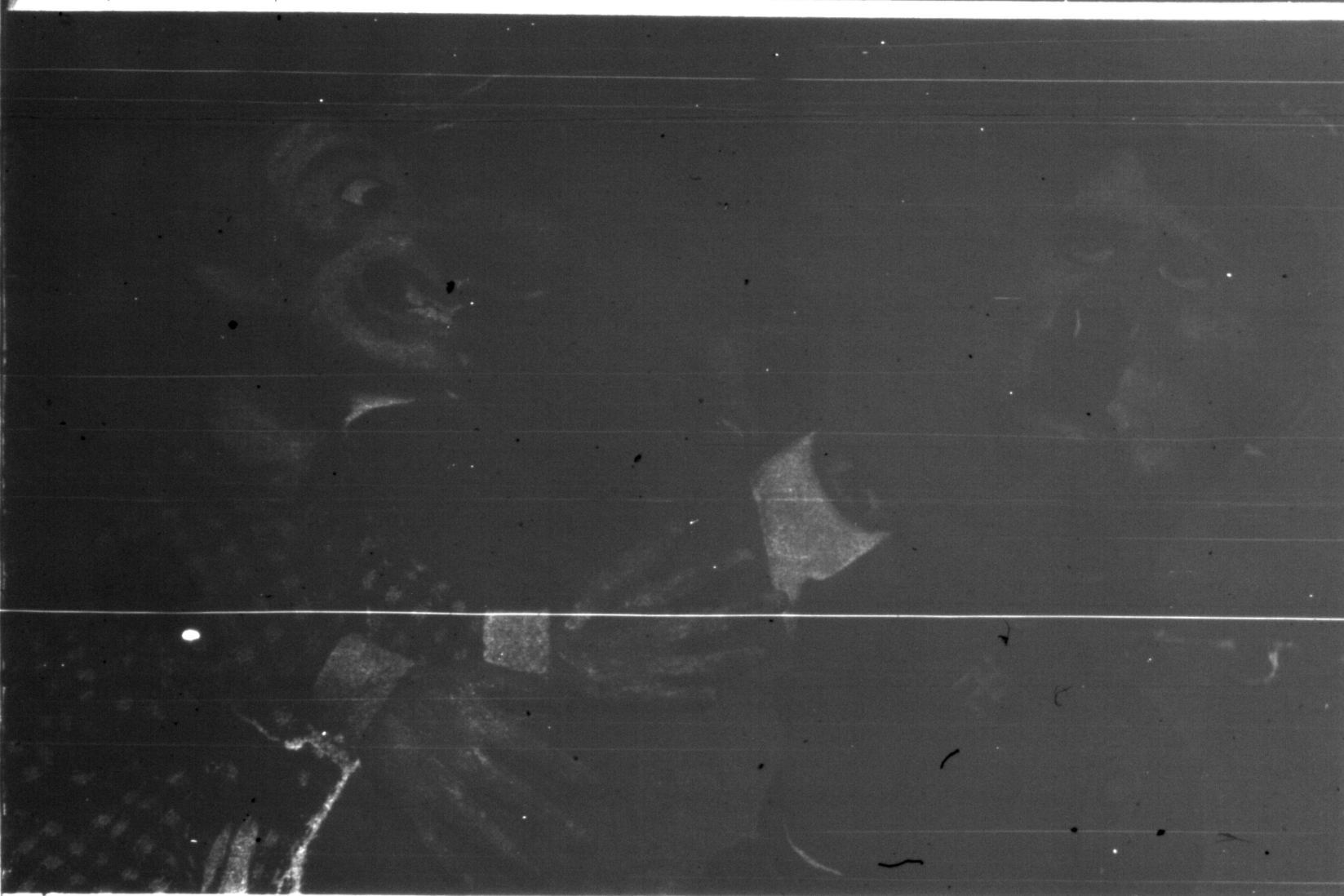


NEW

NOVEMBER 1934



THEATRE



From "SCHNOZZLE DURANTE GETS THE NEWS" with Puppets by Nat Messik and Morey Bunin

Photo by Messik

ILYA EHRENBURG • JOHN HOWARD LAWSON
LOUIS BUNIN • SOPHIA DELZA • VIRGIL GEDDES
MIGNON VERNE • ROBERT STEBBINS • RICHARD PACK
RICHARD WATTS Jr • MICHAEL BLANKFORT

DRAMA • FILM • DANCE

POTAMKIN THEATRE NIGHT

Featuring Harry Alan Potamkin's Spirited Operetta

"STRIKE ME RED"

Directed by WILL LEE of Workers Laboratory Theatre • Music by GERTRUDE RADY



**SATURDAY
AND SUNDAY
NOV. 10th and 11th**

**5TH AVENUE THEATRE
28th St. and Broadway**

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RED DANCERS • BUNIN'S PUPPETS

Auspices Young Pioneers, League of Workers Theatres. Proceeds for Opening of Potamkin Children's Center. Tickets 25c to 99c at Young Pioneers, 35 E. 12th St. and L.O.W.T., 114 W. 14th St., CHelsea 2-9523

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The Soviet Super Film "BROKEN SHOES" and
"KILLING TO LIVE" and Soviet Children's Newsreel

Admission 20 cents

United Front Supporters present

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114 West 14th Street, New York City

NEW THEATRE

NOVEMBER, 1934

WHILE the workers' theatres are doing all they can to avert war and fascist terror, "The Patriots" are distributing thousands of the card reproduced below in New York City.

A Call to Patriotic Citizens!

Every thinking man and woman must not fail to see and read

HATE PLANTERS

An allegorical production in which Communism is exposed. A world-call for the return of social conservatism, a real Utopia in color, music, light and costumes now being presented on the New York stage by the AMERICAN CLASSIC PLAYERS

15th Performance coming to
TOWN HALL
123 West 43rd Street

Saturday Evening, November 24, 1934

Tickets 75c and \$1.00

NEW THEATRE calls upon every theatre, film and dance organization, upon every individual who is against this reactionary attempt to develop anti-working class sentiment, to "boycott" the American Classic Players, and to wire protests to Town Hall against their permitting this incipient fascist troupe to attempt to develop "Hate" and vigilante terror.

FROM the Second U. S. Congress Against War and Fascism, held in Chicago, Alice Evans, delegate of the League of Workers' Theatres, sends the following correspondence:

"We are fighting fascist terror. We shall not be moved", sang the I.L.D. Negro chorus of Chicago. Before the song is finished, the audience has joined in. A pause comes after the singing, and then Harry Ward, National Chairman of the League Against War and Fascism, makes a quiet announcement:

"We will have a demonstration of solidarity from the ranks of the armed forces of the United States. I will ask the audience to be quiet and cooperate in getting through this as quickly as possible, so there will be no disastrous results."

Quickly the lights are dimmed, the microphone and speakers' table are moved back. The wide auditorium is hushed. Three thousand three hundred delegates, representing two million workers and farmers, lean forward in their seats. Another pause.

On the stage comes a young man in khaki

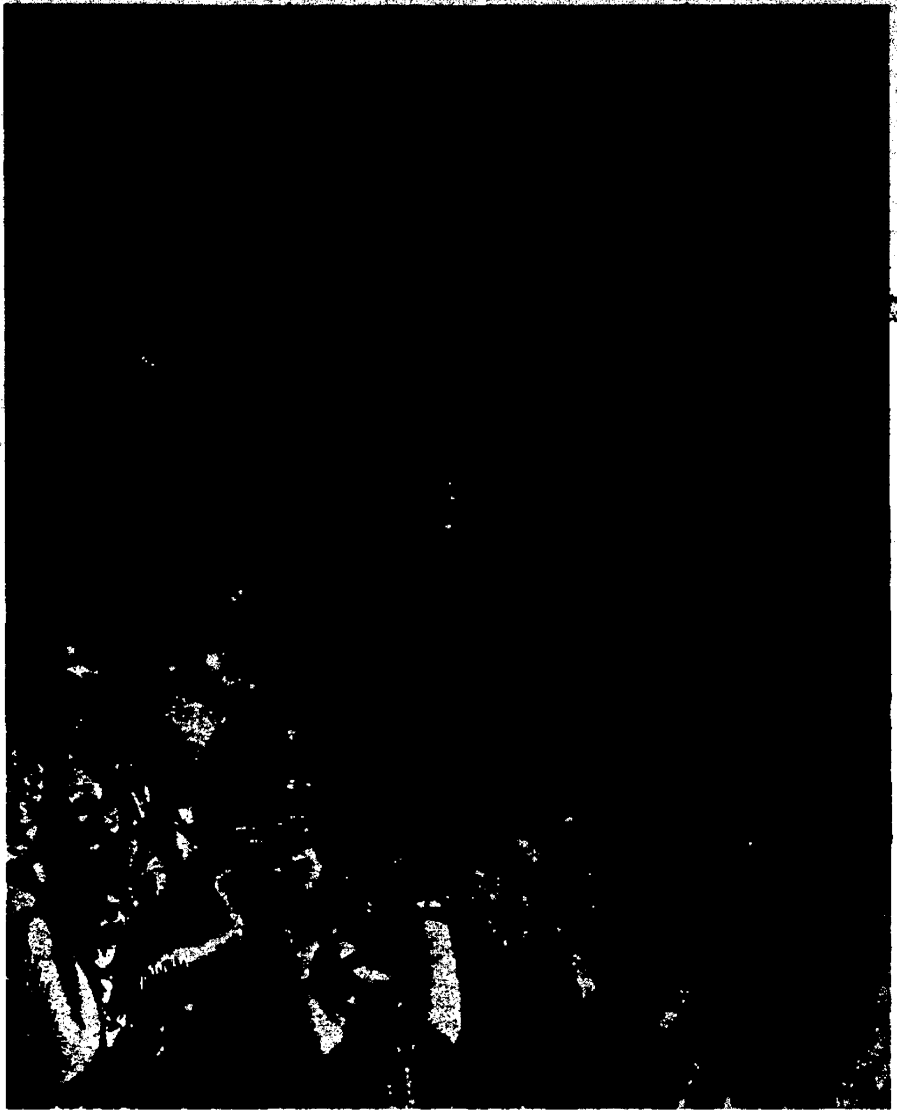
uniform, the upper half of his face masked. "In the name of four divisions of the National Guard of the United States, I bring greetings to the Second U. S. Congress Against War and Fascism." There is youth in his vigorous walk, the strong carriage of his head, the intensity of his voice. Youth and unbounded courage. "We are organizing Anti-Strike-Duty groups within the National Guard, and we pledge ourselves to carry out the decisions of this Congress."

As the National Guardsman walks quickly off the stage, another young man in khaki, similarly masked, takes his place. A deeper voice this time, less tremolo, more power, more grim certainty: "As a first lieutenant in the United States Army, I bring greetings not only from myself, but from six score soldiers in Michigan, Wisconsin and Illinois. Our presence at this Congress is our answer to the bosses, who try to use the army to defend their profits against the rising upsurge of the masses of American people. More and more soldiers stand ready to fight with the working class; pledging themselves to turn imperialist war into war against the

bosses. Long live the revolutionary struggle against war! Hail the workers', farmers', and Soldiers' government of the United States!"

When it is over, and we are back in our seats, beginning to catch breath, there is a glow on every face. For a minute we have touched the flesh and smelled the blood of this living thing about which we have been speaking for two days of congress—the fight against war and fascism. For a minute we have been close to the core of this fight, have known its daring and its strength. A taste we have had—a fleeting foretaste—of the Revolution. This single dramatic incident of two young men in khaki, blindfolded to prevent detection, voicing proletarian solidarity, has crystallized for five thousand people the meaning of the Congress Against War and Fascism. *There was never a more smashing proof of the efficiency of dramatic method in winning masses of people to acceptance of an idea and participation in a struggle.*

As delegate from the League of Workers' Theatres to this Congress, there are many



Carnival Sideshow

Etching by Reginald Marsh



things I would like to write about: Of the magnificent united front, and the vote of the 49 Socialist delegates present to continue this in United Action; of the steel workers, stock yards workers, marine workers who threw their organizations into the fight against war and fascism; of the fine seriousness of the Youth Congress, dedicating Young America to a better future than bosses' cannon fodder; of the moment when 1,000 young people stood for five minutes and cheered Mother Ella Reeve Bloor. But the incident, which remains eaten into the consciousness of every delegate present, was that "demonstration of solidarity from the armed forces of the United States," which became a symbol for the entire Congress.

In line with the decisions of this Congress, we of the Workers' Theatres of America pledge our services to the fight against war and fascism. We will send our companies over the countryside with this message. We will build our platforms at the factory gates. We will do this knowing that the technique of emotional crystallization through human drama is a certain method of winning the revolutionary allegiance of the working class.

MEMBERS of Actors' Equity who are not familiar with the year's procedure in other labor unions must have been startled by two unprecedented events in the regular quarterly meeting of the Association: one was the "quite gentle yet firm suggestion" of their President that all groups of rank-and-file actors "should confine themselves to . . . spiritual and benevolent needs . . . or social relaxation" and leave practical matters to their officials; the other was an unanticipated concern for their welfare expressed in a communication from the President of the American Federation of Labor. True, William Green's ardent letter was concerned, not with finding them parts, nor with adding to the public works openings, nor with stopping kickbacks on contract salaries—he skips over these, but he wants to protect them from the Red Menace.

Actors who do not feel themselves so menaced, but who are threatened by the continuing economic situation, may find behind Mr. Gilmore's mild but firm suggestion a clue to his sombre repetition of the A. F. of L. hysterics. Plainly stated, as was not done at the meeting, a number of Equity actors last winter grouped together informally to try to get through the Association action which would be based on the real needs of the great majority of the membership. Also, since Equity was barring and ignoring actors delinquent in dues, these, together with large numbers of other unemployed actors, marginally employed, and C.W.A. actors, formed the Actors' Emergency Association.

Something like this is bound to happen in any union in which the official leaders lose touch with, or fail to act upon, the grave needs of the body of members. The fact



The Puppet Master

that any actor who was a Communist would see the need for action in the case, and the fact that plenty of actors at the other extreme who have no interest in politics or social theory also felt, through force of their own circumstances, the necessity for such action—these are beside the point here. What the latter have learned, perhaps with shock and surprise, is that the old red herding has been taken off the ice to block the actors' simple fight to make their union represent their interests. Any longshoreman could have warned them.

The line on which the group of rank-and-file actors are working is indicated by the Cuts Board, an innovation which they proposed last Spring and whose adoption was announced at this meeting. Under the ruling no individual member may make an agreement to reduce his salary from the contractual figure, nor may a manager approach him with a proposal to do so. Every such proposition must be brought to the Cuts Board for consideration and action. Thus the organization quite properly relieves the actor of dealing alone with managerial pressure for wage-cuts.

The line on which the Equity officials are working was also demonstrated—by the amendments which they introduced and urged upon the meeting. The number of signers required on a petition for a special general meeting, formerly twenty, was raised to one hundred. This puts difficulties in the way of any part of the general membership calling a meeting. The reason given for the proposal was the expense entailed by special meetings. Since, however, this means of calling such meetings has never been abused, the amendment can only be construed as a measure to ward off activity by the membership on matters concerning them.

Actors who want to safeguard the channels for such action within Equity, and to take part in it, should get in touch (through NEW THEATRE) with the rank-and-file group whom Equity officials are forcing into the position of an opposition.

NEW THEATRE

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

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The Puppet Master

AFTER several years of planning and after a whole lot of fanfare including much blowing of the horn by such distinguished gentlemen as Mayor LaGuardia and John Dewey, The Theatre for Young America gave a dull and unimaginative performance of Hans Christian Andersen's famous fairy tale, *The Chinese Nightingale*. The only bright spots on the program, outside of an excellent performance by the charming young lady who played the part of the kitchen maid, were the dances introduced between scenes. Although John Dewey made a speech to the effect that it was the group's desire to present "not goody-goody but interesting plays that children will enjoy", the kids (about 30 per cent of the audience), the parents, and the old ladies (about 50 per cent of the audience), found the performance disappointing. However, this new children's theatre promises a production of *Don Quixote*.

Workers' kids are not satisfied with fairy tales that have nothing to do with their hard lives. They prefer to see the Pioneers' lively production of Harry Alan Potamkin's operetta *Strike Me Red* (directed by Will Lee of the Workers Laboratory Theatre), which will be presented at the Fifth Avenue Theatre on November 10th and 11th under the sponsorship of the Young Pioneers and the League of Workers' Theatres. In the interest of "good theatre" we advise you not to miss these performances. We intend to invite the staff of The Theatre for Young America, and John Dewey, but not Fiorello LaGuardia, to see *Strike Me Red*.

IT is seldom that the editors of one magazine try to interest their readers in another, but NEW THEATRE's editorial board feels that it is a privilege to urge our readers not to miss a single issue of America's most important and most interesting weekly magazine, the NEW MASSES.

In its first ten months as a weekly, NEW MASSES has published some of the most important writing in American and world letters. Highlights in a magazine that publishes indispensable material in every issue were such "masterpieces" as Ilya Ehrenburg's *Now They Are Madmen* and *The Civil War in Austria*; John L. Spivak's *Letter to the President*, and his amazing exposures of fascist activities in America, *Silver Shirts Among the Gold* and *Plotting the American Pogroms*; Isidor Schneider's *Four Orations*; Maxim Gorky's *Proletarian Literature Today*; Samuel Ornitz's play *In New Kentucky*, and many brilliant articles by Michael Gold, Bill Dunne, Joshua Kunitz, Joseph North, Joseph Freeman, Robert Forsythe and others.

This is a sincere effort to interest readers of NEW THEATRE in a revolutionary weekly that they will find exciting reading. We urge every person who reads these lines to go to the nearest newsstand and buy the current issue of NEW MASSES.

THE Jack London Club of Newark is three years o'd. Most of the actors have been with them less than a year. They have moved ahead fast in spite of inexperience. They should not be discouraged because, in *Can You Hear Their Voices?* presented on October 7 before a New York audience which is accustomed to a higher standard in NEW THEATRE Nights, they received justifiable adverse criticism. There are two lessons in the experience for all-workers' theatres, and the Newark group should progress faster for having learned them.

First, in whatever stage of development they may be, each theatre must learn which types of production are so completely mastered that they are effective and persuasive to general audiences. Skits or plays or whatever they may be of the type that they can handle must be found and prepared, for they are immediately needed. *America, America*, of the Jack London Club is in this class. Then there must also be constant work on special problems, on more ambitious scripts, experiments which stimulate and train the actors and directors. Without these the theatres will get stale and stop growing.

But productions of the latter class, unless they are more successful than anyone has a right to hope, should not be shown to audiences who are not sympathetic or who have no idea of the history and difficulties of the group. To show an ambitious but unsuccessful production to such an audience is to alienate them and expose the group to unfortunate criticism. Audiences judge the play, not the difficulties of the actors.

It was further plain from the production that in spite of the inexperience of the actors they were capable of a better performance than was given. There is good acting material in the group, good energy and good voices. They were working with a good script which offers no very complicated problems. If really competent and seasoned direction had been given them the talent could have been better utilized and the problems solved. They need and should get the help of sympathetic professional actors and directors as suggested at the L.O.W.T. Conference. Such direction and advice will speed and improve the turnout of the theatres.

Columbia's Call To Arms

ON October 5th Louella Parsons in her movie gossip column which appears daily in a national network of Hearst papers gleefully announced that "You can always depend on Monsieur Cohn, of the Columbia Cohns, to have ideas. Here is the latest one. He is planning an anti-Red yarn. Propaganda, so to speak, against the Communists." On the day before, the Columbia Studio-gram, inter-office communication of the Columbia Studios, carried this information:

"STARTED SHOOTING QUOTE *CALL TO ARMS* UNQUOTE WILL BE DIRECTED AND LEADING CHARACTER PLAYED BY WILLARD MACK STOP TREMENDOUS CAST...STORY MOST TIMELY TELLING...OF A CIVIL WAR VETERAN WHOSE TWO SONS BECOME INVOLVED IN COMMUNISTIC ACTIVITIES STOP MACK IN PART OF OLD SOLDIER RECRUITS SERVICES OF VETERANS AT SOLDIERS HOME AND SUCCEEDS IN QUELLING RED UPRISING AND STRIKE STOP DIFFERENT AND CHOCK FULL OF PATHOS ROMANCE THRILLS."

As soon as this information was available, the Film and Photo League mobilized cultural organizations and individuals, including New Theatre, the League of Workers Theatres, the Workers Dance League, etc. to send wires protesting against this film "as designed to help bring on fascism and destroy civil liberties."

To the Film and Photo League, General Manager Samuel J. Briskin of Columbia Pictures Corp. replied:

"... We are assuredly disinclined to distribute any picture designed to help bring on fascism and destroy civil liberties. It has always been our policy to avoid propaganda for or against either side of any public issue. If you will kindly point out to us precisely what portions of this picture are susceptible to criticism upon the grounds enumerated in your wires, we shall be pleased to cause the elimination of any such portions which are reasonably calculated to injure the movement sponsored by your organization."

David Platt, National Secretary for the Film and Photo League, pointed out in answer to Mr. Briskin that judging from Columbia's own description of *Call to Arms*, and from the very title itself, the only way to eliminate the propaganda and incitement against militant labor would be to scrap the film entirely. To date Columbia Pictures has not declared that it will suspend production of this obviously fascist film, nor that they would carry into action the smooth promises of their telegram. To insure that *Call to Arms* does not reach the screen and so viciously influence a hundred million moviegoers, as did Columbia's pro-war film, *No Greater Glory*, we strongly urge every NEW THEATRE reader immediately to write, telephone or wire his protest to:

Harry Cohn
Columbia Pictures Corp.
729—7th Avenue, N.Y.C.

Continuous Performance

By ILYA EHRENBURG

KEEP your eye on your work. Hot rivets. Type the following: In reply to your letter dated. . . . In reply to your . . . In reply Four copies, please. The total: 83. After deducting 20: 136. Standard Oil leaps to 374. 28 cases of canned goods. Lift the lever. Lower the lever. Wheels. Belts. Hot dogs. Line a. Line 10. Linotype machines. Shops. Sausage machines. Press, roll, turn about. Rivets, hot rivets.

Then evening comes, the evening of all cities, bluish dove-colored, pale. Neon-signs are aflame. Roxy, Empire, Plaza, Majestic, Capitòl, Olympia, Rialto, Tivoli, Savoy, Acme, Ufa, Metropol, Ritz, National, Strand. These names dance in the narrow colored tubes of the signs. They could be mistaken for restaurants or for hotels, but really they are cinemas.

Evening disturbs the city jungles. Men pursue one another, hurry and run as animals scurry to waterholes. Men are hunting for walls. The Yankees call for their cars. The Japanese hold their boisterously undulating frocks together. The Swedes move festively across the snow, across the stillness. In Moscow a Komsomol surprised sees a screeching poster of *The Rose and the Frock-coat*. The Parisiens jestingly try to break away from loving arms. In the next minute darkness swallows everything.

She typed two-hundred-eighty letters today. His daily work-sheet read three thousand rivets. What are they going to do? How are they going to save themselves from emptiness, from boredom? Their home awaits them. Food from cans and stillness. At home one must think and thoughts are difficult. When all gossip is exhausted, when the last cigarette is smoked, three hours still remain. Only then comes sleep. When the alarm rings: Typewriter keys or rivets. They weary each other. He is silent. "Those god damned rivets. Deductions for breakage." She cannot even force a smile. "My new stockings are torn."

Where will we go? To the Rialto or to the Roxy? *Love and the Tiger*, or *The Passions of a Violinist*? It does not matter where; hurry. We might be late. Already, the tiger is bellowing. Already, the daredevil is about to make the last and finishing thrust. Already, the violin is crying over incomprehensible griefs. She has seen tigers, accompanied by military music, in the Zoo. She knows no passion. Her husband has her as a matter of course. Peter speaks lovingly, but with little passion. He is freckled and has the usual disease. Let's go to the violinist, hurry to forget.

Why have they deducted one hundred



Ilya Ehrenburg Addressing Soviet Writers' Congress

Scaphoto

eighty pieces from his pay? It was not his fault. The material was inferior. The speed-up is terrific. He can no longer bear it. Towards noon he is exhausted—on the verge of collapse. But what is one able to do about it? He would like to get out of the harness, never again to think of work, of speed-up. In another nine days the rent is due. The devil take it. It is really better not to think. Let's hurry to the Rialto, to the tigers. Hurry. We might still catch the bus. He breathes heavily. He is dead tired.

The hands of clocks move rapidly in Detroit and in Osaka; in Kharkov and in Sevilla. Men hurry. The lights go out. The dream begins. It is a daydream, an audible dream, a dream true to the poster.

THE reels move rapidly. Twenty four pictures to every second. One cannot call stop. The tiger leaps and bellows. The violinist weeps. The sunburned Komsomol laughs scornfully: "So that's how they live in Paris!" In Paris a solitary old man sighs: "Even the tigers live like men." They are not aware that the tiger does not exist, that the violinist is a fake; that only Daddy Zukor exists, supported by sweating chorus girls, by David Sarnoff, by electricity and stupor.

Stop magic reel. Our eyes smart. Our heads are in a turmoil. We can not bear it. But the show goes on.

The film is not only celluloid, not only the tricks of Paramount; the film has a soul

of its own. It is susceptible to the illnesses of the soul. When the text crosses the pictures, the symptoms unquestionably resemble simple madness. Why has the tiger changed into a moustached colonel? Why has the violinist tail and claws? "Jim, shoot!" It is Jim who cries. "Mechanics, help!" There is no mechanic here, there is nothing here, only film, reels and reels of film. Hoarse cry: "Harry, I'll remain true to you." Continuous performance, for as long as there is life. Moving pictures ad infinitum.

A huge ship cuts through the black waves. Sailors are throwing their officers into the sea. This is *Potemkin*, the accursed armored cruiser. It can find no place to anchor; it crosses all the seas, *The Flying Dutchman*. Woe to those who come in its way. Mr. Eastman's nightmare when he came to the continent of Rochester. Stop the frightful ship. Blow it up. Place watches on the billowing waves. *What do you intend to do, Will Hays?*

Will Hays at once crawled upon the play. He is taller than Harold Lloyd. He is taller than the Paramount Building. He towers up to god. He is as flexible as an ape. The wind tousles his long ears. Yet, he could never master the Lord's Prayer, nor eat his ice cream without dripping some on his tie. He cries into the telephone: "Hello. . . . hello. . . . Every fleet and soulsaving station: the ship must be destroyed. Identification: Red flag and foolhardiness. Its course unknown. Under the penalty of death."

Doctor Heller, the erstwhile barber, jeweler, druggist, cutter, is the censor. He knows all: "To forbid, to dismember, to mutilate, hahahah."

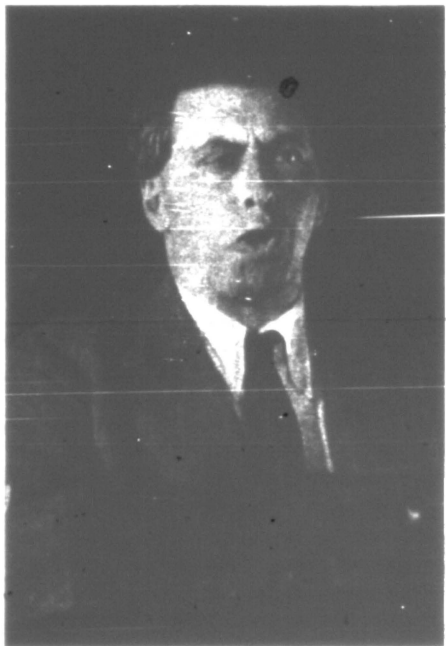
Miss Emma Whits: "Shorten by three hundred yards. Set the trunk on its head. Break all false teeth. We are not strict, in fact we are very moderate. We are like mothers. Sleep children, sleep."

Information: "The censor in Roumania is unusually tolerant. Only cruelty to animals and revolutionary ideas are forbidden." Do not step on dogs' tails; do not touch the oil magnates.

A heavily moustached German blushes from sheer embarrassment. What is the title of this film? *The Woman for a Night*. Have you gone mad? Have you forgotten our German ideals? Beatrice, Gretchen, Dulcine, Pola Negri? Change it, at once. *The Queen for a Night* is so much better, don't you think?

Adolph Zukor laughs chastely. Paramount instructs all Movie Theatre owners: "Nancy Carroll appears in the nude in the film *The Vanishing Dream*. Display of silk under-

By ILYA EHRENBURG



Ilya Ehrenburg Addressing Soviet
Writers' Congress

wear is important. This is a Paramount Picture." Daddy Zukor prays for the soul of his parents: "Kadiash . . . Kadiash . . ."

An unshaven visionary gazes at the display of silk underwear, his lips are moist. O, the bones of Nancy Carroll, O vanishing Vanished Dreams. O, warm flesh. Castrate me, kill me.

Help! Shooting! This is Alfred Hugenberg. Minister. Launching a few cruisers. Trumpeter. Why are you shooting, darling Alfred? It hurts, it hurts very much. Don't you see that I have a heart, a very nice heart. I'm not crying, I'm on the silver screen. I'm a shadow. We are bountiful. In Picardie, in Galicia, in Belgium, we are plentiful like the people. Shadows.

THE reels run backwards. The tone, at first distant and hollow, grows in volume. Bang! The Minister of Agriculture pulls at his moustache. The shadows dance. The shadows undress. The eagles and uniforms are gone. There are only bones left. Someone remarks: "The bones have an excellent tone quality." The apparatus of the firm of Tobis Klangfilm utters very soft noises. The ear can not bear it. Too much sound. The world whimpers and crunches. Now the drum bursts. Glorious silence. Everything comes to a standstill. The cruiser, the trumpeter, the minister go to rest. A hearse moves by. No one is following it. 100 H.P.

Are you Fraulein Else? You lived in the city of limetrees and philosophers. You dreamed of the love of Willy Fritsch. But you were just an ordinary extra. Tell us, what prompted you to fall asleep in a coffin? The shooting of films goes on. Stand up! But little Fraulein Else cannot stand up. She presents a coroner's certificate. She died yesterday morning at four o'clock. She bled to death. Exhaustion. In a butcher's display window sausages are dancing. Are you offering your lips to Fritsch or Harold Lloyd, Fraulein Else? No. To neither. I'm offering my lips to the glorious hot dogs. They smell and bloom. It is a wonderful garden where hot dogs bloom. But Zukor has never thought of it. Bring me a rose, my beloved. I love you, darling. I have not eaten, god knows, how long. On Willy Fritsch's picture there are tears, tears and saliva. The beating of heavenly wings is heard. Policemen appear. They carry Fraulein Else's soul out of the mortuary into Paradise. They form a circle and sing. I went to see *Love and the Tiger*. Upon my word, I'm not to blame. The material is in-

ferior. The angels in uniform laugh loudly. "In the name of the law, stop. You have murdered the Chef. Don't deny it. Upon your soul rests his death. Where were you yesterday at 3.15? You are the murderer." Applause. Cold and misery. Dazzling light meets the eye. The choice is left to the audience: chair, axe or rope.

It seems the film is finished. Hays is praying: "And forgive us our sins, for broken rivets and godlessness." Canon Raymond is praying: "Have mercy on us, have mercy." The baptists eat cornmeal amidst a flow of tears. It is raining. Autumn rain. It rains on the roof of the theatres. It mingles in the lives of the shadows. It beats through the clay of graveyards. One has no rest whether dead or alive.

HE calls it a good day. Three hundred dollars in cold cash. He has a seat in the gaudiest theatre, the Roxy. He is no stock-jobber nor a gambler. He is Mr. Robert Elliot, hangman and gentleman. He tests ropes and buckles stools. He likes young maidens and stepmothers. He weighs 160 lbs. and yet is lighter than a feather. He races with the swallows to heaven. There he fondles the angels, and slumbers on a cloud as if it were a kiss. In the morning the cloud is wet from children's tears.

After the crying spell Mr. Elliot changes into a vampire. She must keep on typing. He is choking her. There are two hundred letters still to be typed. She protests. The vampire dictates: "In reply to your letter dated Nov. 16, we wish to advise you that we are ready" After a long search the detective finally locates the place. He comes to the rescue. Ah, you villain. He kisses her. He breathes into her face like a hurricane. He plays the violin. He is the violinist. This is, indeed, passion. I refuse to type any longer. He adjusts his tie and cries: "You must type." He is simply her new superior. She laughs shrilly, aimlessly in the darkened auditorium. The others around her seem not to understand. "What's so funny?" She keeps on laughing. Gradually her stupid laughter overtakes everyone, it climbs to the ceiling, it chokes the song of the angels, it drowns the bass of David Sarnoff. Nothing but a fox trot remains. Forward, backwards, to place one and two. One two. The rivets are hot. Let it go. Merchandise must be sold at any price. Letters must be typed.

The performance is ended. Hurry. We must catch the bus. We must get up early in the morning. Today is tomorrow and to-

morrow is today. Nancy Carroll is very distant. There are stockings still to be mended. I never had the pleasure to meet Daddy Zukor. I work for Smith & Co. Hurry, my dear. Hurry home. Hurry.

Night. Its scent is different in every city. Everywhere it is full of fears and tears. Night follows the day as the day follows the night. The night is the frontier. One can freely cross it. One can still drown in the river Seine or in the Hudson. One can open gas jets. One can fall asleep. Sleep.

Immense crowds break out of thousands of theatres. They run and lose themselves in narrow black columns. As a farewell they vomit curses, cigarette butts and tears. Yonder, a stupid German is afraid. He is afraid of the "Flying Dutchmen." Suppose, it were to break loose. Policemen are useless in such a case. The American cleans his clouded glasses. The Komsomol looks doubtfully around. All around there is snow; the crows are flying. Under the snow groans a little house. What will tomorrow bring? The Japanese superstitiously titters. It has started. Earthquake.

They ran out, they scattered almost in a coma. They feel as if someone were following them. Under a window someone sings: "Honey, I'll be true to you."

They will not lose these dreams, these insignificant dreams produced in hundreds of factories. These Paramount-dreams, these Ufa-dreams. They will bring them into the musty air of their homes, they will add them to the passion of their kisses. They will bring these dreams to every failure and to every cry. These dreams will linger amidst the confused multitudes of faces. These dreams will torment them till the alarm will wake them, "Six, it is six, six, the rivets are hot, it is six, the letters must be typed."

Then these dreams will have the gruesome shape of mornings, of rivets, and of jobs. "Step on it. Would you like to be Rockefeller? Would you like to have castles and yachts? Keep on typing. Novarro won't fall in love with you. However, the chef might. They will infect you and then discard you. You may die like Fraulein Else and be escorted by policemen to heaven. Type faster. In reply to your letter, in reply . . . in reply."

This is the magic box that rules the world. It is a great discovery, but also a wilderness, a gruesome, devouring wilderness. This is the film.

[Chapter from *Die Traumfabrik* (Dream Factory) by Ilya Ehrenburg. Translated from the German by Nicholas Wirth.]



"This Is the Film!"

Drawing by Charles Dibner

Punch Goes Red

Revolutionary Puppets Take to the Streets

By LOUIS BUNIN

ONCE upon a time a great artist was thrown in jail for making a puppet. This is not a fairy tale: Daumier was the artist. The puppet was called Rata-poil (Rat-Under-the-Skin). He had a long nervous body and face and a bristling Van Dyke beard, and he was an uncannily eloquent comment upon Louis Phillipe, then king of France. The Church disapproved. The State threw Daumier into jail. But the people, throughout Europe, laughed and understood the name and the nature of the little puppet.

This is only one instance of the silliness of the great, and the power of puppets. For hundreds of years throughout Asia and Europe, the puppet has been and still is a mischievous national hero, always thumbing his nose at hypocrisy and stupidity and the foibles of the great ones, always surrounded by crowds eager for the comedy and tragedy of the funny little stuffed figures.

Yosel Cutler, one of the most skillful and famous puppeteers in the profession once made an anti-religious satire on the Hebrew play, *The Dybbuk*. A puppet spirit or Dybbuk lodged in the body of a puppet maiden, bobbing its head out from under her skirt to make its presence known to the audience. Two frantic rabbis tried to dislodge it by means of religious hokus pokus. They were not successful. The puppet janitor solved their problem by having a puppet messenger boy appear and announce that he had a Western Union telegram for the Dybbuk. The Dybbuk forgot himself and popped out. The maiden lost the Dybbuk and the curtain closed on a happy ending.

It is the exclusive right and heritage of the puppet to be whoever the puppet master wishes him to be. In England he is known as "Punch", in France as "Guignol", in Germany as "Casperl", in Italy as "Punchinello" or "Pinnocchio" in Mexico as "Mamerte", etc. But prior to the past ten years puppets were not widely used in America. (It is interesting to note that puppets were banned by the Church in New York state and the old law forbidding their use was repealed only last year.) When Meyer Levin and I opened a repertory Marionette Theatre in the old Relic House in Chicago some ten years ago, both the puppet (laced over the hands and fingers and operated from below) and the marionette (operated from above by strings and controllers) were unknown to the general public. Our Marionette Theatre posters announcing the presentation of George Kaiser's play *From Morn to Midnight* aroused the

curiosity and suspicion of the neighborhood. In recent years there has been a tremendous gain of interest and use of the Puppet and Marionette mediums. Today there are over two hundred listed professional groups, and hundreds of amateur groups in America.

Poor "Punch" has been suffering the humiliation of appearing only in innocuous fairy tales and meaningless circus tricks on the American puppet stage. Now Puppet Punch has gone red. And we puppeteers who know the traditional role that Punch has played in public life and his unique power to spread solemn ideas clothed in burlesque and satire, also know that the new recruit, Punch, has entered the only sphere of activity in which he can exploit to the fullest extent his unusual powers. We see of course what a particularly valuable ally Punch can be in an illegal or semi-illegal movement. A troupe of ten puppets take two humans along to assist with voice and manipulation. The puppets agree to let the humans take all the responsibility for playing dates and transportation, for expenses and profits. And what an ideal acting company Puppets make! These keen, mischievous critics are privileged characters of the theatre world. It is almost impossible to heckle or hate them for their criticisms,

for if you did their stage presence and peculiar expressions would not change one whit and you would gain nothing by it.

ON Tuesday, October 2nd, President Roosevelt, Madame Perkins and Bill Green addressed the workers on the corner of Tenth Street and Second Avenue, New York City. The Blue Eagle was there too, perched on F. D.'s shoulder. But they were not received with patriotic approval as shown in the newsreels. In fact they were enthusiastically booed, hissed and laughed at by a large and growing crowd. A puzzled cop stood by rubbing his thick neck in bewilderment. No police regulations covered this situation. Better go to the call box and find out what the Captain has to say. But look! Look what those guys are up to now! Roosevelt dancing with the Blue Eagle! Bill Green singing as he dances with Fanny Perkins:

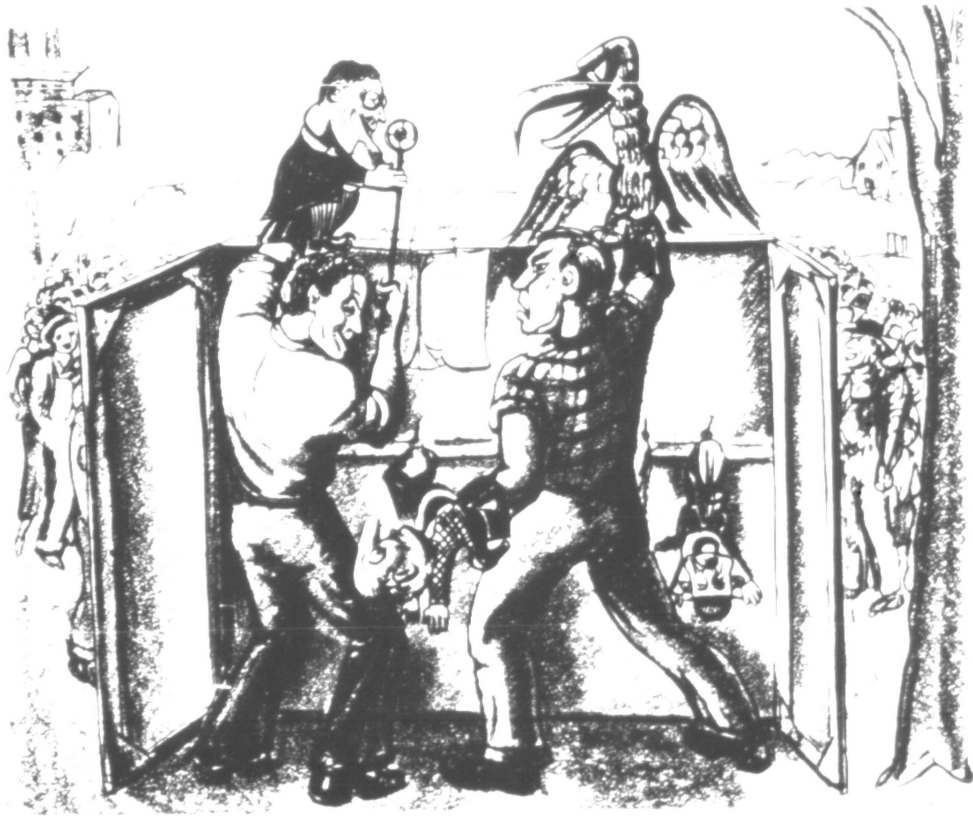
"Oh Bill Green is my name
Of strike-breaking fame
I'm pretty damned clever
At that little game."

"Jesus", the cop probably thought, "if they were four feet taller I'd call out the riot squad." The fact that these nationally known figures were only two feet tall was



Street Performance, *Blue Eagle Skit*

Drawing by Louis Bunin



Street Performance *Blue Eagle Skit*

not the only difference between them and their human counterparts in Washington. For these small stuffed figures were more real in self revelation because the masks of their counterparts, their hypocrisy and demagoguery, were removed and the people in the street saw them and the "raw deal" as they really are.

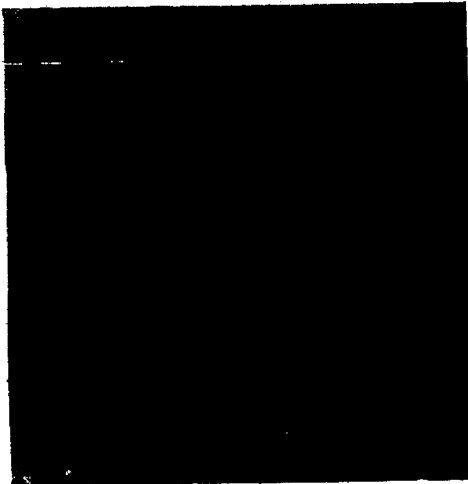
The Workers Laboratory Theatre has formed a separate puppet department since Puppet Punch and his whole puppet family have gone red. Now you will see them at outdoor meetings, on street corners, in union halls and workers clubs, amusing and at the same time educating the workers on the most important political and economic developments in America.

Here is a puppeteer's modest vision of an effective revolutionary puppet show for an audience of share-croppers in Alabama. The actors are a skeleton and a vulture who profess in speech and pantomime a profound affection for Secretary of Agriculture Wallace and President Roosevelt. These two actors heap abuse on the third actor, Punch, a worker. The dialogue, simple and clear, must express perhaps in a fantastic manner the true conditions imposed on the share cropper audience by the A.A.A., and must show through Punch the worker what they must do to overcome the A.A.A. oppression. Jack Shapiro wrote these lines for Punch:

"My stomach often rubs my spine
And now it's started shrinking

And tho my head is made of wood
I've lately started thinking
I'll see that everything is right
And if it's not I'm going to fight
Let's get together, use our might
And then we'll give them hell."

Punch is a gullible, tormented, passive worker at first. His acceptance of abuses is always exaggerated. Towards the last part of the skit, however, when he becomes conscious of the cause of the abuse, he overcomes it by speech and pantomime; that is, he drives the vulture off with the skeleton's thigh bone, and in speech he



Perkins, F. D. and Green Photo by Messik

actually tells the audience how to drive off the A.A.A. vulture hovering over them.

IN dealing with the unemployment relief situation in New York the actors are Punch, an eloquent animated garbage can and a cop's horse. All characters use a rich local dialect. Endless fantastic combinations, exciting because of their incongruity and remembered because of their effect on one's imagination, are not only possible but an encouraging and inspiring challenge to the puppet-maker. The idea, always clear, is projected with the particular twist of the puppet technique. Clarity and imagination are the prime requisites of a successful puppet play.

The worker audiences have joyfully accepted the Blue Eagle Puppet, with his snapping beak and popping eyes and flapping wings. Oscar Saul wrote this dialogue for a new skit:

Bill Green

"Many workers are striking
Many complaints can be heard
Roosevelt

If the workers are striking
We'll give them the bird."

Enter the bird, only to be driven away finally by "Punch" who punches the Blue Eagle off the puppet platform after a hard but determined fight. And, judging from the cheers that greeted this unexpected turn of events, the theatre of the puppeteers is indeed a sharp weapon in the class struggle when Punch Goes Red.

A Play With Two Smokes

By VIRGIL GEDDES

A BROADWAY producer, whose reputation for doing clean plays has not hampered his financial success, called me into his office.

"My readers report favorably on your plays," he said. "But me, I don't know. I haven't read them."

Then turning in his chair he looked away, with a distant, sad expression.

"Your plays are about the country. The farmers, they tell me. Way out there in Nebraska somewhere, aren't they?"

"Yes," I said. "That's where I came from. I was raised out there."

"Yes, I know, dreadful things happen in those places," he interrupted. "But we don't want to know about them here in New York." Then from sadness to a command, "We've got to have pleasant things in our theatres. Why don't you write something cheerful? About us people. Here in New York."

"I didn't know my plays were tragic," I said, surprised.

"See here," he said. "This is a trilogy you've written, isn't it?"

"Trilogy," I corrected.

"Trilogy," he repeated. "Three. Three plays. One of those Greek things."

"I never heard of that word," I added, defensively. "(I don't think there is such a word."

He straightened in his chair, rebuffed.

"See here, young man, I've been called out to lecture on the drama before college students, and there are a few things I do know about the theatre."

We came to a deadlock, but he quickly lowered his armor and took on a paternal manner.

"Anyway, I don't know about this trilogy stuff," he said, sticking to his word. "You see I'm in the theatre because I love it. I don't need to make money."

"That's fine," I said. But he glanced at me quickly and answered: "Haven't you any other plays?"

"Yes. One in five acts."

"Five acts!" He threw up his hands, horrified. "Now why do you do that?"

"Because I like to," I countered.

He shook his head, despondently. "Listen, young man, here is how it is in the theatre. The people come to the theatre. They sit a

while, then they want to go out and smoke a while. That's one act! Then they want to sit a while and then go out and smoke again. That's two acts! They'll come back and sit again, but after that they don't want to smoke—they want to go home. Can't you write me a play with two smokes in it?"

Is it any wonder that to such people any play which is direct, forceful, pointed in its social intensions, and aims to raise the level of the masses instead of lowering it, is either regarded as "obscure" and aesthetic, or "dangerous"? Having educated themselves so long in mediocrity and downright trash, is it any wonder they cannot believe that serious plays can find an audience?

The usual justification for such doings is that they, the producers, are giving "the people" what they want. What is overlooked is that the longest Broadway run does not play to the people; it merely caters to a very small minority of the potential theatre going public in America. This snobbish and empty activity of a tiny segment of our population is hardly the theatre of the American people.

Three Songs About Lenin

Film News from the Soviet Union

Moscow, October, 1934

THE great convincing tradition that reached the peaks of *Potëmkin*, *Mother*, and *Soil* is carried forward gloriously in Dziga Vertov's new film *Three Songs About Lenin*.

In America we know Vertov through theory (minus the context of general Soviet film theory) and hearsay, sprinkled with reproductions of stills from his films. Our actual knowledge of his work comes only from his encyclopedic *Man With the Movie Camera* and Kaufman's *Spring*. Kaufman is the second important member of the Kino-Eye group. From these inadequate sources, we were led to believe that the value of the Kino-Eye was an isolated formal value, unrelated to Soviet life and interests. This absurd error was strengthened by *Close Up* and *Experimental Cinema*. In the Soviet Union one gets a different perspective. *A Sixth of the World* and *Eleventh Year*, earlier Vertov films, are documents of considerable warmth, conveying their facts interestingly.

Vertov's rigid self-limitations, such as his refusal to film any material that he did not find on the streets, in factories, on farms, did not seem to do any harm in his early films. But is such a method compatible with the needs of the U.S.S.R. and abroad in 1934? Evidently Vertov thinks not. He has consciously developed his method and himself far beyond 1924 (the birth of the Kino-Eye). This is 1934 and Vertov saw that film theory must grow as fast as socialism has grown since 1924. Contrast the pitiful attempt of Griffith to stand still during the years 1912-1932, with the world changing under his feet. Vertov grows with the world, and presents in 1934, a film with meaning.

The original conception of this film was to translate into *emotional* terms rather than *factual* terms, the life and meaning of Lenin. This *emotional* conception immediately distinguishes this film from every other documentary film till now. To the former documentary types — the document of *Race and Ritual (Moana)*, the document of *Socialist Progress (Turksib)*, the document of *Time (Berlin)*, the document of *Place (Salt of Svanetia)*, the Political-Social document (*Shanghai Document*) and the early work of Vertov and Esther Shub (*Cannons or Tractors*)—must be added the emotional document of *Biography*.

From the mass of folklore born out of the revolution, Vertov chose three Eastern songs. These songs show us Lenin as he was seen by the formerly oppressed races of Middle Asia. For them Lenin meant freedom. His

death a dreadful blow. His teachings the basis of their future life. These subjects make up the structural form for the film.

It begins with the first song:

"My face was in a prison black . . ."

A song about women. Here is all the weight of oppression, the chains of tradition that were upon these women of Tsarist Russia. Merging into freedom, the real life that is theirs today. The deep sincerity and tragedy of the second song, about the death of Lenin, achieves an emotional impact that one seldom realizes to be within the capacity of the medium of cinema.

"We loved him . . ."

Only afterwards does one ask how such profundity of suffering was conveyed.

. . . we never looked upon his face,
we never heard his voice,
but he loved us like a father—
No, more than that
for no father ever did for his children
what
Ilyich did for us."

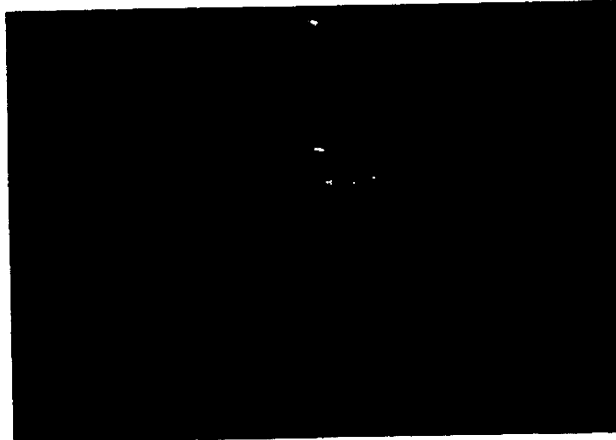
The third song opens with the triumphant chords of

"In a great stone city . . ."

developing into a magnificent paean of achievement under the banner of Leninism.

" . . . and if Lenin could see this country today—"

Vertov uses more than the literal content of the three songs to guide him. The technique of each part of the film derives from the type of song. The first part of the film, as well as the first song, has the structure and feeling of a ballad; the second a dirge; the third a marching song.



Lenin in Red Square, Moscow, 1918

THIS film is important for the revolutionary film workers outside of the Soviet Union. It exemplifies progress in the documentary film. Vertov's former absolute dependence upon montage has become a desire for more specific and concrete images on the screen than the *pure* document can ever accomplish. But he has not unreasonably discarded all his experiments with library material and with untouched document. In *Three Songs About Lenin* there is an enormous amount of library material, molded so deftly into the structure of the whole that one does not become conscious of its source. An example of this occurs in the second song where newsreel material of Lenin's funeral is juxtaposed to a series of faces flooded with sorrow, creating a passage of genuine tragic beauty. Pure document occurs when three spontaneous speeches are recorded for the third song, intimately showing the audience the reactions of three real people to socialist construction. The secret of the power of these passages can be partially explained by the long experience Vertov has had in his work with the documentary film. He knows just how far the pure document can be useful, because he has advanced beyond it.

ACCORDION, by Savchenko (*Mejrabpom-Film*).

TIMOSHKA was the best *udarnik* and the best accordion player on the collective farm. For his good work he was made secretary of the village *Komsomol* (Young Communist League) unit, and was placed on the village soviet. As a result he gets a swelled head and neglects his play with his fellow workers and his love-making with his girl, Marusia. She couldn't understand why he couldn't be himself, the man she loved, as well as an official. Along with his accordion playing, he dismissed as being too frivolous all his former human relationships with the village. Life in the village becomes very dull. Then in a band of young *kulaks* (wealthy farmers) we see a leader (played by Savchenko) who has more respect for the power of an accordion than Timoshka has. An accordion can be an instrument of counter-revolution. The young *kulaks* and their songs disorganize the village and the work of the collective farm. Timoshka considers bullets and then realizes that he has a better weapon. He brings out his accordion and drowns out the *kulak* songs with healthy new ones. Thus he routs the enemy; recognizes his error and becomes part of a once again happy, working collective.

(Continued on page 34)

Souphoto



1941. Parade square, Moscow, 1941.

Straight From the Shoulder

By JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

I HAVE before me a prospectus of a new producing organization, the Theatre Mass, outlining plans for the coming season. In this, I find the following phrase: "The Theatre Mass will present a clearly defined anti-fascist front, without however binding itself to any one party."

I have no quarrel with this declaration. I think one may assume that a theatre organization should be based on as broad a united front as can be honestly achieved. However, the organizational question is one thing; the question as it applies to the theatre worker—and particularly the writer—is quite another thing.

The sentence quoted above struck me forcibly because it involves the technique and method of approach of the dramatist; it also involves his relationship with any organization which produces his plays. I have given a great deal of thought to this as it applies to my own work; it seems to me that the necessity of being *specific* in regard to party and political questions is the first obligation of the revolutionary writer; the propaganda effect of his work depends on his ability to grapple, in strictly dramatic terms, with the detailed reality of economics and politics.

If I am right in this, it means that the playwright must organize his technique from this point of view. Furthermore the organization which produces the work must emphasize specific meaning in every detail of acting, direction and scenic design.

I intend to write a further article for NEW THEATRE attempting to analyze various technical problems of dramatic writing. But I feel that political *accuracy* is the basic principle of such writing, and must be the starting point of any such discussion. A tendency to avoid this problem leads directly toward literary romanticism.

The Broadway-Hollywood school of expression is characterized by turgidness, emotional vagueness—a technique which has been developed for the express purpose of avoiding reality in character, background or point of view. One may reasonably say of the bourgeois theatre—the greater the confusion, the greater the artist! The aim of this sort of theatre is perfectly realized in Eugene O'Neill, who attains great heights of confusion and pretentiousness.

In contrast to this, the growing revolutionary theatre has already offered us stirring examples of dynamic clarity in attacking real problems. Last year, three plays—*Peace on Earth*, *They Shall Not Die*, and *Stevedore*—offered the first genuine beginnings of proletarian art in the professional American Theatre. Each one was a fine achievement. But it pays us to study these productions critically in order to learn from

them and get directives for future work. Is it not correct (and necessary) to say that these plays would have been more effective aesthetically if the political line had been hammered out more clearly?

Peace on Earth gave us a graphic picture of the approaching war danger—but the final act, which should have expressed this problem in devastatingly concrete terms, was muddled by symbolism. Thus the full impact of the theme, and the role of the working class in connection with this theme, was somewhat lost.

THE effectiveness of *Stevedore* lay in its heroic simplicity: the struggle of the Negro masses against oppression and lynch law was here presented with glaring clarity. But it was curious to note that several of the bourgeois critics referred vaguely to the role of the American Federation of Labor in coming to the rescue of the Negro workers. Of course it is very possible that the white stevedores in the play were rank and file members of an A. F. of L. union. But, when one analyzes the text, one is at a loss as to the *exact* background and directives of the working class groups in the play. What union did they belong to? If this was an A. F. of L. union, what was the attitude of the workers toward the Federation bureaucracy? To what extent were the bureaucrats trying to break the growth of race solidarity inside the union? What specific forces were behind the union man who walked out of the strike quarters to join the lynchers?

Some people may think that these questions are not significant in relation to the drama. It seems to me that they are the very blood and bones of the play; such questions should be asked, analyzed and answered, at every stage of writing and presentation.

In *They Shall Not Die*, the most directly exciting moment in a very exciting play was the moment when the attorney for the I.L.D. came into the prison with the actual message of the I.L.D. Here the electrifying political reality merged fully with the events depicted on the stage. The effectiveness of this scene was a direct answer to those who say that audiences are not prepared for specific political material and react unfavorably to it. The immediacy with which this scene appealed to the audience's sympathies or prejudices was the reason for its thrilling quality. *They Shall Not Die* was less effective where it was less successful in maintaining political clarity.

In a recent issue of NEW THEATRE, Michael Blankfort spoke of "escape psychology" as applied to the theatre. I felt that he was mistaken in his statement that the play should provide an avenue of escape; and that he misunderstood the group psy-

chology of the audience. The real case (as I see it) is that a large part of the audience at a revolutionary play *wants* to escape; I mean this literally; the audience (or a major part of it) wants to evade the emotional impact of the class struggle. This was abundantly clear at performances of *Stevedore*. Although the Theatre Union succeeded in reaching an audience with marked working class sympathies, nevertheless a good proportion of the spectators were wavering intellectuals, people without clear convictions.

I talked to many of these people. They were deeply moved by the play, but they were able to perform a very neat psychological trick—to *escape* from the real implications. They regarded the play as a special case of Southern prejudice: "Isn't it a shame that the South is so backward about the Negroes? But after all, it's because there are so many Negroes in the South . . . it could not happen in other parts of the country", etc., etc. The New York critics, who praised the play, gave fine examples of humanitarian vagueness. They ignored the meaning.

IN a word, many members of the audience succeeded in transferring revolutionary content into futile humanitarianism. Now it is true that this will always happen, to a greater or less extent. People will always make a Freudian escape from truths which they wish to avoid. But I say emphatically that it is not the business of the Proletarian theatre to *aid* this escape. In fact, that's the business of bourgeois art; the function of revolutionary drama is to circumvent this escape; it is successful in proportion to its ability to *force* partisanship upon the audience.

The elderly dowagers who occupied orchestra seats at *They Shall Not Die* were touched to the point of tears. An old lady hung with pearls sat next to me—and she wept copiously. I don't deny the value of awakening the sympathies of these people. But the biggest part of the playwright's job is to make his conclusions inescapable. If the Theatre Guild production of *They Shall Not Die* had given the full impact of the class issues involved, the old lady with the pearls would have probably been carried out of the playhouse screaming and kicking—but the play would have been a greater play, in the truly Aristotelian sense—it would have awakened the pity and terror inherent in its theme. And its propaganda value would have been greater because of its greater aesthetic value. As it was the Guild subscribers were able to partially escape—to view Scottsboro as an isolated and shocking case of persecution. This was partly inevitable, especially considering the class-nature of the Guild audience. But it

is obvious that the author intended—and to a great degree, achieved—something far more sweeping than this.

Diviroff, published in *NEW THEATRE* for July-August, is worthy of careful study because it succeeds in dramatizing a mass theme with striking clarity. In *New Kentucky*, (to be produced by Theatre Mass) Sam Ornitz has done a magnificent job in presenting the specific role of the Communist Party in the Kentucky situation. Ornitz shows that the radicalization of the miners led them directly to a Communist position; he presents this issue categorically and without avoiding the implications.

It is absurd for any writer to attempt to write about the class struggle in general terms. The Communist Party is playing a definite role in every strike, in every activity of the working class. Other parties and groups are also playing definite roles. Every worker is intensely concerned with the policies of these parties. In fact his life depends on a correct estimation of these policies.

If a dramatist wants to write proletarian plays, he must bring detailed understanding to the problems which mean life and death to the working class. He must know exactly what he wants to say and he must pound his message home with clarity to the largest possible audience. He must realize that part of his audience is anxious to *escape*, to sublimate the experience by translating it into meaningless or sentimental terms. He must prevent this sublimation. He must *pin down* his audience to the reality to which his art is dedicated. Really against their will, he must force them to understand.

OF course this does not mean that the playwright's approach should be narrowly sectarian. This has been a fault in some Workers' Theatre plays—a tendency to dry and dusty Academic attitudes. The theatre is an emotional experience, and the essential value of clarity lies in the heightening of this experience.

Nor do I mean to infer that a playwright must take a purely Communist point of view. As for myself, I do not hesitate to say that it is my aim to present the Communist position, and to do so in the most specific manner. This is what I believe to be a correct approach—but I do not maintain that it is the *only* approach for the writer sympathetic with the revolutionary movement. But whatever the writer's liberal or radical point of view, his first duty in attacking working class subjects is to clarify his own attitude; to be specific and detailed in his presentation, he can *not* avoid Communism by befogging it; he can *not* avoid current issues by mysticism or sentimentality. He must face the problems which the working class itself faces. If, consciously or unconsciously, he avoids this realistic attack, his work can be of very little service either to the working class or to the art of the theatre.

Theatre Union Replies

By LISTON M. OAK

Member of Executive Board of the Theatre Union

THE Theatre Union has consistently followed a non-sectarian, united front policy. It is a workers' theatre, organized to produce plays that dramatize the problems, the conflicts, of contemporary society, particularly the struggles of the American working class against war and fascism, against the speed-up, against capitalist exploitation and oppression in its manifold forms, against class injustice. Its plays are not merely negative in exposing the evils of capitalist society, in opposing the forces of reaction—they are constructive in showing the masses of workers in militant struggle toward a better world. Our playwrights deal with this dramatic material from the viewpoint of the working class.

Thus *Peace on Earth*, with a background of workers striking against the shipment of munitions, shows the role of a middle class intellectual, a pacifist professor whose opposition to war brings him finally into alliance with revolutionary workers. He realizes the futility of isolated individual pacifist opposition to war, is deserted in the fight by all but the workers; he is framed and electrocuted, but militant mass action against war goes on. The relationship of class forces is clearly shown. It is not vague but specific; its political meaning is inescapable. Thus also, *Stevedore* portrays how Negro workers are terrorized by the bosses. It shows the subsistence level at which Negro stevedores live and the use of Jim-Crowism and lynching to keep them at this level, to prevent their unity in struggle with white stevedores. *Stevedore* advances without equivocation the issue of black and white unity in organized struggles.

But *Stevedore* does not label the white union organizer a Communist. He is called "a red", is portrayed as a militant rank-and-file trade unionist. There are thousands of such trade unionists in the A. F. of L. as well as in the T.U.U.L. unions. The fight against the A. F. of L. officialdom is not the theme of this particular play—it is not germane to the plot, is not "the blood and bone of the play" as Lawson says. Not all political issues involved in the Negro problem can be dealt with in a play as in an article—for instance the question of self-determination for Negroes was not brought into *Stevedore*. The action of the white union members in coming to the rescue of their black comrades is one that has been taken by A. F. of L. locals in the past, and it is what every revolutionist wants them to do in the future. Thus the play is not only historically accurate but also gives directives. Every opposition group in the A. F. of L. fighting against the reactionary and chauvinistic bureaucracy is trying to lead its local toward the type of action dramatized in *Stevedore*.

Political accuracy and ideological clarity does not necessitate specific organizational labels. Both Theatre Union plays have this clarity; neither is guilty of the charge of "literary romanticism" nor of vague humanitarianism, mysticism and liberal sentimentality. If liberals transfer the revolutionary content and implications of our plays into humanitarianism, that is not the fault of the playwright but the result of the confusion of liberal thinking. *Stevedore* does not capitulate to liberalism as does *Judgment Day*. Its political line is clearly revolutionary. But there are technical and dramatic as well as political problems involved in the production of working class plays.

Lawson says the most exciting moment in *They Shall Not Die* was when the I.L.D. attorney delivered the I.L.D. message. He is inaccurate in saying that the I.L.D. was named as such—actually

other initials were used. But even if Wexley had labeled the defense organization the I.L.D., the play was built around a specific case, the Scottsboro case, in which the conflict between the policies of the I.L.D. and the N.A.A.C.P. was central. But the excitement, the ideological significance, of that moment in the play lay in the message of the I.L.D.—solidarity of Negro and white workers in militant mass struggle for the freedom of the Scottsboro boys. *Stevedore* is not built upon a specific case involving conflict of organizational policies, and deals with such conflict only indirectly and by implication.

The Theatre Union has never rejected a play because it was "too revolutionary." When we have rejected a play, or asked the author to revise it, this decision was made either because the play was not good enough and needed rewriting, or because it involved production costs above our very limited resources. But every play cannot be a full exposition of every angle of a particular situation or problem; nor can the Theatre Union plays advance the full platform of a party. We do not plan to produce plays dealing directly and specifically with the conflicts in principles and tactics of organizations in the labor movement. Such plays have value, and the so-called agit-prop theatre is organized to produce them. *The Theatre Union is not an agit-prop theatre*. It is a united front theatre organized to produce plays that all honest militant workers and middle-class sympathizers can support; plays that, without compromise on questions of principle, will appeal particularly to unorganized workers who are not yet class conscious. This policy enabled us to reach an audience of 300,000 for *Peace on Earth* and *Stevedore*, establishing a record and making theatrical history with the first professional workers theatre in America. Like other organizations which maintain a united front policy, such as the League Against War and Fascism, we stick to specific and limited tasks, functioning as a theatre, not as a political party.

Further Comment

The function of such organizations as Theatre Union is to present to the largest audience possible fundamental problems facing the American people, and to show militant struggle against the capitalist system as the only way out. The fight against war, as dramatized in *Peace on Earth*, aims at the roots of the capitalist system, as does the united fight of Negro and white workers against economic oppression and social oppression (i.e., "Jim-Crow") in *Stevedore*. Three hundred thousand workers, intellectuals, and middle-class "borderline cases" have been reached with the forceful message of these plays. A great part of this audience have been interested or strengthened (thousands for the first time) in the struggles represented in these plays. To demand that the political party and labor organizations represented on the stage be "labeled" is to take a "leftist" position, a position that is unrealistic in relationship to the united front audience.

However, John Howard Lawson's argument that a united front theatre cannot produce specifically communist plays is certainly true, and he has brought up real but not insurmountable difficulties facing playwrights (whether Socialist, Communist or just "sympathetic") who write for such a united front organization and audience. His article indicates the immediate need for a communist professional theatre that will produce plays as Lawson and others will write—plays with a clear communist line and straightforward political statements and references.

The Editors.

Shock Troupe In Action

By RICHARD PACK

"THEY're gonna feed us slops, they're gonna water our soup, they're gonna give us food that aint fit for a dog, until we organize and demand our rights!" A member of the Marine Workers Industrial Union is speaking at an open-air meeting on the New York waterfront. He exposes the wretched lodging house the city provides for unemployed seamen—"doghouse" the sailors call it. He outlines a method of action. As he finishes, a sandy-haired youth springs to the platform. "And now, fellow workers," he announces, "The Shock Troupe of the Workers Laboratory Theatre presents a little skit, *Dr. Mixemup!*"

A show! The news spreads up and down the docks. A show! The word is a magnet. Soon, where there were forty, there are three hundred seamen. When the audience is large enough, the show begins. No house-lights dim; no curtain rises. This is theatre in its first form—under the sky.

The sailors eat it up. No movie hokum this. It's their show. It's about them. Their problems. What to do about those problems. Lustily, they boo *Dr. Mixemup*, the misleader who claims the "doghouse" is really beneficial, and they laugh and cheer when the hero exposes the double-crossing "Doc."

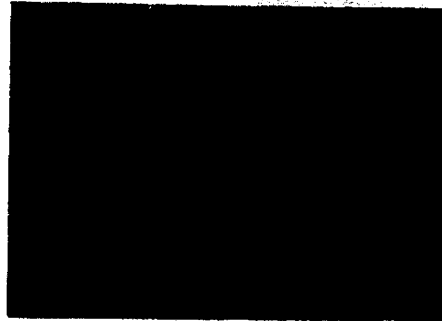
"Swell stuff, boy," one husky sailor yells, "Swell stuff!"

In humorous, dramatic fashion the carefully prepared script has repeated the points made by the M.W.I.U. speaker, has clarified them, has driven them home—and to a larger audience.

One hour later on a crowded slum street on the lower East Side, five young toughs watch in anticipation as the weekly street meeting of the Y.C.L. gets under way. For the past four weeks these hoodlums have heckled every meeting, and they're not going to be denied their fun tonight. But, hell—what's this? No speaker. Instead, there's a quartet on the platform. First they sing a song about "Union Card" and then one about "N.R.A." Catchy songs, too. A few of the boys begin humming the tunes.

And now the crowd is getting larger. Up and down the street, windows open. Heads pop out. They watch the show from their "balcony seats." Soon, the audience in the street and in the windows joins in the singing. Then, a girl explains the purpose of the Workers Laboratory Theatre. "We're going to put on a little sketch now," she says, "Will you help us make room?"

The same toughs who shortly before were ready to break up the meeting help keep the crowd back while space is cleared and boxes are set up for higher levels. The players have their backs to a building, and now the crowd closes in again, surrounding them on three sides. Then the announcement, "The



Harry Lessin in *Newsboy*

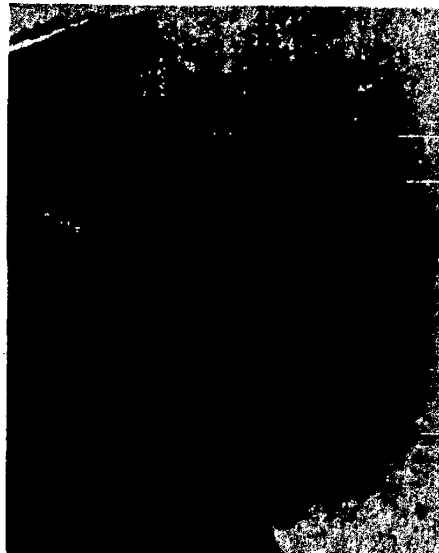
Workers Laboratory Theatre presents *Free Thaelmann*," and the show is on.

THE audience pays careful attention. They are impressed by the sincerity of the actors and the nature of the theme. When the sketch is over, they discuss among themselves their dislike of Hitler made more real by the performance they have just witnessed. As they go home, you hear some of them singing the songs about "N.R.A. she cut my pay" and "Make me out my Union Card," etc.

Sixty thousand New York workers have witnessed similar Shock Troupe performances during the past year. In dozens of Union halls, workers centers, and on many streets "The Workers Laboratory Theatre Presents —" have become familiar and welcome words.

The Shock Troupe was organized last Fall when, with the beginning of the strike wave and with the intensification of the crisis, the W.L.T. was flooded with calls from the field of action. Workers all over the city demanded performances.

"We just couldn't meet all the calls," says Al Saxe, one of the directors of the



Will Lee in *Hollywood Bolshevik*

Photos by Messik

Troupe, "Most of the W.L.T. members work during the day and can only give one or two nights a week to the theatre. That doesn't give enough time for rehearsals and performances. We had to organize a full-time production unit which would be ready to play anywhere at any time.

"With the swiftness of events today," Saxe declares, "the shock troupe becomes a political as well as an artistic necessity. Shock troupes should be built wherever possible—in dance and film groups, too."

Not only has the Shock Troupe greatly intensified participation by the W.L.T. in the day-to-day struggles of the working class, but it has advanced the theatre artistically. More time for rehearsal and study has resulted in performances vastly more expert and finished. The Shock Troupe has also had time to experiment with new form of revolutionary theatre and to adapt the forms and technique of the bourgeois theatre to skits and plays of proletarian content. It was the W.L.T. Shock Troupe which collectively conceived *Newsboy*.

"We try to take into consideration," says Will Lee, another of the Shock Troupe directors, "that we play before a larger number of workers, and must therefore use a form than can be understood by the greatest majority, so that its contents should not be politically over their heads and so that its forms will be easily recognized . . . forms that the workers are in the habit of seeing in bourgeois theatre—vaudeville skits, popular songs, monologues and dialogues based on famous radio and movie characters.

THE Shock Troupe is composed of the "cream" of the W.L.T., artistically and politically. Most of the members came to the Shock Troupe with previous academic training and professional experience. Al Saxe acted in vaudeville and stock and studied at the University of Wisconsin Experimental College. Will Lee taught dramatics at summer camps and directed Harry Alan Potamkin's children's operetta *Strike Me Red*. Greta Karnot was with the Fokine Ballet at one time and studied with Wigman and with Charles Weidman. Her husband, Stephen Karnot, a former scenic designer, appeared with the International Theatre in Moscow and studied with Meyerhold. Harry Lessin was a scholarship student at the University of De Pauw Dramatic School and appeared with Fritz Lieber's company. One of the Troupe was with Jasper Deeter. Another taught dramatics at a well-known women's college, etc.

ALTHOUGH it pays no salaries, the W.L.T. now provides the members of the Shock Troupe with food and lodging. The Troupe lives in a collective apartment in an

(Continued on page 33)

By RICHARD PACK



Harry Lessin in *Newsboy*



Will Lee in *Hollywood Bolshevik*

Hollywood Sees Pink

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

IN its characteristically puzzled fashion, Hollywood attempts from time to time to realize that this is a changing world and that some fairly radical social transformations are at hand. It is not, on the whole, a happy discovery for the timorous magnates, because they hate to displease any one who might become a potential customer, and you can't make pictures that have something to say without annoying some one or other gravely. It is much safer to make amiable sentimental melodramas about the vital matter — which dashing juvenile wins the handsome ingenue? But world changes are at their door and since the cinema is almost unescapably a topical medium, the Hollywood producers, who are not completely blind, cannot quite evade them. Thereupon they look about them for the easiest way out and strike what they regard as a fine compromise between the two important sides involved. They cannot, of course, decide to take a radical viewpoint, because it wouldn't be good business, and they are at least shrewd enough not to go in for extravagant tory-ism. Thus they hit upon a mild and amiable liberalism to satisfy the majority of their clients.

It is, I think, a great mistake to believe that the California film-makers are, as a rule, intentionally malicious or studiously unfair in their attitude towards revolutionary themes. Undeniably, they are heartily, if sometimes furtively, on the side of the established order, but it does not make their definite anti-revolutionary bias any more pleasant to realize that it is the result of instinct and the box office, rather than of intentional malice. My point is that it is giving the Hollywood magnates credit for far too great a degree of intelligence to suspect any such conspiracy on their part. In their hearts they have, I firmly believe, intended to go in for the closest approximation of harmless, mid-Victorian liberalism they can hit upon. It merely happens that all of their handsome investments, all of their fears of censorship and legions of decency and the women's clubs, all their dreams of being big shots in a great industrial world—in fact, all of their instincts and emotions—make it subconsciously impossible for them to be on the side of the exploited. They are not scheming villains. They are just instinctive defenders of a system that has enabled them to buy those swimming pools and tennis courts.

Then, too, they are hideously afraid of the box office. That is not to say that they are shrewd judges of box office values, by any means. In fact, their lack of skill in that respect is quite notorious. Therefore it is certainly no proof that American film



Hollywood Sees Pink Drawing by Del

audiences are not ready for revolutionary screen dramas to say that the producers fear that such works would not make money. It happens, though, that so far as they can judge from the frequently inaccurate reports of their agents, the thing to do is, not to ignore explosive topical matters altogether—too many people are talking about them for that—but to handle them in what the business men of the cinema handsomely regard as a safe and sane but progressive fashion.

CERTAINLY the shifting styles in the treatment of the Soviet Union indicate that the producers are making a desperate, if ineffectual, effort to keep in touch with what they see as popular sentiment in the matter. You have only to compare the difference in attitude of the early anti-Bolshevik melodramas, including Mr. DeMille's atrocity, *The New Commandment* and the celebrated *Rasputin and the Empress*, with the well-meaning *British Agent* to see that the Hollywood boys are at least aware that the days of the more violent Soviet-baiting are over. *British Agent** did try desperately to be fair. It didn't succeed, of course, and its anti-Communist bias was evident, but obviously that was the result of no foul purpose on the part of the producers. They merely tried in the customary futile fashion to be "fair" to both sides, and their instinctive fear of communism was enough to incline them definitely to the side of the interventionists. This prejudice came out chiefly in the manner in which the best speeches were given to the hero, who attacked the Russians for deserting their noble allies, while the entirely ineffective replies

were reserved for the heroine, who was supposed to be Lenin's loyal secretary.

At least in this case the effort to be friendly to the menacing shadow of Bolshevism was great enough to cause some observers—including, to my astonishment, that brilliant and discerning critic, Robert Forsythe—to feel that the producers were being curiously impartial, for a change. In the case of *Rasputin and the Empress*, a film which achieved the unparalleled feat of libeling even Rasputin, the partisanship was too obvious to escape anybody. Here the anti-Bolshevik enthusiasm took the extravagant position of rushing frantically to the defense of Nicholas II. I doubt if you can find in all the records of anti-revolutionary prejudice any episode as wildly foolish as the one in which the late czar, about to be done to death by a cruel communist mob, pulled from his pocket his own five-year-plan (really, it was) for the salvation of Russia and presented it to them with his patriotic compliments. It must be said for screen audiences that there is no record of anybody being fooled by that delightful little dream incident.

At the present moment the counter-revolutionary prejudices of the cinema are revealed chiefly by the frequent sneaking into pictures of foolish minor characters who are labeled "communists." Thus in such films as *Friends of Mr. Sweeney* and *The Merry Frinks*, disagreeable comic figures supposed to be hilariously offensive radicals were introduced in extraneous fashion, while in the melodrama called *Whom the Gods Destroy*, there was a cringing, snarling and cowardly character, introduced for minor plot purposes, who for no good reason was shown as a gabby radical. Lest the introduction of these three unpleasant personages seem complete evidence of Hollywood malice, I should remind you that when the stage comedy called *She Loves Me Not* was transferred to the films, the episode in which the two farcical young communists of the play and the burlesque communist parade with banners appeared, was carefully omitted.

The most frank and vicious anti-radical propaganda that I have found in the films in several years was in a Fox picture called *I Believed in You*. In an early episode, it introduced, apparently as its hero, a dashing young radical agitator, who was saved by the heroine from the police while he was fleeing from arrest. It seems that he had been organizing the coal miners. Well, the innocent girl is quite taken in by his charms and doesn't realize that he is a worthless and mercenary scoundrel, until a handsome young millionaire, who had loved her nobly from a distance, proves it to her. It happened that this splendid fable was embedded

* See Robert Stebbins' comment on *British Agent* on page 22. (Ed.)

By **RICHARD WATTS, Jr.**



Hollywood Sees Pink,

Drawing by Del

in such a worthless picture that the drama was a complete failure, anyway. It was, therefore, impossible to figure what share its ideas played in the public's definite refusal to have any part of it.

I SUPPOSE that the carefully liberal attitude of the cinema is best illustrated by such works as *I Was a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, *Massacre*, *Wild Boys of the Road*, *A Cabin in the Cotton* and *Heroes for Sale*—all of them, by the way, produced by Warner Brothers and with Richard Barthelmess playing the lead in three of them. Of the five, *I Am a Fugitive* was the most striking and effective. Its account of the cruelties of the Southern penal system was vigorous and impressive, but it was very careful not to point out any particular Southern state as the scene of its vividly depicted atrocities. There was something just a trifle ironical, too, about the sight of California, the home of Mooney and Billings, scornfully contemplating Georgia, the land of the chain gangs.

Mr. Barthelmess's *Massacre*—based freely on the book by Robert Gessner—told of the oppression of the Indians at the hands

of the savage and rapacious white man. It possessed the rather startling virtue, for Hollywood, of showing that the cruelties inflicted upon the Indian were not the result merely of sadistic impulses on the part of evil and lecherous government agents, but were, of all things, the results of economic forces. It was pretty astonishing to find the cinema pointing out that certain financial interests were concerned with persecuting and destroying the redskin because the redskin possessed certain valuable natural resources that the exploiters wanted. In amazingly bold fashion, the picture actually went on to name the interests involved. At this point, however, its futile liberalism came out and the film proceeded to announce that all that was necessary was for the hero to call the abuses to the attention of the Great White Father in Washington and everything would be all right. Nevertheless, *Massacre* marked a definite advance in the American social cinema.

It is that careful contention that a few evil men, rather than an entire economic system, are to blame for social abuses that chiefly keeps the American cinema from be-

ing properly vigorous in its treatment of such themes. In *Cabin in the Cotton*, the crusading Mr. Barthelmess went into the matter of the treatment to which tenant farmers in the South are subjected and he grew quite handsomely indignant about it, too. Then the climax arrived, and it was shown that his contention was that everything could be fixed up in half an hour if a couple of honest, foursquare gentlemen representing the opposing sides could just get together in man-to-man style.

AGAIN and again you will find that optimistic belief that all the social and economic ills of the world can be readily settled by a little kindness, tolerance and patience and the spirit of live-and-let-live. In an otherwise splendid picture about the besprisons of America, *Wild Boys of the Road*, the vigorous and indignant power of the film was destroyed when at the conclusion it was revealed that one upright judge, taking time out for a minute or two, could find a happy home for all the youthful vagrants.

(Continued on page 34)

The Folk Dance

By SOPHIA DELZA

THROUGHOUT the ages peoples have expressed in dance their most profound wishes and exultant aspirations their limitless hopes and intense fears, their most exuberant sentiments and frivolous desires. Dance form clearly indicates the character and organization of a society and reveals not only its emotional tone but also its inherited "mœurs" and growing ideology. Variations in dance forms reflect progressions, retrogressions and changes in the ethical, economic and religious structure of a society—reflect them or parallel them or precede them. Between the art expression in life and the organization of the material practices of life such an emphatic correspondence exists, that the oft repeated phrase "art for art's sake" seems a persistent absurdity. Do we not try to fathom the activities of a lost race by the relics of its arts? Do we not think we understand contemporary peoples by their manifested art expressions?

In societies less complicated than the one in which we live or the ones which have preceded us by calculable years, perhaps because of telescoped information and the perspective of time, there appears to have been a singleness of purpose and a directness of expression which unified organizationally the activity of living and the process of art. The most forceful anxiety in man's daily life, the most dominating wish, or the most compelling gratitude—all or some of these feelings color the nature of his



German Folk Dance, 16th Century

dance. But when the intrinsic need for the particular dance has ceased, and the original forms are merely followed, the dance then becomes degenerate and moribund; if the original purposes are reconverted for contemporary use, however, the dance becomes a vigorous and healthy pastime, as well as a recreation. This is the state of most of the dances of folk people (i.e. agricultural); dances are performed not as efficacious rites but as self-sustaining dances which in the light of their origin effect unity and sympathy among the members of the community. These dances have a direct

relation to their activities, in practice, not in purpose. To dance a spring dance will understandably not bring a fruitful harvest; doing this spring dance will express an understanding of nature's work and the common need for a rich harvest.

Folk society was merely a fraction of the structure of a much greater and many classed society. Each class built antagonistic walls of defense against the other, amassing within its own boundaries and forming self-protective communities, accenting distinctions among the many working orders (agricultural and urban) dominating orders, ruling orders and religious ones. These orders contributed to each other's good in unequal proportions, in a society where benefits of living were disproportionate. Such emphatic distinctions isolated the groups to such an extent that their art expressions found forms self-sufficient to their special demands, unrelated to the life and art of their contemporary classes. Communities developed independently in work and in dance. During these many decades the agricultural peoples, because of the inherent and destined fundamentals of their work, because of the traditional solution of their problems, and the knowledge of ancestral habits which they could follow protectedly or upon which they could institute necessary changes, were able to maintain a cohesion that the industrially progressing peoples have as yet been unable to find.



Russian Folk Dance

From an Old Print

IN early medieval society, where the unequalized orders in the social structure had become fixed, there was still to be found an impulse in religious expression common both to the dominating orders and the populace who were united in their superstitious and fanatic fear of God. But as the wonder and mystery of the heavens were supplanted by more tangible problems, this shared expression was shattered. And more tangible concerns varied with the given class. Each class, retired to the solution of its specific problems, and eventually developed its unique art from its special way of existence. The populace, composed of those who worked for their livelihood, was naturally (*i.e.* unnaturally) separated from those for whom it worked, from whom its personal life was consequently removed. Since its personal life was so intimately bound up with its economic life, there developed a conscious relation of thought and emotion between the two with the result that any expression during leisure time naturally involved the concern of its work.

THE growing urban communities, by nature of divers occupations, developed a series of specialized and specializing guilds, none of which were permitted to overlap, dividing and subdividing into innumerable occupational classes. Their dance expressed their work in the same way as the mimetic dances of the primitives reflected theirs. But it must be remembered that in primitive society there was absolute unity of purpose whereas in the Middle Ages there was a like unity of purpose *only* among the members of the individual guilds which were expressive of a divided society wherein little overstepping was tolerated. And it must also be remembered that this urban society had little to do directly with the other working order (the rural community) which likewise continued to grow. Urban community dances lay emphasis

on industrial activity and were barely concerned with the nature of family life. They knew only "class" (social) dances, which were being invented and created anew for appropriate occasions,—industrial, religious and festival.

Removed from the problems of governmental controversies and from the immediate influence of new inventions and fluctuating manners, rural communities, on the other hand, were more able to sustain and continue their customs than were those who lived in the midst of unceasing upheaval. The demands of agricultural work, being of unchanging nature, emphasized a psychological stability which helped make more or less permanent the habits of those involved in such work. The people were united by similar problems regardless of the particularized phase of the work they pursued. The demands of nature, of growing, of sowing and harvesting, of winter and summer, rain and sun, joined them in their work and leisure. Desires and interests needed the same outlet; joys and sorrows were caused more or less by the same external and unapproachable fact. And so in the light of the problems of their lives, the rural folk of the past had a common and firm basis of sympathetic understanding which united them in joy at a successful harvest, in sorrow at some common misfortune, which stimulated them to express communally their need for fertility, for strength. Here there was no diversity of interests. Their lives corresponded with their arts, expressing immediate concern for their work which was so irrevocably bound up with existence.

Folk dances throughout several centuries have remained consistently the same, firmly entrenched on the land, in the hearts of those recreating them, isolated with reason from the changing concerns of a more rapidly changing world. Essentially, living routines of early folk people have been similar to

those of their ancestors, a new gadget or two, changing superficially the method of work, but not the character. Contrast this with urban conditions—constant change of individual type, persistent influx of divers races, drastic alterations in working methods and repeated disrupting readjustments to life.

The folk dances of Europe which we know today are probably the same in most aspects as of the 17th century, with changes of so slight a nature that our deductions are little affected. The basic generalities of the folk dance exist in all the folk areas regardless of race or nationality. Despite the variations displayed in each ethnological group, we find the basis—religious and economic—common to all; traditions followed by all; purposes and intentions apparent in all; and each group has the personality of its race and environment.*

WHY are these dances still alive, healthy, spirited in spite of a traditional style so old, a form repeated again and again? The strength of the mass dance lies in the mutual functioning of many who are dealing with the same material simultaneously. It is re-creation of property common to all; it releases the individual within the accepted limitations which form his life. That interest which first was expressed in the dance is still a vital one; there is a fast bond among those who equally share and divide a common task; and there is a subconscious appreciation of a mass entity.

Our present social dances, fox trot, tango, etc., which keep superficially changing are by this time *indirect* derivatives of the urban dance. Due, however, to the externality of these changes they have no possibility of important future development. The significant values our age needs cannot be expressed in this social form of the dance which, no doubt, will continue to be varied in trivial ways through sheer inertia.

There is another heritage of which we are the possessors, however, the art dance type. It is this type which, by nature of its being an art and therefore conscious and creative, can express the world of thought and reflect its temperament and which can show a direction and activity that the folk dance cannot by its nature offer.

A dynamic *common* interest will help perpetuate the art of the dance. The fact that folk dance is still existent as a living recreation and not merely as an historic memory proves in part that statement. The virtues basic in the art of the folk people can be applied to the new dance. The modern dance in order to thrive needs the mass sympathy, the communality (either in direct dancing participation or in understanding the audience relation to dance), and the fruitful direction that has sustained the folk dance for such a long period.

* For description of structure of these dances see *Trend* magazine, Mar-Apr, 1934.



Merrily They Roll Along

By MOLLY DAY THACHER

THE first reviewer who was dispatched to see the D'Oyly Carte Company in Gilbert and Sullivan returned to report that he enjoyed it too much to write a critical review for *NEW THEATRE*. The implication that a revolutionary theatre-goer ought not have a good time above 14th Street is one that we repudiate. The charm and craftsmanship of the productions are indisputable. The complaint of the revolutionary with them is that they are not open to the hundreds of workers the country over who would delight in them. In a socialist society such a re-creation of the best of an older theatre period would be welcomed and studied—though it could never, as this has done, come among such barren contemporary plays that it would be the outstanding production as it is on Broadway.

It would perhaps be superfluous in such a socialist state to point out the social roots of the operettas. They are the product of a period of expansion of the British Empire, when audience and authors took this state of affairs for granted. That is why the satire scratches only at the surface of its time: the foibles, the affectations and clichés and composites. It had not occurred to the authors that below the surface, which had nothing in common with the Rock of Gibraltar, lay the causes of the things they disliked, equally vulnerable and waiting for a penetrating attack: that the bureaucratic asininity of the captains of the Queen's Nav-ee was precisely what could be expected in a society based on exploitation in the colonies and at home.

As our theatres attack these deeper causes they can learn from Gilbert and Sullivan. It is amazing how little adaptation some of the lyrics and dialogue would require to sharpen them and give them contemporary point. Pooh-Bah, of *The Mikado*, Lord High Everything Else but Executioner: Lord Mayor, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Archbishop, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and Private Secretary, are cut in the very pattern of Il Duce, who grabs himself another portfolio every time he remakes the Italian cabinet. Pooh-Bah, the pot-bellied, could be turned into a very revealing caricature of the Corporate State. Again, the songs, with their device of ridiculing trite phrases by rhyming them in couplets which show their silliness, are a good source of music and rhyme schemes for the workers' theatres. It would not be hard to remake the executioner's list of people who would not be missed.

We are given to saying that Broadway is dying. *Merrily We Roll Along* is the epitome of what we mean by death, and what Broadway means by success. Some of the

best Broadway talent is concerned in it—and that is real enough talent. George Kaufman and Moss Hart have written a play in which they set out to treat seriously the corruption of a talented playwright who falls into writing for cash success and can't stop. He ends completely empty, surrounded by wise-cracking and vicious people. Hart and Kaufman should know. But the only comment they can make is that their protagonist started back in college as a nice boy with such fine ideals, and more's the pity. Our moral is that the authors, and Kaufman again as director, and the cast, have attacked the play much as their hero must have gone at his. They know the tricks of show business, they have tricked out their idea with catch lines and catch curtains—from acid-throwing to suicide, tricky costumes and hack settings, and acting that is a cheap patchwork—until they have turned it into a cash success. A qualified exception should be made for the acting of Mary Hay, but the workmanlike attack on her part is negated by the lack of sincerity

in the direction of the whole, and she also falls into the method of the rest: of indicating an effect that has no root in reality, for the sake of an anticipated reaction from the audience.

Margaret Leach and Beatrice Kaufman in *Divided by Three* illustrate again the poverty of this "sophisticated" sector of the population as soon as they turn from wise-cracks to a serious idea or so much as touch an emotion. More talent wasted and undeveloped: Judith Anderson, Donald Oenslager's sets, and the intelligence of the two new playwrights. Paul Green's play, *Roll Sweet Chariot*, originally unclear and further mishandled in production, will be discussed in the January number of *NEW THEATRE* which will be devoted primarily to Negro plays. The Theatre Guild opened with *A Sleeping Clergyman*, by a Scotch doctor, James Birdie. Sparse patches of sensitive playwriting and a conscientious performance by the gifted Ruth Gordon stand out from an otherwise mediocre play and production.

The New York Times OCTOBER 21, 1934

Birmingham Will Combat Communism With Plays Put On by Relief Workers

By The Associated Press.

BIRMINGHAM, Oct. 20.—Birmingham is going to combat communism this Winter with laughter—the kind comedies produce.

The City Park and Recreation Board plans to accomplish its ends against communism, especially among Jefferson County's 31,500 workers who are on relief rolls, through dramatics.

The relief workers themselves are going to administer the "cure," the 160 on the Recreation Department rolls organizing companies among themselves and neighbors. Already forty-eight free plays have been scheduled for adults, twenty-two for children and fourteen for Negroes.

Some people laugh when Miss Agnes Coughlin, Director of Fine Arts to the board, tells of its aims. But she is not to be deterred because she has "seen it not only work once, but at least a dozen times already."

"There was one man, an avowed

Communist and agitator, who after acting the part of a law-abiding citizen in the play, completely changed his character to match that of the man in the play," said Mrs. Estelle Marlowe, superintendent of dramatics in Miss Coughlin's department. "Now he is the best worker we have."

A widow with a family of eight or nine to support had become embittered at her lot and joined a group the park board supervisors knew to be "Reds." The supervisors gave her a part in a play, acting as a happy housewife giving a bridge party in a splendid home. "That was just what she wanted to be and it cured her," said Miss Coughlin. "Her whole attitude toward life has changed."

Comedy and comedy drama, with all marriage triangle-love eliminated and no reference made to capitalism or labor, dominate the themes of the program designed to combat communism.

REDEEMING THE REDS

"The southern ruling class meets the spreading strike struggles in the mills and mines of the South with savage terror. They hate and fear Communism. They cannot laugh off the growing solidarity of militant Negro and white workers. Now they use theatre—as well as tear gas and bullets—as a weapon against the workers. In Birmingham the authorities may redeem a 'red' here and there, but Communism is growing faster there than in some northern cities, and will continue to grow until the southern workers finally overthrow the system that starves and enslaves them." [Statement by an Alabama Communist organizer.]

Scenes From The Living Theatre — Sidewalks of New York

Photographs by BEN SHAHN



Observer or Partisan

By MIGNON VERNE

THE dance exists in a society which has an irreconcilable and ever-sharpening class conflict. Ideologies are at war with one another, just as the classes from which they spring. It is the purpose of the class in power to dismiss—oftentimes to slander openly—the developing art of the working class; sometimes subtly, at other times more bluntly. From this viewpoint it is interesting to examine the issues of the *Dance Observer* which have thus far appeared.

The purpose of the magazine, as announced in its prospectus, is ostensibly to provide what some would describe as "better type" criticism in the dance, as well as defend the so-called modern American dance. Interesting also is the fact that the sponsors of the publication announced that it would be "non-commercial."

Since the *Dance Observer* has published a number of interesting articles, such as Henry Cowell's *Music and Its Relation to the Dance*, Alex North's *The Dance in the Soviet Union*, Alex Field's *Dancing Under the Spanish Republic*, and others, it has undoubtedly made a contribution far superior to any other bourgeois dance magazine in America. Moreover, the fact that the magazine does not truckle to advertisers and managers is, of course, something which sets it off from the general run of bourgeois dance magazines. Also the appearance of *Dance Observer* broke the virtual monopoly of Martin's regular department of dance comment in the *New York Times*.

An examination of the content of the magazine reveals, however, in spite of its apparent "independence", that it puts forward sterile art-for-art's-sake theories of "bohemianism." In the leading editorial of the first issue (February 1934), one of the editors, Paul Love, reveals the nature of the class of dancers which the magazine supports when he says that "hidden in corners, practiced by a few, almost esoteric, it is difficult to know how to approach this art," i.e., the modern American dance. Mr. Love further in the article exhibits confusion, typical of his liberal viewpoint, in his discussion of the ballet. Maintaining that the ballet can say nothing of the "earth it spurns", he adds that "at present the fragile fairy tale can no longer seriously occupy a world gone slightly mad" (my emphasis). Mr. Love continues, "It (the ballet) is an exotic flower, and we should no more expect it to bloom in our soil than we should expect a handful of daisy heads to burgeon into healthy plants." To refer to "our soil" as if it were something common to all is meaningless, for it is obvious that plants

will be healthier when grown in a millionaire's garden than in the backyard of a city slum. Moreover, Mr. Love's empty nihilism is shown by his talk about "a world gone slightly mad." This nihilism contradicts his romantic conception about "our healthy soil", not understanding that the bourgeois world is going "slightly mad" on this "healthy soil", as well as Europe's.

Further on Mr. Love compares his subjective reaction to the German dance with the conception of the American dance, ignoring the class features common to both. "The German dance", he says, "is the most subjective form the dance has achieved. . . . Space is the prime element. The body yearns for it. . . . It is the struggle of an ego with all outside of it, and the struggle leads to naught but exhaustion." Mr. Love evidently does not realize he is discussing the mood of post-war disillusionment of the petty bourgeoisie. "The approach through the spirit (speaking of the German dance), the infinitude, the outgoingness, are European. The mysticism is Teutonic, and the muddlement likewise." This evaluation is based on national rather than class characteristics; it is clear that America, too, is not without its mystic dancers, the Teutons have no monopoly on muddlement.

Further, Mr. Love engages in some chauvinistic ballyhoo when he tries to prove the superiority of the modern American dance over the modern German dance. He declares that the

" . . . European attitude towards space is an insatiable will to be extended, to dissipate the body in atmosphere and touch the infinite horizon." The modern American dance: "centripetal rather than centrifugal movement, states their desire. In its simplest terms the Germans will go to the mountain, the Americans force the mountain to come to them. . . . The American dance has strength the German dance with its fanatic self-expression can never encompass."

CONFUSION found in the magazine's esthetic and philosophic approach to the dance is even more glaringly seen in another article entitled *Economics and the Dancer*. The chief contention of the writer of that article is that the public wants foreign and exotic artists. The American dancer is not in demand as far as the box office is concerned. The writer quotes figures to show that a recital costs a minimum of \$800, that after the performer makes her debut and has won acclaim, "she still has not won leisure to create. . . . The economic necessity of earning a living by teaching (the only way open to her) makes such tremendous physical and nervous demands on the dancer that creative work cannot but suffer."

The writer asks, "What is responsible for this condition of affairs?" Because, "Amer-

icans suffer an inferiority complex in the light of which foreign culture alone seems worthy of support." The author then appeals to the public to support American talent as a panacea for the economic difficulties of the dancer. Interestingly enough, the same issue of the *Dance Observer* carries an article by Alex North on the dance in the Soviet Union which contradicts this explanation.

"In the Soviet Union," reports Mr. North, "all new forms of art are encouraged and dancers and musicians are given all possible aid by the government." It is clear that, whereas in capitalistic countries like the United States, sincere artists are left to the mercy of the vulgar, capricious and superficial tastes of the Babbitt bourgeoisie, in a workers' land, like the Soviet Union, no dancer with talent need have any financial worries whatsoever about training and professional opportunities.

The failure to understand this fundamental difference explains why Winthrop Sargent, one of the most conservative of the *Dance Observer* editors, declared that

" . . . the appearance of the Soviet dancers, Vecheslava and Chabukani, must have caused many a qualm and many an argument among the expectant dance enthusiasts of New York. It may likewise have set at rest the apprehension of anyone who feared that a subversive modern choreographic influence was about to be set loose on the New York public. This reviewer for one found himself wondering why they bothered to fight the revolution."

Sargent then gives the two Soviet dancers who appeared here the highest praise, saying, not without malice, that they were "as fine as any that had ever appeared before the Romanoffs—not realizing that these two dancers of working class origin received their training free from the Soviet government and thus were able to achieve as sparkling perfection as any ballet dancers under the Romanoffs, and were, further, on the crest of a brilliant concert career which took them to the shores of America with absolutely no financial worries. Besides, Mr. Sargent, if such fine dancing could grace the theatre of a Romanoff, it is certainly glamorous entertainment for the workers and peasants of the Soviet Union, who, during centuries-old existence of the ballet in Russia, never had the opportunity to see the art for which their country was almost as famous as it was for the Cossack's knout.

In another review which discussed the Workers Dance League competition in Town Hall (July issue), the critic summarily dismissed most of the dancers with words like "mediocre". This technique of criticism of the revolutionary dances—regardless of their merit—is a labor-saving

device of the tabloids which vote one to five stars to Hollywood films.

IN view of the fact that Martha Graham is without doubt the guiding spirit behind the policies of the *Dance Observer*, it is interesting to see how one of her new compositions was discussed in the magazine. Here again, Mr. Paul Love says

"... the third dance (Theatre Piece No. 2 *Pantomime*) is a formalized statement in pantomime of four ideas: War, March, Death, Bread. The last is an inner contentment which is expressed this time through vigorous physical activity. If we dissect these moods it should be clear that the first, although it represents peace (Theatre Piece No. 1 *Saraband*) infers that the individual is not active, that it is not an inner peace but more of a dead waiting. Miss Graham calls the next two sections theatre pieces so that they will imply the imposition upon the individual of an artificial control (materialism) whose only final result can be war. The conflicting movements here give an inkling of the awakening consciousness of the people whose maturity results in a new piece which is alive because the individual has a complete awareness of himself."

This criticism and the dance which is its subject is a hodge-podge of sociological

phrases. What does one mean by *War, March, Death, Bread*? In a war somebody fights somebody else; marches generally head somewhere. These titles in themselves are meaningless. The trend reflected in the *Dance Observer* shows, among other things, that its editors find it difficult to ignore the vital stimulus of the revolutionary dance and so make rhetorical concessions with such interpretations as "materialism", etc. The *Dance Observer* finds itself in the dilemma of those who decline to make decisive choices where decisive choices are the only salvation—in "a world gone slightly mad."

Until it does so, its only service will be to keep dancers in the morass of "pure" estheticism. To criticize merely the form of dancing, to give it merely subjective psychological interpretation, and at the same time to regard as unimportant and irrelevant the concrete ideas expressed by the dance is still putting the dance above the battle. To do this serves to distract from the vital issues and conflicts of our time. Dancers and dance critics who do not participate in the revolutionary dance cannot remain "observers" without being "partisans."

Mr. Maurice Schwartz, is in Hollywood trying to ease into film work.

Defying the confusion in the Yiddish theatrical world, the Artef dramatizations of dominant revolutionary forces are fearless and uncompromising, and transcend the old smug conception of what constitutes dramatic effectiveness.

Nearly one hundred thousand people saw Artef productions in seven months last year. In the same time it provided workers' clubs with mass recitations, readings, and improvisations. The Artef is still in the stage of development. It has an ambitious schedule for this season and plans to go on "the road."

THE artistic development of the Artef is evident in its current production of *Recruits*, which had its premiere at the new Artef Theatre on West 48th Street (the first Workers' Theatre on Broadway.) The play creates, in nine impressive scenes, a stirring recreation of life under the Czar. The method Beno Schneider employs in directing is a synthesis of Reinhardt's expressionism and Stanislavsky's naturalism. He had to undo the corrosive tradition of Second Avenue exhibitionism, to steer clear of sentimental realism, in order to get at the inner dramatic pathos and intense truth that underlies mass struggle, without deviating from character portrayal. This he achieved through remarkable restraint, through subtle coordination of line and movement reaching often into symbolism. *Recruits* is unforgettable in its picture of primitive conflict between the poverty-ridden workers of a Russian-Polish village and its handful of rich Jewish proprietors. The central theme, going back to 1828 under Czar Nicholas I, revolves around the bitter system whereby the children of the poor were impressed into long years of servitude in the army. The havoc created in the village by the arrival of the Czar's decree calling for Jewish conscripts, how the decree was met by the community elders who seek to shift the obligation of supplying the Czar with recruits upon the poor, how they finally trick Nachmen, leader of the happy-go-lucky artisans, into signing himself away for the army, the running thread of romance, superstition and suffering, the vivid impersonations against the richly toned, slightly grotesque backdrops prepared by Mr. Solotaroff, make a moving, artistic comedy.

The Artef

By SAMUEL KREITER

THE Artef is one of the main stems in Yiddish proletarian culture. Going on its ninth year it bids fair to survive the once lively art of the now decadent Yiddish histrionics.

In 1926 when the rank and file of American Jewish labor were junking bureaucratic leadership, a group of class alert shop workers with a passion for the theatre formed a dramatic studio under the guidance of the actor-poet-regisseur, Jacob Mestel. For three years they rehearsed and studied the manifold subtleties of stage technique. Following the period of strenuous training, the studio matured into a compact artistic players-ensemble under the more resourceful direction of Beno Schneider, a student for years under Vakhtangov. Besides the thirty-eight active players, the Artef maintains a studio for workers who desire dramatic training.

The Artef has successfully staged twelve productions which averaged thirty performances each, a good average considering that its playing time is confined to week-ends and that the Artef operates without fat subsidies from big-hearted donors. Of the twelve productions three dealt with the American scene: *The Third Parade* by Paul Peters and Charles R. Walker, based on the bonus march to Washington; *In the Roar of the Machines*, an original play of American shop conditions by the Yiddish writer, F. Chernet; and *Drought*, adapted by N. Buchwald from Hallie Flanagan's *Can You Hear their Voices*. The others were importations from Soviet repertory.

Though Jewish life is in a state of constant change the Yiddish bourgeois theatre has not seen fit to change its threadbare pattern of inane mushy melodrama and chassidic "romance" for a form of social art. As such it has failed to identify itself with the varied and multiple problems that face the masses today, an oversight which is fast becoming its downfall. The Artef, on the other hand, arrived as a robust instrument in the class conflict. It reflects mass struggle in place of mass suffering, which was a woe-begone feature in the "social problem play" that served early radical immigrants as a means of registering passive protest.

Furthermore, the Yiddish bourgeois plays are wanting in creative and technical imagination, in live humor, in fresh acting talent, in good lines. Even the most simple-minded of playgoers are no longer entertained by the facial and vocal acrobatics of a Ludwig Satz, the good-natured crooning and spoofing of the elfish Molly Picon, the prostrate unreal dilemmas of a Jennie Goldstein. The better front of the trade, the Yiddish Art Theatre, fell upon evil days after sixteen years of near-heroic efforts on behalf of the finer play. Some of its disbanded troupers are now on the Coast doing earnest but ineffectual revivals. Others in New York have instituted themselves as the Yiddish Folk Troupe and premiered this season under Joseph Bulov in a Soviet melodrama, *The Verdict*, now playing at the Yiddish Folk Theatre. Meanwhile, their lost leader,

See THE STARTLING COMEDY

RECRUITS

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Ungrateful For Gift Horses

By ROBERT STEBBINS

THERE is no proverb more dangerous for the film-critic to follow than "Don't look a gift-horse in the mouth." Especially when casual research reveals the equally ancient and weighty maxim "Beware of the Warner Brothers bearing gift-horses, Robert Forsythe's diffidence in analyzing *British Agent*, becomes difficult to understand. So far as he knew "it was the first time Hollywood had given the Soviet Union even a glimmer of an even break." No serious consideration of *British Agent*, however, could yield this opinion even if one's basis of judgment were "the inferiority of Jean Harlow last week."

British Agent is perhaps the most pernicious anti-Soviet picture yet exhibited and none the less so for its subtlety. The fact that the audience broke out into spontaneous applause when Lenin is shot indicates how cagily the producers maneuvered their material while, as Richard Watts Jr. would have it, "attempting desperately to be fair to both sides." Mr. Watts, critic for the *New York Tribune*, did incidentally detect a "slight hint of anti-Bolshevik bias from time to time." In *British Agent*, the Hollywood tacticians avail themselves of a new technique. Hitherto the set-up had been the Western world of buoyant capitalism embodied in the person of a virile, clean-shaven soldier-evangelist opposed to Bolshevism exemplified by cringing, filthy Russians who can dispense a fate worse than death with great composure. The particular scheme in *British Agent* is to place a well-meaning, soft-spoken individual dripping with sincerity, Mr. Leslie Howard's chief stock in trade, in a position where unfortunately the cards are stacked against him. The producers depend on that carefully nurtured American aberration "sympathy for the underdog" to win their case. The idealism of Leslie Howard (and what can be as touching as devotion to a lost cause?), whose entire existence is consecrated to winning the war, "humanity's war" he calls it, is contrasted with Russia's treachery in deserting the Allies. "It simply isn't cricket, old fellow." Elena, secretary to Lenin, no less, and Leslie's sweetheart, can only reply, "It's no use, darling, we can never understand one another." Elena undoubtedly learned her history by inference from the collected works of Elinor Glyn.

I should belie the facts of the case if I gave the impression that the producers of *British Agent* confine their attacks to indirect imputations of cowardice. The "reds" are to be seen shooting down peaceful citizens intent on their own business. Two adventurers whose only fault is a perfectly natural taste for counter-revolution disappear, presumably done in by the Cheka. A

third, an oh so insouciant American, is threatened with execution at dawn and subsequent burial in quick-lime. The Cheka breaks into the British Consulate, demolishes the premises and slays a whimsical retainer who has never harmed a fly in a long life devoted to the English gentry. The American wants his guard removed because it makes him "itchy to look at him." . . . These are but a few of the instances that make one wonder how Forsythe could have found *British Agent* a "far advance from the shaggy-haired bomb-throwing brutes who have been Hollywood's idea of the Communist in recent years." If anything *British Agent* fits very nicely into its niche in the wax-museum of "red" horrors Hollywood has built. In the light of Forsythe's undeniable talent, his absorption in the purely academic problem of relating all future movie production to *It Happened One Night* seems regrettable. Certainly *British Agent* was a fair sort of opponent and would have made the going interesting to one of Robert Forsythe's sporting spirit. In that picture, at least, it appears "Hollywood" was not "too easy."

IN the editorial columns of NEW THEATRE, September 1934, there appeared King Vidor's endorsement of the program of the Film and Photo League, the second provision of which was a declaration against all fascist and pro-war films. Both from Mr. Vidor's own article in NEW THEATRE and from personal reports he emerges as an individual of unquestioned integrity. Therefore the unmistakable fascist direction of Mr. Vidor's latest film *Our Daily Bread* merits special attention. Here the specific remedy propounded for humanity's ills is a variety of "back to the earth" idea similar to Sinclair's EPIC plan. Somewhere towards the middle of the film, our hero, heroine and comrade derelicts, already back on the farm, are meeting to determine what form of government shall regulate their lives. The first speaker, a rotund, unctuous spellbinder, rises and in the pathetically stilted manner characteristic of the dialogue throughout the picture makes a plea for democracy. He is immediately howled down with "Yeah? It's just such words as got us where we are today." The next speaker proposes a Socialist government. "Baloney," is the short but effective reply. Then up springs a fiery-eyed farm-hand. "This is a big man's job. What we need is a big boss." By acclamation young Tom Keene is made Big Stick of the farm. In the course of Mr. Vidor's article he remarks, "Pictures would be better if they were not controlled by big business." What he fails to perceive is that the ideological concepts underlying his picture (the

need for a big boss, the segregation of discontented workers in what would eventually become concentration camps) if carried to logical conclusions can only result in the complete fascization by big business of all art and life processes.

That Mr. Vidor is at cross-purposes with himself is entirely attributable to his political uncertainty and the environment of loose, tentative thought in which he moves. For instance, Mr. Chaplin, our greatest mime, but in all else a typical bourgeois dilettante, was responsible for one of the absurdities incorporated in the picture: the incident of the criminal giving himself up to justice so that the reward for his capture will help buy groceries for the farm. This is only one of the three necessary steps whereby workers may come into their inheritance. *First*, the hero's uncle must own a mortgage-ridden property. *Second*, the fugitive at large must generously sacrifice his freedom for the benefit of the community, and *third*, a loyal screen-wife must prop the hero's flagging courage at a moment when the machinations of the erubber-stamp vampire threaten to deflect him from the path of duty. How such a figmentary concatenation of trivialities was accepted as a serious solution of the economic problems of the workers (witness the daily press reviews) can only be laid at the door of deceit or wish-fulfillment bordering on stupidity. The only episode of any validity in a film based "on the headlines of today," namely, the foreclosure auction at which outside bidders are excluded, misses fire because of the heavy-handed melodramatic treatment.

Running through *Our Daily Bread* is a pseudo-religious motif obtruding on the body economic. It is Sunday. Karen Morley, the leader's faithful frau—"if it suits you, it's O.K. by me"—is sitting in the cornfield. Suddenly a single, surprising corn stalk pops out of the ground. She calls to her helpmeet. He rushes to her. Kneels down besides her. Slowly a look of rapture fills his face. "I feel as if God is watching over us." The soft music of angelic voices seems to come from the top of the screen. "There's nothing for people to worry about," he continues. "Not when they've got the earth." In the cinema, then, it appears that *desiring* a thing is equivalent to *possessing* it. Particularly when tenth-rate music and diffused lighting are thrown in to further stupefy the mesmerised intellect.

Whatever merit *Our Daily Bread* boasts is purely cinematic. Mr. Vidor has an eclectic mind in the best sense of the word. The influences of Eck in the ditch-digging scene, of Pudovkin in the character-casting, of Eisenstein in the emphasis on natural forces

as material capable of dramatization, are in evidence and put to good use. But unlike the work of the Russians whose cinematic devices are inherent and held firm in the solid matrix of Marxist analysis, Mr. Vidor's dream children float about like dead flies in a soup of fantasy and confusion.

ON the same program with *Our Daily Bread* at the Rialto is a short newsreel taken in the Soviet Union called *Red Republic*. Presumably photographed by Margaret Bourke-White it exhibits none of those excellences we have come to expect from Miss White's stills. Mr. Havrilla, the narrator, stirs up gales of amusement by remarking that the Soviet government rewards its faithful workers with shower baths. There are perhaps sections of the United States (the Black Belt, the Ozarks, not to mention our own East Side), where this attempt at wit would fail of its purpose.

The beauty of martyrdom and the futility of Jewish participation in a Christian world are the suggestions of Gaumont's latest super-production *Power*. Another step in the campaign of British Films to win a world audience, *Power* achieves a minimum of emotional impact at a maximum of outlay. Consisting largely of costume tableaux, the film displays no more animation than a wedding cake under its glass bell. Conrad Veidt has been misdirected in a performance that attains the ultimate of bathos. The spectacle of Mr. Veidt's chin bobbing up and down on the waters of grief is not likely to add to his artistic stature.

Still from *Thunderstorm*, directed by Petrov

Whatever satisfaction this movie-goer derived from the month's offerings was provided by a recent Soviet importation, *Thunderstorm*. Unlike *St. Petersburg Nights*, which was vaguely sprawled over the year, *Thunderstorm* moves swiftly through the few months of its action. In the story of the bewildered bride plunged by marriage into a family of money-grubbing in-laws we have symbolized the complete isolation that all individuals of sensitivity experienced in pre-revolutionary Russia. The characterizations are of great

merit and the musical score discloses a refreshing originality.

Deserter, now playing at the Acme Theatre, Pudovkin's first sound film to reach America, was released too late for adequate review in this issue. It is one of the greatest Soviet films made since the epochal Russian silent pictures, and I suggest you make a special point of seeing it immediately. Dealing with a strike of marine workers in Hamburg, *Deserter* is especially timely. It marks a great advance in the technique of the sound film.

Shifting Scenes

Workers' Theatre from Coast to Coast

WEST COAST

"The terror of the late strike still has its reverberations. But," writes Ben Meislin, of the Western District L.O.W.T., "we are getting into shape to start things moving again. A new Blue Blouse group is being organized in Hollywood. The remnants of the old Blue Blouse troupe in Los Angeles with some new blood has been combined with the Prolet Dance Group, and permanent headquarters have been established, to be known from now on as the W.L.T. of L.A. Classes have started also. The dance group will give a satirical ballet at the November 7th celebration."

Also in L. A. The Reinhardt *Midsummer Night's Dream* in the Hollywood Bowl impressed one correspondent enough to write, "It did have a few good moments. Then there were long dull love clinches and conversations of the Hollywood actors. Your reviewer came out impressed more with the costliness of the production than anything else. Yet most of the people were overwhelmed by dimension and applauded." This last sentence is a good comment on one type of audience.

And in San Francisco—Ten new members joined the L.O.W.T.

New York—The production of *Yegor Bulitchev* by the Finnish Workers Dram Group, as compared with that of the Artef, left much to be desired, but the acting revealed talent. Since this is the only Finnish-speaking Group in New York, it should present as part of its program plays dealing with specific problems of its workers.

OTHER POINTS EAST AND WEST

Boston—This city will see the premiere of *Gold Eagle Guy*, the Group Theatre's production of Melvin Levy's play, in mid-November. New Theatre Players has re-organized for the season's activities, following the Eastern Conference.

Newark—The Red Star Dram Group just organized, made up of students and workers.

Bayonne, N. J.—A new group organized.

THEY WANT PLAYS

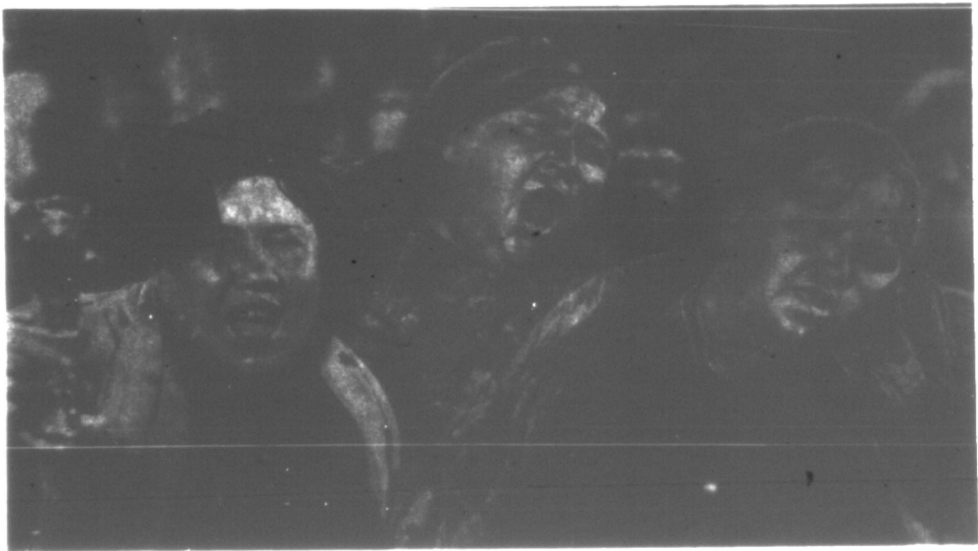
New plays are the urgent need of the *Rebel Theatre* of Wilkesbarre, which "went

dead" in May through lack of material. The group has 20 members, and is getting in more through the Little Theatre movement. A good way to strengthen the work and draw in new elements. The entire report shows the struggles of inexperience, but also a hopeful beginning.

The new Pittsburgh *Workers Theatre Group* also wants plays, scripts simple enough for totally inexperienced people to work on, and for small numbers of players, with few enough characters for a small group.

CHICAGO'S ONE-YEAR-OLD

"It is almost unbelievable that the L.O.W.T. here is not yet a year old," writes Alice Evans. "Since the national festival we have been going forward fast. Our school looks like a big success, giving the groups real technical training." A booking and repertory system are also under way. Work is beginning for the conference to be held the last week-end in November, with a big theatre night as the starting event. We hope that Chicago will establish a shock troupe soon.



Still from *Thunderstorm*, directed by Petrov

HEADED FOR THE ROAD

It's the firm opinion of most theatre experts that the re-opening of a play dooms it to failure. To date, there are only two that prove this rule by exception. And one of these is *Stevadore*, which re-opened on October 15th, to dismal predictions, and is doing very well at the Civic Repertory Theatre. New York readers of *NEW THEATRE* will be able to see the play for a few more days before it goes out on the road. First stop is Philadelphia. . . . Theatre Union's annual costume ball takes place Friday, November 16th, at Webster Hall. We hope it's as good a party as last year's and intend to go and find out.

A NEW THEATRE

Within one month the *New Theatre Group* of Philadelphia was born, grew to seventy-five members, including scenic designers and stage technicians and chose its first play, *Too Late To Die*, written by one of its own playwrights—Christopher Wood. The *New Theatre Group* plans a permanent theatre, with its own workshop, studios, classes, music, dance and playwright sections, "dedicated to serving the great masses of the people."

IN NEW YORK

The Theatre of the Workers School opened its new headquarters at 47 East 12th Street at the end of October, with the presentation of its own sketch, satirizing Upton Sinclair and his "Epic Plan," and the Soviet movie *Fragment of an Empire*. In its new large quarters the group is preparing for more extensive work.

Die Neue Theatre-Gruppe is arranging a night of anti-Nazi dramatics for Sunday, November 18th, at the New School. Other German and American groups will appear at guest performers.

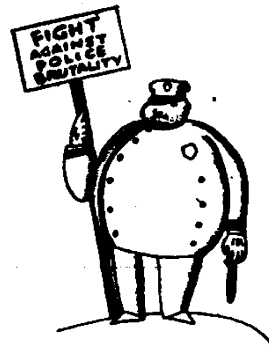
An unfortunate omission from the Theatre Collective article in the October *NEW THEATRE* resulted in the impression that the Theatre Collective had not considered the importance of public performances for workers' audiences. The Theatre Collective reports that an important part of the Studio Course involves Theatre of Action plays.

SCHOOL TEACHERS AND COPS

The dramatic instructor in a reactionary school reports that *Newsboy* was performed recently by the students, without the school board's discovering either the origin of the play (Workers' Lab. Theatre) or the sympathies of the director—who also directs a workers' theatre group. The board was so struck with the excellence of the lit-montage technique used in the production that the instructor was surprised and overwhelmed with praise. "I couldn't tell them of the revolutionary origin of the play and technique, so I had to take the full credit," the director writes. "I wonder how long before they discover what I am doing and fire me, but I don't care much. You see, I'm so

fed up with their 'Jest Plain Larnin' that I am anxious to take an open part in the revolutionary theatre."

Our advice is to stick to the job as long as he can. Not everyone has the opportunity to spread revolutionary ideas within the colleges and at the same time help to



build the workers' theatres. The same group reports that the brother of a local policeman has joined the group and is doing active revolutionary work as well. The cop brother is sympathetic too, which proves that not all flatfoots are flatheads as well.

BRITISH WORKERS THEATRES

A November festival is being staged in the middle of this month by the Workers Theatre Movement of England.

In Winnipeg, Canada, membership is growing in the Progressive Arts Club and the Workers Theatre is busy. Classes have been started and are regularly carried on, with the standards of work improving and membership increasing as a result. *Newsboy* was prepared for production last month. This group is also working on a subscription drive for *NEW THEATRE*.

THEATRE FRONT

The National Office of the L.O.W.T. has started issuing again a monthly bulletin called *Theatre Front*, on inner organizational problems. Free to members. Five cents to non-members. Write for it!

DON'T FORGET THESE DATES!

The next *NEW THEATRE* Nights are scheduled for November 4 and November 25 at the Civic Repertory Theatre.

MISTAKE RECTIFIED

What would you do, if you'd get 100 copies of *NEW THEATRE* instead of your regular order of 50 a month? Here is what the Jack London Theatre of Newark did in this situation. John Lee, a member of this group, went to the Little Theatre where a Soviet film was opening and sold 46 copies in two days. In between he sold another 20 copies, and by now, the 100 copies are gone, the rest of the group finishing the job. Take your cue, Workers Theatres!

On the L.O.W.T. blacklist for failing to send in news: Most of the N. Y. groups;

Unity Players, (New Haven); all New Jersey groups except Newark; Workers Little Theatre, Cleveland; John Reed Dram Group, Youngstown, Ohio; Theatre of Action, Detroit; Workers Dram Club, Gary, Ind.; St. Louis Group; individual groups, Chicago; Kansas City group; Tri-Cities.

Five Month Plan

NEW THEATRE may be regarded as the barometer of rising interest in the revolutionary theatre arts. This gauge shows *NEW THEATRE*'s circulation has risen 360 per cent (believe it or not—it's true) from 2,500 in May to 9,000 in November—all this without benefit of an "angel."

The *Five Month Plan*—a revolutionary way to improve *NEW THEATRE* and build the groups, has resulted in about 60 per cent of the film, dance and theatre groups spreading their influence by reaching many new readers. Right now, if every reader of this column would either subscribe or become an "organizer" for us for one month and send in at least one sub from a friend, *NEW THEATRE*'s future would be assured.

The *Five Month Plan* leaders are:

The Detroit J.R.C. Group which sold 75 copies, got 15 new subs, only one sub short of its quota, the best record of all. This group fell down on "New Theatre Nights" however, and produced no new plays.

The *New Dance Group, N.Y.C.* sold the most magazines, 350, got 11 new subs, one-fourth of its sub quota, arranged a fine New Theatre Skit and participated in three New Theatre Nights—leading group, class A.

The *Workers Lab. Theatre, N.Y.C.* sold 300 copies, got (only) 5 new subs, but led in participation in New Theatre Nights. Three new plays. Did best labor front concentration work—in the marine strike.

Toronto Progressive Arts Club sold 175 copies, got 4 new subs, increased three-fold, but no New Theatre Nights or plays.

The other groups are backward in *NEW THEATRE* work. The national executives of the workers Theatre, Dance and Film-Photo Leagues urge every group to step up the *Five Month Plan* pace immediately. Check those prizes offered in the September issue, and set out now to win.

theatre dynamic

Guest Performers:

N.F. Theatre Group
Workers Lab. Theatre
Jack London Theatre
Ellen and Fred Marlos
M. Bauman
Hertha Pauly
Eric Burroughs
Chari Burroughs
Herb Haufrecht

First Appearance:

THE NEW THEATRE GROUP

Sunday

Nov. 18

8:30 P.M.

NEW SCHOOL
66 W. 12 N. Y. C.

Tickets: New Theatre, 114 W. 14th and Box Off.

Facing The New Audience

Sketches Toward an Aesthetic for the Revolutionary Theatre—Concluded

By MICHAEL BLANKFORD

THE first two articles of this series appeared in the June and July-August issues of *NEW THEATRE*. Owing to the necessity of condensing the remaining articles into a single one, the points described in the first two articles could not be utilized fully in the remaining space. I have incorporated only what seemed to me essential to a healthy working class theatre.

Some readers have objected to the psychological aspect of these articles. It is interesting to note what Serge M. Eisenstein said in this connection. "At present I am working on the psychology of audience reactions, trying to measure the effects of a film on the audience. These laws, I believe, can be found by pure physics, not intuition, and so I am working on the principles of Pavlov and Freud."

THE bourgeois theatre satisfies the wishes of its audience either by sublimating them, by inflating them, or by flattering them. The audience is led, and often willingly, by these analgesics through a fake and feverish reality (*Grand Hotel* genre), or through an ocean of sentimental whipped-cream (*Ah, Wilderness*, etc.), or through an equally sentimental pastiche of history (*Mary, Queen of Scots*, etc.), onto the plains of a sort of thumb-sucking, pleasurable Nirvana.

But for our audiences, war is more than dirt and terror (*What Price Glory*) and more than an eternal and inevitable phenomenon (*Men Must Fight*); it is profit-imperialism which can be overthrown for good (*Peace On Earth*); "what are soldiers and sailors but workers with guns?" (*Sailors of Catarro* by Friedrich Wolf). Negroes are not fishfry fanatics with a paradise *weltanschauung* (*Green Pastures*), nor god-struck gamblers and lechers (*Porgy*); they are workers with honor (*Stevedore*).

Though our audiences do and must consist of workers, sympathetic intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie, they are not united in their understanding of contemporary forces. Thus our plays must not only appeal to the militant and class-conscious vanguard, but must also attract the mass of less advanced workers. Our plays must not only inspire their audiences, they must organize them as well.

Our plays must hew to this line: To present the working class point of view and revolutionary ideology most effectively and most dramatically.

The revolutionary theatre in America is still breaking ground. The half dozen or so plays which give promise of a great theatre have uncovered many problems. These concern themselves chiefly with the technique of creating effective working class propaganda. They arise not so much from the sheer mechanics of playwriting as from

the lack of a full understanding of what our audiences are, and how to present our new material to them in the most dramatic way.

Pendulum Plays

Revolutionary plays, with few exceptions, have been "pendulum plays." These are plays which show a worker or an intellectual swing from a conservative position in the first act to a militant, class-conscious position by the final curtain, e.g., 1931, *Peace On Earth*, *Steel* and *Stevedore*.

There are two reasons why pendulum plays have been most popular. First, in the early discussions concerning audiences for revolutionary plays, it appeared that the only audience which could be counted on was a thoroughly militant and class-conscious one. This audience, it was thought, would prefer plays which ended on a corroboration of their own position.

The second reason came later when this analysis of the potential audience was broadened, and our theatre, as organizers, conceived of drawing unclass-conscious as well as militant workers to our plays. The pendulum play was and still is considered the most effective means of interesting and proselytizing this audience. The reasoning goes something like this: The unclass-conscious worker identifies himself with the hero. The hero turns left; therefore the worker turns left. Q.E.D.

That the pendulum play will exist for some time to come is a certainty. I am afraid it will exist to the exclusion of many other possibilities. Playwrights who notice how successful such plays can be are prone to accept the formula. This formula has dangerous tendencies. It tends to adopt a special case, and generalize from it, giving the false impression that the whole working class is turning left at the same rate. Also, it may lull its audience into a kind of false security by approaching the class struggle in too mechanical a fashion (i.e., everybody who goes through a strike is a class-conscious worker). Thus it may give rise to a fictitious kind of wish-fulfillment, an instance where "escape"¹ in our plays comes closest to the escape in the bourgeois theatre.

(1) In a review of my second article, John Howard Lawson in the *Daily Worker* pointed out that the word "escape" used to describe a certain aspect of our plays was a bad choice. Although Lawson seemed to have skipped those paragraphs in which I clearly made the distinction between bourgeois and proletarian "escape," the fact that the word has so universal a connotation has convinced me that on this point Lawson was right. The following may be a better formulation: plays which end on a note

THE pendulum play arising from a conception of the identification of the audience with the hero makes it essential for us to look into what this term *identification* really is.

Identification is a projection of the audience upon and in some character or characters. For the time being the audience places its bets on some person in the play. *Identification* is more than sympathy with that character; it is a "living in the character"—what writers on esthetics call "empathy,"² and may be achieved with characters that are ordinarily unsympathetic. Unless there is some common experience between the characters represented and the audience viewing them, the characters appear unreal and identification is impossible. The audience does not need complete recognition of all the *experiences* of the characters but there has to be some common ground. In our plays, this common experience may be in the realm of ideas expressed for the more advanced section of our audiences, or it may be in the field of day-to-day class struggle situations, strikes, etc. If, however, our plays are to be most effective, the common experience must always include universal and immediate wishes (for a home, for a woman, for children, for security, for love, happiness, etc.).

If our playwrights kept this factor in mind, very important flaws in their plays would be filled in. The bosses would not be out and out dark villains. Such characters are not entirely convincing on the stage; they are unreal and being unreal our audience will not understand what they stand for. And from the mouths of villains, as in *Peace On Earth* and *Stevedore*, an important part of the play's ideology comes forth. It should be obvious that it is as important to unmask the capitalist villains as it is to advance the ideology of the proletarian

of future victory for the working class represent an *idealistic* approach whenever the victory does not grow immediately and convincingly out of the class and character conflicts in the play. This *idealism* often satisfies the audience wish for alleviation from the painful present. Revolutionary idealism, however, differs from other kinds in that it is a stimulant toward the achievement of the projected victory by means of very concrete steps, i.e., demonstrations, strikes, revolution.

(2) Bourgeois estheticians have misused the concept of empathy to create a theory of "psychic distance" in which the audience is said *not* to be *esthetically* appreciating a play when it gets involved in it. Bill Robinson, who jumped on the stage and took part in a scene of *Stevedore*, would be described as having a non-esthetic experience. There is no place for "psychic distance" in a revolutionary esthetic. If it were possible, the whole audience ought to be aroused enough to jump on the stage.

heroes. But, in order to unmask them effectively, it is necessary to understand them.

It follows that sympathetic characters would not be symbols, and as symbols, unreal, but would have immediate and personal problems which may grow out of or stimulate their activity in the class struggle. For instance, contrast *Peace On Earth*, in which a hero was dramatized by an idea, with *Stevedore* in which an idea was dramatized by the hero. In *Peace On Earth* Peter Owens fought against war. In *Stevedore*, Lonnie Thompson fought for his home. Both are class struggle issues, but the latter is a more successful way of involving the audience.

If our playwrights keep these points in mind, they will not be guilty of bad pendulum plays. A bad pendulum play is one in which the hero is distorted in order to get him militant by the final curtain. "1931" is such a play. There is no indication in the character of Adam that makes his final gesture plausible. Such distortion could not occur if the playwright realizes that where he distorts identification is destroyed, and his "point" nullified. "1931" becomes, therefore, a good play about unemployed misery but a bad play about a worker turning left.

But it isn't as simple as that. I can hear the playwrights protesting, "Hold on you! Do you want them to leave the theatre without knowing what they can do about unemployed misery? Do you want us to paint a dark picture and let it go at that?"

And I answer: Make your character turn left in a way that is consistent with his past, in a way that is convincing, or let it go at that, for his turning left by rote, by distortion, will never win an adherent to our cause. And yet, I feel it would be wrong to write a play about the jobless without indicating "a call to action."

There are two real problems harassing the revolutionary playwright. One, the problem of "the call to action" which I have suggested above, and the other is "last scene trouble."

The Two Furies

THE two furies they are! One scene in *Stevedore* which contained the explicit "call to action" was rewritten thirteen times. And a different last scene for *Peace On Earth* was tried out at each of three dress rehearsals. The one used opening night and afterwards was never tried out before the opening night. The two furies they are, more with our theatre than with the bourgeois theatre, because of the nature of the subject matter of our plays and the class character of our audiences.

The difference between "a call to action"

(3) In this play although there were worker-characters, it was the intellectual, Owen, who attracted the audience's sympathy, and with whom it identified itself.

and the "revolutionary last scene" is the difference between what should be done and the promise that it will be done. In *Peace On Earth* the call to action was for workers to unite against war; the last scene showed them uniting against war even under the terrific pressure of capitalist terror. In *Stevedore*, the audience was called to unite, black and white, and the last scene ended on a dual note: Blacksnake's cry of victory, "They're running. They're running," and Ruby's cry of sorrow at Lonnie's death. The total impression that Peters and Sklar wanted to give was though the leader may die, his comrades would carry on toward the promise of victory.

Although these two elements, a call to action and the last scene, are dissimilar, they may often take place at the same time. The promise of a victorious future that the last scene gives usually emerges out of the call to action that is proposed in the play.

Why are these two elements so difficult? "Last scene troubles" arise because the playwright as we have indicated above, doesn't want to let his audience go away depressed. He wants to suggest, if he can, the revolutionary future. However, unless the playwright constructs his characters so that the promise of the future arises convincingly out of the struggles of the present, all within the framework of the play, his good intentions are wasted. This can be achieved by creating situations and characters which allow for identifications and the fulfillment of the audience.

Piscator⁴ worried about the last scenes of his productions. He solved the difficulty by spectacular uses of the stage. This led him to abstractions. We have to solve this by the human conflicts in the play. This leads us to a concrete, personalized and emotional appeal which dramatizes our ideology. The problem is more the playwright's than the director's.

In "1931," in *The Third Parade*, in *We, the People*, in *The Belt* and in *Amaco*, the call to action occurs in the last scene⁵. This is also partially true of Wexley's *Steel*. Of course, this means that the most sympathetic character took a long time to become conscious of what had happened to him and what to do about it. The trouble with plays of this nature is that too many revelations within a short time is exceedingly difficult to make real to an audience. Confusion often results from having the call to action in the last scene. But the fact that the two

(4) In an article on Piscator by Anna Latsis (*International Theatre No. 5*) the stress is always put on the spectacle and the spectator. There are, of course, many differences between spectators and audience, spectacle and play. Both are useful. For less advanced workers, however, plays are more successful because they are simpler to participate in and easier to understand.

(5) I violently differ with the call to action as expressed in some of these plays, but as examples, they are worth looking into.

elements can occur at the same time must not mislead us into thinking that both are necessary in every revolutionary play.

The Call to Action

IT is clear, that the more specific the call to action the narrower the appeal. *Marion Models, Inc.*, a Theatre Collective production, called upon its audiences to join the Needle Trades Industrial Union. This can appeal therefore primarily to workers in this trade. Most agit-prop plays have very specific calls to action, often to their disadvantage.

When the subject matter of a play demands a call to action the call must be there. (Attention protesting playwrights.)

The call to action usually, if not always, arises in the play alongside the ideology of the bosses. In *Peace On Earth*, for example, the call to action comes only after students have been arrested, strikers killed, and war-making been effected. This is the way it should be. You can't have a protest in a play unless you have shown what there is to protest against. But in this play as in many of the others, there are too many calls to action. A play about war cannot successfully include every aspect of imperialist war. The authors not only attempted to encompass too much but, at the same time, they overestimated the capacity of their audience to receive.

The call to action is an effective call only when it is a dramatic call—a call which comes out of a conflict between two convincingly human forces in the play. The call to action usually holds the ideological kernel of the play. Frequently these kernels come forth in long speeches, and in scenes whose conflict is irrelevant to or not entirely integrated with the rest of the play. In an earlier article I described the close relation between integrated conflicts and the wish fulfillment imperative for an audience.

A call to action need not be specific. There are plays which have an implied call to action—*Precedent*, *They Shall Not Die*, *Gods of the Lightning*, etc. These plays have the following in common: (1) There is a workingclass hero who struggles against the bosses and their tools; (2) The situations arise out of workingclass experience; (3) They are based on historical events, the implications of which are well known.

These plays may lose some of their organizing ability by not having a specific call to action, but they have many advantages especially for the less advanced part of our audiences. The situations are recognizable and thus may be avoided in real life. (e.g. attempts to bribe union leaders, stool pi-

(6) *Newsboy* is an example of what the agit-prop play has in store for us. It is a superlative creation, and the Workers' Laboratory Theatre and Alfred Saxe deserve great praise. Agit-prop plays, however, demand special critical treatment inasmuch as their purposes and audiences are not typical.

geons, scabs, legal frame-ups, etc.) These plays commemorate great workingclass heroes (Tom Mooney, Sacco and Vanzetti, the Scottsboro nine, the bonus marchers). They are wholesome examples of militant action and by this virtue imply a similar action for the worker audiences.

Must our plays have a call to action at all? What about plays which concern themselves with the upper class—their decay and degeneration? Or with political corruption like *Merry-Go-Round*? What about plays like *American Dream*, *Gentlewoman*, and Charles Walker's *Crazy American*?

WE must attack the bourgeoisie on every front. If we can weaken their hold on the workingclass by exposing corruption in high places, or by illuminating the dark and unhealthy lives of its society, we must do so. But there must be an indication in such plays that the whole of society does not consist of the decadents on the stage; that there is another world. Of course this may be done without introducing a Communist, if by introducing that character, the play appears distorted.

Throughout this article I have constantly stressed the fact that only through the characters we create in our plays can we hope to write effective propaganda plays. I have stressed the human and personalized side of what our plays should be. I have done so because it seems to me that only by this means will our plays fulfill the wishes of its audiences. The bourgeois theatre fulfills the wishes of its audiences and in doing so fuses that fulfillment with the interests of the oppressor class. We, too, must satisfy audience wishes, psychological and economic, but our task is to fuse that satisfaction with the interests of the workingclass.

The outlook of our theatre is a brilliant one. We are pioneering. In a sense we are just emerging from the morality drama. We await our Shakespeare.

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Technical Advice To Movie Makers

By RALPH STEINER and IRVING LERNER



THIS column initiates a regular feature in **NEW THEATRE**. There is an urgent need for intelligent and honest scientific technical information about movie making, uninfluenced by manufacturers and their advertising agencies. Since **NEW THEATRE** does not, and has not the desire to depend upon manufacturers' advertising, it will print candid opinions about motion picture apparatus, film, etc. These opinions will be based on actual test or experimentation. **NEW THEATRE** asks its readers who are movie makers or potential movie makers to send in their questions. The inquiries will be answered by Ralph Steiner and Irving Lerner. All questions should be addressed to them in care of **NEW THEATRE**.

We open this feature with a series of questions and answers on the use of 16mm film. Most beginners are at loss as to the kind of film they should use. For the most part they have to depend upon the statements of the manufacturers. However, little can be learned from their ads excepting that *Eastman* will do the rest if you push the button; or that *Agfa* will solve all your film problems; and with *DuPont* you can't possibly go wrong. Very little help will be gained from the various amateur movie magazines. They pretend to run very technical information about various films but they are as helpful as the advertisers. The reasons are obvious.

This is the first of two articles on the use of 16mm film. As far as quality and decent results are concerned, 16mm film is as good as the "professional" 35mm stock. It also offers many other advantages. It is fireproof and does not come under the strict laws regarding "inflammable" motion picture film; it is very much cheaper and thus it facilitates the necessary period of experimentation by beginners and film groups.

I want to make an outdoor movie on 16mm film and should like to ask some basic questions: I wish to get as good photographic quality (the most accurate rendering of textures and tones as possible.) What qualities has reversal film that will give the results I seek?

Extremely fine grain, and, when the exposure is correct, great richness of tone. Also low cost when only one print is needed.

What are the limitations of reversal film?

The first difficulty is that since there exists no original negative from which to make reprints you can't experiment with several ways of cutting a scene.

Secondly, there is the difficulty of determining the correct exposure. Some brands are processed with compensation of errors in exposure. All *Agfa-Ansco* film is processed without compensating for errors in exposure thus giving no latitude. With this type of film (the same holds for any other brand of the non-compensating type) an exposure of 50 per cent less or

more than normal will result in a lighter or darker print, respectively. *And there is no exposure meter made that will give consistent results.* Eastman reversal film, however, is processed with compensation for errors in exposure. This works out quite nicely *except* that when you photograph an actor against a dark background the compensator "decides" that you've made an underexposure and lightens the whole print, giving you a blank white face. When the same actor is photographed against a light background the compensator says, "overexposure", and the actor's face is printed much too dark.

What would you advise me to do about this problem of exposure?

I found that contrary to logical practice one had to *underexpose* when using dark backgrounds and *overexpose* it for light backgrounds. As a solution to the exposure problem, I suggest buying 50 feet of Eastman panchromatic reversal film (not superpanchromatic) and exposing a series of shots with an actor against dark, normal, and light backgrounds, giving one quarter, one-half, normal, 2X normal, and 4X normal exposure for each category. Accurate and sufficient notes should be taken of the conditions and the actor should hold some identifying mark for each exposure. From the projected results plus a check with your notes you will have the best possible exposure guide.

Why do you recommend Eastman Panchromatic instead of Supersensitive Pan?

It's cheaper and since it's not hypersensitive to red you get more realistic face tones and textures. If you should want smooth, idealized Hollywood faces use supersensitive pan.

How about filters?

On regular pan a K2 (yellow) should be sufficient for proper sky values. If you are using super pan a K2 will tend to "Hollywoodize" faces while an X1 (pale green) will keep them realistic. A series of exposures made with the filters you intend using should be included on the 50-ft. experimental roll of film.

How about negative-positive film? And other questions I might have about reversal film?

In the next issue we will give you our finding on negative-positive film and if you have any other questions just address them to us care of **NEW THEATRE**.

New Dance Group

By EDNA OCKO

THE New Dance Group—four years old—two times winner of the annual competition sponsored by the Workers Dance League, originally composed of six genteelly pink dance students who found in the revolutionary movement the vitality and perspective they wanted in their dancing grew to practically unwieldy proportions when it organized classes for laymen and students. The charge being ten cents a class (bourgeois schools — \$1.50), hundreds joined. Present membership is 239, of which 16 are members of two performing groups. The slogan and goal of the New Dance Group is: *Towards Performing Groups*,—to create and perform dances bearing the message of the fighting, class-conscious proletariat—to perform wherever it can—before bourgeois audiences as well as mass meetings, trade unions, the waterfront, picket lines, etc.

We approach then our first distinction warranting discussion and analysis. Two hundred and thirty-nine members—16 performers. The New Dance Group has a double function. There are classes to be taught and performances to be given—teachers and a method are needed for one, dancers and direction for the other. How is this work carried on?

Classes are three hours long; divided in three periods,—one hour for technique, one for creative work on subject matter suggested by the Educational Committee which has representatives in each class and to which the teachers also belong, and one hour for a meeting which includes discussion of technical and political problems, reports based on theme work of the class and suggestions for further activity. There are children's classes and a men's class. Mass dance and folk dance evenings are planned for the entire membership and guests.

Prospective performers are chosen from the advanced class. This group meets for additional technique with the performing group. Those who are ready for performance meet twice a week for rehearsals on their own dances, directed for the time being by an experienced director from the first performing group. Most of the teachers are members of the first performing group. The additional technique classes and the men's class, however, are led by those not closely affiliated with the group (first—because since no specific thematic work is allotted to those classes, an outsider can conduct them competently; second—by thus encouraging experienced dancers and teachers from bourgeois circles to work for the group, the group increasingly activates them into a movement with which originally they might have had little sympathy).

The second performing group of four members is only a few months old, and as yet undistinguished. The first group in its comparatively brief period of existence has performed before several hundred thousand workers and intellectuals in both bourgeois and proletarian circles. The personnel consists of an experienced dance accompanist and composer, and ten dance students (so-called because they are still studying in bourgeois schools). Four of them are scholarship pupils at the Mary Wigman School, two have scholarships with Fe Alf, and the others study more or less regularly. All, however, support themselves by outside work, C.W.A. jobs, posing, teaching, etc.

IT is perhaps this broad and catholic dance background that the German pedagogic method so unflinchingly gives its pupils, in addition to the intelligent and sensitive leadership of its directors, that has made the New Dance Group the most experimental and richly inventive of the groups in the Workers Dance League. Under collective leadership, this group has experimented with many forms of dancing and dance accompaniment. It has not hesitated to use whatever means available to aid it in putting forward its ideas; it has been amazingly quick to profit by criticism, to shift its artistic or

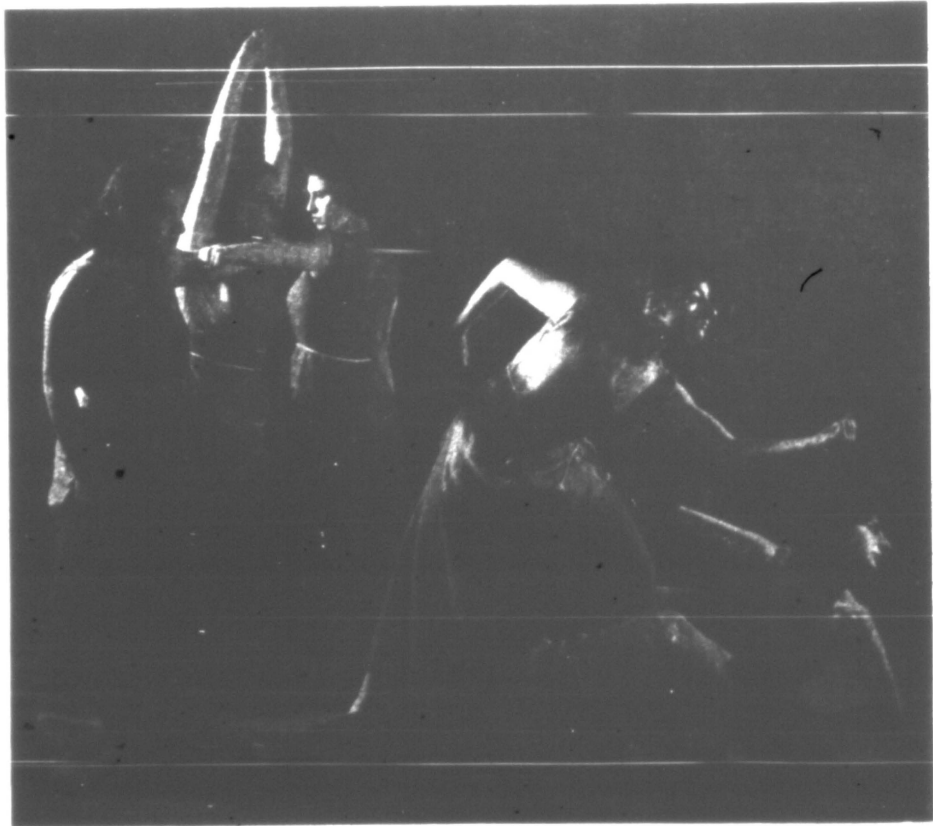
ideological course, to re-direct its policies, in order to achieve artistic clarity and significance in its dances. First among its experiments, let us list its stress on collective leadership. There is no one dance choreographer, or director. Each member may direct dances, and these dances are subject to change through creative improvisations on the motif by other members of the group. From general agitational subjects—*Awake, Revolt, Uprising*—it shifted progressively to specific issues: German Fascism, the N.R.A., etc. Group dances, solo dances, mass dances, American and other national folk dances as well as revolutionary folk dances have been created by the group: dances without music, with percussion, with verbal accompaniment (*Van der Lubbe's Head*, second year prize winner was danced to a poem); also agit-prop dances (using stage props and based on specific contemporary themes, viz., *The Blue Eagle, New Theatre Skit*), joyous dances, satires. Among the subjects dealt with in their repertoire are a War cycle, the Scottsboro boys, the N.R.A., Charity, etc. Plans at present call for work on a full length revolutionary ballet.

Still, the New Dance Group has failed to evolve what seems most imperative in organizations of this sort—a Shock Troupe—a troupe to live and work collectively and



New Dance Group in *Uprising*

Photo by Alfredo Valente



New Dance Group in *Uprising*

be able to go into action anywhere, anytime, in the service of the cause it espouses. This absence of a shock troupe has resulted in serious deficiencies in the actual program of the professional group:

1. There is not enough rehearsal time for the creation of new dances to meet the insistent demands for performance.

2. Dance directors and choreographers are developed only with great difficulty to assume responsibility for dances, since intensive work is impossible at this time.

3. In their failure to cover all requests and needs for performance, contact with the working class has been considerably curtailed, and the group has not as yet achieved complete identity and sympathy with the day by day struggles of the working class. For this reason, their dances at times have been vague and their style too abstract for workers' audiences.

THE New Dance Group is a house divided. Its performing members have the problems and responsibilities not only of their immediate activity, but the activity of the dancing classes also. Were these classes really the recruiting ground for new members to be activated into performance, or at least into participation in other phases of the class struggle, there would be no doubt of the validity of the school. A tabulation of membership shows, however, that very few dancers join; there are office workers, school teachers, shop workers, unemployed, housewives, college students. The attraction for these people is recreation at cheap rates (50c a month to all members).

In order to attain its goal therefore, the New Dance Group must make one of two decisions. Either it must raise the price of membership according to the paying ability of the pupils, and in this manner gain support for a professional shock troupe, or it must send all members who are studying for relaxation to dance groups formed by the Workers Dance League in other organizations (Office Workers Dance Group, etc.), and retain only those people showing definite talent or interest in the dance. In order to do this, the Group must attract young dance students by the excellence of its technical training and its clearly defined point of view. These students would eventually become members of the shock troupe or else form individual units to cover more performances.

The organization should therefore appeal immediately for young dancers, male and female, to work with the group either as teachers, performers, or prospective participants along these lines. It is important to reorganize its structure immediately so that the first Performing Group can become a shock troupe and new performing groups can be enlisted from the advanced membership. The entire membership should be activated into more conscious participation in the class struggle (demonstrations, marches, picket lines, attendance at the Workers School, etc.), so that whatever dances are done derive coloring and life from the revolutionary struggle.

Dance Notes

MODERN AMERICAN DANCE?

WE QUESTION that the Guggenheim fellowship awards in dancing were an attempt to further the modern dance in America. One of the most amusing high lights of the past dance season was the award to Miss Angna Enters. This Milwaukeean who returns from Greece to make her debut in New York December 9th, was the second dancer to receive the honors. To quote Mr. John Martin, dance critic of the *New York Times*, the first recipient was Martha Graham, "who two years ago was enabled to go to Mexico to carry out a project for the study of primitive dancing." We cannot be too grateful for the thoughtfulness of the Foundation in having permitted us, through Miss Graham, a peep into the primitive past. This year-of-grace our horizon is rich with the promise of Miss Enters' undertaking. Her project was "for the study of archaic and classic Greek art forms, including dancing, miming and music, for the creation of a cycle of mimes based upon the myths, religious rites, manners and customs of the Greeks." . . . Let us entertain no doubts . . . The Greeks had a word for it.

DANCE SCRIPT CONTEST

The New Dance Group is sponsoring a contest for the Workers Dance League. This contest calls for a prize winning dance scenario or libretto for a ballet or mass dance. The subject matter must be suitable for performance on May 1st. One need not know how to dance or direct dances in order to participate in this contest; leave that problem to the League. This is for writers, poets, thinkers, scenarists, who have ideas they would like to see danced. . . . Dance scripts to be submitted before December 1st to the Dance Editor, *New Theatre*. . . . The prize will be the entire Little Lenin Library.

LET US PRESENT

It is gratifying and significant to note whom the W.D.L. recruits into its ranks. Along with hundreds of workers, students, and professionals in other fields, our membership already boasts of the best of the younger dancers,—dancers who are the outstanding products of the finest the bourgeois schools can put forward. We wonder if Martha Graham, Hanya Holm and Doris Humphrey realize that their best pupils, almost without exception have allied themselves, either as teachers, performers, or leaders of groups with the revolutionary dance movement. Jane Dudley and Miriam Blecher of the Wigman School, Anna Sokolow and Sophie Maslow of the Martha Graham Concert Group, Ernestine Henoch and Bill Matens of the Humphrey-Weidman Group, and others have rallied to the support of working class art. In a few years, what dancers will the bourgeois field have when all the logical successors of our bourgeois concert dancers of today are working with and for the revolutionary working class?

NEW THEATRE NIGHTS

Nor is that all. Somewhere else in this issue, in the review of the Dance Observer, mention is made of the heart-breaking difficulties of the concert dancer. Not only must she be rich enough to buy a theatre for an evening, but once she gives a recital, unless she is well known, she dances before a few faithfuls and relatives. Contrast this with our own dancers. On November 25th several of our soloists will perform in recital at the Civic Repertory Theatre, under the auspices of *New Theatre*. We prophesy packed houses for Jane Dudley, Miriam Blecher, Nadia Chilkovsky, Anna Sokolow, Edith Segal. On December 22, at Town Hall, several of our groups are combining in recital, and in January, a program of group and solo dances will be given.

Dancers are being featured on *New Theatre*

programs this fall. Lillian Shapiro's dance, based on Langston Hughes' revolutionary poem, *Good Morning Revolution*, was received with enthusiasm by the audiences at the Civic Repertory Theatre on October 7th. Sophia Delam, whose article on the folk dance appears in this issue, will dance at the next *New Theatre* Night, November 4th at the Civic Repertory.

John Martin has become suspiciously cautious and is steering clear of the W.D.L. Last year he spoke for us, and well of us; he placed us on the New School series; he encouraged us at every turn. This year, however, when broached on our reappearing in the New School Series of Forums on the Modern Dance, he writes: "I am afraid we can't have the W.D.L. in the series this year as we have planned what is in effect a repetition of our first year's program. I was awfully glad to have you last year and certainly hope that we can have you again another year." In view of his repeated assertions that this year is full of hope and promise, his statement that he is going back to the program of the first year smacks of liberal evasion of an issue.

ANN BURLAK SAYS

American workers are hungry for proletarian culture and art. This is being demonstrated every day by the eagerness with which they respond to proletarian plays, movies, dances, poetry and all forms of proletarian art.

An excellent indication of this desire of American workers, was the response of the Paterson textile workers to the program given at the 15th Anniversary of the Communist Party meeting, held there recently.

The Red Dancers, under the direction of Edith Segal, presented an appropriate dance called the "Sell-Out." Coming on the heels of the betrayed national textile strike, the dance, depicting the role of Gorman and the Arbitration Board, demonstrated the great value of such groups as the Red Dancers in the labor movement. It is especially significant that the Red Dancers are up to date in preparing a special dance about Gorman and his sell-out tactics.

A young Negro, member of the Jack London Club of Newark, made such a stirring impression by his recitation of "Good Morning Revolution" (a poem by Langston Hughes) that the audience demanded he repeat the recitation. He was thunderously applauded and cheered.

The affair ended with the presentation of the play, "America, America" by the Jack London Club of Newark. The workers left the meeting feeling greatly inspired by the program.

We should have more such groups, to put life and color into our mass meetings. All our talented groups such as the Red Dancers and theatrical groups should keep up with the events of the day, and prepare presentations that are fresh and inspiring. More power to our Red Dancers and theatre groups. They should have the whole-hearted support of every revolutionary fighter.

ANN BURLAK.

Efrem Zimbalist, world renowned violinist, who recently returned from the Soviet Union, will give his opening New York recital Sunday evening, November 18, at Carnegie Hall. The proceeds are for the Anti-Nazi Fighting Fund . . . a fund that deserves the support as well as the interest of all who are against fascism. Zimbalist says, "In all my experience in playing before enthusiastic audiences, I have never been so thrilled as I was in Moscow before the Soviet workers, whose spontaneity stimulated and inspired me."

The Movie Front

National Film Conference

THE revolutionary film movement marches on-ward! At the historic first national film conference of the Film and Photo Leagues of the U.S. held last month in Chicago, delegates from Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Boston and New York pledged to devote themselves tirelessly to building and strengthening the workers film movement in America. The National Film and Photo League was set up as an instrument for consolidating the work of the various leagues and for conciliating and uniting the many outside film and photo groups throughout the country on a minimum program of activity.

Nearly forty reels of documental film produced during the past year by the various groups were brought to the conference by the delegates for exhibition and discussion. The presence of so much vivid evidence of the reality of the revolutionary film movement in America almost alone sufficed to keep the discussions at the conference on a high level. At the close of the meetings many of the films were put on view before a critical audience.

The conference dealt with practically every problem that can confront amateur and professional film and photo workers. Problems of production, processing and developing, distribution, organization, agitation, politics, theory, were thoroughly covered and conclusions reached. Resolutions were passed in support of NEW THEATRE magazine, central organ of the National Film and Photo League; the National Bureau was empowered to work out plans for increasing the space allotted for film and photo activity in the magazine, to include center-

spread photo montages in every issue and wider representation of articles on film and photo production.

It was brought out at the conference that some Leagues were divided on the question of newreel or enacted film production. It was pointed out that the history of the film, unlike the other arts, dates back a mere quarter century; that the early beginnings of all the arts and crafts were devoted, like the present-day newreel, to the things seen and interpreted—in clay, paint, song, dance, from which point they had thousands of years to develop to their present imperishable forms. But the film, although only in its twenty-fifth year, has already been so heavily overloaded with the trappings of previous arts, that, excluding the Soviet film, it can no longer be considered film at all, but bad theatre, literature, whatever you wish. The Soviet film began with the Kino-Eye and grew organically from there on. The Film and Photo Leagues rooted in the intellectual and social basis of the Soviet film begin also with the simple newreel document, photographing events as they appear to the lens, true to the nature of the revolutionary medium they exploit in a revolutionary way. Aside from the tremendous historical and social value of the reels thus photographed, they are also true beginnings of film art. The reels exhibited at the conference with all their weaknesses of lighting, photography, direction, are the only films in America that breathe a spirit of life and art. They are beginnings on the right track.

The mandate of the conference was that the major task before the Film and Photo Leagues of America in this coming period must be the continuous and widespread production of newsreels and documents of the class struggle in action principally, and secondly, whenever and wherever the occasion calls, semi- or wholly enacted film production logically developed out of the firm newreel base. The tremendous growth of the workingclass movement coupled with the increase of strikes and class warfare makes it imperative for the Film and Photo Leagues to concentrate its best film and photo forces on the field of battle, adequately to record the vital events of our time. A resolution was passed therefore calling upon every League to institute a shock production troupe of the most talented cameramen in the organization, whose main function will be the production of newsreels and documents. At the

same time each group must establish a training school to develop potential members of the newreel troupe, to provide a constant influx of new members for this important work. The conference adopted a resolution to be sent to the newly elected National Committee of the John Reed Club asking their co-operation in the preparation of scenarios, and to the League of Workers Theatres to assist with actors, equipment, etc. in the event they are called upon to help on enacted or documentary film production. The National League was authorized to go ahead and make plans for the production of four 35mm documents on coal, steel, the farm question, the South. It was decided that 16mm should be the basic stock used locally by the Leagues for the coming period; on a National scale 35mm is to be used and later reduced to 16mm for mass distribution.

A NATIONAL Film Exchange was set up to insure wide national circulation of all films produced by the various Leagues. This to avoid a recurrence of a situation where Los Angeles, for instance, produced over twenty reels of film, but most of which were not exhibited outside California. The central apparatus in New York is to function as a clearing house and whenever possible hold negatives from which prints can be quickly struck for distribution.

A Photo Exchange Department was also established to facilitate the publication of photos coming in from various parts of the country in the working-class and other press and periodicals in New York and elsewhere. In addition the Photo Exchange Department was given power to plan a National Photo Exhibition and assist the Leagues as much as possible in photomontage work.

Plans for carrying on more effective agitational work against anti-workingclass films were thoroughly discussed. The conference agreed that the Leagues must attempt to draw more liberal pacifist anti-war, anti-fascist organizations into the fight against reactionary films and not as in the past, carelessly dissipate time and energy in conducting huge mass campaigns against films like *S.A. Mann-Brand* and *No Greater Glory*, single-handedly. The Film and Photo Leagues must of course take the initiative in exposing such films, but the campaigns must be conducted only in conjunction with other organizations, never alone. The Los Angeles Film and Photo League, particularly, was urged to wedge its way more sharply into the film industry as a vital means of fighting reaction while it is still in embryo; also to make lasting contacts within the Motion Picture Workers Industrial Union of Hollywood.

A RESOLUTION was adopted for the publication of a monthly National Film Bulletin of organization and agitation under the direction of the National Educational Chairman.

Resolutions were passed affiliating the National Film and Photo League to the national Workers International Relief; the local Film and Photo Leagues to affiliate to the local W.I.R. if or when established.

A National Executive Committee consisting of a National Secretary, a resident National Bureau, and the Executive Secretaries of the various Leagues supplemented by endorsers and advisers was established. David Platt was elected the first National Secretary of the Film and Photo League. Other officers of the National Bureau elected for one year are: Tom Brandon, Frank Ward, John Masek, M. Green.

The delegates voted unanimously to hold a convention of all existing film and photo groups next October in Hollywood, California.

David Platt.

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Voice of the Audience

I SAW BOTH

To the Editors of NEW THEATRE:

New York City, October 5, 1934.

The Center Theatre is part of Radio City, is part of Rockefeller Center, is part of the most colossal, stupendous, lavish architectural feat this city has seen. The theatre is immense, with a forty-foot stage, muralled lavatories, and a little thirteen-year-old boy at the door who tells you in a eunuch-like voice where to go with your tickets. You sit down in wide, comfortable, soft seats with plenty of room for your knees and a push-button light to read your program in the dark.

You sink back in your seat and never come forward again until intermission. The production is *The Great Waltz*, an epic spectacle with hundreds of people on the stage, a ballet of fifty, music by Johann Strauss, myriad-colored costumes, gargantuan sets, cyclorama stage, comedy relief love interest, and a baritone—all by the beneficence of Nelson Rockefeller.

The theatre is crowded. The audience is middle-aged and suburbanish, solid bourgeois; no young people here. The production captivates only one organ—the eye. The audience mopes, gapes, stares dully, yawns, simpers patronizingly at the comedy relief, gushes at the acts, applauds the finale, sighs, is bored. The talent is execrable. The seats are soft. The play is stuffily irrelevant.

The Civic Repertory Theatre is across the way from the Salvation Army and a row of pawnshops, clothing stores, orange juice stands (and the NEW THEATRE office). It is decrepit, musty, drafty, smelly, poorly ventilated. The seats are hard. Mine was behind a post. A boy and a girl are in the corner of the stage with a soft light on them. The girl has on a street dress, the boy a shirt and a pair of pants. The theatre is hot and jammed. People sit on the edge of their seats. The boy and girl are saying something. Something very prosaic about love, job, depression, bastard-luck, baby, job. They stand stiffly, recite restrainedly. A powerful electric thrill shoots through the audience; clutch the knee, crack the knuckle, watch breathlessly two kids talking. No one in this audience is over thirty-five; most are under twenty-five. The recitation reaches an hysterical crescendo in the lives of the boy and the girl. The tense audience deflates with a mass sigh and a wondrous gasp. There is a terrific, rocking applause. The Jack London Club of Newark is presenting Alfred Kreymborg's mass poem, *America, America*, on a NEW THEATRE night.

I saw both. Everybody used to tell me "these reds, these dogmatists, they deny life to fit their phoney pattern, they deny human values, they insult the intelligence, they're a pack of theorists—after all, life can't be pressed into a mold," etc., etc. Those two kids in the corner of the stage, standing stiffly, summed up for me the strength, the complete relevancy, the zest for life, which the revolutionary theatre possesses. That stinking old 14th Street Theatre pulsed with a power which the Center Theatre can never have.

Not until after the revolution. That's why I'm for your revolution: so that the revolutionary theatre may be able to take over the Center Theatre and fill it. After all, these capitalists, they know how to build theatres. It's a fine stage, comrades!

—JOHN JOSEPH SAMPSON.

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We Gather Strength

Eastern Theatre Festival

FROM every point of view the Eastern Festival and Conference, held September 21-23, in New York, displayed a development of a sincere interest in the revolutionary theatre, professional and amateur, as an art and craft. For the first time in the history of the American Revolutionary Theatre movement the bulk of the discussion did not revolve about inner organizational problems but around creative problems facing the various theatres.

A definite tendency was manifested by the representatives from Detroit, Cleveland and Boston to isolate the revolutionary theatre from all other existing theatres: to regard the short forms as the only true representative revolutionary theatre form, and to leave the whole field of "stationary" theatre to the "Little Theatre" movement. While it is desirable to have a certain amount of specialization in the larger cities where it is possible to establish any number of theatres (stationary, professional and short form), in the smaller centers where there is almost no bourgeois theatre, the revolutionary theatres must undertake the task of producing short plays of a mobile character as well as two or three full length productions during a given season. Wherever such work has been attempted (in New York and Newark) the results have shown that the revolutionary theatre can in short time become the leading cultural force in the community. Not only that, but such productions provide the possibility for absorbing all sincere theatrical artists who are either working with the Little Theatres or not working at all. The reports of the delegates invariably indicate that such artists and technicians are present in every city but no effort is made to win them over by providing the means for creative expression. The fact that such leading theatre artists as George Sklar, Lee Strasberg, and Mordecai Gorelik participated fully by contributing their views on repertory, directing and scenic design, shows that New York has made great progress in this direction. The conference very definitely recommended to the groups to make every attempt to overcome their isolation.

Coupled with this is the problem of a more serious approach to the creation of repertory and production. It was the general opinion of the conference that the repertory of the L.O.W.T. is still very weak and schematic. Very little attempt is made to develop and present a situation in a comprehensible manner. This is largely due to the fact that most of the plays have been written by inexperienced playwrights. The professional playwrights present felt that it is not enough to ask them to write plays. Some provision must be made to compensate such playwrights for their work so that they may devote their time to writing plays for the revolutionary theatre.

The conference recognized in principle this point of view and George Sklar recommended that within the near future a system of royalties be established for major productions where larger incomes are involved, and that a fund be created to compensate playwrights who write short plays which are produced by theatres of action and where mass work is the chief object.

In order to eliminate the low level of production on the part of undeveloped groups the following proposals were made:

1. To establish a production and planning council in each city composed of all leading directors, whether they are connected with a revolutionary theatre or not; and to make these directors available to groups for at least one night a week. Each group admitted to the L.O.W.T. must accept this principle, as part of the program of the L.O.W.T. Professionals who join the L.O.W.T. will find, through the service bureau, a ready field for creative activity.
2. A New York District Training School for organizers and directors to be established by Dec. 1st.
3. Scholarships to be established for members of out-of-town groups to work with such groups as the Workers Lab. Theatre for a period of a few months.
4. Outlines for classes in revolutionary theatre to be sent out to the groups by the L.O.W.T.

In order to make it possible for every progressive group to become affiliated with the League of Workers Theatres and to enter into joint actions, 't

1. The L.O.W.T. undertakes to conduct a campaign through the medium of the theatre against Fascism and War, and for the defense of the U.S.S.R.
2. The L.O.W.T. is opposed to censorship.

The record growth of *New Theatre* from an "inner organ" reaching only 2,500 average sales per month as late as May, 1934, to a broad, mass base of 9,000 readers per month, was regarded as one of the most encouraging signs of rapidly growing interest in the workers theatre. The failure of the magazine to provide the groups with enough specific material for their use was pointed out, and after the editors explained what difficulty they had obtaining such material, each delegate promised to activate the best writers in his group to write for *New Theatre*.

The conference decided that *New Theatre* is one of the best mediums for interesting professional and little theatre artists and technicians in the workers' theatre. Resolutions were passed to arrange *New Theatre* Nights at once, to support the Five Month Plan, to attempt to gain new readers and new subscribers for *New Theatre* by a concerted drive in each group.

Though the conference itself cannot accomplish the task of transforming the theatres into vital mass theatres, we did lay a basis for this transformation. It is up to the groups under the leadership of the L.O.W.T. to eradicate all forms of isolation, particularly isolation from the broad masses of workers. Too few attempts have been made to duplicate the experience of the Workers Lab. Theatre, which is performing regularly in the streets and on the waterfront. There is even a conscious tendency on the part of some groups to play more and more exclusively for revolutionary organizations. The reason is obvious. These groups feel that the revolutionary audiences are more appreciative and understanding. When an audience does not appreciate a performance of a Workers Theatre it is only proof that there are new fields to conquer. Improved quality of production will enable our theatres to approach any audience and get a warm response.

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SHOCK TROUPE IN ACTION

(Continued from page 13)

old tenement on the East Side—the twelve of them in a five-room flat. When they moved in last January, they slept on the floor for a week, until friends managed to round up enough old furniture to stock the apartment. During the summer nights when the flat was oven-like, everyone slept on the roof. They had no ice-box this summer. But that wasn't a problem. "You see," explains Greta Karnot, "we never had enough food to keep in an ice-box anyway."

Food was—and still is—the greatest domestic problem of the Shock Troupe, since they are dependent mainly on the contributions of friends and sympathizers. Ten dollars a week, or roughly about thirteen cents per person a day, is the average expenditure for food. They eat no luncheon,

A SENSE of humor, intense devotion to a common cause, and a policy of frequent self-criticism has enabled the Shock Troupe to live amicably in their crowded quarters. They meet once a week for an hour of self-criticism. Sloppiness in

Each Shock Trouper must adhere to a rigid schedule. Everyone rises at eight sharp and breakfasts at nine.

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11:15-12—Meeting—discussion of bookings, repertoire.

12-2—Rehearsal of repertoire: *Newsboy*.
2-2:15—Rest period.
3-4—Rehearsal of satiric skit: *Hollywood Goes*
4-5—Song practise.
5-6—Dinner.
7-8—Waterfront performance: *Dr. Fixemup*.
9-10—Needle Workers Industrial Union Hall: *Free Thaelmann*.

"Playing out in the street is a rich performance for the actor," they say, "There is a powerful reciprocity between actor and audience. There is no barrier between us. We're so close to each other that the feeling of acting disappears. We can't pretend or fake. We've got to give it all we've got."

As we go to press the Shock Troupe is taking an active part in the Communist Party election campaign, in addition to their regular concentration work on the docks.

The Shock Troupe is making theatre a sharper weapon!

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THREE SONGS ABOUT LENIN

(Continued from page 10)

Accordion ho'ds its own alongside *Shame* and *Patriots*. This is a real accomplishment since it is a first film and its director, Savchenko, is 23 years old! The youthful quality that permeates the film is responsible for its strength and weakness. Its weak points are relatively unimportant because the film shows a fresh approach and establishes a new kind of Soviet film.

This is the first film made in the U.S.S.R. to be built upon an extremely simple plot, developed by music as a plot element, rather than as a background. Of course the classic model for this genre is *Sous les tois de Paris* which the director has obviously seen. He has not made the mistake of transferring method, subject, and plot wholesale from Paris to Moscow. Savchenko has taken a plot which is truly Soviet, even though it is much too fragile for a full-length film. There is no attempt to inflate the importance of the material beyond its normal dimensions. The result is gay, fresh; and the audience enjoys it.

Besides being a gay film, *Accordion* bears witness to the wisdom of admitting hundreds of young workers into the Soviet film industry; bringing with them the healthy ideology of the Komsomol, of the factory and collective farm.

By J. L.

HOLLYWOOD SEES PINK

(Continued from page 15)

At least in *Heroes for Sale*, Mr. Barthelme didn't arrange a happy ending by suggesting an equally amiable solution of the matter of the unemployed ex-soldier, but he did substitute a sort of mystical vagueness at the conclusion of the film that was similarly stultifying. Then, in the film version of *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, we were informed, after a good deal of penetrating criticism of reform via Congress, that a fascist body of ex-soldiers could shoot a few lobbyists and reform everything immediately. Of course, too, the films have played vaguely with fascism in *Gabriel Over the White House* and DeMille's *This Day and Age*, but they did so with even less conviction than they displayed in "defending" the revolution in *British Agent*.

[To the editors of NEW THEATRE it seems that Richard Watts seriously underestimates the propaganda of Hollywood's commodities. However unconscious they may be in their pre-fascist interpretations of both revolutionary and bourgeois subjects, the objective effect of their direction points clearly and directly toward fascism as even a superficial glance at the films Watts mentions will indicate. "Victorian liberalism" is much too mild a term to apply to the producers of *Gabriel Over the White House*, *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, *No Greater Glory*, etc., producers who are so closely meshed with that arch-diocece of finance capital, the Chase National Bank. Columbia's publicity announcement that it has in production "an anti-red yarn, propaganda, so to speak, against communists," should dispel the notion that the "idiot movie producers" don't know what it is all about when it comes to defending their class.]

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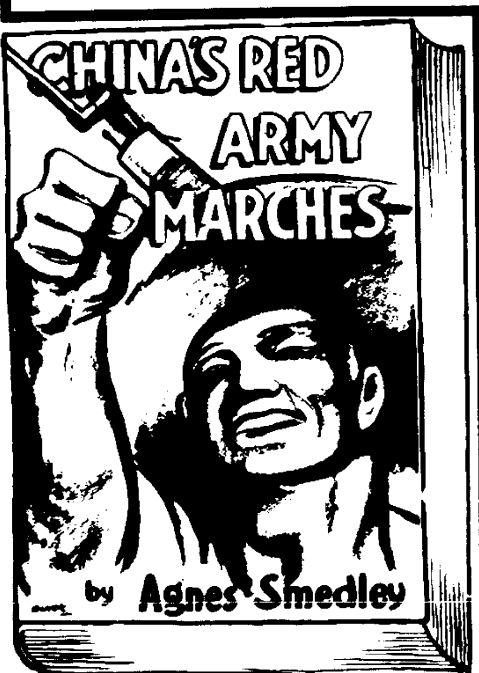
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