialogue of the masses, about situations that the masses are familiar with, about types that they can quickly recognize. What is more, the playwright must try to understand the psychology of the particular group of workers his plays will be presented to, so that the audience will be able to identify itself easily with the actors in the play.

The director likewise must be guided by the above principles. He must see to it that the actions and 'business' do not becloud the central idea, i.e. organization, but actually emphasize it, yet with economy of gesture and motion, this last to permit any worker to take any part with a minimum of rehearsal. The settings, costumes, make-up, lights to be done away with as far as possible.

Thus traveling light Workers Theatre groups will be able to perform in meeting halls, at demonstrations, in front of factory gates, on street corners. Thus can they reach workers who by no manner of means can be induced into a hall to listen to organizers. Thus traveling light, will they also appear at Union Square when on May 1st, all workers will come to demonstrate the solidarity of the working class and to protest against deportation, lynchings, wage-cuts, and oppression by the Capitalist Class.

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the  
Bourgeois  
Theatre

## The Collective Method in the Workers Theatre

by

Bernard Reines

Workers Laboratory Theatre

The Workers Laboratory Theatre has recently been trying to develop a technique of collective playwriting. The revolutionary theatre cannot depend for its plays on the irregular writings of a few individuals. It must have a steady supply of plays covering many subjects and when an event of importance occurs, the revolutionary theatre must have a dependable technique of dramatizing it at once while it is of the greatest interest to workers. The collective method can do this well, also, this method activated large numbers of workers, thus stimulating their interest. It develops their ability to see and express the class struggle dramatically, which is the most effective form of propaganda. It helps them to become better political speakers, it enables the revolutionary theatre to get the greatest benefit from the experiences of all its workers, and it develops that sense of discipline in accepting the collective will based on the experience of all the workers, which is absolutely essential for the forward march of the working class as a whole.

The procedure we have worked out in collective playwriting, while still far from real smoothness and efficiency, is very promising for our purpose. The playwriting committee, to which any member may belong, decides on a general subject for example, persecution of the foreign born and the Negro in the United States. Then there is a discussion in which every one is expected to take part. Various phases of the subject are gone over until all aspects are covered. Then certain of these phases are chosen by vote for inclusion in the particular play. Thus the play's general outline is decided. Writing the actual dialogue is usually assigned to one comrade. The written play is then discussed again by the playwrights, who make changes as considered desirable. The play is then submitted to the executive committee and finally to the general membership, each body proposing changes or letting it stand as it thinks best.

It is true that this procedure takes much time, but since it is our job to develop the theatre of the revolutionary masses, we work to draw in the broadest possible participation to get every one we can to take part in the actual work of the theatre, to encourage the broadest initiative-- always on a collective basis. Thus when, after discussion, the majority of any group votes along certain lines, every one is expected to accept and work whole-heartedly along these lines.

It is expected that as we gain experience in the collective method, we shall be able to work better and much more quickly than we do now. And of course we seek to make use of any useful suggestions that we come across.

It is likely that we shall soon make a further extension of the collective technique. Our theatre is now divided into two groups, each of which handles plays entirely by itself except in the writing. Now we are going to adapt the playwriting method also to these groups. Instead of a special committee for playwriting, each group will take up a subject

Of its own, discuss it, and write up the play by itself, as well as produce it. Thus each individual of the group will get experience in every field of dramatic work.

One very important critical warning must be given about the collective method. The experience of the Workers Laboratory Theatre, points out this essential principle of successful collectivism; THE COLLECTIVE METHOD WILL SUCCEED ONLY SO FAR AS THE INDIVIDUALS OF THE GROUP READS OR THINKS IN ADVANCE TO PREPARE ON THE PARTICULAR SUBJECT TO BE TREATED. If all or most of the workers come unprepared and have to start trying to dig up ideas on the spot, progress is slow and discouraging. This is a lesson which must sink much more deeply than it has even into the minds of the Workers Laboratory Theatre.

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### The Workers Theatre and the Boss-System

by

Deutchman-- Workers Laboratory Theatre

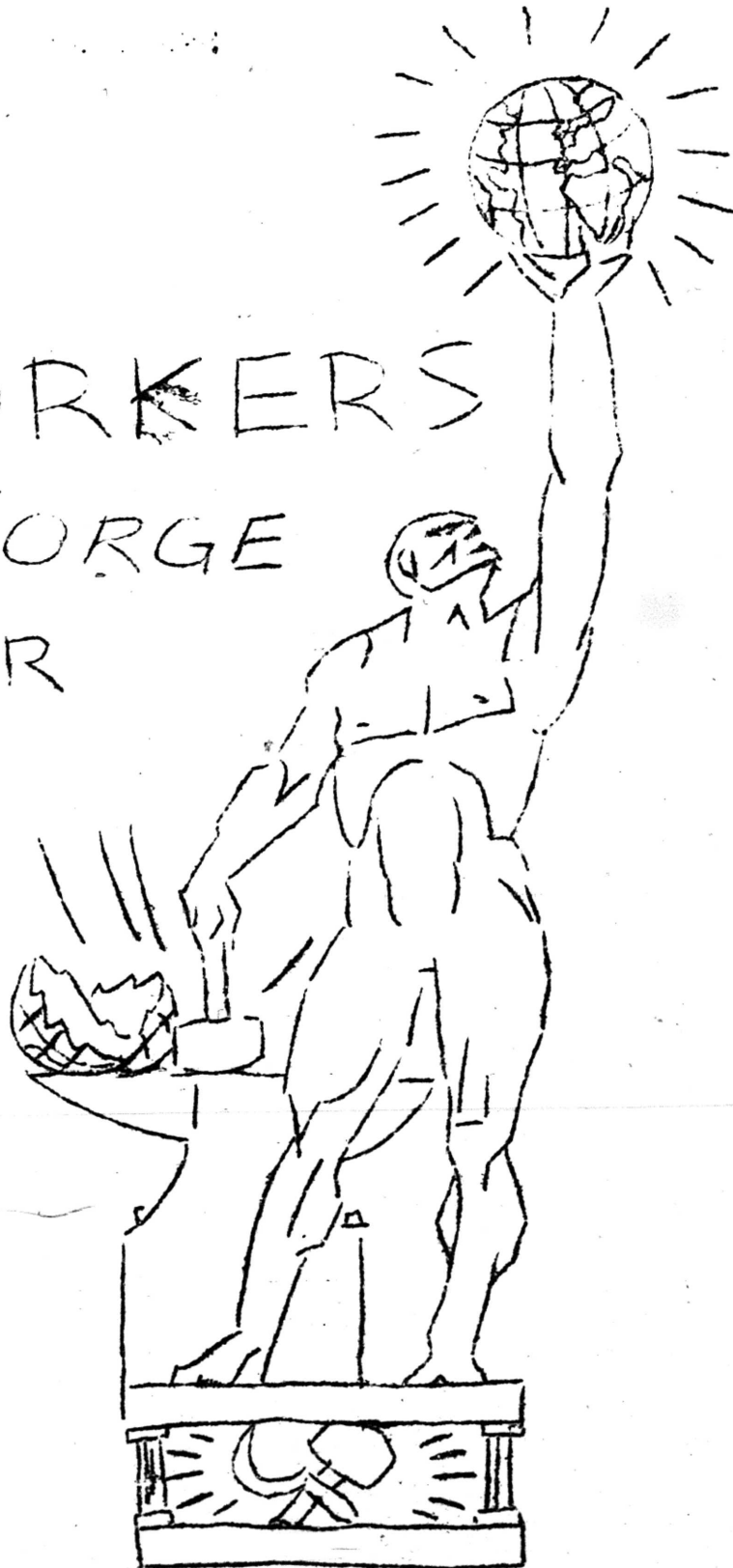
There are ten million workers unemployed in the United States. Probably nine million and five thousand have no other means of support or must also support a family. Most of these are industrial workers and yet the Capitalists have stated that industry is on its feet again and all we must do is to sit back for a few minutes and wait for prosperity. Men and women are dying from hunger and the cold. Workers who succumb too easily to the Boss-system have found as their only solution---suicide.

In the March issue of the Daily Worker there was a story of an old man who has been crippled by an automobile accident. He was paying eight dollars a month for rent. He was unemployed. He was evicted. What was an old, disabled man to do in the face of a system that does not and will not insure aid for disablement and old age. If we could only show this case as an exception, but there are thousands of such workers both infirm and able with families. I once spoke with a justified specimen of capitalism--a gangster. He said, "Do you think I'm going to work for any goddam boss for ten dollars a week and be kicked around by him when I can make more money in less time and enjoy myself?" With what pride can we point to a system that breeds inmates for asylums and prisons? With what sort of blindness are the workers afflicted not to see the horrors and stupidity of Capitalism.

The Workers Laboratory Theatre does not concern itself with the individual emotions of the bourgeois intellectuals and emotionalists. Of what concern to us is one afflicted with neurosis because they spend their time in morbid introspection and does not realize that it is due to the contradictions in the Boss-system, when there are millions of workers suffering from starvation, for the producers get nothing but wage-cuts and lay-offs and the parasites get everything. It is the work of the Workers Laboratory Theatre and all other workers dramatic groups to propagandize through plays and awaken class-consciousness in workers and show them the solution of organization. The Workers Laboratory Theatre is doing this. Because it has recently been organized it has worked as a cultural entertainment only

BUT WE WILL soon begin working as an agit-prop group,  
performing on the streets, agitating under the  
leadership of the Communist Party for the fight against  
the boss-system.

WORKERS  
FORGE  
YOUR  
SOVIETS



FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE SOVIET UNION!



## How the 'Workers Theatre' Works in Germany

(Translated from the Rotes Sprachrohr)

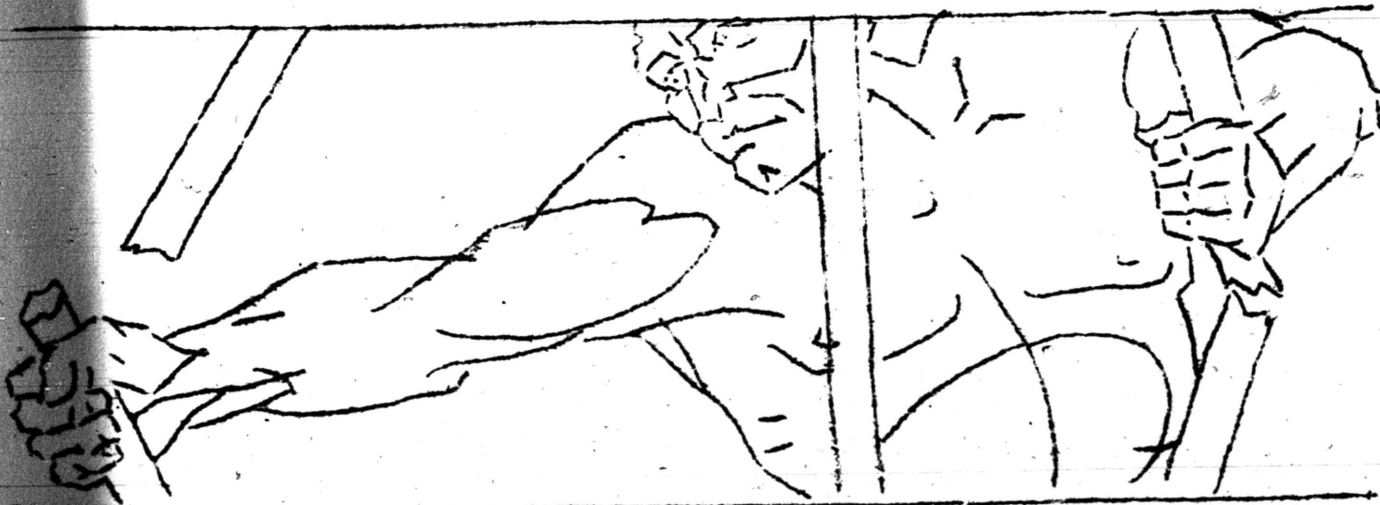
by

E. W. Mareg

The following should give an idea of how the work of the worker theatre groups in Germany is carried on; how these groups are fulfilling the slogan 'Worker Actors! To the Factories--To the Streets!' and the methods used in doing this. Almost every theatre group works on this basis and can therefore be taken as an example.

'Down with the playing theatre...Up with Propaganda Play,' is the slogan. Away with the silliness of thinking that without a stage, movable scenery and make-up we will not be able to do it. Sure we do it. We are no actors....We are agitators. We don't want to squeeze tears out of our audiences. No, we want to conquer the workers' brains and hearts. To agitate, that's what we want to do. Where? Everywhere where workers are. Have we been everywhere already? No. Where have we been? Most of the time in the halls or at organized meetings and demonstrations. Whom do we find in halls or meetings or demonstrations? We find those workers that have already been won and are class-conscious. Not at meetings and not at demonstrations are the workers that we have to win. They don't come to us? Well, what of it. Let's go to them. Where can we meet them? Near their shops, during the lunch hour, or when they quit work for the day; on the breadlines, in the streets, in the parks.

It is of great advantage to know where shop meetings are held and to go to play there. But what if we are not allowed to play there? Then we organize a meeting



out on the street, in front of the shop.

We have flags with us; signs are put up. Two comrades fix themselves up as fascist and capitalist. Just as the workers begin coming out of the factory one comrade gives a signal on a bugle. The others announce through megaphones in a mass-recital style (mass chorus) what is about to go on. The first fifty workers approach. Two are attracted and stop, the others don't stay. Fifty more workers are coming, the interest is increasing, forty of these stop and only ten walk away this time. We begin with a fascist scene. Hundreds of workers stand around us. We play a couple of other short plays. A revolutionary worker speaks. We distribute leaflets; say a few slogans through the megaphones. Thirty minutes have passed. We pack up quickly and disappear. As we get around the corner we hear a patrol wagon arriving. O boy! But we were already around the corner. The workers go home discussing what they have seen and heard. Four days after we found that the 'Red Union' in this factory had gotten a number of new members. The kind of work we have done in front of this factory we have already done successfully in front of other factories.

The advantages of these meetings cannot be overlooked.

We don't need to organize and prepare plays weeks before. No hall rent and other similar expenses have to be covered. The financial needs are very low. However the agitational gain is high. Hundreds of men and women who will never go to meetings, the youth that we find in streets during the day or strolling around in the evening will see and hear us, we step right in their way. They cannot help it. And they take up joyfully and spontaneously our words and play. Many of them join the party or the other militant organizations right where we play. The last time they have is not spent for the movies but for a pamphlet from us.

In every case this kind of agitating is successful and very important.

WORKER ACTOR! TO THE FACTORIES! TO THE STREETS!

IS THE SLOGAN IN GERMANY

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## IT'S FUNNY AS HELL

A public hall. On the platform are a table, a gavel, a pitcher of water and a glass. Five chairs are arranged on the platform which is otherwise empty. In the audience at the extreme right, Jack, Tom, Fred, poorly dressed, are seen talking in low voices, gradually louder as though arguing.

Jack- Oh, yes, I know, you mentioned it three times in the last half hour that the committee elected me and I've got to do it. But if you think you'll get anything you got another guess coming.

Fred- Oh, you never can tell, don't forget, There's two women on the committee, and you know women's soft-hearted.

Tom- And don't forget the reverend--

Jack- I'm not forgetting nothin. It's you who's forgettin that there's a politician and a philanthropist on the committee and that kind don't do a thing if they can't see profit somewhere.

Tom- How about the Christmas spirit--

Jack- Say, Tom, you're dumber than I thought you was. Christmas spirit-- D'ye hear Browning that's the philanthropist talk on the radio last Sunday?

Tom- No, why?

Jack- well, he was talkin about the unfortunate working people, we must be good to them, we musn't cut their wages and all that bunk, but he himself just laid off 50% of his men and give the rest a 15% cut. That's the kind he is.

Fred- Yes, but now that we're here--

Jack- ( interrupting) We

better stop arguing and find a place to sit down. We ain't got much time. ( They sit down near stage. ) ( On the platform from the left appear Miss Stewart and Reverend Dribble. )

Miss S.- It is so wonderful of you Reverend Dribble, to leave your own work and volunteer to help us. I don't know how to thank you.

Rev. D.- No need to thank me. I am a servant of God, Madam, ever ready to help in a good cause. When I heard about your noble work, I came aa once, for I know that I can help. I will pray for the unemployed next Sunday.

Miss S.-m Thank you so much. How do you find conditions in your parish?

Rev. D.- The conditions are such that I marvel anew every day at God's wisdom and goodness in sending upon us these trying times. The church attendance has increased marvellously of late.

Miss S.-I hear there are many needy families in your community.

Rev. D.-Yes, but we are trying to help them in whatever way we can, and I hope your committee will also do something for them.

~~Miss S.~~ Miss S.- Why, of course, --- After you've been so helpful to us. ( Miss Calkins Comes in. They greet her. )

Miss D. C.-How do you do, Miss Stewart. How do you do, Reverend, I thought I was late, I rushed terribly. ( Sits down. )

Miss S.- ( Looks at audience ) The hall is nearly filled, but Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Browning

are not here yet. As soon as they arrive we will begin.

Rev. D- You look more beautiful every day, Miss Calkins.

Miss C- I think you are flattering me Rev. Dribble. Everyone has been telling me that I look bad lately, and I did lose three pounds in the last four months.

Miss S.- No wonder you are losing weight. Conditions being what they are, you must be kept pretty busy these days.

Miss C- I am. And I expect to be kept busy for a long while if things keep up this way.

Rev. D- We must not be dispondent, Miss Calkins. The Book says "In God I have put my trust, I will not be afraid, what can man do unto me--" which makes me think that I ought to preach a sermon on despondency next Sunday in addition to the prayer for the unemployed. I hope we will have you with us then.

Miss C.- I will try to come, but I cannot promise.

Miss S.- Rev. Dribble, perhaps you could speak to Mr. Browning after the Sunday service. Conditions have become simply impossible since he laid off more than half his men. Perhaps you could persuade him to take back some of the men, and if he can't use them in his plant, he may be able to use them around his estate.

Rev D- I most certainly will talk to him, Miss Stewart. You see, Mr. Browning is a trustee in our church and always consults me when doing

some philanthropical work. On the other hand, I am of the opinion that Mr. McCarthy could do more for the men by giving them some work around the park. Mr. Browning is a wonderful man, but he is very practical, and he does not think it best for the men to let them loaf around on work that they are not accustomed to. He maintains that a workingman has the greatest self-respect when kept at maximum efficiency.

Miss S.- I think Mr. McCarthy is also a practical man. But-- here he is himself. (Mr. Mc Carthy comes in)

McCarthy- How d'ye, Miss Stewart, isn't the weather wonderful today? How d'ye do Miss Calkins.

Miss S.- This is Rev. Dribble Mr. McCarthy.

Mr. Mc.- How D'ye do, Reveren I have heard lots about your good work and I'm mighty pleased to meet you.

Rev. D- The pleasure is all mine, Mr. McCarthy. We were just uttering your name when you came in.

Mr. Mc- I hope you were saying nice things about me.

Miss. S- The Rev. was saying that you with your political influence, could do a great deal for the unfortunate unemployed by providing them with city work or some form of relief.

Mr. Mc.- You have come to the right man, madam, and I will do ~~all~~ all I can. Altho, to tell the truth the city treasury is very poor now, what with the market crash and the general depression.

Perhaps you ought to talk to Browning and tell him his layoffs make things bad all around, he ought to keep as many men as he can right now.

REV. D- I do intend to speak to him concerning this very thing. Mr. Browning is a

trustee of my church, you know. At the same time I am rather fearful that consideration of his duty to his stockholders may not permit him---here is Mr. Browning himself.

(Browning comes in)

Browning.- Hello everybody, am I late? How do you do, Miss Stewart. Hello Mac, how do you do Reverend.

(shakes hands with the men)

Miss S.- This is Miss Calkins  
Mr. Browning.

Mr. B.-How do you do Miss Calkins. What do you say we begin, Miss Stewart-I have to catch a train for Washington tonight.

Miss S.- Yes, we were only waiting for you.

(addressing the audience)

Ladies and gentlemen, friends, you, no doubt know why we are all here this evening. Your presence here attests to the fact that you do, also that you are ready to help not only with your sympathy but in a more practical manner. As you are aware, our community, not unlike many other communities in our country, has been visited by one of those periodic depressions, which our economists find so difficult to explain but which bring in their wake a great deal hardships and untold misery. These depressions come to us every seven or eight years and are somehow tied up with our industries but to those affected by these depressions they are acts of God and we as civilized human beings, cannot stand by and watch these poor unfortunates go down without stretching out our hands and helping them just a little. A cold winter is coming and some of these people have no food, no clothes, some of them even have no homes, we must therefore rush along relief measures to ameliorate somewhat the conditions of these poor people, and so I

have invited some of the outstanding citizens of our community to address you and point out the need of relief right now. Speaking of acts of God, we have with us a man of God, who will say a few words to you. I have the honor and pleasure of introducing the Reverend Doctor Dribble. (sits down)

Rev. D.-Miss Stewart, ladies and gentlemen, a few minutes ago when Miss Stewart inquired about conditions in my parish, I answered that conditions were such that I marveled anew at the wisdom and goodness of God for sending upon us these trying times; also that attendance in the church has increased wonderfully of late. Why did I say those things? Because as in everything that God manifests himself there is a lesson to be learned. For a number of years mortal man was forgetting his maker. He was turning to things of the flesh rather than the soul, attendance in the church fell, many even doubted his existence. God has decided therefore to manifest anew to vouchsafe to us a sign so to speak of his continued watchfulness over us, a reminder that he is ever ready to summon us to account. For God is good, but he is also just. And he has sent upon us these trying times to urge us to return to his church, that we may beg his forgiveness, that we may pray to him. And in measure as we pray to him will he help us. I have therefore decided for next Sunday to pray in my church for the unfortunate Unemployed and to ask forgiveness for them and all of us. Amen. (sits down)

Miss S.- (rising) Thank you Reverend. You have given

EXPRESSION to our own sentiment. Now I have the pleasure of introducing Miss Calkins whom you all know so well.

Miss C.-Miss Stewart, Rev. Dribble, ladies and gentleman. On my way here this evening I made up my mind to speak of so many things but now that I am here I don't know where to begin. Conditions are simply terrible friends, and we all must do something for the community immediately or I do not know what will happen. If at any time our rich people, our millionaires, can do something for the community, this is the time. This is the time when they should take on help to remodel their sunken gardens, to build their new yachts, to add a new wing to their residence, to create some sort of work that will give these unfortunate idle a chance to do a little work and earn a few dollars for themselves and their little ones. But we must not only look to the rich for help for all, all of you can help. If you, your friends, your neighbor, have been planning some renovating about the house, hire now and give those men a chance to earn a few do dollars. It is well to keep in mind too, that not only will you be doing your duty by your community but you will also strike a bargain, for these people are willing to work for very little and will give you more than you money's worth.  
(sits down)

Miss S.-Thank you, Miss Calkins. As you may not know Miss Calkins is very active in trying to relieve the conditions of the unemployed and therefore speaks authoritatively on these conditions. I am certain that we all feel as she does and will all endeavor to do our best to help. And now I have the pleasure of introducing the Honorable Mr. McCarthy.

McC.- This occasion reminds me of a story folks. It seems a lady invited a reverend for dinner one Sunday evening,

and during the meal she remarked that she was tired. "You shouldn't be tired," said the reverend, "you haven't preached two sermons to-day." "No," said the lady, absent mindedly looking into her soup, "but I listened to them." Ha! Ha! Of course, in the present case the two speeches were very moving and not at all tiring. At the same time, these speeches did not present a single suggestion as to how to help these unemployed in a practical manner, how to feed them, clothe them, put them to work. No one mentioned what we should do with the unemployed say when the apples are all sold or when the parks and empty lots have been cleaned. What then? Another thing. The public is under the impression that the city and its treasury must come forward and stand the cost of unemployment relief to the limit. That is all wrong, folks. We must keep in mind that a city has just so much appropriation and no more and may be forced to further tax real estate and business to acquire additional money for such use. Did any of the speakers mention that? They did not. Why did they not suggest that prohibition be abolished or that the tariff be recalled or better still that the employers stop laying off their men. That's all.  
Miss S.- And now I have the pleasure of presenting to you Mr. Browning whom you all know so well, a man who has done more for the community than any man we can think of. Mr. Browning.  
Mr. B.- Thank you, Miss Stewart. Thank you, fellow-citizens. The last speaker, the honorable Mr.

McCarthy made some remarks that I feel bound to reply to. But before I do that I wish to warn you that Mac is really not as bad as he sounds. I ought to know because we are members in the same club. He is really a very fine fellow, a public spirited man, the like of whom it is very hard to find; but in his zeal for the welfare of the community and the unemployed he has overlooked the basic economic law of supply and demand a law that no one dare trifle with unless he wishes to court disaster. This law tells us that there is an automatic adjustment between demand and supply and anyone assuming that by keeping the men or by any other fandangled schemes he will solve the unemployment situation he is wasting his time. Another thing. This depression is passing, there are enough indications on all sides that things are on the upgrade, and soon we will have forgotten all these hard times. Now, if we keep these men, we will pamper them and this will eventually break down their self-respect. One of our leading manufacturers has said that at no time is a working man so efficient as when he sees a line of applicants trying to get his job. Of course this may sound harsh to sentimental people, but such is the law of life. Therefore, in order to maintain our industry at its highest pitch, and in order to return to normalcy in the shortest possible time, we must keep our workers' morale at maximum efficiency, and lay them off whenever possible. However realizing that since some relief must be provided for idle at present, I offer to double any single donation made here or anywhere else in the country. Miss Stewart may announce it in the papers. I thank you. (sits down)

(Jack approaches platform and holds out to them a typewritten sheet)

Miss S.- "hat is it you want?"

Jack- The Committee asked me to present this petition to your honors.

Miss S.- Sorry, we have no time to receive any petitions here, friend, you may come to our main office and present it to our emergency committee.

Jack- I already did that, and they told us they can do nothing for us.

Miss S.- Well, obviously we can do nothing for you either.

Jack- Yes you can, if you people really want to help us the way you've been talking the last hour--

Miss S.- Please try not to be rude, you are interrupting our meeting.

Jack- Excuse me, lady, I didn't want to interrupt you, but if you'd know how it is to be hungry and cold----

Miss S.- (tired and impatiently) Yes, Yes, I know all that, I listen to it every day, but we have no time to listen to you now, we must proceed with this meeting.



McC.- (Who has meanwhile approached them) May I help you, Miss Stewart? I've handled his kind before. (to Jack) Who let you in here? Jack- (sarcastically) Nobody. I came in myself.

McC.- Well get out the same way.

Jack- Not before you read this petition.

Rev. D.- You know my good man you are acting very ungratefully in behaving as you do, at a time when we are working so hard to relieve

YOUR distress.

Jack- Thank you for nothing. You people are too anxious to help us, your conscience must be botherin' you or you's scared.

Miss C.- This is outrageous.

Jack- All the papers is full of what you people is gonna do for us, how many millions each capitalist will give to the poor, but they dont say a word about how many people is out of work, how many men and women didn't have a square meal for weeks--

Mary- (in audience) That's right, it's true.

Mike- (in audience) You tell 'em.

Jack- But you aint satisfied. Now they begin throwin people out on the street cause they dont pay rent. Where will they get the money to pay? And where will they move to, you tell me that.

Miss S.- Well, my good man, that is what we are trying to do. We are trying to raise money to help you.

Jack- I know how you are trying. But you aint tryin hard enough. When we come down to your emergency committee, what's just had a good beefsteak dinner, and ast them to stop throwin us out on the street, they say they cant do nothin for us, when we come to you, you's busy with the meetin.

McC.- Why dont you go down to the board of estimate?

Jack- You know why. They did send a guy down the other day and you know how the cops beat him up.

McC.- We got what was coming to him, he called them crooks and grafters.

Jack- And he was right, you just have to look at the papers--

Mr.B.- Excuse me Miss Stewart, I must catch a train to Washington. (goes out quickly)

Jack- Just like the rest of his kind. They make a mess and leave the cleaning up to priests, old women and crooked politicians.

Mike- (in audience) Give it to him, bo!

McC.- I have a mind to come down and thrash you, you bum----but for my respect for the ladies.

Jack- That's OK, the ladies will excuse you, come on down.

McC.- I dont want to soil my hands. I f you dont let the

meetin continue, I'll have you thrown out.

Jack- Not before I tell you what I have to say.

Mike- Atta baby!

Miss S.- We have heard enough.---

Miss C.- What nerve!

Rev. D.- We'll call the ushers.

McC.- Get the Hall out of here this very minute or I'll call the police.

Mary- (hysterically, in aud.) For God's sake dont let the cops in.

Jack- (to audience) Fred here Tom and me came here to ask these rich people to do something to stop dispossin the unemployed, but they want to call the cops to beat us up. Now we aint afraid of cops, but I want you to tell me somethin, you what had a good dinner in a warm house. Do you think it right to have the cops beat us up, just because we too want to have a home to sleep in, we too want to can, do you think it right people?

Some in audience- No, No!

it aint right!

Jack- If you think it is right that gentleman will just blow the whistle--

Some in audience- It aint right.

Rev. D.- This is preposterous, I believe we had best go.

Miss S.- I think he has friends here.

Miss C.- This is outrageous!

McC.- (to Jack) We'll meet again. (McCarthy, Rev. D. and Miss Calkins leave)

Jack- See you behind bars, your honor.

(Miss Stewart stands a moment bewildered then rushes after the rest)

Some in audience- Speech, Speech!

(Jack is undecided, then he mounts the platform)

Jack- I aint much of a speech maker, but I'd just like to tell you forks a story.

Maybe you saw it in the papers,



About a guy what was tryin to sell his shirt on Broadway to buy somethin to eat. Now, by chance, I saw him at that time. He was an old gink, just skin and bones, and everybody thought he was crazy. And he was crazy-with hunger, cause he didn't eat fer about a week. Well, he was taken for observation to the lunatic asylum where he died the next day. But when he was on Broadway, people were laughing at him. And the thing was funny, funny as Hell. All around you saw expensive restaurants and right here you had a man dyin of starvation right in front of you. Now, wasn't that funny? I want to tell you another story. About two months ago me and Fred there, lost our jobs, and as we couldn't get another and didn't have much saved up, we were put out for non-payment of rent. Where could we go? We decided to bunk up in one of the empty pavilions down by the Battery. We found a bunch of other guys there. The place was cold and damp as hell, but we had a roof over our heads, and we didn't kick. One day the cops found us out, pulled us all in, and the judge gave us 30 days each. For what? Because their damn system took away our chance of makin a livin. Well we were in the coop a coupla days and then they let us go--the papers was makin too much of a stink about it. When we got out, we had to liik for another place. We found an old tunnel in Central Park, but the cops kicked us out and broke up the two chairs and table we put there. And now we re up against it. It seems they got us comin and goin. We look on one side we see classy restaurants, swell apartments, expensive clothes, jewelry. On the other side, we see thousands, millions like myself, hungry, cold, without homes. When we want to eat or a roof over our heads, they want us to pay for everything, but they wont give us a chance to work and make some money. Instead they give us charity, their charity, waitin four hours in the cold for a lousy sandwich and a cup of what they call coffee. And they think we'll take everything lyin down, they think wd'll starve without kickin, but they have another guess comin. We may not be good enough to get jobs, but we are smart enough to organize and fight, fight like hell, so that those damn swell apartment houses shake to their foundations. We know they'll call out the cops and the National Guard and the Militia, but we aint got much to lose and everything to gain, friends. They can beat up a hundred or a thousand but not millions, and these millions will fight, I tell you. And when they'll be through fightin, everybody'll eat, everybody'll have a home----or we the poor, unfortunate unemployed, will know the reason why.

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WORKERS OF THE WORLD--UNITE!

YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT YOUR CHAINS.

YOU HAVE A WORLD TO WIN.

Correspondence Column

The WORKERS THEATRE is for the workers. That it may serve them well it must have their guidance and cooperation. Readers should send criticism of the magazine, articles etc. to WORKERS THEATRE 131 West 28th St. New York City.

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Copy of letter sent to the Cultural Department of the WIR

2019 West Division St.  
Chicago Ill.

April 25, 1931.

Dear Comrades-

We received your letter and was glad to hear from you concerning the cultural Dept. of the WIR. A little later we received your magazine also, and were tremendously pleased with it. In the future, we would greatly appreciate it if you would send us a copy regularly. If there is any charge connected with it, let us know.

We are very interested in your cultural department for a very definite purpose, and that is as a source of material which we can very readily utilize - if you agree to let us use it. Out side of the Blue Blouses there is a John Reed club and a Workers Cultural League. The Workers Cultural League is the central controlling body of all organizations.

The Blue Blouses has begun working on the "Belt" and we are going to present it the 23rd of May....

Fraternally yours,

Marvin Barry

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WORKERS THEATRE has just received three plays from Berlin. These plays have been used with great success by the Red Blouse groups in Germany and may be adapted to the needs of American Blue Blouse groups. We are at present engaged in the work of translating them and they will be available for distribution in the near future. The following are the plays received:

"Arbeiterfrau und Klassenjustiz!", by Hans Huss - Red Blouses, Berlin.

"Feuer", By Hans Huss ( adapted from the novel "Feuer" by Henry Barbusse )

"Der Traum Des Generals" by Willi Ost.

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WORKERS THEATRE wishes to acknowledge two letters of criticism, one from J.T. and the other from Harry Alan Potemkin. Both of these letters analyzed the magazine thoroughly and will be of great assistance to the editors in planning future numbers. Only lack of space prevents us from giving these letters in full.

Workers theatre groups

The "Workers Theatre" Magazine, published by the Workers Laboratory Theatre, is for all workers dramatic groups. It needs the cooperation of all these groups. Send in reports of your activities. **SUBSCRIBE TO THE WORKERS THEATRE MAGAZINE!**

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Dear Comrades:

Thanks for your very interesting and enthusiastic letter. We are glad to see the Workers Laboratory Theatre taking the initiative in what, here's hoping, will turn into a permanent national worker's theatre magazine. The bulletin you are issuing will certainly do much to build the workers theatre movement. Aside from the co-operation and strength that will be given to each group by the contact established thru a national periodical, the individual groups can benefit by technical and organizational information in the bulletin which might otherwise take long periods of time to acquire.

This should include everything from directing to publicity work, from make-up to designing, etc. Then too, there should be included questions of policy, methods of drawing in new elements, how not to do things, etc.

Fundamentals of playwriting would be most welcome to a number of would-be-playwriters who have something to say but dont know how to go about it. The Rebel Players Playwriting Class would find it a help indeed. The same applies to directing.

May I also suggest that you start in with your issue by printing a list of one act (and longer) proletarian plays, where obtainable, etc.

As for the Rebel Players themselves, we have just presented Paul Sifton's 'The Bolt' and may possibly present it again for some local workers organizations. We are also putting on 'Mr. God Is Not In', by Harbor Allen, for the ninth Freieit Jubilee.

Our playwriting class is learning fundamentals and writing a play as it goes along.

Unfortunately we lack a permanent headquarters for storing sets, props, etc., for meeting, rehearsing, library, etc. We hope to overcome this difficulty soon.

Another obstacle is the lack of suitable and sufficient material, plays, tableaux, pageants, etc. This problem should be easily solved with and by this national bulletin.

A lack of directors and technique is also to be eliminated but thru persistent efforts these obstacles will all be overcome and we will have permanently established a workers theatre movement that will be a strong weapon in

THE Class struggle.

Comradely;

V. Cutler- sec'y  
Rebel Players of Los Angeles  
529 No. Cummings Street

YOUTH BRANCHES OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORKERS ORDER  
ARE BUILDING DRAMATIC GROUPS

A special feature of the First Annual Dance of the Youth Section of the International Workers Order on April 11, was the presentation by the Workers Laboratory Theatre of the play 'Buy Now'. The play proved such a huge success that we have since then received numerous requests for short plays from the branches to be produced by them. With the help of the Workers Laboratory Theatre we are attempting to fill all requests for material.

Inwor branch 404 is already busy rehearsing 'The Big Stiff' which will be given at their installation Saturday night May 2, 1373--43 St. Brooklyn. Sparts Junior branch 408 is also rehearsing this play. Our out-of-town branches are also interested in dramatics. We have sent a play to our Houston, Texas branch which they are going to produce. Some of the plays we are getting out are Oscar Sap-- The Great Money Trick-- Men of Steel, and others. It is the aim of the Youth Section to develop a dramatic group in every one of our youth branches.

The Workers Laboratory Theatre is getting out a monthly magazine which will be of great value to all dramatic groups, and we urge all our branches to subscribe to this magazine.

NATIONAL YOUTH COMMITTEE  
INTERNATIONAL WORKERS ORDER  
National youth organizer  
Dave Greene

WORKERS, BUILD YOUR OWN THEATRE!



Review of

'PRECEDENT' at the Provincetown Theatre  
Reviewed by Sidney Ball Workers Laboratory Theatre

"Precedent" is the story of a frame-up. Delancy, a labor organizer, leads a strike against wage cuts. The big boss calls him to his office. "Delancy", he says, "you're a capable man. Drop all this damn agitating - let the strike alone - and we'll pay you 7,000. a year". But Delancy can not be bribed. The boss must find some other way to break the strike.

The day of the Preparadness Parade a bomb is thrown. Ten men are killed, half a hundred are injured. We see the District Attorney "investigate" the case. An old woman who saw the explosion is brought before Delancy. "That's not the man I saw", she says. "Mrs. Evans," says the District Attorney cordially, "I would like to offer you a comfortable job in your old age, working for the city, but, remember now, wasn't the man you saw Delancy?" "Yes," quavers Mrs. Evans, "that's....that's the man."

We look into a hotel bedroom. A woman in a green kimona sprawls on the bed. A phonograph grinds drearily away. The District Attorney enters. "I've come on business this time, Maybelle." "Uh huh," says Maybelle. "Now listen to me, on the day of the Preparadness Parade a man by the name of Delancy left a black bag in this room, that's right, isn't it?" "Uh, huh", says Maybelle.

And so the whole story of the frame-up is shown - from the lying testimony of a prostitute in the courtroom, to the proof by the defense attorneys that perjury had been used, till the final hearing before the Governor who "mercifully" commutes the death sentence to life imprisonment. In the brief epilogue we see Delancy, almost without hope now, in the prison cell in which he has spent the last 15 years. And the audience leaves the theatre their sympathy aroused, strongly resentful - of something, they are not sure what.

The production of "Precedent" is done in the typical Broadway manner. There is a certain type of slick realism that is done admirably in America. Thus the parts (21 players were used) were mostly taken by ~~the~~ actors that gave the appearance of having played characters similar to the ones assigned in the play, for so long that these were as natural to them as their daily lives.

The only part of the production that presumably would not be seen in a Broadway edition of the play was the settings. One or two were excellent in that they were simple and easy to handle, yet gave the gist of the picture wanted. The first scene is laid in a room of the Delancy's home. Two well-worn easy chairs are placed on either side of a small reading table. Behind the chairs is a screen painted with an exceedingly ugly wall paper design. This small section of the stage is illuminated

by a couple of baby spotlights while the rest of the stage is dark. These few elements of a room that have been picked out suffice to give an idea of the whole.

A workers theatre group has very little to learn from "Precedent". Such a production requiring a large number of trained actors, numerous scenes, and put on in a regular theatre requires a greater financial outlay than most workers theatres can afford. Nor does the play show the Mooney-Billings case (from which it was taken) in the proper light. It entirely neglects the treacherous role played by ~~the~~ the A F of L leaders who assisted the bosses in railroading these militant workers to jail. Tom Mooney himself says, "In every struggle of the workers against brutal exploitation and political oppression, the A F of L leadership acts as an open strike-breaking force - true to its role - the mortal enemy of labor within its own ranks. They acted thus in the Mooney-Billings case in which they are no less scabs than they are in most struggles of the workers."

"Precedent" is subtitled, a play about justice." The program states, "Our case is with the incredible entanglements of the law, which, through a complicated system of established precedents is not facile enough to effect simple human justice."

This emphasis on the legal forms that made possible the frame-up is a smoke screen hiding the inevitably vicious class character of all laws under the system of capitalism. The emotional protest that is aroused by the play "Precedent" is not directed into any channel that will help free Mooney. As the play ends the defense is about to appeal to the U S Secretary of Labor - a hireling of the same bosses that caused the frame-up. This is the authors contribution to the defense of Tom Mooney.

Robert Minor, long active in the defense of Mooney, says; "There never was the slightest hope of doing anything for Mooney and Billings except in the form of an international action in closest connection with all the tumultuous struggles of the working class....The May Day demonstrations throughout the world will be an early opportunity to raise the thunderous voice of labor against the beast of Yankee "justice!" "

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published monthly

(tear this out and send it in)

## The Mess at Verdun

A. Prantis

Workers Laboratory Theatre

What principles must guide a proletarian writer when reviewing a play, especially one written presumably to criticize social evils? What must he look for, what must he point out, what must he criticize?

These are the questions confronting the present writer when about to review "The Miracle of Verdun", a play, written by an ex-militarist, directed by Biberman, an ex-pupil of Meyerhold, and produced for a bourgeois audience, a play attempting to criticize militarism.

At a recent symposium directed by Harrison George on the the topic of a "Workers Theatre", when the subject swung around to art, aesthetics, expressionism and other high-falutin'isms, some one in the audience stated the matter plainly by saying that the Workers Theatre should be utilitarian-- it should aim to carry the message of organization to the masses-- and that utility of this theatre will determine its own technique and form. Also that all the so called arts of the theatre should be determined by this theatre utilitarianism.

In conformity with this principle of utilitarianism, therefore, the review of a play should be guided by one thought, namely, does that play help towards achieving organization of the masses or does it not? If it does not why, and wherein does it fail? We must look for the flaws and criticize them. At the same time we must note anything in the arts-- the settings, the acting, the handling of masses in that particular play from which the Workers Theatre could, perhaps learn something that it could adapt its own use.

To state the theme of the play. An ex-soldier, together with a group of tourists, visits a mass cemetery at Verdun, where German and French soldiers were buried during the war in a common grave. This soldier dreams that a miracle takes place, and the soldiers, who gave their lives in the war to end war, arise from the dead only to find that their death has been in vain and that the world is aiming for another war as never before. A very fine idea that, and one that perhaps a proletarian writer should tackle. But when the muddled headed bourgeois writer tried to develop this idea he made a mess of it, and when the director got thru with it, it was a hodge-podge.

For when the writer brings the soldiers out of their graves he places them on a hillside where they lie around and sentimentally swap reminiscences. Then they separate to their several homes to find that they are not wanted by their folks. They assemble again and march to a council of nations, who call upon a reverend, a cardinal and a rabbi to determine whether the miracle is a miracle, and who decides for various reasons that it is not. The soldiers slink away.

But that is not all. There is in that council the Prime minister of Belgium and from the few remarks that escaped him, apparently a member of the second international and who, thanks to the director, behaves like a wild jackass. He mutters 'Capitalism', bumps on the tables, waves his fists, opens his mouth and....says nothing.

For the 'direction' has been through---aside from the satire on militaristic speeches that even the 'Nation' could print, not a word of protest appeared in this play, every situation which is pregnant with protest, with revolt. Chlumberg, the author, apparently gave the prime minister of Belgium something to say, but as Biberman has to hold on to his job, nothing harmful to our ethics was said during the entire play. As it is, we overheard two nice ladies behind us remark that the Theatre Guild was producing too many propaganda plays lately. The Customers must be pleased, dont you know.

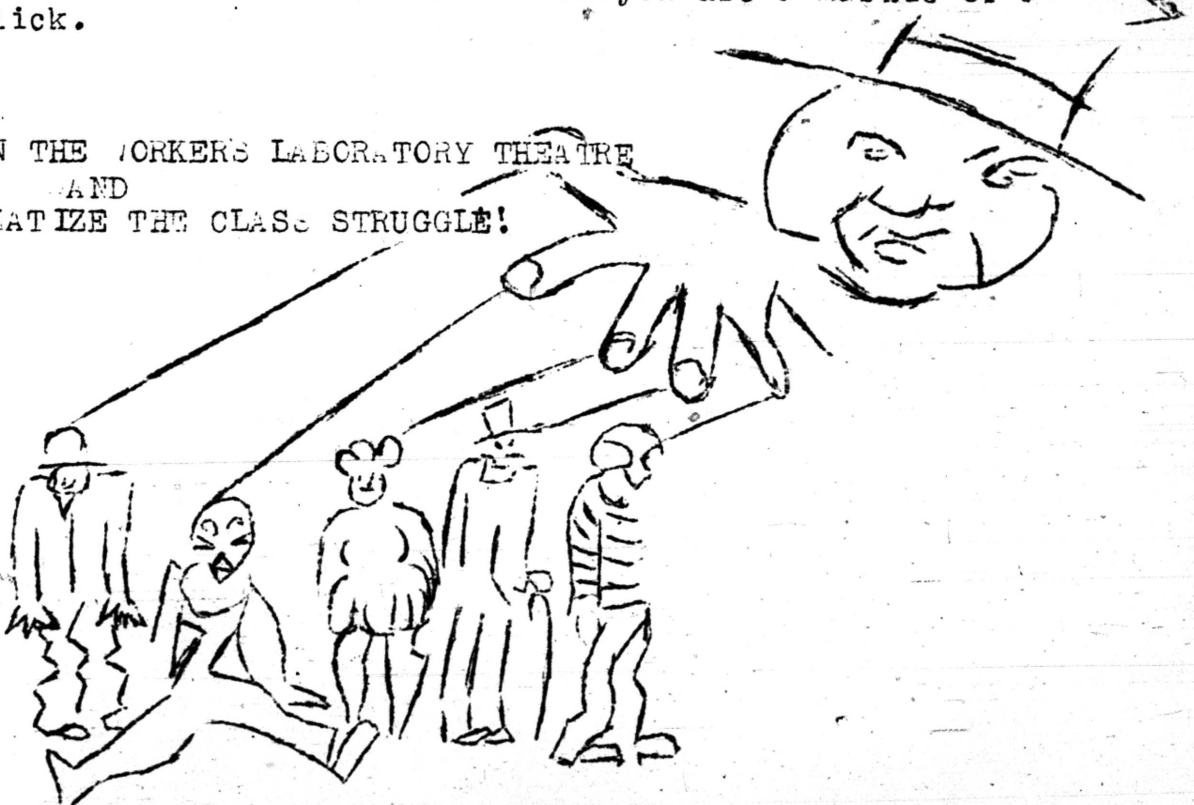
And thus incorrect social thinking by Chlumberg instead of resulting in a play with a clear central idea, namely a satirical or realistic attack on militarism, results in several ideas all mixed up, some defeatist, all muddled and obscuring the main idea. Thus the rejection of a soldier by his former wife forms one idea, a discussion by the clergy of the possibility of miracles another, the rejection of a Jewish soldier by the rabbi a third, the handshaking of two former war enemies, a German and a French soldier, a fourth, and so on. You must keep your wits about you or you go away with the thought that the play was written to discuss miracles, genuine and otherwise. Of course, it was left to the pope to pronounce this one a real miracle, but only after he had a divine vision which we think must have been a nightmare due to mixing ice-cream and pickles again.

How much more effective and powerful would this play be if the author had fearlessly followed the idea to a logical conclusion. Without changing the situations very much, he would, instead of discussing miracles deliberately attack militarism. Instead of the crazy Belgian he would have a Russian (who by the way is excluded from the council of nations in the play) come out flat footed and state the causes that led to the last war and that are about to precipitate another war. The soldiers would realize that they were betrayed, would call out all the 15 millions dead that were destroyed in the war and annihilate that entire machinery wherein such treachery and selfishness were possible. Instead, in the play they slink away like beaten dogs, while the militarists remain to gloat in their victory.



Muddled thoughts in the writing determined the muddled directing and acting in the play. Instead of all the scattered situations being directed so as to lead emotionally to the climax, to give movement and direction to the play as a unit, the acting is broken up so as to accentuate only the subsidiary ideas. Thus there is a climax, when the soldier is repudiated by his wife and villagers, another when the rabbi sends the Jewish soldier to eternal damnation and so on. And to harmonize with all this the soldiers behave as no soldiers ever behaved-- they talk about sunshine and flowers, they croon a tune--- I don't think even risen soldiers could do that. The pressure of life around them would preclude that. When they rise up from the cemetery they wind round the hill in a circle to make a pretty picture. When they arrive at the council chambers they seat themselves on the winding carpeted stairway and then you are sure that Biberman wanted to make the picture very, very pretty. When the soldier is rejected by his wife or when the former enemies shake hands they do it in approved non-realistic, melodramatic style. Which proves again what money can do--the customer is satisfied, directors get fat checks--the pictures are pretty--Art they call it. Everyone is happy. As for conveying social ideas--bother them--they give you headaches, better leave them alone. Your turn next-John- will you use a mashie or a niblick.

JOIN THE WORKERS LABORATORY THEATRE  
AND  
DRAMATIZE THE CLASS STRUGGLE!



CORRECTION--The Workers Theatre mentioned by F. Eduh on the 'Rise of the workers theatre' in the April issue of this magazine does not refer to the Workers Laboratory Theatre of the Workers International Relief.

Editorial Committee Note