

NEW THEATRE

MAY, 1934

Price 10 Cents

DRAMA . . . FILM . . . DANCE

THE WINTER OF BROADWAY

--- Harold Edgar

"CROWD SCENE"

--- Frank Merlin

THE REVOLUTIONARY FILM

--- Leo T. Hurwitz

National Workers Theatre Festival



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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Volume III, No. 6

MAY, 1934

The following appeal has been received from Germany. No comment is necessary.

HANS OTTO

actor from the Staatstheatre of Berlin was arrested November 15, 1933, by one S.S. Sturm-führer and by 3 S.S.-men.

HANS OTTO

ten days later was taken to the hospital with a fractured head and entirely disfigured.

HANS OTTO

was hurt so terribly that he died right afterwards.

ACTORS OF ALL THE WORLD!

The Nazis murdered Hans Otto, one of Germany's most talented actors because of his loyalty to his class and to the social ideas for which he had fought all his life. After his brutal murder, the Hitler government not only forbade Hans Otto's friends to take part in his funeral, but also forced them to honor his murderers.

Actors of all the world! Protest! Show your horror of this barbarism and claim from everyone from Germany who wants to work with you in the theatre or on the film to declare himself against the murderers! Take your stand publicly and openly against the murderers of your brother-actor Hans Otto.

ASIDES

Sharp criticism of the editorial policy of New Theatre was voiced by delegates from sev-

eral workers theatre groups at the Chicago Festival. The main point of this criticism stated that New Theatre was not sufficiently reflecting the activities and experiences of the workers theatre movement but was giving too much attention to Broadway.

The National Executive Committee of the League of Workers Theatres and the Editorial Board are taking steps to improve New Theatre along this line. A discussion article on New Theatre will be published next month. Next month, too, a department devoted to discussion of New Theatre editorial and organizational matters will be begun. Theatre, film, and dance groups as well as individual readers are urged to send in letters of criticism and suggestions at once. Each group should also encourage its members to write longer articles based on their work—and send them in to New Theatre.

One of the proposals accepted at the Second National Theatre Festival of the L.O.W.T. was to hold a "New Theatre Week." During this week each group is to make a special drive to popularize and spread New Theatre—and each group is to hold an affair to raise funds for New Theatre. In view of the pressing situation, New Theatre Week this year was set for May 20 to 27. Each group should act at once to put New Theatre Week across.

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NEW THEATRE

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New York City
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THE WINTER OF BROADWAY

HAROLD EDGAR

ROUND-THE-TOWN reporters tell us that this has been a "great" season on Broadway. By this they mean that there have been more "hits" than there were last year and the year before that. This is true, although the information stated this way does not give us a real picture of the situation. The rise of box-office receipts on Broadway does not indicate the degree of "shrinkage" that has taken place in theatrical production since 1929. Whereas before that time at least sixty plays held the boards at the height of the season, at the present moment there are no more than twenty-five. This means many dark houses, unemployed actors and a general exodus toward Hollywood, radio and other forms of the entertainment business. So while there is some justification for the boast of "prosperity" on Broadway this season, it would be more accurate to say that this "prosperity" is now rather narrowly limited, and assumes an almost monopoly character.

Aside from The Theatre Guild and The Group Theatre which are organized for greater permanence than the "offices" of individual theatrical producers one may observe a steady decline in the position of such "old reliables" as A. H. Woods, William Brady, the Selwyns, John Golden. Lee Shubert by force of a great accumulated capital and the control of large spheres of real estate still holds his own, and Sam Harris lives off the writings of the shrewd Broadway showman, George Kaufman, and the perennial attraction of Irving Berlin musical spectacles. A comparatively young-

er generation of director-managers, Jed Harris, Guthrie McClintic, and Arthur Beckhard might be described as the in-and-outers, speculating on a taste that is related to the artistic standards of the post-Belasco critical era as well as modernized hangovers of Charles Frohman showmanship, and the "good old days" from 1900 to 1919! The latter group are on the whole more alert craftsmen than the older producers, being themselves workers in the theatre, not merely entrepreneurs. But their variable policies make their careers spotty and their destinies precarious. Max Gordon is the new type of successful theatre impresario playing safe with "sure-fire" names in actors, playwrights, composers, etc.

Artistically, the Broadway season has yet to produce a single play of truly eminent stature, even from the standards of good bourgeois criticism. Of course, "Mary of Scotland" was rapturously greeted by the daily reviewers but this can be explained by the fact that Anderson writes more fluently and with greater dignity and schooling than most Broadway playwrights. Also the Theatre Guild production, though thoroughly bad as an interpretation, has a certain external good looks, and "personalities", which in the absence of any more striking, take the audiences in. It is difficult for the present writer to speak conclusively of the play as a play since its production actually garbles it, but he is sure that the play is not important as "poetic drama" since it belongs to the reminiscent school which derives most

of its inspiration from unconsciously remembered romantic models rather than from a strong new impulse to say something vital for our day. Such work, whatever its virtues may otherwise be, is creatively inferior to the same author's "What Price Glory?", "Outside Looking In," and "Gods of the Lightning."

SOME critics liked O'Neill's comedy "Ah, Wilderness!" but even the most liberal estimate can only accord it about 35 minutes of pleasant observation of a very minor sort, the rest being an extremely weak dilution of Booth Tarkington sentiment and O'Neill "thoughtfulness"—pretty false at best. No one liked O'Neill's "Days Without End" except possibly some lonesome and naive Catholics. "The Green Bay Tree" is a physically smooth production of a play that pretends to be "strong" but actually has no theme and no point of view, and is quite special in any case (it deals more or less with homosexual relations). "Sailor Beware" is a hit because the dramatic reviewers and apparently a good part of the Broadway audience still react to high-school naughtiness (disguised under a veneer of travelling-salesman "sophistication") as if these qualities were robust.—"Her Master's Voice" is a comehither to the remaining bourgeoisie which likes a simple, harmless comedy without reference to anything but the most protected nooks of homes that hardly exist any more in the world. Typically Broadway is the farce "She Loves Me Not", all plot-contrivance and jiggly movement, and quite

funny because it reduces every topic to unreal, juvenile nonsense. It reveals the American middle-class grinning at its own childishness. From a more highbrow source (the intellectuals who rub themselves close to money) comes the opera "4 Saints in 3 Acts" by Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thompson, which includes some talent perhaps and colors that might engage us like a display of toys, but which is fundamentally a classic of insignificance and emptiness.

On another level we find "Men in White", "Tobacco Road" and "They Shall Not Die". The first is a thin play given interest by virtue of a collective production at the hands of The Group Theatre—a technical achievement. "Tobacco Road" brings new material to the theatre, material which is extremely valuable because it is really of our country and our time and because the middle-class fears to deal with it on the stage. This play has climbed to success because of the interest of the radically inclined intellectuals on the one hand, and a general interest in Henry Hull's vivid performance on the other. And there is no use hiding the fact that the play's reputation for bad manners has also helped to put "Tobacco Road" over as "a show" on Broadway. As a play of social import, however, "Tobacco Road" is inferior to John Wexley's dramatization of the Scottsboro case, "They Shall Not Die", the most interesting play to date that has appeared on Broadway this season, and one of the best plays thus far that the revolutionary movement has stimulated amongst middle-class playwrights. But this play can become a financial success only if some pressure is brought to bear on the Theatre Guild to make them realize that there is a public

clamoring to see it if the price of tickets will be put within reasonable reach of the proletarian pocket. The Guild might be able to learn something in this respect from the Theatre Union.

ONE of the outstanding general features of the features of the season's plays on Broadway is the impoverished quality of the work of people who have hitherto been regarded as our best dramatists. Besides O'Neill and Anderson, Philip Barry's "Joyous Season" was so bad it was pathetic, Sidney Howard's "Yellow Jack" starting with a highly interesting idea is thinned out to nothing both in the author's execution and in the production, and "Dodsworth" a dramatization of Sinclair Lewis's fourth-rate novel prospers because the audience likes Walter Huston's manliness! Another very significant characteristic of the season has been the tendency to deal unrealistically with the past (costume plays of all sorts) and not to deal at all with the present except in terms of horse-play and circus tricks. ("Let 'Em Eat Cake" etc.)

The final word to say, however, about any summary of Broadway—whether the plays of a particular season happen to be good or bad, prosperous or not—is that there exists no Theatre there, in the sense of a consciously growing collective of theatre workers bent on developing themselves for the purpose of expressing the definite content of their scripts in a way that is truly compatible with and a heightening of the playwright's creative intent. . . . The Theatre Guild is not a commercial organization in the sense that Jed Harris, for example, is a commercial manager, but its actual artistic technique—whatever plays they do—is no different

from that of the commercial manager. In other words, Broadway has no equivalent of the theatres of Stanislavsky, Tairoff, Meyerhold before the revolution,—all of which regardless of their separate ideologies, were true theatres—has not even a conception of such a theatre. The only visible exception is the Group Theatre. In such collectives for which proletarian circles offer much more fertile ground, lies the true future of the American theatre.

Blue Eagle

A serious criticism is levelled against the content of the New Dance Group's Blue Eagle. The group appeared before an enthusiastic and extremely sympathetic working class audience at an East Side Settlement House. After the performance members of that audience, intent on expressing their appreciation, flocked backstage and showered the dancers with praise and compliments—that is, all but one disgruntled member, an Italian laborer, who was obviously displeased. Making his way through the crowd that surrounded the troupe, he paused a moment and then with the aid of appropriate gesture, expressed himself:

"Your dances coulda been all right," he said, "but wanting no good." When asked to explain himself, he very heatedly exclaimed, "For Christ sake—why da hell you no killa da Blue Eagle!"

TO ALL ACTORS

The most important movement of the actors since the great Equity strike of 1919 is now taking place. A full account of the developments was published in the April issue of New Theatre. Because the matter is so important, the editors will send a copy of the April issue (while the copies last) to any actor requesting it. Let us hear from you—now!

FROM ATLANTIC TO PACIFIC

The Revolutionary Theatre Holds Its Second National Festival

BEN BLAKE

Two years ago in April, 1932, delegates of workers theatres met on a large scale for the first time in a National Workers Theatre Festival. The place was New York City. One afternoon and evening was given over to a dramatic competition, with some twelve of the best workers theatre groups from the eastern half of the country presenting short plays and recitations. A second day was given over to a theatre conference which discussed the experiences and problems of the workers theatre and formulated a program for future work. To this conference delegates came from groups as far west as Illinois.

The most important work done by that conference was to establish the League of Workers Theatres of the U. S. A. and affiliate it as a section with the International Union of the Revolutionary Theatre. This for the first time established a national center for guidance, exchange of experience and repertory, and organizational assistance to the many scattered workers theatre groups thruout the U. S. A. The festival took place, significantly, in the same spring when for the first time in many years the annual Little Theatre Tournament of the bourgeois amateur theatre was cancelled because of the economic situation. The Little Theatre Tournament was not held last year, either, although several sections of the League of Workers Theatres held successful local festivals (New York, Cleveland, Los Angeles, etc.) A recent announcement stated that the Tournament would not be held this spring, also.

Now, after two years, the

second National Theatre Festival of the League of Workers Theatres has been held. The growth of the revolutionary theatre movement in America is indicated by many facts: The Festival was held from April 13 to 15 in Chicago—a sign that New York is no longer the one strong center of the revolutionary theatre. Delegates came this time from as far east as New Jersey, New York, and Boston, as far south as Louisville, Kentucky, and as far west as Los Angeles. A good delegation came from the Progressive Arts Clubs of several cities and towns in Canada. There were delegates from Detroit, Cleveland, Grand Rapids, Milwaukee, Gary (Indiana), Kansas City (Missouri), Moline, and other cities. New Jersey and Boston delegates thumbed their way.

Entire performing groups came to participate in the dramatic competition at the festival from New York, Cleveland, Gary, Detroit, Moline and Los Angeles. The Shock Troupe of the Workers Laboratory Theatre of New York toured to Chicago, performing in four cities on the way. The Blue Blouses of Los Angeles rode a bus for four days and nights without stopovers for sleeping, in order to perform at the festival!

Another important feature of the festival was the attendance of delegates from a number of stationary theatres, both semi-professional and professional, including theatres of high standing nationally. The Workers Theatre of Chicago, the New

Theatre of Hollywood, and the Theatre Collective of New York were represented, as were the Theatre Union and the Group Theatre, the latter two among New York's best professional theatre organizations.

Absent were representatives from farmers theatres, students theatres, and all-Negro theatres, tho there were Negro players in at least three of the seven English-speaking groups that performed. Two Chicago Negro choruses (one of the Unemployment Council and one of the International Labor Defense) appeared as guests on the program, as did a Ukrainian Workers Ballet and a Bulgarian workers children's dance group.

The conference of delegates met mornings and afternoons for two days. Three evenings were devoted to performances.

The business of the conference was as follows:

"From a Mass Movement to a Mass Organization," a report on the present political situation and the work of the League of Workers Theatres (LOWT) in its two years of existence—by Harry Elion, National Secretary of the LOWT.

"Creative Problems of the Revolutionary Theatre"—a report by John E. Bonni, member of the National Executive Committee of the LOWT.

Reports of the work of the various districts and sections of the LOWT.

General discussion on all previous reports.

"The Theatre and the Press," a report with main emphasis on the development of New The-

atre, official organ of the LOWT—by Ben Blake, editor of New Theatre.

Discussion on press report.

"Organizational Problems of the LOWT," a report—by Anne Howe, National Organizational Secretary of the LOWT.

"Workers Theatre in Canada," a report—by Ed Cecil-Smith, of the Progressive Arts Club of Toronto.

After the reports and discussions, the conference divided up into commissions for intensive study, exchange of concrete experiences, and formulation of future programs. Each commission was devoted to one specific aspect of the revolutionary theatre. Commissions met on the following subjects:

"Concentration Work"—the development of workers theatre groups in the most important industrial centers, of farmers theatre groups, of Negro theatre groups, etc., the development of a movement to attract professional theatre workers to the revolutionary theatre, the development of a program in defense of the interests of theatre workers in their unions.
— Chairman, M. Gorelik.

"Repertory"—Chairman, B. Blake.

"Production and Training"—Chairman, S. Karnot.

"Theatre Management"—Chairman, A. Saxe.

"Stationary Theatre"—Chairman, J. E. Bonn.

"Children's Theatre"—Chairman, W. Lee.

"Organizational Matters of the LOWT"—Chairman A. Howe.

A special report on radio work was submitted by E. Kazan.

The commissions met simultaneously for a three-hour period. Then the conference re-assembled to hear the resolu-

tions and recommendations of the commissions. Sentiment was outstanding among the delegates that the most fruitful work of the conference was accomplished in the commissions, for there actual experiences were told in detail. It was felt that the commissions had been far too brief, that in the future a much greater part of such conferences should be devoted to the work of commissions. The time of the commissions was too short to allow for the drawing up of satisfactory resolutions for the theoretical guidance of the various phases of theatre activity. Therefore the commissions submitted only resolutions on definite practical organizational steps to be taken.

The conference voted to assign the task of formulating resolutions summarizing the experiences and sentiments of the commissions to the National Executive Committee, which was to mimeograph and distribute these resolutions as well as the entire proceedings of the festival.

The commission on LOWT organizational problems thru its chairman Anne Howe recommended that a coast-to-coast National Executive Committee be established instead of the present one which is composed of New York members only. Two members of each section, plus a National Buro at present to function from a National Office in New York but later to be moved to a more central point, would constitute the National Executive Committee. It also recommended the re-election of Harry Elion, John E. Bonn, and Anne Howe to the Committee in their present functions. It proposed to recommend that a new editor of New Theatre be chosen. All these proposals were adopted by vote of the delegates.

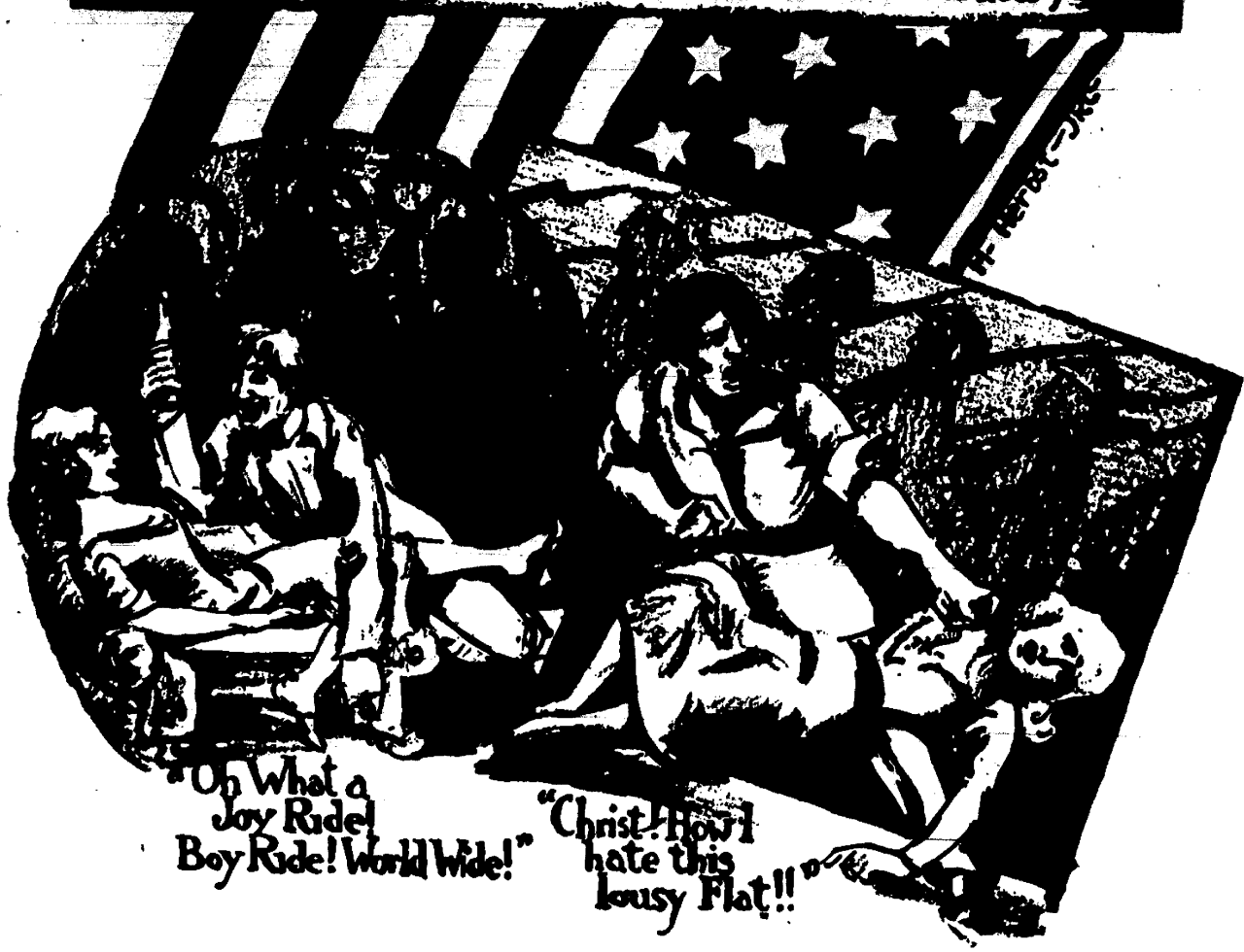
The Presiding Committee elected at the beginning of the conference included Meislin (Los Angeles), Marvin (Moline), Romaine (Milwaukee), Holt (Chicago WLT), Simon (Chicago Workers Theatre), Tann (Artes, Chicago), Mitchell (Cleveland), Block (Gary), Tepp (Newark), Bonn (NEC and Presidium of IURT), Howe (NEC), Saxe (WLT-NY), Trufin (Ukrainian Dramatic Circle, N. Y.), Kazan (Group Theatre, N. Y.), and a delegate of the Theatre Union, N. Y.

Greetings were received and read from the International Union of the Revolutionary Theatre and the New York District of the Young Pioneers of America.

In the three evenings devoted to performances, nine theatre groups appeared in competition, together with guest performances by the chorus and dance groups as noted above, and a guest performance of a scene from "Fortune Heights," presented by the Chicago Workers Theatre, a stationary theatre. Some of the competing groups also gave guest performances which were not included in the competition but which afforded an opportunity to see more of the work being done by them.

Guest performances of this nature included the Workers Laboratory Theatre of New York in "LaGuardia's Got the Boloney," a satirical musical revue dealing with New York's demagogic mayor; and the Blue Blouses of Los Angeles in "Recruit" by M. Leon, a mass recitation against war and for solidarity between workers and soldiers.

The dramatic competition consisted of the following performances:



Impressions of AMERICA, AMERICA, Alfred Kreymborg's dramatic poem, presented as a shadowplay at the National Theatre Festival by the Workers Little Theatre of Cleveland.

AMERICA, AMERICA, will be presented at the 'New Theatre Night' by the Repertory Playhouse Associates on May 20 at the Civic Repertory Theatre, New York City



"The Blue Eagle," presented in Jewish by the dramatic group of the Hirsh Leckert Workers Club of Chicago. This was a realistic play showing a worker's determination to continue and win a strike against lower wages brought on by the NRA.

"Troops Are Marching," presented by the John Reed Club Dramatic Group of Detroit. A montage-play, made up of incidents and recitation showing the suffering of the workers in the last war and declaring for revolutionary struggle against the threatening new imperialist war. Done with blackouts and rhythmic movement, as well as realistic elements.

"Oh Yeah," presented by the Ukrainian Dramatic Circle of New York. A highly stylized satire picturing the various nationalist factions of the Ukrainian chauvinists and their failure to dupe a Ukrainian worker in this country, who finds that only the "red" Ukrainian tells him the truth and helps him fight for bread. Simple movements, skilful caricature, good make-up, varied rhythmic action.

"America, America," presented by the Workers Little Theatre of Cleveland. Adapted from the poem by Alfred Kreymborg. Done in the in-

teresting medium of the shadow play.

"Courtroom Scene," presented by the Workers Dramatic Club of Gary. A realistic play showing the trial of an organizer of the Steel and Metal Workers Industrial Union, framed up by company dicks on the charge of throwing a rock at a detective from the picket line.

"Post Mortem," staged by the New Theatre of the Tri-Cities (Moline, Davenport, & Rock Island), a symbolic fantasy showing J. P. Morgan, aided by Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Norman Thomas, as the real dead (out of the grave for a little while) attempting to rule the living (the workers and farmers) for a little longer—but sent back to the grave by the aroused masses.

"Newsboy," presented by the Workers Laboratory Theatre of New York. A dramatic montage from a poem by V. J. Jerome, scenes from "1931" and the Jooss ballet plus original material. With music and dance movement, blackouts.

"A-Shopping We Will Go," presented by the Blue Blouses of Los Angeles. Semi-stylized Hindu magician show, with the A. F. of L. rank-and-file coming up thru the audience to assert its determination to strike

for better conditions in spite of its leaders, in spite of Roosevelt's boloney, in spite of the treacherous NRA. Concluding with a mass recitation.

"In The Hog House," presented by the Workers Laboratory Theatre of Chicago. Realistic play showing the Negro and white workers in the stockyards, united in the Packinghouse Workers Industrial Union, winning a strike.

The judges awarded first place to the Workers Laboratory Theatre of New York ("Newsboy"), second place to the Ukrainian Dramatic Circle of New York ("Oh Yeah"), and third jointly to the Workers Dramatic Club of Gary ("Courtroom Scene") and the Blue Blouses of Los Angeles ("A-Shopping We Will Go").

A critical evaluation of the performances, together with full accounts of various aspects of the second National Theatre Festival, will be published next month and in succeeding months in the pages of New Theatre. The National Executive Committee of the LOWT is also preparing to issue a series of mimeographed bulletins containing in detail the proceedings and results of the festival.

On June 1st, Unity Theatre, 24-26 East 23rd St., is moving to Mineola, Long Island, for the summer. They are renting one of the world's oldest and most delapidated farms where they expect to do a First Year Plan. There will be about 20 in the group and they are planning a season of intensive work on plays for production during the summer and next winter. Many young men and girls in Mineola are anxious to become members of Unity Theatre and thus start a dramatic group of their own. This definite strengthening of Unity

Theatre will make it possible to present plays at all the Workers Centers in Long Island of which there is an ever growing number. The repertoire will include the four short revolutionary plays "*Credo*"; "*Death of Jehovah*"; "*Class Collaboration*" and "*Brodway, 1933*" which are now being presented every Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings at the theatre's headquarters.

THEATRE ARTS IN SOVIET RUSSIA

AT THE NEW SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH; Nina Tar-

asova, songs; Lee Simonson, theatre; Julien Bryan, films.

Mr. Simonson seems to have made a discovery and he is very enthusiastic — even inspiring.

The most absorbing part of the program was the films. Mr. Bryan brought a surprise film showing the czar, the czarina, the court and court life in the year 1905. Then he showed these courts, palaces, churches as they are today. This juxtaposition was one of the best arguments for Soviet life.

"CROWD SCENE"

When Masses Must Walk the Stage

(Mr. Merlin, now a producer, has directed plays for the last eighteen years. His ability to present plays that call for handling crowd scenes has been particularly praised by reviewers. Here a veteran American director writes a technical description, for other theatre workers, of how certain effects can be achieved.)

When a crowd scene is to be depicted on the stage in the revolutionary theatre, it must possess far greater significance than in the ordinary theatre, since, when the revolutionary playwright shows a crowd on the stage, he does so not merely to create excitement, but to convey an authentic mass emotion that is an integral part of the action and emotion of the play as a whole.

This article does not pretend to go into the philosophy of how and when crowds should be used on the stage in the revolutionary theatre. It will attempt only to present a few technical points that I have found valuable as a director of many plays calling for crowd effects.

Suppose the director of a play must show the mass action of workers in a big plant, or the movement of a whole town, roused to mass demonstration. The first obvious solution is that of reproducing the scene in detail, using three or four hundred actors. This is easy to do. Size is in itself impressive. Since, however, in the professional theatre a payroll must be faced on Saturday, and in the non-professional groups there are far from enough devoted men and women to appear nightly for rehearsal and appearance in a

FRANK MERLIN

brief scene or two,—and usually no stages with sufficient playing-space—such a mob must be cut down to twenty or thirty people.

The director sometimes employs the tried and true device of having the mob offstage, and only the leaders of it visible to the audience. That seldom works satisfactorily. The audience wants to participate by actual seeing and hearing, and this participation of the audience is particularly important in the revolutionary theatre.

In my own practice, I have used different devices. In "Rope," for example, a lynch play involving a whole community, I used exactly seventeen actors. On a stage that gradually darkened, I had them come on in groups of twos and threes, slowly, ominously gathering. Finally, in the pitch blackness, muffled cries were heard, sharp commands, and then, on cue, a sharp white light cut through the enveloping blackness, lit a shaft of illumination on a few figures, and on the outskirts of that shaft of light the shadows of the others looked like at least seventy men.

In "False Dreams, Farewell," I kept a huddled mass of actors near the center of the stage, and during a short hysterical crowd scene, had these joined by others who came on from various entrances. This gave the effect to the audience of hundreds more crowding in the immediate vicinity, though not at the moment visible. These directions in handling crowds are more or less of a mechan-

ical nature. Before leaving this point, however, I would like to pass on one tip to fellow workers. In watching crowds in newsreels, I have noticed that there is always a comparatively large space between their component members. With this fact as a guide, I rehearse actors in crowd scenes to keep a full arm's length away from their neighbors. Try a scene with 100 people on the stage, huddled together. Try the same scene with 50, all keeping their distance from each other. The effect of the second is much more realistic and thrilling.

More important in creating an effect of reality and vigor is the psychological attitude of the actors in such a scene. Actors have a tendency to use the same words and gestures to convey the general emotion desired. This makes for a chorus rather than a crowd. When a chorus-like effect is desired, a rhythm for this can be worked out. But when realism is wanted, the director must supplement the actors and even the author in supplying phrases and movements.

In a prolonged crowd scene, actors can build up a bit of "character" for themselves, and this will dictate movements that will vary the scene. Thus, in "False Dreams," on a ship-board scene, one passenger was turned by the actor into the typical "deck-walker"; another made himself a chronic drunk, a third appeared obviously on his first trip—and all this without a word. In a quick crowd scene, it is not important what the actors do, as long as they don't all do the same thing.

Time after time I have seen

such famous mob scenes as the Forum Scene from "Julius Caesar" spoiled by mechanical gestures and "walla-wallaing" on the part of the actors, instead of the use of actual lines. This will inevitably happen if the actors are told merely a vague general outline of what they must do. My method in such cases has been to tell the mob the meaning of the scene, not in the words of the playwright, but in their own words, to give them a proper background for what part they play.

I had to use local "extras" for this work in touring, and would say to them, to set them for the funeral oration scene, for example, "You are starving, things are not going right with the state. You do not know

how to remedy this. But you feel a change must be made. Caesar is dead. All your ills are blamed on the dead Caesar. His pal, Mark Anthony, gets up to defend him. Are you going to let him get away with that? Of course not. Let me see if you can yell Mark Anthony down." And so on. Even with previously unrehearsed actors, such a speech would usually result in an exciting scene on their part.

As a final point, I would like to say that I have found that the mood the director wants to create must start in himself. It is almost impossible to get a group of actors excited if one does not talk excitedly to them. Or, if they are playing a sodden mass of down-trodden peo-

ple, one cannot talk to them in exalted tones in directing this scene. Having set the general mood, first in oneself, then in the group, the problems of spacing, of brief characterizations, and so on, can be solved almost mechanically. And their solution, because it grows from basic rightness of mood, is apt to be good theatrically, and as far as carrying on the general line of play is concerned.

In the case of presenting a revolutionary play, this would seem to be particularly applicable, since it makes for integrity of the general line of the production, and for real importance, rather than a mere exciting interlude, as far as the use of crowds is concerned.

VOICE OF THE AUDIENCE

IMPRESSIONS OF A NEWCOMER

TO one whose meager knowledge of assembling a play has been gleaned solely from the movies and plays he has seen concerning themselves with this business, the casting of "Intervention" has been a distinct revelation.

The threadbare backstage play—of "the show must go on" type, dealing with the harrowed playwright who agonizedly looks on while the product of his brain is systematically and unfeelingly torn to bits, the cigar stub chewing director furiously browbeating the nerve racked principals and lesser satellites, the wise-cracking assistant director, the jumble of odd bits of scenery, the racket being made by stage hands, electricians, carpenters, etc. — the whole an impression of utter confusion and chaos, is a theme already too familiar.

With this picture in mind, your apprehensive reporter came to the Workers Laboratory Theatre for a tryout. "Intervention," then being cast, was read to the expectant actors, and the fun was on.

We were asked to read one part, then another and a third. The readings over, criticisms were called for. Criticism! From us! We who had had no experience of this sort were invited to voice our opinions. The director here was not the supreme dictator. It seemed incredible! After the amazement wore off and it finally penetrated that my voice would carry weight, together with that of our director, I was ready to stand up and cheer for the Revolution. In the vernacular, this was "terrific."

Subsequently, those of us who

had tentatively been assigned parts were instructed to attempt an analysis of each character from the viewpoint of social background, education, habits temperament, etc. Again I was puzzled. What kind of classroom tactics were these? Were we doing a play or psychoanalysis? Further instructions to read up on the history of the period in which "Intervention" was laid, created more mental opposition. To hell with these pedagogic methods—

Well, I got over that too. Although considerable time was consumed, some of it apparently wasted, the schoolroom tactics proved invaluable.

In the writer's humble opinion the Theatre of Action may be in its infancy but it's a mighty lusty brat.

— PAUL ARRANOW

A THEATRE OF ACTION

THE STORY OF THE WORKERS LABORATORY THEATRE OF CHICAGO

ALICE EVANS

THE scene was the stage of a settlement house where the Chicago Workers' Laboratory Theatre was born. The time: one year ago. The characters: six members of the new dramatic group, fifteen members of a neighborhood Unemployed Council, and one director—recruited from the little theatre movement, and come "down" to help the "struggling young artists"—as she put it. Wearing a thousand-dollar mink coat and a directorial air of superiority, she was telling us what to do. The previous week we had begun work on a revolutionary mass chant. Having too few actors, we had invited Unemployed Council members to take part. Copies of the play were handed out and a reading rehearsal began. As the unemployed workers got into the swing of the chant, the angry refrain "Revolt" grew stronger and stronger. At the end, when the entire group marched forward, saying: "We'll take the world! It's ours," they gave a stirring performance.

Greatly agitated, our bourgeois director called me over to one side and said: "We've got to stop this at once. My God, do you realize what you are doing? These people take it seriously. They're not play-acting. They mean it. You don't know what you're starting. This is dangerous!"

We have not seen the bourgeois director since that night, but I feel indebted to her for expressing the purpose of our workers' theatre: *A theatre which the working class takes seriously. A theatre which expresses the interests, the*

strength and the rebellion of the workers. *A theatre which is dangerous to bourgeois society.*

This incident clarified the role of the Workers' Laboratory Theatre to its members. We had begun dramatic activities at the settlement house a few months before as "A Theatre With Its Footlights Facing the New Social Order"—an attempt by young collegians and bohemians to make a splash in the mild waters of liberalism with a new kind of amateur theatricals. "The social problem play's the thing" was our only guiding idea. The group couldn't stay agreed long enough ideologically to achieve any expertness technically. After two productions, "Can You Hear Their Voices?" by Hallie Flanagan, and "Loud Speaker" by John Howard Lawson, the group split. The liberals broke off from those who felt the world economic crisis was so imperative that we must give only plays of the class struggle. The small group of revolutionaries began again, as the Workers' Laboratory Theatre. In the course of a year, since that time, we have made every mistake that a workers theatre can make. We have learned a great deal from these mistakes. It is with the hope that they may be of help to other groups in the same position that I am telling them.

WE started as an indefinite cross between the stationary theatre and the theatre of action. At the time both

terms were unknown to us. We knew that we wanted a theatre composed of young workers giving plays about the class struggle. That was all. Our first play was "The Hand of God," an adaptation by one of our members of Whitaker Chambers' story, "Comrade Munn." It was a good little play, aside from its unrealistic presentation of a strike situation, but our first performance was a flop. It was presented from the settlement house stage with a combination of bad acting and elaborate scenery to an audience of thirty or forty polite relatives and friends. We realized then it was not our function to be a stationary theatre. Our members were not well-trained actors, nor were they patient enough to work at becoming so before producing any plays. Our group was too small to stand the financial drain of elaborate scenery, or the organizational drain of promotion and publicity in order to get audiences. We recast our ideas of what the Workers Laboratory Theatre should be. We got three engagements to give "The Hand of God" before workers groups in the city. We rehearsed every night for one week; we improved the tempo, interpretation and power of the play. Finally, we had the thrill of presenting it to a responsive audience of one thousand workers at a Lithuanian Workers Celebration. From that time on the Workers Laboratory Theatre became a theatre of action.

A violent dramatic experience which strongly affected the composition of our group came shortly after this. We were in the midst of producing

one act of "Gods of the Lightning." The personnel of the group was still confused: a few workers had strayed in and a nucleus of radical students had remained. We were, however, greedy for members with professional experience or little theatre training. Such a one was our leading actor in "Gods of the Lightning." A fellow of obvious personal wealth, he nevertheless seemed interested in the revolutionary movement, and he was an excellent actor. Three days after we performed "Gods of the Lightning" to an enthusiastic workers' audience at an I.W.W. hall, the Sopkins' strike broke out. Twelve hundred Negro girls, employed in four dress-manufacturing sweat shops on Chicago's South Side, walked out under the leadership of the Needle Trades Workers' Industrial Union. The largest Sopkins' shop was six blocks from the settlement house where we rehearsed. Three of us from the theatre group were on the picket line. The second morning, turning a corner with two of the strikers, I came upon the star actor of the Workers' Laboratory Theatre, standing outside the dress shop adjoining Sopkins' (also on strike), talking to a cop. He greeted me with a forced smile and apologized for the fact that his father-in-law owned the picketed shop.

"But—can't you do anything for the strikers?" I asked.

"You see," he answered, "we really can't. If we grant their demands, we'll have to close up—couldn't make any profit. We're losing money every minute this strike is on. We've got to break it. I'm still sympathetic, you know—but I've got to make a living."

I walked on, with two of the girls who also had to "make a living," and who being were paid from \$1.50 to \$7.00 a week.

After the strike was over, we

invited this "comrade" to attend a meeting of the Workers' Laboratory Theatre at which he would have a chance to defend himself. He refused to come. At the meeting when we expelled him, a discussion took place on the necessary close tie-up between a workers' theatre which gave plays about struggles and the struggles themselves. We lost a few members after this meeting, for they felt the judgment of the renegade too severe. Those of us who remained knew a greater clarity, a feeling of closeness to the striking workers, a determination to build a theatre which would express their spirit and be of use in their struggles.

THE author of our next play, however, was neither a worker nor a Communist, but a young intellectual whose father is the well-to-do leader of a strong union in Chicago. Experience with him has shown us that there is value in involving people not interested in workers struggles in the group. We realize now that the Theatre of Action has an important function as a mass organization, because it draws into its activities members who cannot be brought into the movement any other way. It serves in a sense the function of a workers' sport group, offering young people something they care about doing, and through participation they become acquainted with and attached to the revolutionary movement. The young intellectual in question wanted to write plays, to see them performed, to get criticisms. He found opportunities for this in the Workers Laboratory Theatre that he could find nowhere else. After reading several plays to us which we discussed seriously, praised for their good dialogue and criticized for their bourgeois approach, he wrote "The Big Shot," an excellent short play in which the hero joins the Un-

employed Council, and the final line is: "If I can't work for a living, by God I'll fight for it." We have given this play about forty times to date, with five different casts, at forums, picnics, strike meetings, and Unemployed Council halls. The author is one of our most active and valuable members. He just finished a new play about a struggle in the South, where an organization of Negro and white sharecroppers prevents the lynching of their Communist leader.

We have discovered a second function of the Theatre of Action as a mass organization: the political education and personal development of its members. We have one young worker who, when he joined, refused to submit to group discipline of any kind. He was irresponsible about coming to rehearsals and unmanageable when he attended them. He had an excellent voice though, and our director gave him a good part and worked patiently with him. Gradually, through the chance to "let loose" which he got on the stage, the excitement of performances, and participation in orderly rehearsals, he became a quieter, more reliable and effective comrade. There are other cases of workers who have overcome self-consciousness, learned to speak understandably, developed poise and leadership abilities through participation in workers' theatre activities. As for political education, we bring our membership into direct contact with the organized revolutionary movement in many ways. Last week we were on the program of an Anti-War mass meeting. Another time, the teacher of our playwrighting class made attendance at the Second Farmers National Convention Mass Meeting an assignment to the students. This experience proved not only valuable in giving the students playwrighting ma-

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"STEVEDORE"

Reviewed by

JACK SHAPIRO

THE THEATRE UNION states in its program that its point of view is that there is but one constructive guide in the prevailing situation; the interest of the great masses of the people, the working people, the workers as a class. If this point of view was expressed with eminent success in *Peace on Earth*, its current production, *Stevedore*, does so magnificently.

Stevedore, a new play by Paul Peters and George Sklar, deals with the most bitterly exploited section of the American working class, the southern Negro. It bases itself on factual material. A program note mentions the attacks on Negroes in East St. Louis in 1919, the Dr. Sweet case in Detroit, the Bogalusa lumber strike, the New Orleans dock strikes, the Colorado bathing beach fight, the attacks on sharecroppers at Camp Hill and Tuscaloosa, Alabama. It is just as true, however, of the Scottsboro case and of innumerable other episodes which are part of the daily bread of the American Negro. Revolutionary drama is not evolved out of thin air. It springs from a deep sense of exploitation and revolt. It is an exposition and a weapon. It is true and poignant and rousing. *Stevedore* is all of that.

The action of *Stevedore* is laid along the dock front of New Orleans. Its story is a simple and familiar one—one which with some slight variations, we have read and reread in the daily press time and time again. But it managed in its ten rapid and intensely moving scenes to bring home to the audience with amazing power the cruel injustice, the cynical exploitation which is the lot of a

basic section of the American people. It also managed to impress its audience with the conviction that there is a great soul-stirring hope, that there is an ever growing will and capacity among workers, both black and white, to rise and put an end to lynching and race hatred and exploitation. For those who have been struggling to solve the problems of revolutionary drama and theatre, *Stevedore* holds an important lesson.

A characteristic fault of many of our revolutionary plays is that in their anxiety to impress their point they fall into non-dramatic means. There is little of that in this play. *Stevedore* manages to induce a creative attitude on the part of its audience. It gives us a situation rather than the playwrights' comments, but a situation translated through the revolutionary vision of the authors. As a result the audience inevitably draws the right conclusions but draws them creatively from the dramatic action.

THE revolutionary idea in drama, as well as in political science, is not superimposed upon life but springs from life itself. The characters in *Stevedore*, therefore, move about the stage not as coolly planned tools for the conveying of an idea but as thoroughly human beings. They weep and cringe and laugh and play and fight. They are shown in their strength and weakness. The result is immensely thrilling and convincing, and when in the last scene black and white workers leap over their improvised barricades to rout a lynch-crazed

mob, the audience in spirit leaps with them.

The actors, for the most part Negro, act with a gusto and spontaneity rarely to be witnessed on the American stage. The settings by S. Syrjola and direction by Michael Blankfort are beautiful. The net result is so overpowering that one is reluctant after the last curtain to begin to concentrate on whatever minor weaknesses there are to be found. There is one fault, however, which to me seems too apparent to be easily overlooked. I for one could have easily dispensed with the first two scenes, particularly the opening scene. It seems to me out of gear with the rest of the play in style and spirit and unnecessary structurally. It may be argued of course that with as broad an audience as the Theatre Union tends to attract we cannot be too thorough in exposing the flimsiness and hypocrisy of the age old "rape" cry, but I feel sure that this could have been done during the progress of the play proper without such a thoroughly non-integrated scene which sets off the conflict at a false tangent and which one is glad to have forgotten at the close of the play.

But this fault, while important, is completely engulfed in the engrossing drama that follows. *Stevedore* is a great step forward, a tremendous victory for the revolutionary theatre. It not only deserves the full support of the working class and the broad masses, but will undoubtedly get it on the basis of intrinsic merit.

F I L M

The Revolutionary Film—Next Step

THE film movement in America has for some time been faced with the problem of what film forms are its true concern. The Film and Photo Leagues have up to now produced mainly newsreels. They are necessary because of the rigid censorship and the malicious distortion that the capitalist film companies use in their treatment of events relative to labor and labor's struggles. These newsreels serve an agitational and revelational function to arouse the working class, and as a corrective for the lies of the capitalist agencies. A strike, demonstration or hunger march is shown with the full brutalities of the police, with the full heroism and militancy of the workers, without the distractive mocking comment of the bourgeois announcer.

Because newsreels are fractional, atomic and incomplete, the revolutionary movement has required a more synoptic form to present a fuller picture of the conditions and struggles of the working class. And so the synthetic documentary film has become an important form for film workers in the revolutionary movement — a form which allows for more inclusive and implicative comment on our class world than the discursive newsreel. For this great and rich medium the bourgeois filmers have had little use, since they cannot face the truths that the documentary camera can report. Their lies are better served by a more closely supervised camera in a shadowed studio under the kind sun of California. Aside from a few reels on sports, some shorts of believeitornots, and

LEO T. HURWITZ

the half-truth-half-lies of industrial and "educational" films, Hollywood has ignored the vast possibilities of the synthetic film document.

Another factor, besides its great effectiveness, has determined the preoccupation of the radical movie-makers with the documentary film. At this time, with the radicalized working-class as small as it is, it is almost impossible for economic and technical reasons to undertake the vast task of producing and distributing revolutionary dramatic films, which, in some ways, are capable of going beyond the document (as the synthetic document transcends the newsreel) in its width of scope, its synoptic approach, in its ability to recreate events and emotions not revealable to the camera in the document.

THE problems of documentary montage are very different from that of the dramatic film. The former may be called *external* montage, the creative comparison, contrast and opposition of shots, externally related to each other, to produce an effect not contained in any of the shots—or, as Samuel Brody has well described it, "reality recorded on film strips and built up into wholes embodying our revolutionary interpretation of events". For this type of cutting, "The Man With the Movie Camera" is the textbook of technical possibilities. The dramatic film presents the problem of what may be called *internal* montage, which is essentially a creative analysis and recon-

struction of an internally related visual event in terms of shots of film, to reveal best the meaning of the event. The documentary film embodies the reporting on film of actual events and the creative addition of these bits of cinematographed reality to render an interpretation of that reality. The dramatic film involves in its cinematography the interpretive breaking-up of the recreated reality, and, in its montage, the synthesis of these analysed elements to recreate the event on film from a given point of view.

Any acted sequence in an ordinary film will serve as an illustration of internal montage—any direct succession of acts to render a dramatic event. An example of external montage may be taken from a recent newsreel compilation by the New York Film and Photo League. The newsreel shots are sure: President Roosevelt signing a state paper and looking up at the camera with his inimitable self-satisfied smile, and a shot of fleet manoeuvres—two shots taken in widely separated times and places and not essentially (but *externally*) related to each other. By virtue of splicing the shot of the warships just after Roosevelt signs the paper, and following the threatening ships of war, with the rest of the first shot (Roosevelt looks up and smiles), a new meaning not contained in either shot, but a product of their new relation on film, is achieved—the meaning of the huge war preparation program of the demagogic Roosevelt government.

External and internal montage, as described here, are by

no means mutually exclusive. Both may be used, and in fact have been used frequently to complement each other—sometimes with emphasis on the document as in *Ten Days That Shook The World*, sometimes with the emphasis on the recreated drama, as in *The End Of Saint Petersburg*.

A mixed form of the synthetic document and the dramatic is the next proper concern of the revolutionary film movement: to widen the scope of the document, to add to the document the recreated events necessary to it but resistant to the documentary camera eye—a synthetic documentary film which allows for material which recreates and fortifies the actuality recorded in the document, and makes it clearer and more powerful.

THE training of revolutionary film makers in America has come wholly from their experience in the

newsreel and documentary film. What has been learned of the problems of shooting and cutting has been learned in the crucible of events, in preparing films of workers' struggles to be used in turn as a weapon in these struggles. In order to study the problems of internal montage and to prepare for the making of the type of film indicated above, ten or twelve members of the Potamkin Film School, under the technical direction of Ralph Steiner, are working in an experimental group at the Film and Photo League. They have set themselves a series of problems, each involving the writing of a shot-by-shot continuity for the sequence to be filmed, photographing of the sequence and the final editing. Two problems have so far been completed. The first, to render the simple act of an unemployed man entering his room after an exhausting day of job-hunting, sitting

down, tired, worn and without hope. The second, a continuation of the first, the landlord entering the room to serve the tenant with a dispossession for non-payment of rent. This group works wholly with non-actors in order to duplicate conditions which will occur in making films later. The great task is to learn how to make the camera eloquent, how to make use of the natural acts of an untrained actor to serve the needs of the scenario.

It is too early to indicate the nature of the films which will be made along the lines indicated here. However, the plan is to develop this experimental group into a production group within the Film and Photo League for the purpose of making documentary-dramatic revolutionary films — short propaganda films that will serve as flaming film-slogans, satiric films and films exposing the brutalities of capitalist society.

Program of the International Cinema Bureau

Work Groups: (1.) The establishment of work-groups for theoretical propaganda struggle.

- a) against bourgeois, fascist films;
- b) for proletarian, revolutionary films;
- c) for Soviet films.

Reference material: In these work groups reference material must be gathered for the critical expose of current bourgeois fascist films.

Short articles: This material must be worked into short articles and sent to press. The following work-methods are recommended: Collective analysis; discussions of the

Summary of the Decisions of the Film Conference held in Moscow recently to plan a program for the Cinema Bureau of the International Union of the Revolutionary Theatre

most popular bourgeois films. A comrade should be assigned to write reviews on the basis of the conclusions reached during these discussions. Also on the basis of these discussions a report on a number of typical films can be drawn up.

Public Discussions: (2) Suggestions of the International Bureau to be immediately

carried out by appropriate methods.

- a) These theoretical work-groups must organize open discussions on the popular films to which prominent individuals and comrades should be invited.

Criticism: b) The screening of a typical bourgeois film with an accompanying analysis. Before the screening a report or discussion of the general characteristics of bourgeois films and the refined and subtle psychological methods used to inject ideological poison therein and the great dangers involved. Also before and during the showing serious or satirical comment

on the film exposing its hidden fascist propaganda.

Revolutionary Film: c) Showing a revolutionary film—with an introduction, when possible.

Bourgeois Newsreels: Showing of typical bourgeois newsreel also with analytical and critical remarks directed towards the satirical expose of the concealed propaganda.

Documentary Films: e) Screening of documentary films. These must also be accompanied by a lecture. The social and political significance thereof and other facts must be conveyed.

Dramatized Documentary Films: f) Showing of dramatized documentary films. Many documentary films, which can be obtained, are such that with the minimum of inserted new shots which can be cut into the film, can be transformed into films with socio-political meaning and thus "neutral" films can be given a revolutionary point.

Montagefilms: g) Experienced comrades to make montage-films on various current political subjects out of film-library material. (Anti-War, Crisis, Unemployment, Socialist Construction, etc.) Also the insertion of text into newsreels makes very effective montage films.

Marxian Study Films: h) The making of films for workers' schools which utilize documentary material and graphs to illustrate the categories of price and profit and clarify the forms of capitalist exploitation.

Mass Action: i) Organization of mass action against the fascist film by means of leaflets, boycotts (attendance strikes), sabotage, etc.

16mm Production: The most important problem is the pro-

duction of our own 16mm films. Apparatus must be secured—at least a camera and accessories to begin with. Should be gotten from the other cultural organizations to whom the great importance of this work must be explained. It should also be pointed out to these organizations that the making of films bearing on their own activities is extremely important—thus a film on the sports activities of the LSU. Also films for the WIR or the ILD. Films for the revolutionary theatre organizations to take the place of backgrounds and sets.

Proletarian Newsreels: Proletarian newsreel-weeklies on the labor movement: strikes, demonstrations, proletarian life as found in reality and in contrast, the parasitic life of the bourgeoisie, exploitation, fascist parades, terror, etc. Such films with explanatory titles can become your first repertory. This must be carried out in efficiently managed fashion, of course. The existing police regulations and decrees must be studied and remembered. The film section can organize under the innocuous name of some club, and carry on showing on the "invited guests" method. It is certainly advisable to find a neutral name for your organization.

Very Important!

Films for the WIR: When you have reached this point, when you can shoot films, you should place primary emphasis on the making of WIR films. The WIR is preparing a broad film activity and your material must and can be the essential documentary foundation thereof. On this point you may secure further directives from the local WIR leadership.

Truth Is Forbidden

THE MAYOR OF CHICAGO AS FILM CENSOR

The following Associated Press news release makes news of film censorship which in fact has been in practice for years:

From the New York Herald-Tribune:—

CHICAGO, March 2 (AP).—All newsreel pictures of rioting or mob scenes today were banned from Chicago motion-picture theatres by order of Mayor Edward J. Kelly. The Mayor said he issued the order because such pictures "might incite Chicago Communists to riot."

There have been no major riots in Chicago for years and only few instances of mob disorders.

"Some of the scenes cut out were those of the rioting in Vienna," one newsreel official said.

The public release of Mayor Kelly's statement follows the recent meeting in Washington D. C. of representatives of all the major newsreel companies in response to an emergency call of the Dollfuss' agents in the U.S.—the Austrian Embassy. Ostensibly with the permission of the U.S. State Dept. the Fascist representative implored the newsreel companies to eliminate scenes of the heroic struggle of the Austrian workers against the brutal offensive directed by Dollfuss. The newsreel companies agreed, it being no break in the tradition of film censorship by the U.S. Federal Government via the medium of the Hays organization (Association of Motion

Picture Producers and Distributors, Inc.)

The special significance of this official public action in Chicago can only be understood in the light of the fact that the Roosevelt Government is extending its policy of smashing any attempt of working class struggle against the NRA program in the field of motion pictures. By using the local police power of censorship on the grounds of "inciting to riot," an attempt is thus being made to suppress completely or, what is worse, to distort newsreels showing scenes of picket lines, demonstrations, mass meetings, evictions, whether they appear as hot news through the commercial companies, or through increasing mass movie showings of The Film and Photo Leagues in various cities.

The above release mentions the absence of "mob disorders" in Chicago recently but neglects to mention the increasing number of demonstrations against evictions, against Fascism, for unemployment relief, which have been attacked by the very police under Mayor Kelly's control. Stating that some of the scenes cut out were those of rioting in Vienna, one of the newsreel officials overlooked the important fact that since the Sacco-Vanzetti newsreels were burned in 1927 at the order of Will Hays, there has been an uninterrupted ironheel

(Continued on Page 22)

PHOTOS NEEDED

Theatre, film, and dance groups should take photographs of their productions regularly and send them in for publication in New Theatre.

Theatre Collective's new play "Marion Models Ink."—a full length play dealing with Union struggles in the Needle Trades, will open late in May.

DANCE

Which Technique?

EZRA FREEDMAN

Despite frequent and prolonged discussion as to the technique revolutionary dancers should use, there is still some disagreement. The disputants fall into three main groups: (1) The advocates of one or another of the bourgeois schools who think that their particular technique is best suited for revolutionary themes; (2) Those who think we must develop a purely revolutionary technique; (3) The eclectics, who believe in choosing what is best for our purpose from what all the bourgeois schools have to offer and rejecting whatever is not useful to us.

Since progress will be most rapid under a unified program, let us attempt to achieve some sort of working unity. Each one of these three groups has something definite to contribute toward solving the technique problem.

The first, and perhaps most conservative, category would limit us to the point of stifling. We must remember that any particular bourgeois technique was invented as a means to project the intellectual concepts of its creator. It is doubtful whether even the total intellectual concepts of all the bourgeois dancers to date contain as much revolutionary energy as is latent in any one of our recognized revolutionary dancers. It is much less probable that any one of the aesthetes, mystics, escapists and what-nots among the bourgeois dancers has devised an instrument capable of bearing the full weight of our message. Certainly no single bourgeois lens has sufficient scope and limpidity to pass the powerful light

and images that we conceive without much blurring, loss and distortion.

The second contention, that of the "ultra-radicals," goes much too far. It would leave us with very little or nothing to work with. To discard even the valuable contributions to the dance of the bourgeois schools would be comparable to the folly of a Soviet automobile factory abolishing the belt method of mass production merely because Henry Ford, a member of the hated capitalist class, originated it. No one can deny the desirability of and eventual necessity for a characteristic revolutionary dance technique, but it hasn't arrived yet and we cannot knock away the old props until we have built new ones under us. Improvement of the ideological content of our dances comes first. Then we must fashion the technical instrument which will be the most accurate projector. Only as our ideology improves will the need for new technique spur creative work in this field.

The eclectics, who comprise the "center" or "liberal" party in the technique controversy, although possessing the most plausible policy, are nevertheless incomplete. Because their bag of tricks is bigger, they are apt to become too confident of its all-sufficiency and neglect the acquisition of new technique which will become more and more necessary as the class struggle and the building of socialism, our ideological basis, inevitably grows in volume and intensity.

The revolutionary dancer belongs to no one school, but be-

longs to all, yet stands out distinctly from all the rest, head and shoulders above them, by virtue of his contribution of vital ideology and the beginnings of a revolutionary technique. He realizes that the revolutionary dance was not miraculously conceived out of nothing at all; that it must, for a while at least, retain many of the characteristics of its forbears, the various bourgeois schools.

We must first enrich and vary the ideological content of our dances by drawing from the most fertile soil and environment of the class struggle. Then, in the interpretation, while applying the techniques we know, we must ever be on

the alert and keep questioning: Is this technique the best for this particular passage? If we alter it somewhat, will it be more suitable? Can we perhaps invent something that will bring out our meaning more clearly than anything hitherto known? By this means the new technique will grow naturally out of our work. We will never arrive upon it, however, by merely arguing about the merits of this or that technique. Technique is nothing, does not exist for us, unless considered in conjunction with the idea-material to which it is to be applied.

We must ever be on our guard against dogmatism and

the inertia of contentedness and not cling relentlessly to any particular technique, even if it be our own creation born out of hard work and sacrifice, when changing conditions call for change or alteration. We must rather be pliant, mobile and dialectical, with the enhancement of the class struggle as our measure of progress. If our art, of which technique is an essential factor, becomes intimately bound up with the class struggle, then it must advance as inevitably as the class struggle is advancing.

(This article is published as discussion material in preparation for the Workers Dance Festival to be held in June.)

THE NEW DANCE ADVANCES

THE WORKERS DANCE LEAGUE RECITAL at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on April 20th was another step towards the achievement of one of the goals of that organization—the creation of a revolutionary dance art. Presented by the United Front Supporters for the benefit of the Labor Defender, this recital introduced a new group—the Modern Negro Dance Group—and a guest soloist—Fe Alf.

Miss Alf, a German dancer of great technical virtuosity and fine artistic sensitivity, gave a performance which well merited the applause and bravos it received. Her dances, "Summer Witchery" and "Fille de Joie," were vigorously and charmingly executed. In the dance "Slavery" it seemed obvious that she was exploring new and not altogether familiar ground. While this dance was also flawless in technique, it suffered somewhat from repetition and a too

HY GLICKMAN

abrupt ending. The costuming and accompaniment in all three dances excellently supplemented the work of the dancer. This reviewer is of the opinion that Miss Alf, through continued nearness to the Workers Dance League, will be a staunch leader in the revolutionary dance world.

It is deplorable that the Modern Negro Dance Group should have been handicapped by the unavoidable absence of several of their members. Under the circumstances, they proved themselves a group from whom we can expect quick growth and definite contribution to the revolutionary dance.

The New Dance Group, in the dances "Van der Lubbe's Head" and "Uprising," showed an astonishing advance over the performance it gave at the last W. D. L. recital held in January at the City College Audi-

torium. Both dances were choreographically well organized and excellently staged. However, along with a good basically Wigman technique, they have inherited the shortcoming of overcostuming which detracts from the effectiveness of their undeniably dynamic movement. With the exception of this fault, I feel that the work of the New Dance Group compares more than favorably with the work of many of the bourgeois dance groups.

To the New Duncan Dancers (against whose use of the name "Duncan" Irma recently took legal action) fell the difficult task of opening the program. That the "Soviet Cycle" did not perform this task altogether successfully was due partly to lifeless accompaniment, and partly to a lack of the coordination and spiritedness which this dance must have. Their dance "In Memoriam" was given the best performance I have ever seen. Nevertheless it was repe-

titious, choppy, and built toward no high climax. The New Duncan Dancers must not forget that a group dance is an organic unit which must be carefully created. They must also guard against the tendency to display ability individualistically which seems to show out from behind their work.

ADD Bates and Irving Lasky gave a creditable performance of "Black and White." The dance in its original form was less drawn-out and built more effectively to a strong climax. "Scottsboro," the other offering of the Red Dancers, was a more solid contribution to the program. This newest composition is capable of being reworked into a dance which will perfectly crystallize the well-known Scottsboro case. That it was sadly in need of better accompaniment, both vocal and musical, need hardly be said. But its greatest fault lies in the attempt to make Negro boys of white girls. I know of no way in which this fault can be corrected except by an immediate drive by the Red Dancers for male dancers and by their use of a better type of blacking.

The Theatre Union Dance Group in the closing number "March of the Pioneers," seemed to show that these girls (who on occasion try to out-Graham Graham) have come to realize that they must modify their technique if they are to dance revolutionary dances. Their dance "Starvation-Depression" still reminds one of the term—"moving cardboards"—that has been applied to their work from altogether friendly quarters. The T. U. D. G. is on the right road, however, and I am sure it will produce some fine revolutionary dances.

To sum up, one can say that, despite its many problems—the heritage from bourgeois

CASUALTIES

HUMPHREY-WEIDMAN

DORIS HUMPHREY, CHARLES WEIDMAN, AND GROUP
Sunday eve., April 15—
Guild Theatre

TO those who follow the career of dancers in the contemporary Broadway theatre, the story of Humphrey and Weidman carries a moral. After an absence of two years from the concert platform, during which time this pair and their group were occupied with several Broadway successes ("As Thousands Cheer," and "School for Husbands"), their return was slightly less than triumphant. In fact, considered from any point of view, the crowds who stormed the doors of the Guild Theatre were given pretty small fare for their money and their interest.

Each new dance on the program showed a distressing lack of distinction, considered either from the formal or the ideational point of view. Each old dance, by which we mean those previously performed, while of higher calibre, seemed equally substanceless.

The couple probably was drafted into the theatre because even their earlier dances promised much that was popular, much that was purely theatrical and entertaining. Even "Dionysiaques," the most extensive of their group offerings and by far the best, considered in the light of group composition and architecture, bore, in its excitement, elements of theatricalism and a

schools, the struggle for self-clarification, and the need for finances—the Workers Dance League moves toward its chosen goal with a growing strength which nothing can hold back.

straining for effect. Now, the theatre gives these two back to the concert stage with these questionable qualities heavily stressed, and an all-encompassing triviality and superficiality to boot.

Their new works were without exception light, casually amusing show pieces. "Rude-poema" was a love play in pseudobucolic simplicity, between man and woman, "Kinetic Pantomime", the usual, witty pantomime of Weidman where the trivial becomes silly and goodnaturedly laughable, the "Alcina Suite" by Handel, a reworking of classic dance forms again interpreted as amorous byplay between the two dancers, (it is distressing to note that whereas their former duets were usually of dancing partners, now they invariably suggest a man-woman relationship); "Memorials," a group of three dances, pleasantly satiric and unprovocative, and finally an "Exhibition Piece", an ingratiatingly meaningless trio by Humphrey, Weidman and Limon.

It is absurd to seek social direction in any of their dances, were not the absolute absence of such an approach a direction in itself. Their dances are most often called by their technical terms, and the numbers remaining from former recitals, with the limitations of this type of expression in mind, at least possessed definite dance quality. The best of these was "Circular Ascent", danced by Miss Humphrey. While her "Pointed Ascent" seemed forced, the companion piece suggested all the artistry and sensitivity that a dancer of the capabilities of Miss Humphrey could have. It is to be deplored, however, that she does not couple her definite-

ly subtle and exquisite sense of dance movement with ideas more worthy of portrayal. While etudes in dance movement possess definite charm and value, it is the first step of the dance, not the *Ding an Sich*. Miss Humphrey and her cohorts seem to feel that a good dancer should be concerned purely with the formal aspects of dance expression, that once the technical movement and the choreography have been artistically combined, the dancer has performed his function. Hence the presentation of "Studies in Conflict," in "Counterpoint," etc. But we contend that, together with other arts, the dance is a vehicle of expression, that it is not there to express *itself* as an art, but that through this sensitive instrument, we are enabled to glimpse the movements and expressions of our lives.

We do not know what we can look forward to from these dancers. The theatre did not do well by them. It deflected their technical development, so that we see them now a pleasant theatre team, using whatever gifts they once possessed for a display of hardly more than first rate vaudeville entertainment.

—E. O.

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TAMIRIS

"Toward the Light"

PROMISE OF THINGS TO COME

Tamiris, in her second recital of the season presented for the first time a cycle of dances, "Toward the Light". Since the other numbers on her program have already been dealt with in these pages, one is justified in reviewing only this presentation, particularly because of its tendencies.

Tamiris is to be commended for choosing as subject matter for her new work, a revolutionary theme,—a criticism of the maladjustment of contemporary bourgeois society and a direction "toward the light," toward revolutionary society. It seems unfortunate, however, that the opus itself was inadequate. Her primary deficiency was one that confronts, in some degree, our own dance groups: she sought to *impose* a revolutionary content on to an un-revolutionary dance-thinking, which alone would spell failure to any project. In this case also, the revolutionary content was so obvious and general, and so poorly fused with the movement, that whatever virtues the program possessed were obscured by certain undeniable flaws.

Costumes, symbols, literariness, music, all sought to make comprehensible what the dance in its *essence* failed to present; integration of idea with movement. This superstructure of revolutionary cliches was ineffectual in making the dances revolutionary. They became understandable not because of

their intrinsic clarity but because of their stage properties.

The bewilderment and search "toward the light" was suggested in the first dance by a musical medley of popular jazz and national tunes and an interpretation in movement of these shifting rhythms. The second dance, also a solo, was carefully annotated by enormous red poppies in Tamiris' hair (Flanders Field), an army gray costume, and black crepe arm bands. This, together with the martial music in contrasting dynamics could have told the complete story of the dance without any dance movement. From this dance to the third was an easy progression. Enter the militarist (with appropriate, recognizable music, and a disguised Sam Brown belt) to whip into action the mourner (Negro spiritual motif), the jazz figure (jazz motif) etc. Again, it was not the dancing but the literalness of the presentation that impressed the onlooker and created the mood. The penultimate dance was a solo again. Here we saw red,—a red costume, a revolutionary and agitated swirling around the stage leading logically toward the end of the quest, the last number, (which was the first, incidentally to possess definite value as a composition for group). To the Internationale, thinly disguised harmonically, a group of happy Soviet workers danced freely and proudly in the light.

No matter what the technical proficiency of the artist, good art, while not formed in a vacuum, also cannot emerge from a casual and superficial

WORKERS DANCE LEAGUE

SECOND ANNUAL FESTIVAL IN JUNE

THE WORKERS DANCE LEAGUE is approaching another milestone. Preparations are well under way for the second annual W. D. L. Festival which will take place on June 2 and 3. Last year, before a capacity audience, in the auditorium of the New School for Social Research, ten dance groups held the first symposium on the revolutionary dance. The year's activity within the League was fulfilled in the success of the performance, and the function of the performance in the results felt by the League. Membership grew and several groups of already advanced and professional dancers joined the W. D. L.—the Theatre Union Dance Group, the New Duncan Dancers and the Modern Negro Dance Group.

The culmination of a year's activity will again be reached in the June Festival. On the first day, each group will pre-

sent one new dance, on a revolutionary theme, not performed at the last festival. Prizes will be awarded. On the day following the recital, a convention of delegates from all the W. D. L. groups will discuss this year's achievements and next year's plans. They will consider the artistic level of the work, the force of its direction away from the confines of the various bourgeois techniques and toward a revolutionary technique, and the question of organization. They will include also more of the specific problems of the revolutionary dance movement.

The most important work of the convention will be to plan the work for next year for the W. D. L. and to establish the Eastern Section which will lay the basis for the organization of other sections and ultimately a National Workers Dance League.

— L. R.

observation of social phenomena. The revolutionary artist or even the "fellow traveler" in the arts must delve more deeply into the source of his inspiration and study more profoundly the stuff that goes into the forming of his creation. Tamiris herself is well-trained; her group is a disciplined and malleable one. With such technical advantages and with a sincere interest in social criticism and change, she has much to promise future audiences. We look forward to a rapid, and what is more important, a more complete development of her dancing and her performance.

— E. O.

FREE DANCE TRAINING FOR MEN

On the assumption that activity in an art makes for greater appreciation, Blanche Evan has organized a free class in the modern dance for men. Only laymen are eligible. Miss Evan hopes in this way to increase the present limited male audience for the modern dance. The class meets every Saturday at the Albertina Rasch Studio.

Nijinsky, by his wife Romola, a biography of the star of the imperial Russian ballet, has been published by Simon and Schuster. It will be reviewed in our next issue.

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Repertory Playhouse Associates

A Theatre of Action

(Continued from page 12)

terial, but also in showing them a stirring phase of the American revolutionary movement.

A member of the Jewish Workers Clubs tells an amusing story of how their members were catapulted into participation in struggle. The group was booked to present an eviction play written by one of its members before an Unemployed Council branch. Arriving at the hall, they heard news of an eviction taking place around the corner. They accompanied the Unemployed Council members to the scene of action, helped put the furniture back in the house, fought off the cops, and then proceeded to present the play. Thus reality and make-believe were merged into a decisive educational experience for actors and audience.

Through these services of involving non-revolutionary workers, giving political education and aiding personal development of members, we have found the workers' theatre to be a valuable mass organization. The building of a successful mass organization, however, does not guarantee an effective Theatre of Action. In fact, often one development works against the other. The problem of building out of such a group as I have described—untrained, inexperienced students and workers—a skilled and disciplined acting company whose performances have a real politicalizing effect on audiences,—that is the most difficult and most important problem to solve. For the propaganda value of a Theatre of Action to the revolutionary movement stands or falls with its artistic merit.

Film Censorship

(Continued from page 17)

of internal censorship, increasing in vigilance with the growth of strike, unemployment and anti-fascist struggles in the U.S. since 1929.

Considering the existence of internal censorship (censorship by the Federal Government through the capitalist film companies themselves) the conclusion is inescapable that official political censorship in Chicago is a signal for the local governments throughout the country to openly castrate all newsreels and to particularly suppress all activities of The Film and Photo League.

The position of the Film and Photo League on Film Censorship is as follows:

1. WE are opposed to all governmental censorship of films. We are opposed to censorship by the local police, by State Censorship (N.Y., Penna., Ohio, Md., etc.); we are opposed to the "unofficial" censors power placed upon the Hays organization by the film industry at the recommendation of the U.S. Federal Government.

2. We are opposed to censorship of full length, short and all forms of standard size films; we are opposed and with most emphasis, to censorship of newsreels and 16mm film censorship (at present there are bills in the legislatures of Ohio and several other states for censorship of 16mm films).

3. We are opposed on the grounds that film censorship like newspaper and censorship of speech, is a breach of the alleged Freedom of Speech granted by the Constitution of the U.S., because it is an attempt to gag the working class, to distort and suppress news and opinions, in the interests of the ruling class.

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