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Theatre Against War and Fascism

By ARCHIBALD MACLEISH

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TWO nights ago I read in the paper that *Waiting For Lefty* was to close. I went to see it again. It was a sweltering night—air you could hardly breathe outside and inside a slow, sweating breathlessness. There were no more than half a dozen theatres open in the city and those few barely filled. Even the gentlemen who live by having (and publishing) one dramatic reaction regularly every day like bran flakes for breakfast had given up: they were filling their news columns with personal items about parties in Hollywood. The theatre was dead—the theatre as Broadway and Broadway's intellectuals understand the word. There wasn't enough life in it to justify the ads.

That was outside the Longacre. Inside the Longacre it was also hot. Every time the curtain went down the temperature of the room went up. There was no more breeze than a hat would make hanging in a closet. But no one, after the first minute, noticed. Because inside the Longacre something was going on which made heat and air and almost everything else irrelevant. You can call it anything you like. If the word *theatre* means the kind of thing the Pulitzer Prize judges recognize and the kind of thing the critics of the one-a-day approve then it wasn't theatre. But if it wasn't then so much the worse for the word. And so much the worse for those who use it.

Now the point I am trying to make is not that Clifford Odets is a good playwright nor that his work is better than anything else in New York. The first fact is pretty widely known and the second is obvious. The point I am trying to make is that Clifford Odets and the Group and a crowded sweltering audience created among them something moving and actual and alive. And the implication I am trying to suggest is that this moving, actual, living thing existed only in the Longacre theatre and not in the theatres where the regular seasonal offerings familiar to the trade were wheeling through their manequin ceremonies.

In that point and in that implication lies a truth which American writers, revolutionary or not, cannot continue to ignore. The truth is this: The American theatre is dead and the American theatre is now alive. The American theatre is as dead as we have been saying it was for many years and the American theatre is more alive than it has ever been in its history. What is dead is the commercial theatre with all its appurtenances, all its critical and promotional paraphernalia, all its tricks, all its grimaces. What is alive is

the workers' theatre with all its lacks, all its poverty, all its meagerness—and all its passion, its eloquence, its insolence, its force. The workers' theatres offer a stage and a hearing for the best work and the most honest work any writer of verse or prose is capable of doing. For the first time since I have known anything about such matters there exists a theatre in which dishonesty is not demanded, in which hokum is not a compulsory ingredient. There is offered, in other words, a theatre for art.

And there is offered also something more. There is offered an opportunity to affect the life of our time. No serious artist, no matter what he might pretend—no matter what the conditions of importance of his life might force him to pretend—has ever doubted that his art would have fundamental meaning for him only when he could feel the impact of his art not upon the appreciation of an audience, not upon the judgment of a critic, but upon the life of the generation of which he is a part. There is no greater persuader than art when it is permitted to touch the vital nerves. There is nothing more frivolous than art when it is denied access to the sources of life. In the workers' theatres art may touch and reach. It may be more powerful than the possessors of power, more serious than the creators of knowledge, more persuasive than the actions of armies.

Now, sooner or later, it is probable that the people of this country will be faced with a choice of which one alternative will be fascism. The appeal of fascism, since it has no intellectual content and no economic logic, is purely emotional. Against emotion only emotion, in the great masses of men, can fight. Against the false and journalistic emotions of fascism the real and human emotions of art must contend. There therefore exists in the workers' theatres not only an opportunity for an honest art and not only an opportunity for the impact of an honest art upon the life of this generation but an opportunity for the delivery of that impact at the precise point where it is most essential that the life of this generation should be influenced. In support of fascism, when the time comes, there will be enlisted all the forces which money can buy—the press, the movies, the commercial theatre. They will be lined up as they were lined up during the war. Their power will be overwhelming. Against them will stand the artists whom money cannot buy. And yet, and despite the discrepancy in numbers, in wealth, in everything else which creates discrepancies, the conflict will not be unequal. No power on earth can outpersuade the great and greatly felt work of art when its purpose is clear and its creator confident.

AS NEW THEATRE goes to press, Luigi Pirandello, Italy's Nobel prize winning playwright, arrives on the *Conte di Savoia*, a bright Fascist badge in his lapel, a fat Hollywood contract in his pocket, "breathing fire" on Ethiopia.

"I am a Fascist because I am an Italian," declared the man who had a play closed down in Italy only a few years ago because it was considered "un-Fascist." Although Pirandello said "he never mixed politics and literature," he issued a statement which read in part: "The American people have conquered a whole continent and made it a home for the prolific work of the white race. I am sure they cannot withhold their sympathetic feelings for the Italian people, determined to call to civilization the last African region where slavery is still openly and shamefully perpetuated."

Ostensibly here to make a scenario for a Hollywood version of one of his plays, Pirandello revealed his real mission in this country by this open bid for American support of Mussolini's intended invasion of Ethiopia. Pirandello's war-cry elicited protests from the following prominent theatre workers:

JOHN HOWARD LAWSON: "Luigi Pirandello is in this country as a propagandist for Fascism. He describes Mussolini's brutal attack on the Negro people of Ethiopia as a service to 'civilization.' Every writer who respects the honor and dignity of his craft should protest this prostitution of a writer in the service of destructive reaction.

"Everyone knows that Mussolini has 'civilized' Italy by ruthless suppression and destruction of civil rights. Everyone knows that the African adventure of the black shirt gangsters is an attempt to rob and enslave an independent nation. Pirandello has declared himself as an open enemy of culture and progress. This pretentious and dishonest aesthete should receive a vigorous answer from the whole American people. The best answer that can be given is to raise our voices in the August 3rd demonstration against war and fascism."

CLIFFORD ODETS: "Pirandello's shameless propaganda for war against the Ethiopian people reveals the complete bankruptcy of Italian fascist thought. There is a definite tie-up between Pirandello's art and the decadent culture of Fascist Italy. Pirandello reflects the 'civilization' he is ballyhooing in this country. As an artist, he has nothing important left to say. All he can do is repeat himself. As a man he can

sink no lower than to be Mussolini's official tool."

ROSE McCLENDON: "Pirandello's statements supporting Mussolini's planned attack on our people in Ethiopia demonstrates how low the artist must fall to endure under Fascism. I am glad to add my protest to those of men like John Howard Lawson and Clifford Odets against Pirandello and all he represents. Lawson did not hesitate to risk his life in Alabama out of sympathy for the Negro people and Odets recently faced physical danger in an effort to expose the terror directed

"I appreciate Signor Pirandello's dilemma. If he dared to voice such an opinion, a quart of good Fascist castor oil would be poured down his gullet upon his return to Italy. Fearful of such heroic catharsis, he should have adhered to his first discreet statement; that he knows nothing about such matters. It was a mistake to prove it."

ELMER RICE: "I have read the newspaper reports of Signor Pirandello's statements regarding Italy's proposed action in Ethiopia. If this really represents his point of view, I would like to go on record as being heartily in disagreement with him. I consider Italy's attack on Ethiopia an act of unwarranted imperialistic aggression, and one which should receive the condemnation of all people who believe in liberty."

MORDECAI GORELIK: "Pirandello declares he is not concerned with political questions . . . he is an artist, not a politician. In the same breath he calls for the invasion of Ethiopia. This is an example, evidently, of Pirandello's highly publicized 'subtlety' of thought. The fact that Pirandello is playing stooge for the Italian embassy is perhaps another example of artistic freedom, but, in fact, Pirandello has for sometime been notorious as a doddering servant of Italian Fascism; he represents everything that is deadly to the theater

and to organized labor in the theatre."

Pirandello Arrives, Damning Ethiopians

Nobel Prize Winner Defends Duce's Acts in Africa, but Statement Sounds Like Ghost-Writer's Work

By D. A. DAVIDSON

Luigi Pirandello, Italy's shrewd, mystic novelist and playwright, arrived on the *Conte di Savoia* today breathing fire upon Ethiopia.

It was canned fire in the form of a typed statement which a fellow passenger, commercial attache of the Italian Embassy in Washington, distributed on behalf of the urbane old man even before a large press delegation had made its way into his cabin.

Its prose style was not that which the world associates with Piran-

dello, Nobel prize winner, but more like that of fire-eating Mussolini himself.

Signor Pirandello wanted to rest his political views with that, even pleaded, smilingly, "I don't understand politics," through the corporal's squad of representatives who translated his Italian.

But when a reporter commented mournfully that it wasn't nice to take Ethiopia away from the Ethiopians, Signor Pirandello's fine, small hands leaped into the air; his sharp white beard bobbed excitedly and

New York Post, July 20

against the Cuban people. The Negro theater worker must be equally alert and answer Pirandello's shameful support of Fascist invasion of Italy by supporting the united front for the defense of Ethiopia."

SIDNEY KINGSLEY: "Each time an imperialistic power attacks a weaker people it has assumed a saintly pose, tacked on a halo and cried 'advancement of civilization.' That battle shout is a bit shopworn by now. I expected some fresh approach from Signor Pirandello, even if it were only a frank Machiavellian statement to the effect that Fascism believes in war and cannot exist without it. Signor Pirandello's playwriting has been severely criticized as being too cerebral. On that score his political expressions are above criticism.

"A playwright's first loyalty is to humanity. His only intolerance must be inhumanity. Civilizations are not carried on the point of the bayonet; they are destroyed by sword and fire; never advanced. Not the roaring savage with the saber scar on his cheek, but the quiet fellows, with microscopes, slide rule, pen and ink, carry the banner of civilization.

PIRANDELLO'S visit to the United States is obviously timed to build up sentiment for a war move which is cordially hated by world opinion. Pirandello lied when he declared: "The whole country is behind Il Duce. It is a magnificent thing to see the enthusiasm in Italy now."

Anti-war demonstrations, the flight of hundreds of civilians across Italy's borders to escape conscription, and open mutiny among Mussolini's troops give the lie to Luigi, the Black Shirt.

If Mussolini is allowed to go forward with his Ethiopian campaign, a world wide conflagration is certain to break out. For every sincere anti-Fascist there can be only one course of action—a united front against Mussolini and all war makers.

The New Theatre League, New Dance League and the Film and Photo League, which embody in their day-to-day creative tasks the struggle against war and Fascism, call upon all sincere anti-Fascists to join with them in the August 3rd demonstrations against imperialist war and threatening Fascism.



Mary Wigman and Group in *Witch-Studies*.

Mary Wigman—Fascist

By NICHOLAS WIRTH

IN the April issue of *Das Theater*, Mary Wigman, one of the most outstanding dancers of the modern era, salutes Hitler. For the past two years while living amidst the barbarous brutalities committed by the Brown-shirted hordes she has remained silent. She saw many of her pupils and friends driven out of Germany into exile; she witnessed the burning at the stake of the most precious achievements of human intellect, but her voice remained mute. Finally, in April, 1935, Mary Wigman speaks. She feels proud to be an Aryan and a disciple of the Nazi theoretician, Alfred Rosenberg. Following his footsteps she discovers the missing link of Nazi culture—"The German Dance."

Her thesis is titled *Mary Wigman: Deutsche Tanzkunst*. She speaks of Hitler's Fascism as:

"The great revolution and inversion—a springtide which roared with elementary strength over the German nation and land and must affect the very premise of art as it influences all other phases of life."

Out of this beginning flows the theory of the New German Dance—this dance can only be conceived on German soil by German intellect and can grow into full maturity only in the German milieu. In reality, however, it is the dance created to the groans of men and women tortured in the concentration camps. It no longer needs percussion instruments

for accompaniment; for the cry of hungry children, the beat of soldiers' feet throughout the land, serve the dancer much better. A dancer in Germany today creating the New German Dance needs no designer for costumes; the brown tunic splashed with the blood of many thousand anti-fascists—Jews and Christians, Socialists and Communists—could best express the pure Aryan soul.

In the January issue of the same magazine, a critic finds nothing new, nothing exciting in the art of Mary Wigman. These dances seem to the critics very, very old, typical of the expressionist school. Strange as it may seem, there is no mention of the "German dance." In those three short months Mary Wigman finds herself, and the Nazi press finds Mary Wigman. The years of bitter struggle for recognition are passed. For she has chosen to accept the dictates of Goebbels.

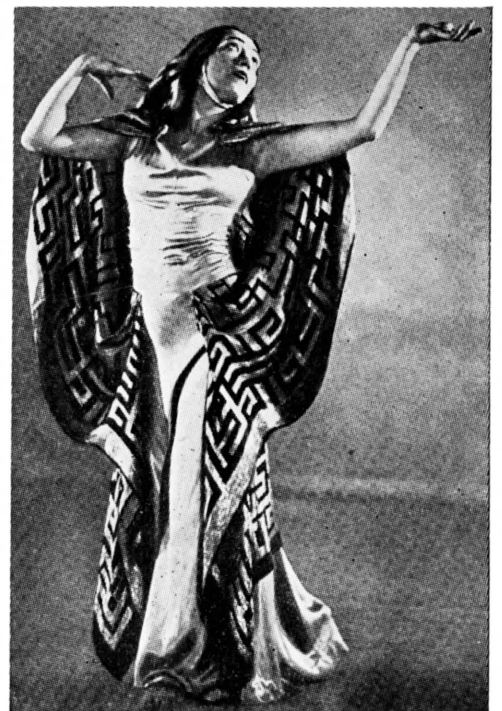
In their efforts to preserve the last remnants of culture in Germany, thousands are facing persecution and death—while Mary Wigman, who belongs in the vanguard of that struggle, deserts. She openly supports the rule of the exploiters, closing her eyes, ignoring the misery; many of her best pupils are working in the other camp, fighting for a new society; and recently, these pupils addressed a letter to Mary Wigman. While they extol the old Mary Wigman, who did so much for the art of the dance throughout the world, they must mourn the Mary Wigman who gives way to Goebbels. When her art had no national bounds, they followed; now, they must leave that memory, while she is Fascist.

In her repertory of death, there can be little hope for humanity. In the decaying Nazi society, she is the prophet whose torch is escape from life. Her dance is a monument to the living dead.

DANCES like *Lament for the Dead*, and recent similar dances are not accidents. Their basic premise is the frustrated spirit of bankrupt Germany. The courage of the underground anti-Fascist movement means nothing to Wigman. No artist with a perspective of progressive society would choose to portray the urge to death as life's major emotional force. The living dance is with the revolutionary artist who projects the class conflicts of our times—a potent factor in the creation of a dance neither German nor French, but belonging to the peoples of the world.

Wigman's pupils cannot believe that she has so easily given up her fight to extend the path which she bravely began. She has fought many times against the accepted concepts of dance forms, against the ballet, against the prewar forms. The depth and breadth of her movements were real—they were motivated by compassion for human suffering. Today, to remain a vital creative artist, she would have to turn against the Nazis and go the way of such Germans as Toller, Piscator, Heinrich Mann, Wolf, and others who have left Germany to struggle against Fascism. But Mary Wigman prefers Fascist Germany to exile. The *Totentanz* is being performed on all the fronts of capitalist society, as together they hurl towards death.

There is a German dance nurtured by hope. Its motives are solidly woven in the growing unity of the German workers. Its music is created with the desire for freedom. Its theme is revolt against Fascism.



Mary Wigman in *Mother Dance*

The Cult of the Flag

By ILYA EHRENBURG

THE preacher delivers his sermon in a barrack hastily constructed for the purpose of recreation. In the evening the soldiers are treated to a comic film. They laugh heartily during the performance of *Charlie Begets a Wife* and of *Max Takes a Cold Shower*. On the walls they see slogans presented for education of the soldiers by the Y.M.C.A. The slogans have painful respectability: "We fight for Justice and our Country." "Think of your wife; beware of venereal diseases!" The soldiers follow Charlie and Max with interest, read the slogans on the walls and sing psalms.

And they remember the cities of their origin. They remember the evenings at home with their families. They are tired of the dampness in the trenches, of the ever-gloomy darkness of the deafening and everlasting noise. Death, when accosted for the first time, is tragic, but when one lives with him side by side, throughout the days, the nights, months and perhaps, years, he becomes as ordinary as a persistent toothache. The corpses of the comrades and of German soldiers lie before their open graves. On dark, hot nights, their stench fills the nostrils. The soldiers no longer think of heavenly justice, they think of the odor of corpses, the foul smell which never leaves them. The fight for culture, for democracy, has become a matter of indifference. They can smile no longer.

The preacher lives in the barrack side by side with the films. In monster boots a queer fellow appears who slips and falls. This is funny. This is very funny, indeed. The soldiers laugh. The monster boots inject life into them. This is no longer the war in the trenches. This is no longer the wasteful ruin of towns and cities. It is no nightmare. This is but an evening in childhood, a peepshow—light and laughter.

The soldiers have laughed and prayed. Now they must be shown why they are sacrificed. At any rate, everyone receives a glass of whiskey before the order for attack is given. The officers yell. Everything changes. This moment is selected to fill them with scorn and hate. On the morrow no one need be afraid; they will beat, stab and kill.

The projection machine whirs on. On the screen a huge shadow appears. He is not Max who takes a shower. This fellow is a monster, a Prussian—the son of a bitch! He breaks into a house and seizes the woman. He shames and chokes her. The children wail and beg: "Please, Mister, spare our darling mother." The beast grimaces and neighs. After having had his fill,

he murders the woman. The orphans cry. This very moment the husband in the trenches kisses the picture of this unlucky woman who fell prey to the lust of a Prussian beast. The husband carefully replaces his wife's picture in his coat pocket, over his heart. He grabs his gun and shoots the wild Prussian. Of course, it is not the same person who seduced his wife, but his brother, just as much of a brute. "A monster less on the earth," he cries, and digs his bayonet deep into the Prussian's heart.

The soldiers curse. "Dogs! We'll show them!" Some of the soldiers gnash their teeth—they are thinking of their wives. Others grin—it would be pleasant to have a woman.

The preacher prays: "God. . . Truth. He gave His soul. . ." Tomorrow they will go into the trenches. The rest period is over. The machine is oiled.

IN a small town, very far from the dugouts, old and young women spend their evenings in the movies. What else could they do? Melancholy, helplessness, is dominant throughout the whole town. There are no men to be found. Here an exciting film is being shown. It is called: *Furor Teutonicus*. The Germans are in Belgium. They murder, and seduce the women. Muller, a German soldier, captures the girl Marie. He locks her in the cellar. "Where is your brother?" Marie is true to her King Albert. She hates and despises Muller. She remains firm and true in spite of all torture. The Allies are preparing to attack. The audience breathes: "Hurry!" Soldiers run gaily across empty meadows. The city is recovered from the German hordes. Pierre, who is young and very good-looking, captures the beastly Muller. Marie's brother appears. He is but a boy, but joins the victorious army, to die if necessary for justice. Muller on his knees begs for mercy. Pierre spares him. The audience is very annoyed. But Pierre is clever like all true Frenchmen. He makes the German walk on his fours. "You're no man, God made a mistake. You're a beast, damn your hide! Don't you ever dare to walk on two feet." And spits into his face. Marie kisses Pierre. They will be married as soon as the allied armies march into Berlin.

The women cry: "For the last two weeks I have no word from him." The women laugh: "He was comical on his fours." The women are angry: "Such brutes should be murdered." They are leaving the theatre. A truck goes by. Prisoners. Undeterred by the lateness of the hour, by the rain, they run after the truck yelling: "Kill the bastards.

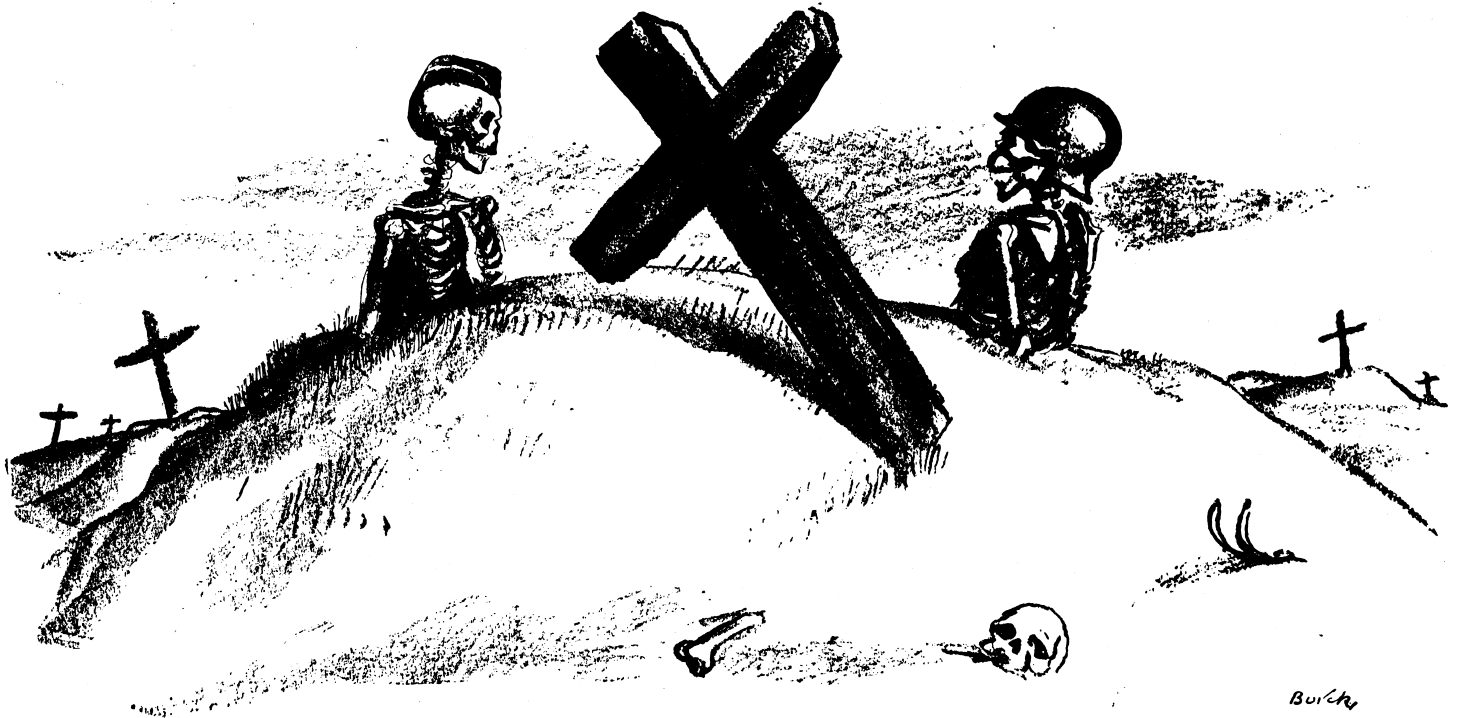
Kill the murderers." A dozen Germans are being transferred to prison camps. They do not comprehend the situation, but the bloodcurdling yells of these mad women frighten them. They huddle together in fear.

THE autumn rain pours in torrents upon the city. Over the city, over the whole world—darkness. The night veils faces of despair, mutes the cries of misery.

This very same evening in Magdeburg, Germany, women witness the showing of a film called *God Punish the British*. John Bull gathers money, drinks whiskey, and grins. In Germany children are dying of hunger. Flash. . . the coffin of a small child. The women curse. The women threaten the shadows on the screen with closed bony fists. "They must perish. Make the bastards suffer. Death is too easy, torture them." Over Magdeburg, Germany, the same night, the same darkness veils the faces of despair, mutes the cries of misery.

Those who fought in the trenches know WAR. War means lice, typhus, dysentery. . . . It means shrapnel, machine guns, hand-grenades, poison gases, amputated bones, wounds, death. . . . War is corpses hanging on barbed-wire. . . . it is darkness, it is continuous night. On the screen the soldiers are victorious under all circumstances. The proud banners of stripes or the stars flutter on the screen. The film never falters, the film fights well. The film deserves dozens of high decorations. But the film does not crave for sad remembrances. It is a spirit and is interested purely in profits and is satisfied with the knowledge that it has fulfilled a patriotic task.

When in Russia the soldiers began to cry for bread and peace, the Entente became very frightened. They understood that threats no longer sufficed. The Frenchmen sent Social-Democrats into Russia. Their task was to convince the Russian masses that their foremost duty was to further the cause of the Allies even though it spelled certain death. The Americans did not trust in the power of the Social-Democrats. But trusted the film. They exported into Russia 64,000 meters of "fighting mood" and "heroic self denial." The gift came too late. In Russia already no one even went near movies. There men yelled, shot at one another, listened to remarkable speeches, and altered the world. These men, in Russia, had no bread; many of them died from hunger—others from bullets. But they did not die for "justice." They died that the world should become a better place for men to live. No one was interested in the "case" from America, America's gift remained untouched.



"Move Over, Buddy, There Are More Coming"

From Jacob Burck's *Hunger and Revolt*.

The Americans started shooting new films. And shortly after released *The Russian Hell* and *The Red Terror* and made up for their losses.

THE War is ended. The Germans are forced to their knees. They starve and remain mute. But who knows? Some day they might revenge themselves. The Englishmen cannot be satisfied. The war goes on. They produce the film: *Huns are Huns* and call upon the population not to buy German-made merchandise. The film was financed by English industrialists during the time when justice was finally triumphant.

In thousands of rooms and cells, alarm clocks announce the early morning. Men wake sadly. Again another day, Tuesday or Wednesday. There is foul air in the subways, the buses are not fit for travel. This is but another day to be spent before workbenches, behind counters. Another day, full of noise, fear and haste.

Those who were in the trenches already forget lice, dampness, stench. But they still remember the danger, nearness of death. They still remember the yearning after home, desire for women, for the bright lights of gay cities and the orgies in the front salons. The War was an adventure and they look back upon it not too kindly, but certainly not with hate.

When the grotesque fights on the screen are shown, they make no comment nor do they curse. An uncertain smile appears on their faces. They remember other things. They have survived the fire and remained alive. It might be a crime, but the matter has its own justification. And they acclaim the bayonet show on the silver screen.

The youth have not as yet experienced

the fight for life in the trenches. They have not accepted as yet the monotony of days. Their fingers itch and out of fury everything becomes muddled in their heads. Will they ever experience outside of numbers, work and days, freedom, adventure, and women's laughter? On the screen men risk their lives, throw bombs from the sky, find old wines in abandoned houses, march past multitudes. On the screen men pursue an eventful existence. Is this war? These youngsters dream of air fleets, machine guns, and girls. Only the alarm clock is able to interrupt the dream. Tuesday or Wednesday. . . . This is how the new generation is being ripened for a new war. It is going to be the "biggest and the last." It will end war. It is going to be filmed with 100% sound. It is going to earn millions and millions of dollars in profit. What have the masses to lose? Nothing except their miserable lives.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer produces *The Great Parade*. At last, war is declared. The brave Americans join the Army. See the world—join the Navy! Class distinction is abolished. The son of Morgan's partner mingles with ordinary laborers. The soldiers are taken to the front. The scene resembles a well designed sport festival. A young maiden winks. The hero throws a flower to her. It is really more exciting than a western cowboy melodrama. Bullets fly, cannons roar. Young girls in the audience bend forward. War is resurrected to another life on the screen. Will Hays is speaking: "We strive for an understanding among the Nations. At the same time we educate our youth in the spirit of heroism." The newspapers repeat his words. The film producers, however, are silent. They are too busy calculating their profit.

During the war Adolph Zukor produced idyllic pictures. Why arouse the masses? But the war is over. He mobilizes his personal war. He commands: "Fire from guns, come with tanks, die, and make love." Every other producer follows suit. Paramount produces: *The Warm Heart*, etc. In a very short time the world scene is flooded with war films to educate the youth in the spirit of heroism. In Hollywood, in Joinville, in Neubalbsberg, big cannons thunder, shrapnel explodes, brave actors groan.

Every week a new war film is released. The four tragic years are forgotten. The invalids vanish, die. There is another war—the war on the screen. The applause is deafening. It outroars the thunder of guns. The Bulletin of the International Cinema Institute quotes the perfume manufacturer Coty: "We must not allow the film to caricature war, for war is the mightiest social factor in the history of mankind."

All countries began to appropriate large sums for the production of military films. These films were not for amusement but for the education of youth. They were produced without stars and without love. There were no sinners. Watching these films the people could learn to use poison gases, bomb and destroy cities, and send ships to the bottom of the ocean.

Today these films are purely "educational," but tomorrow we might find them real, too real. Men will respond to commands. They will salute, crawl on their bellies. Explosion. Another fellow leaves the world. Over a handful of earth the wind will flutter a rag of stripes or stars. . . .

Will Hays often declared: "The film must keep awake the worship for the flag."

[Translated by Nicholas Wirth]

Louella Parsons : Hearst's Hollywood Stooge

By JOEL FAITH

MENTION the name of Louella Parsons within the confines of any select group of Hollywood's trulls, bawds, panderers and chiselers and you will hear a flutter of jealous but respectful conversation.

For Louella Parsons, movie editor of William Randolph Hearst's Universal Service, is subject to the awe and envy of every Hollywood highbinder. She is feared and admired by filmland's leading executives, men well versed in the arts of throat-slitting. From them and from a fringe of cheap hangers-on, Louella is given her due as a past master at tactics which require apt use of the claw and the fang.

Louella's chief function is to ballyhoo Marion Davies, the blond girl friend of her boss. Willie's greatest sorrow is that with all his money and power he has not been able to convince the American people that his bosom friend is an actress. Year after year the senile Sultan of San Simeon pours out his gold in more and more lavish streams trying to buy popularity for Marion. His chief aide in that attempted fraud is Louella. Thus Willie, Marion and Louella constitute the most powerful triumvirate in Hollywood.

Louella was one of the first to write motion picture news for Willie. She wasn't so much in those days until through her, Willie, then a comparatively young blade when you figure he is still going pretty strong at 70, made the acquaintance of numerous young actresses. Then one day Louella, who knew the kind of man Willie was, introduced Marion Davies to him. It must have been love at first sight, for the little blond girl graduate of the Convent of the Sacred Heart in New York — wiser than most convent graduates — from that meeting on became the object of the great man's attentions.

Dated from that time, too, is the long, warm friendship between Louella and Marion. That friendship is compounded not alone of sentiment, because Marion and Louella need each other. In Louella, Willie's girl friend has an ardent champion who will stoop to anything to delude her readers that Marion is an actress. In Marion, Louella has a powerful friend at court. On her dressing table Louella keeps a photograph of Marion on which is written "To the best friend a girl ever had." The writer has profited by her membership in Willie's official family, for she has made it pay and pay and pay and pay.

HER salary is said to be \$500 a week for writing the tripe which is printed in all Hearst papers and syndicated in many others through Universal Service. As toastmistress on the Hollywood Hotel radio hour, she draws another huge figure from Campbell's Soup, sponsors of the program. The "side money" she makes is enormous. When she married Dr. Harry Martin, Hollywood physician, she was given at least a quarter of a million dollars worth of wedding presents. There is a "Parsons Shelf" in practically every major studio, on which are placed her literary efforts. Every once in a while — too often for skinflint producers — Louella writes a scenario. Geniuses may stand ragged and starving outside the gates of Hollywood, but Louella has no trouble selling her scenario ideas. It is not within my knowledge that any of her stories has ever been made into a picture, but worldly wise producers pay her well.

Dr. Martin has profited also by being a son-in-law in Willie's official family. His knowledge of medicine, not to mention the fact that his wife is the powerful Louella, makes him much sought after as a technical director on pictures dealing with any phase of the medical profession. His "social position" has also given him a wide acquaintance among rich actors and actresses. He is a specialist in social diseases and his clients are many.

Harriet Parsons, Louella's daughter, is another beneficiary of her ma's power. For some time after finishing school Harriet found no trouble selling stories to fan magazines. Now she works at Columbia, supervising *Screen Snapshots*, intimate glimpses of stars in their relaxed moments. When Louella leaves town for a vacation "Parsons, Jr." takes over the column. To do the Parson spawn credit, when Louella is away the writing becomes almost literate.

AS I said earlier, Louella's chief job is to misrepresent Marion Davies to the American public. Her latest effort in this conspiracy against film fans is best shown by contrasting her review of *Page Miss Glory*, with a review of the same opus in the Hollywood Reporter. The Reporter is a trade daily, written for business men. In order to survive it cannot lie too freely although it is subject to pressure through purchase of its advertising space. Louella, unfortunately for the public, knows no such limitations. Take a look at this:

Louella's view:

"No picture in a long time has been more eagerly awaited than Marion's first Warner Brothers production, principally because she is the most important comedienne on the screen today and because this is her first picture under the Warner Brothers aegis. The consensus of opinion of the boys and girls who attended the preview of *Page Miss Glory* is that here is a picture that will speak for itself at the box office."

The Reporter's view of Marion's box office appeal:

"With every resource of the Warner First-National studios put at their disposal, it's a sad commentary that this picture turns out to be barely fair program entertainment that will have to depend on the drawing power of Dick Powell for its grosses."

Louella's view of the humor:

"All of the critics agreed that there is a delightful feeling of spontaneous, natural comedy throughout the story which never lessens or becomes forced. I do not think it amiss to say that seldom has any picture brought forth so many honest chuckles as this hilarious comedy. The whole picture is fun. There is a delightful combination of fast action and snappy dialogue that has been happily directed by Mervyn Le Roy."

The Reporter's view:

"What actually comes forth is a long, drawn-out affair that relies on well-worn gags for laugh getters and with one or two exceptions — the old reliables that never fail — the laughs don't come off. Exhibit 'A' of the humor: 'Let's talk turkey.' 'I like steak.' Miss Davies makes her first screen appearance in many months and tries real hard, but the net result is some pretty bad over-acting and a conception of light comedy delivery that only needs a custard pie to bring back Mack Sennett."

Louella's view of Marion's beauty:

"Only a girl as beautiful as Marion Davies would be willing completely to disguise her lovely self in a makeup that is so entirely original as that of the chambermaid. But when Marion blossoms out with a wardrobe that is a triumph of the modiste's skill and in her own natural beauty she offers a contrast that is so exciting that she brought forth oh's and ah's that could never have been achieved had she started without this ridiculous preliminary makeup."

The Reporter:

"George Folsey's photography is excellent and so are the sets, but the gowns are something that not even a movie star could make you like."

ASIDE from her conspiracy with Marion to make people think Willie's bosom friend is an actress, Louella has taken it upon herself to give out more misinformation than any other newspaper or magazine writer in Hollywood. The job is one that comes naturally to her, for Louella's is a bland, invincible stupidity. She misspells names, gets details of happenings on the business side of the industry wrong and makes some of the most incredible mistakes. Many of her boners are due to ignorance, many to her own carelessness, for she is a poor reporter and a wretched writer.

When RKO announced it would make *Green Mansions*, Louella immediately rushed into print with the inside information that Radio would bring W. H. Hudson to Hollywood to help write the screen version of his famous book. The author, of course, had been dead for 10, these many years.

In writing of Warner's decision to use music with *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Louella had this to say:

"Shakespeare or no Shakespeare, there should be some entertainment in films of this kind."

Several years ago when Warners chose Alan Mowbray for the part of George Washington in *Alexander Hamilton*, Louella, with a startling and amusing display of Hearst's "Buy American" stupidity which even she has seldom topped, delivered herself of this:

"It seems strange to me that an Englishman would be cast as the father of our country."

Probably because she can utter such ridiculous things she is kept pretty well off the subject of labor. Even during the Equity strike of 1929 in Hollywood when Conrad Nagel, the Christian Science reader, sold out his fellow workers, Louella steered clear of troubled waters

except to say patronizingly that the striking actors didn't know how lucky they were and that "personally, the producers have always been very lovely to me." At that time the Los Angeles Examiner and other Hearst papers were so bitter against the striking actors and gave so many columns of space to attacks upon them in their news sections that Louella didn't have to bring her popgun into play.

The Parsons column is devoted largely to plugging Marion Davies; to praising Hearst-Warner Brothers for their vicious anti-labor and war-fostering films and as a receptacle for all the cheap drivel that clutters up Hollywood drawing rooms. However, Louella can write upon a social theme, in her own inimitable way, when her pocketbook is threatened. Once she wrote an attack upon the income tax system, pet hatred of the patriotic Willie, and I leave it to you, gentle reader, whether you have ever seen anything in print to rival this piece in which she bellows with all the indignance of a Holstein heifer that has just been slapped athwart the buttocks:

"Taxation without representation is tyranny." Those words have rung down the years since

the historical Boston tea party was the first stepping stone to America's glorious independence. Today these words have come to have an ironic meaning to some of our motion picture people in Hollywood, who have been so flagrantly and unfairly treated by the income tax collectors.

"Our own American Revolution was caused directly by taxation when King George failed to listen to the pleas of the long-suffering colonists. Injustice is bad enough in any class, or individual, but it is particularly outrageous in the case of motion picture people because the whole system of income taxation is an unjust one; and when the exactions of the tax collector are added to the injustice the situation is doubly unjust and intolerable. All the motion picture folk are taxed on their big incomes and no provision is allowed for the lean years."

Then there is this revealing closing argument:

"Everyone has an innate love for his country and certainly no one more than the motion picture player. The first profession to rally to the cause when Uncle Sam declared war against Germany was the motion picture industry. Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin dropped their work and made a tour of the country selling Liberty Bonds. The motion picture screens were opened to propaganda. The Division of Films was formed so that the right messages might be disseminated to the people. Can Uncle Sam so soon forget?"

LOUELLA'S spitefulness is well-known in Hollywood. Let an actor imply, as Leslie Howard did by gracefully backing out of the lead in a second picture opposite Willie's girl friend, that Marion is a ham actress and Louella will "let him have it" in her column. Let anyone cross her, as Tallulah Bankhead did once, and there is nothing she will not do to get revenge. She nags spitefully in her column at people she doesn't like. As for her indifference to the old adage about "glass houses," you should read the way she publicly takes to task certain Hollywood actresses who occasionally go to dinner with married men! Once a new ticket taker on the door of Loew's State theatre in Los Angeles didn't recognize her as she swept through the door. How could he see in this waddling bovine the same radiant vision of the faked published photographs? He stopped her, thinking of all things that she might be the kind of person who would want something for nothing, and he almost lost his job. Louella did her best to have the youth fired, but a fair house manager took the boy off the door and saved him his job.

Laughter burns in the heart when one realizes what Louella's position in Hollywood indicates. She is Hollywood's sacred cow. The feeling of reverence, fear and awe she inspires in leaders of the motion picture industry speaks for itself. That this waddling drivel-monger, this venomous, disagreeable woman can be respected by the big shots, is a sad, sad commentary upon the industry. There is some hope, however, that the increasingly successful boycott of Hearst's papers will greatly weaken the influence of "the best friend a girl ever had."



Louella Parsons—
"The best friend
a girl ever had."

Columbia, the Gem of the Drama

By ROBERT FORSYTHE

NOTHING excites me more than Art and I am correspondingly elated at the news that a National Theatre has been authorized by Congress and that we are to see drama elevated to its former state, including a revival of *St. Elmo*. Reading rather intently through news reports of the venture I am not prepared to explain its significance other than to say that judging from the list of incorporators our great nation is dwindling. The forty-four incorporators are taken from the four cities of Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York. This neglects such cultural centers as Los Angeles, Boston and Newark, N. J., and I very much doubt that any good can come of a move to re-establish the supremacy of the Thirteen Colonies, even with such exceptions as noted.

From what I can gather from such sources as *Variety* and my contacts with the inner circles of Tory Society, the move is sponsored by Mr. J. Howard Reber of Philadelphia, who was in charge of shows in the camps during the war and has not recovered. Acting on the basis that what was good enough for the boys at Camp Dix is good enough for the matrons of Chevy Chase and Haverford — a notion which has very good grounding, Mr. Reber and his associates were broaching the subject to Mr. Franklin D. Roosevelt at Hyde Park six months before he was nominated. Naturally gratified by such evidence of clairvoyance, Mr. Roosevelt went so far as to suggest that his uncle, Frederick C. Delano, a specialist on national planning projects, be called in. Up to this time it had been all Reber and Philadelphia. Mr. Delano immediately saw the weakness of such a setup and insisted upon spreading the honor about. Hence Baltimore, Washington and New York. Boston was omitted on the ground that since Denman Thompson and *The Old Homestead* could not be disinterred, there was no likelihood that even a theatre sponsored by Mrs. George Horace Lorimer of Philadelphia could produce a play which could be acted intact in the Home of Cod.

The measure, known as the Wagner-McLaughlin bill, was passed unanimously in a House of Representatives which has been long noted for its interest in the arts and was doubtless impressed by the fact that no Federal endowment was asked. It had previously passed the Senate, a body equally sensitive to things of the spirit. According to the *New York Times*, the corporation "is set up, without Federal endowment, to present productions of the highest type in the theatre; stimulate public interest in the drama; advance this interest by the production throughout the

country of the best plays, acted by the best actors at a minimum cost; encourage the study of the drama in schools, universities and colleges, and develop the art and technique of the theatre through a school within the proposed National Academy."

This seems modest enough, upon reflection, and little remains now but to raise the money, secure the best plays and begin showing them throughout the country, acted by the best actors at a minimum cost. Why nobody has thought of this previously is beyond me. It has long been patent that the firm of Wee and Leventhal could not hope to cover the nation in a way satisfactory to all drama lovers. There have been additional attempts to bring such masterpieces as *The Patsy* and *Tommy* to the masses by way of a company traveling by truck and there have been intermittent tours by Miss Katharine Cornell, Mr. George Cohan, *The Green Pastures* company and two active Uncle Tom companies playing under tent in regions north of the Mason-Dixon line but it could hardly be said that in this show of febrility there was any solace for a man like J. Howard Reber who had practically maintained the morale of the Pershing forces in those dark days when the fate of democracy and civilization hung in the balance. I am not prepared to give full credit to Mr. Reber for all camp shows but I have been told by many ex-service men that

after a production of the usual drama at the base unit, they were eager to go out and die for their country.

WHAT the sponsors of the movement possibly have in mind is something like the Comedie Francaise, with a Philadelphia tinge. In France the thing led to the setting up of a National French Diction, a procedure profitable to various buck-toothed Mademoiselles who are paid to teach it to Americans. It also keeps in production some good and many bad French classics and a good number of actors who are friends of the director—something parallel to our own Metropolitan Opera. It is also a device for stringing out an ingenue's career to the age of fifty. Since the Comedie Francaise specializes in revivals, there is every likelihood that the American National Theatre will find that original plays of a type sufficiently stupid to interest a committee headed by such theatrical geniuses as John W. Davis and Frank L. Polk of New York, and William Green of Washington (could this be our Willie of the A. F. of L.?) will be difficult of attainment and then will come the task of selecting the American masterpieces which cry for reproduction. The greatest of all, naturally, is *Abie's Irish Rose*, with a record run of five years in New York, but it would take an imagination superior to my own to fancy the



New Theatre Proposes a Curtain for the National Theatre

Designed by Anton Refregier

ermine-clad, diamond-choker audience marching down the aisles at an opening night to see Miss Nichols's famous gold machine again in action. There are, of course, always *Way Down East* and *East Lynne* and *The Drunkard* or even *Bought and Paid For*, *It Pays to Advertise* or *Alias Jimmy Valentine*. Or the entire repertory, over a period of ten years, of the plays of America's foremost dramatist, Owen Davis. Or perhaps a revival of *Gods of the Lightning* or *Lucky Sam McCarver* or *Stevedore*?

This brings up a point. At the time Mr. McLaughlin of Nebraska was steering his National Theatre measure through the House, a feat comparable to engineering an adjournment on the Fourth of July, there was excitement in Washington over a drama which the Hearst papers and the various patrioteers were trying to keep out of town. There will be no prize for the best guess. It was that Battle Cry of the Republic known as *Waiting for Lefty*. The New Theatre Group of Washington had leased Pierce Hall of the All Souls Unitarian Church for the performance and what followed is so customary as to have become traditional. There were the Hearst reporters and the red squads and the agonized cries from the American Legion. The play was supported, with vigor and courage, by such liberals as Representatives Amlie, Marcantonio, Schneider and Lundeen and two performances were given in the church hall and an additional one in the auditorium of the National Press Club, after deletions forced by the police and the usual campaign by the Hearst forces.

The National Theatre, eh? And run by such individuals as John W. Davis, the Morgan lawyer, and Mrs. George Horace Lorimer, wife of the editor of the Saturday Evening Post? I beg leave to doubt that I could be impressed by drama under such auspices. For one thing, I am old enough to remember the fate of the New Theatre in New York, which was almost identically a move by the *haute monde* to foster the mimetic art. Under the direction of Winthrop Ames and the managerial guidance of a pleasant old reactionary known as John Corbin, who still remonstrates bleatingly at the idea of the masses daring to obtrude upon a scene where only the select of God and the House of David might be expected to congregate. The productions of the

FLASH!—On July 23rd a delegation of writers, including Clifford Odets, John Howard Lawson, Henry Hart, Ivan Black and Herbert Kline, called upon Luigi Pirandello. The American writers presented a statement calling upon Pirandello to desist in his propaganda in favor of Mussolini's coming attack on Ethiopia and to come out openly against war. This statement he angrily refused to permit his secretary to read. We ask our readers to send protests to Pirandello (Waldorf Astoria Hotel, N. Y. C.) against his pro-war stand.

THE EDITORS.

old time New Theatre were stupendous to the point of aggression and much too learned for the feeble-minded of Park Avenue and the Union League Club, who forthwith departed Mr. Ames and returned to the comforting arms of Mr. Ziegfeld and the plays of Samuel Shipman.

ORDINARILY I should be wary of such projects as the National Theatre and Academy and, in clever hands it could be a magnificent agency for dumbness and nationalism, but I hardly think there is anything to fear. If we are to have a return of flag waving and Know Nothingism and alien baiting (I hesitate to mention the word fascism for fear of offending Mr. Laurence Stallings of the American Mercury), there will be willing hands to tackle it without benefit of Congress. It is only a question of time until we have the resurrection of Channing Pollock with a play announcing that America is the best old land that ever rose above the sea and those thinking otherwise need a whiff of the grape. But that the National Theatre will manage to do this or anything else, I very much doubt. At the worst we might see a pageant by Percy MacKaye but it is unlikely that even Mr. George Cohan would have the heart to repeat his flag waving and Yankee Doodling. This is only my opinion, subject to alteration and dispute. We shall continue to have bad enough plays but under private auspices and with the expectation that every time the eagle screams a bell in the cash register will ring. If, like the Comedie Francaise, we should secure a school of American diction which would suppress the Oxford accent, I could bear with more than a little in other respects. If it were a question of the American National Theatre and Academy being subjected to the acting of Elsie Jenkins Symington of Baltimore (I take the name at random) for the sake of her contribution to the cause, I should have no objection other than staying away from the productions in which Mrs. Symington appeared. There are definite elements within such a plan which can lead to a pretty brand of fascism but if there is some way of keeping the control in the hands of the group now acting as sponsors, I'll take my chances. Much as I dislike to say it, the rich are culturally not bright. I should say, on a not too wild guess, that they will have more success in closing up good productions from workers' groups than they will ever have in producing a good play of their own. If they really want something done about the theatre in America, I can formulate a program whereby for only a fraction of the money they will waste, they can foster plays which will be a credit to the stage of any nation. These plays will (a) materially advance "interest in the drama throughout the United States of America" and (b) make the sponsors of the American National Theatre and Academy extremely ill.

MOSCOW THEATER FESTIVAL

ALL but the uninformed will grant that the Soviet Theatre is the first in the world. As Harold Edgar says, in the January issue of NEW THEATRE, "the explanation for the aliveness of the Soviet Theatre is *technical*—the fruit of a perfected training—but it is also *social*. The Revolution has released the great masses of the Russian people so that it may profit from the cultural heritage of the past, and assist in the making of the cultural reality of the present. And the Revolution has given the theatre worker the most advantageous conditions—the greatest freedom—to develop and to become truly an artist."

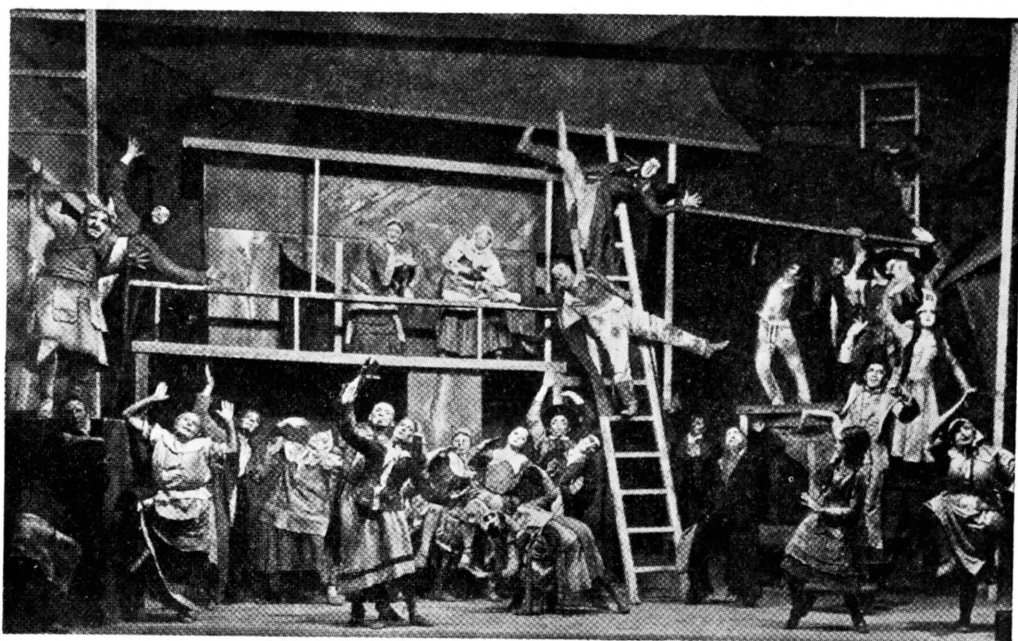
The Third Annual Moscow Theatre Festival will give a panoramic picture of the leading theatre in the world.

Meyerhold Nemirovich, Danchenko, Tairov and Stanislavsky are a few of the world's famous theatrical directors who are assisting in the arrangements for the Third Annual Moscow Theatre Festival, to be held from September 1st to 10th. Outside of the theatrical profession, the Moscow program is receiving wide attention from travelers who are extending their journeys to include Moscow for the first week of September.

The Festival will open with *Sadko*, by Rimski-Korsakov, on September 1 at the Bolshoi Theatre, followed on September 2 with *Eulenspiegel* at the Theatre of the Young Spectator, the evening attraction being *King Lear* at the State Jewish Theatre.

Among Moscow's 59 theatres are 12 new edifices, including the famous Nemirovich-Danchenko Theatre, where on September 3 will be presented *Katerina Izmailova* (Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk), by Shostakovich. On September 4 the Theatre for Children will present *Tale of the Fisherman and the Little Fish* by Polovinkin. The Soviet Union lists 87 theatres devoted exclusively to presenting plays to children.

At the Second Art Theatre, *The Spanish Curate* by Fletcher will be given September 4, with the Trade Union Theatre to present *The City of the Winds*, by Kirshon, September 5. The matinee at the Bolshoi Theatre will usher in the September 6 performance by the ballet of *Three Fat Men* by Oranski, followed by the evening presentation of *Aristocrats*, by Pogodin at the Realistic Theatre. Romaenev will present *Fighters* at the Maly Theatre. September 7, with September 8 to mark distinction by the Puppet Theatre matinee, the evening performance to be *Thunderstorm* by Ostrovski, at the First Moscow Theatre. The Kamerny Theatre will this season come into prominence by a production of *Egyptian Nights* by Shaw and Pushkin, the final performance of *In the Distance* by Afinogenov at the Vakhtangov Theatre concluding the Festival September 10.



Scene from *The Sorceress*, Jewish Theatre, Moscow.

Soviet Diary By HAROLD CLURMAN

SAW *The Sorceress* at the Jewish Theatre. I wanted to see this production that was first presented in 1922 because it represents a certain extreme in stylization, which at a certain time in America was considered the norm of stylization. It also marks the first big production of Gronovski who in those days was a leading figure in the Soviet Theatre. In general, it was impossible for me to consider this production as a work of art: I looked at it more as a document in theatrical history. Unless one regards it in this light it is difficult to understand why it should have assumed so much importance in its day. There is almost no story left of the original material, and what story there is is absurd and dramatically without function. What we see is a grotesque harlequinade—angular, distorted, abstract, garish, noisy. It is full of gestures, leaps, somersaults, nonsensical rhymes, bewildering props, heterogeneous songs, dances and a kind of crazy choral comment conveyed through strange sounds, stranger bits of mimicry and all sorts of corkscrew contortions.

This production was worked on for two years and is relatively short: two and one-half hours. The first minute I looked at the stage I said to myself "All this is stuff and nonsense," the next minute I thought "Why shouldn't it be?" and as the scenes progressed I felt myself thinking "how much charm and life there is in it!" The fact is that it is all very clear, simple, even concrete, when one relates it to the period with which

it was concerned. It is a folk picture or ballet of the old Jewish Ghetto. But this Ghetto is crazy and fantastic because the Bolsheviks are going to clear it out, build anew so that it will become an unbelievable memory of the past, an impossible dream, half nightmare, half joke. The Jew of the new Socialist society is roaring his mockery of the cramped, dislocated life of the old Ghetto. He is sweeping it away with energy and laughter. He buries it by making of it a topsy-turvy masque. And with the old Ghetto, the actors of the new Soviet Jewish Theatre were breaking the shackles of theatrical convention inherited from the old Jewish Theatre. At one moment a character cries out in a comic wail, "They are dead! they are dead! they are dead!" "Who is dead?" the chorus clamors. "The old Jewish theatres" is the reply. So the sentimental intonations of the provincial Jewish stage, the little comedy tricks, the fake pathos, the childish heroics, the professional Jewish theatre sweetness are all satirically exaggerated and caricatured.

Even the set which at first sight looks like a perfectly arbitrary arrangement of surfaces is based on the definite reality of a Russian Jewish village before the revolution with its poverty-stricken wooden materials, its ramshackle architecture, its cockeyed, helter-skelter, tattered effect. Though it is essentially a stage construction which permits the varied acrobatics of all the strange characters, the set gives the feeling of the kind of place the old Ghetto was. Understood in this light the production is a real Bolshevik product. And the actors at the time—themselves liberated from diverse Russian, Polish and Rou-

manian Ghettos—must have felt it and acted it with all the enthusiasm of their young, vigorous bodies (no doubt the two years were used to train themselves to perform all the acrobatic stunts of the show), acted it with the joy of victory, with the hopefulness of pioneers amidst the ruins of an old world, with the iconoclasm of revolutionaries. And the audience likewise must have understood it quite clearly. . . . So once again we see that what appeared in pictures and hasty interpretations like mere left-wing artiness was actually an expression of reality. From this again we learn that the outer aspect of art can be understood only in relation to an inner content, and that for art to function it must be organic with a people at a certain definite time under certain definite conditions. When such stylizations were merely imitated as they came to be in some of our "experimental" theatres, they represented at best nothing but the Freudian writhings of arrested adolescents. Not that this production is without its blemishes of flatness, of "modernistic" sophistication and of mere bizarrerie. Today the actors play it coldly, without much inner urge, youthful plasticity or sense of fun. They have no emotion, and it is all a little like a bad reproduction of a bright painting. Gronovski never did work emotionally with his actors but they had emotion at first that came from their personal relation to the period and to the situation. Now only the form remains, but as an actor of the company explained, it remains technically accurate because Gronovski worked it out so that if the actor turned the wrong way he was likely to get a crack on the nose, or if he made a badly timed cross he might have one of his colleagues crash down on his head. "Gronovski did this on purpose," the actor said, "he wanted every movement to be as strictly coordinated as a machine." Indeed the production has something of the precise nature of a cuckoo clock.

AFTER the performance I go backstage to talk to Goldblatt. He plays the leading part and he is at the same time the founder and chief director of the Gypsy Theatre. Our conversation leads to some interesting, though familiar facts. The company plays in Moscow till May 18th. Then it goes to Leningrad till the first of July and after that it tours the Union till September. Following this the actors take a six-week vacation. The regular Soviet vacation is four weeks but the actor is allowed these extra two weeks because as a worker he is supposed to be on the job only five days a week but since this is not always possible even with a large company playing repertory (there are forty-one in this group) the two weeks are added to compensate for the extra days he has worked during the season. Vacation in the Soviet Union is "with pay." Goldblatt informed me that a doctor

Note: This is an excerpt from an informal diary kept by the author during a five week visit to the Soviet Union devoted chiefly to a study of the Soviet Theatre.

had been to the theatre that very day to examine the actors and advise them where it would be best for them to spend this vacation. The mountains were recommended for some, the sea for others, etc.

"I wonder if you realize how lucky you are," I said. "The Jewish actors in New York are having a hard time and the American actors are no better off." Goldblatt answered "I do understand our good fortune. I was born in Roumania and our only dramatic school was in Bucharest. If I wanted to study there I had to be baptized, as no Jew was permitted to enter. Second, the tuition was so high that I could not have afforded to pay even for one month. But now I teach in our own dramatic school. The students are young people from the provinces, eighteen or nineteen years old. They are given free board and lodging in Moscow. During the day for about five hours they are instructed in all the branches of theatrical craft. At night as part of their training they are asked to see all the productions, and of course they do not pay for their tickets. Added to this they are given fifty or sixty roubles for pocket money. This goes on for four years and only then is it decided whether or not they may join the theatre. They imagine that life for the actor is this way everywhere."

In talking to Goldblatt about Gronovski who is now a successful and wealthy director of bourgeois films in Paris, I asked him why he had left the theatre. "Because he is an impressionable fool," was the answer.

When we came out of the dressing room onto the stage-landing I saw a big call-board all plastered with typewritten material. "What is that?" I inquired. "That is the theatre newspaper. It is used as a means of mutual criticism. Actors may write their criticisms of one another, of the director, the organization, anything they feel strongly or clearly about. The directors can do the same, as well as any member of the collective—including stage-hands." "What is the main paper now?" I asked pointing at the center of the board. "That is a comment by our electrician. He says that the criticisms directed against the theatre lighting are justified but for the lighting to be improved more time must be devoted to light rehearsals." I asked further, "Why don't the actors write letters to one another if they want to criticize each other. Why do they put the criticism on the board?" "That is the most impersonal and at the same time the friendliest way—this open criticism by means of the newspaper. The actors learn from one another, help one another this way. There is no desire to hurt or to find fault for its own sake. This system benefits everybody. All the actors learn and discipline themselves because of this, whereas personal discussions cause bad feelings and do great mischief." I go away quite impressed.

The Drama in Transition

A Book Review of the Season

By JOHN W. GASSNER

GRUMBLERS at dramatic criticism, as well as its apologists, are fulsome in regretting that critics are forced to market snap judgments, though rarely is anything done about it. Even where the critic does not curtail his night's sleep in deference to the early press editions he must find opinions on as much of the text of the play as the production succeeds in projecting. In a sense, he is judging a "production" rather than a playscript. And while no one doubts that a play is something intended to be performed, it is undeniable that a bad performance can kill a good text, just as a good production may throw dust in the eye of the most seasoned playgoer. It is this writer's contention that dramatic criticism should extend its boundaries to include criticism of the printed texts of the plays. At present few published plays receive more than desultory attention, and very rarely from the critics who review the productions. This summary, a matter of course at the conclusion of the season, is undertaken empirically in the expectation that it will reveal well-defined trends in the theatre which will throw light on its present difficulties and achievements.

The business of calculated entertainment naturally occupied a large portion of the season. Many of the plays in this group have already been forgotten; some have not even been accorded the dubious permanence of book covers. Their measured jests, synthetic emotionalism and thrills *a la mode* are (or will be soon) buried in a silence which it would be unkind to disturb. But the gentlemen of the press generally greeted their nativity with paeans, and Mr. Average Customer flocked to the *ac-couchement*. Some of these plays—for want of a better term they may be referred to as "fluff," to which category also belong certain serious dramas of synthetic effect—are therefore worth noting as emanations of their milieu.

PLAYS TO ORDER

Ode to Liberty, which Sidney Howard fashioned from a French play, was that strange contraption, a "vehicle"—for Ina Claire. It stands as a representative importation from the superficially clever boulevard drama of France. A revolutionist figures in the comedy as a concession to public interest, but in a play of this kind he is naturally a weird caricature. The English importations are characteristic of the culture of that right little, tight little island in which

the aristocracy and the middle class have been living in wedlock for two centuries. John Van Druten's *The Distaff Side* glorifies the eternal female of the English upper classes who stands firm as the rock of Gibraltar amidst the tea-pot monsoons of her brood. Upon her ample bosom, to the left of which beats a noble heart, rests the English family, which in turn supports the "English" scheme of social stability. But the last war and the rumblings of a new holocaust are disturbing to even the firmest of foundations, and another play by the same author, *Flowers of the Forest*, is the familiar ineffectual pacifistic play, which seems to be the most that these English playwrights can accomplish for the cause of peace. No understanding of causes, no gauging of effective ways of prevention, no driving power of protest—only feeble protestations and regrets stirred into a stew of private emotions! And lest the eternal feminine lack further authentication, the English novelist, Margaret Kennedy, supplements *The Distaff Side* with *Escape Me Never*. Elisabeth Bergner's unforgettable art is not a matter of text, though in passing it may be noted that her performance reached its zenith when it evoked the anguish and the mandatory fortitude of the poor. In the main, the theme of the play is the familiar staple of eternal love unshaken by the slings of fortune and by harsh treatment. The *Griselda* tale—a woman humbly loving and serving her male tyrant—is dear to a civilization founded upon sex as well as class-exploitation. Nevertheless, *Escape Me Never* is a heady stimulant when compared with the pink lemonade of *Point Valaine*, the latest Noel Coward contribution to the cause of audience-deception. A red-headed female sensualist experiences genuine love for the first time, but loses her unspoiled young aviator when a jealous head-waiter, who has served as her stallion until then, bares her sordid past. Here are the usual canards: lust in the tropics, the innocence of youth, reformation of a scarlet woman, etc. The play marks no advance in Coward's writing. Simply substituting frothy melodrama for the fluffy comedy of *Private Lives* and *Design for Living*, Noel Coward remains Noel Coward, a phenomenally facile "shake-scene" who epitomizes the hollowness of the sophisticated leisure class which prides itself upon its so-called taste and perspicuity.

The season's inventory of fluff would of course be incomplete without a liberal sprinkling of the home-made variety. *Petticoat Fever*, the most atrocious of these products, is nearest in its characterization and atmosphere to the English Channel. Nonsense, as a transitory flight from reality, is not of itself

objectionable. But nonsense so stale, repetitious and undistinguished as *Petticoat Fever* is well-nigh inexcusable. That this play should have passed muster with audiences and with many critics is symptomatic of the craving for escape at any cost. Samson Raphaelson's *Accent on Youth* is superficially a bird of another feather. Its dialogue has intelligent passages and its story — of a middle-aged playwright and his admiring secretary—is projected with creditable ingenuity. It even has a novel twist in theme—namely, the idea that youth is a very much overrated virtue in a man; that a muscular young Babbitt has little chance against a middle-aged gentleman who substitutes taste and conversation for calisthenics and an iron digestion. If, nevertheless, the play remains fluffy, it is due to the fact that neither the dilettante nor his half-witted rival deserves so much attention. It is precisely because *Three Men on a Horse*, intended as nothing but fluff, relies upon American realities that it succeeds as a fairly rounded farce. It is specious, like other plays of its ilk. But its picture of suburban life, race-track gambling and the wholesale greeting card business is vastly amusing, and gives the farce solidity and verve. Of other comedies, such as *Personal Appearance*, *The Lord Blesses the Bishop*, and *The Bishop Misbehaves*, and such melodramas as *Small Miracle* and *Kind Lady*, one can say nothing that is not obvious. They are more or less expertly prepared confections for popular consumption. It is impossible to speak of the musical plays, such as *The Great Waltz* and *Anything Goes*, which have not been printed and were not seen by this reviewer.

THE "LOGIC" OF TRANSITION

COMING to the ostensibly serious and strongly felt efforts of the season, one is confronted by a variety of products which would be confusing without some classification. Only a dynamic grouping, however, can have any critical value. One is impressed, first of all, by the large number of plays that strove valiantly with significant material, deserving plaudits for their intention but only partly, if at all, for their achievement. The reasons for their partial failure may be instructive.

According to importations the courtesy of first call, we meet Shaw's latest fugue, *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*, and O'Casey's *Within the Gates*, which has been alternately praised and damned. There was little dissenting favorable opinion regarding the Shaw contribution, and in the main the strictures against it strike this reviewer as valid. The wonder lies only in the fact that many of them were not directed with equal vehemence at the play from Ireland. Both symbolic dramas are largely muddled, with the difference that the Shaw comedy is as snarled in plot as the O'Casey play is simple and

elementary. An over-eagerness to brush nearly every phase of contemporary life—domestic, political and religious—sent the old swashbuckler of the theatre scurrying in half-a-dozen different directions at the same time. The basic reason for his failure lies not in an enfeebled technique *per se* but in Shaw's present orientation. Not so many years ago he announced that Karl Marx had made a man of him. But today Shaw can no longer find the Marxian thread which would hold together and explain a majority of the imbecilities he seeks to castigate. The lack of unity in the play reflects a conspicuous absence of consistency in Shaw's present thinking. The dubiousness of many of the play's ideas—such as the relative usefulness of the clergy and the futility of a rapprochement between the East and the West, as well as its loquacious apostrophe to the "Life Force," which is presented as a solution of the world's ills—is symptomatic of Fabianism rushing from one insubstantial idea to another in a frantic effort to evade the question of class conflict. Shaw's recently professed admiration for dictators is another instance of this confusion. The seeds of decay, it is now ap-

parent to many of us, were there from the beginning in Fabianism and social democracy, but they were not disturbing in most of Shaw's work until in recent years. Shaw's confusion is regrettable because, in spite of the weight of abuse heaped on the play by the theatre's accredited undertakers, the old Shaw still crackles at times in *The Simpleton*.

Within the Gates, though full of noble aspirations which it would be unfair to deny, is neither more profound nor more incisive than *The Simpleton*. It is surprising that those who found Shaw's hymn to life tiresome should have swallowed O'Casey's much more drawn-out and more banal paean. In his play, too, the solution for our afflictions is faith in "Life." O'Casey's pronouncement is ambiguous enough to satisfy all tastes and opinions. It is all things to all men, and therefore resolves nothing. The diffuse structure of the play reflects its intellectual poverty, its lack of social clarity. Its tale, of a bishop whose illegitimate daughter became a prostitute, is featherweight, and in spite of much fine writing the play remains a largely ineffectual pageant or masque. Only in its broadside against religious hypocrisy, which led to its banning by Boston's Comstocks, does the play develop any momentum. The Bishop, a stoled and sabled Dr. Coué, is forcefully realized. But his pollyanna preachings are not measurably improved upon by the Dreamer's ambiguous harangues, and the sentimentalization that anoints this ineffectual visionary as the savior of the world epitomizes the confusion of the entire drama. The author of *The Plough and the Stars* and *Juno and the Paycock* is a great realist. That his roots are in realism is attested by the recently published collection of his early work, entitled *Windfalls*. *Within the Gates*, which should be studied by students of O'Casey as one phase of his development, reflects a long-standing cleavage in the Irish theatre, which has oscillated for a long time between realism and romanticism. In the romantic genre, however, O'Casey is no match for Dunsany and Yeats.

Another British drama, James Bridie's *A Sleeping Clergyman*, cannot be dismissed as insignificant in its implications. Eugenics is not a novel theme in the theatre. But Ibsen and Hauptmann championed eugenics at a time when it was one of the tenets of advancing liberalism. Bridie faces a changed world. Protesting against the hasty generalizations which condemn an individual as a racial liability because of some inadequately understood weakness, defending the potentiality of the human spirit, Bridie's play can be seen as a challenge to the entrenched interests that have preempted eugenics as a means of diverting attention from the shortcomings of environment. It is safer to beat hell out of the lowly

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PRIZE PLAY CONTESTS

Offering \$300 for Prize Plays

THE New Theatre League and the American League Against War and Fascism are conducting a prize contest for plays against war and fascism with a first prize of \$125, a second prize of \$50 and a third prize of \$25. The National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners and the New Theatre League offer \$50 for the best play about Angelo Herndon, and \$50 more for the best other play dealing with Negro life. Details of both contests are available in the June and July issues of NEW THEATRE. (Copies will be sent on receipt of 15c in stamps.) The rules are as follows: Plays are to be thirty minutes to one hour in length, with any scene arrangement or theatrical form acceptable. No full-length plays will be considered. The author's name and address must be enclosed in a sealed envelope with the name of the play on the outside. All plays should be sent to the Repertory Department, New Theatre League, Box 67, Station O, N. Y. C. A playwright may submit any number of scripts. NEW THEATRE reserves all rights including publication and performance of prize-winning plays and 50% of all royalty returns. We also reserve the right not to award prizes if the plays submitted are not up to the necessary standard.

Concerning Paramount's Mr. Wilkie

A Film Review of the Month

By ROBERT STEBBINS

THE letter of Mr. Al Wilkie, of Paramount Films, in the July 9th issue of *New Masses* creates a situation of considerable discomfort. In explaining why Peter Ellis, film reviewer for *New Masses*, had his press privilege withdrawn, Mr. Wilkie wrote, "Although I am not a regular reader of *The New Masses*, on every occasion that I did glance through your publication I found definitely unfavorable reviews of our pictures. Naturally I do not expect a critic to like all the pictures; by the same reasoning I do not expect any critic to dislike all of them. . . ."

Mr. Wilkie's strictures, if taken to heart, would make reviewing this month's films a terrifying task. Not only is it the produce of the Paramount Studio this time. The entire output of the industry exhibits a mediocrity and anarchic aimlessness that precisely forces the "critic to dislike all of them."

Peculiarly enough, it was a Paramount film, *The Glass Key*, that provided an isolated incident of interest, namely, a rather neat and entirely filmic method of indicating homicide. We are in an upper-story room of a gangsters' hideout. George Raft is seen standing with his back to the door, revolver in hand. Outside the frame of the picture, in the corner, a rival gangster is being strangled to death. In the scuffle the single lamp that illuminates the room has been set swinging. All the audience sees is the swinging light and the alternating light and shadow on Raft's face. When the movement of the lamp has ceased Raft has one competitor less. Not a new device, particularly, yet as the month's sole instance of directorial felicity, it sufficed to place *Glass Key* above the others.

Love Me Forever is a disturbing augury of what will happen when the opera cycle hits Hollywood: for instance, the quartet from *Rigoletto* sung by a quartet of quartets! Four singers to every part, not to mention a chorus thrown in for good measure! In the excerpts from *La Boheme*, Grace Moore sings all the female roles. Only the reputed fanaticism of the opera addict stands between the Hollywood bright boys and such wholesale dismemberment of the repertoire as will shame any previous efforts in the field of movie "adaptation." *Love Me Forever* tells the sweet simple tale of how Grace Moore, a daughter of society, in reduced straits, learns to care for Leo Carillo, restaurateur, formerly of the Chicago stockyards, but not until Mr. Carillo has impoverished himself making Miss

Moore a great star. Once more Hollywood furnishes thrilling proof that love knows no class distinctions and that gratitude is not an unknown virtue in the ranks of higher society.

It is seldom that dullness and general ineptitude of production engender feelings of almost gratitude in the film critic. *Sanders Of The River* provided such an occasion. Intended as a glorification of British Colonial rule in Africa, it fails utterly of its purpose. A more crude and inconglomerate melange would be difficult to duplicate.

Nina Mae McKinney comports herself throughout as if she were on the glittering floor of a Chicago cabaret. To see her amidst the native women, ogling Paul Robeson, her eyes "growing radishes," as William Closson Emory once put it, is to realize how abysmally tasteless directors and producers can be when they put their minds to it. The talents of Paul Robeson are completely lost on rank imitations of African chants, particularly one song, for all the world an equivalent of *I Love A Parade*.

Leslie Banks personifies the beneficent but stern rule of the great white king in England. No sooner does he leave his bailiwick than two nasty traders of guns and gin start peddling their wares. The natives, that is, all but those under Bosambe (Paul Robeson), are only too anxious to buy. Hell breaks loose. A wicked native king goes on

the rampage. Slave raids are a never-ending threat. (In this connection it may be interesting to note that Mussolini justifies his projected land grab by an overwhelming desire on his part to abolish slavery in Ethiopia.) Sanders returns in the *very nick* of the very nick of time to save Bosambe and his wife (McKinney) who have been taken prisoners. The native king is ground under the heel of righteousness. Bosambe, a dutiful flunkey of his white rulers is elevated to the kingship of all the tribes. Peace reigns and exploitation of the natives may now proceed unimpeded.

Fortunately, fraud stares out of every shot. *Sanders* will hoodwink very few. This, however, should not have the effect of quieting the protests of informed movie-goers. Alexander Korda of London Films may not have succeeded but the intent to deceive was there.

NO MORE LADIES (M.G.M.) merits little comment. Its substance is none other than that reverend antique "Turn about is fair play" except when Joan Crawford avails herself of the proverb and Robert Montgomery receives the riposte. To be sure, Miss Crawford is too delicate a property to commit an infidelity but for a moment it did seem perilously like one to Mr. Montgomery. Mr. Franchot Tone wanders through the film in one of those
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Still from *Peasants*, Prize-winning Soviet Film—soon to be released. Dir. Ermler

Soyuz Film

Can We Use Stanislavsky's Method? By V. ZAKHAVA

(V. Zakhava makes this Marxian analysis of the Stanislavsky system on the basis of his experience as Director of the Vakhtangov Theatre in Moscow. The founder, E. B. Vakhtangov, ranked with Meyerhold as Stanislavsky's most talented and original pupil. His artistically and socially revolutionary productions with the Habima players were staged during the trying first years of the revolution. His early death in 1922 removed one of the three outstanding Soviet directors and cut off his work, described in this article, of adapting the Moscow Art Theatre methods to the uses of the new socialist theatre. For a full exposition of the Stanislavsky system readers are referred to *NEW THEATRE* of December 1934 and February 1935. The following article was translated by Mark Schmidt for the Group Theatre, with whose permission it appears here. It has been edited and condensed by Molly Day Thacher.

THE creative method of the Vakhtangov Theatre is not cut-and-dried. It is no collection of dogmatic rules for building any theatre at any time or for preparing any production. Vakhtangov's own formulation shows how much flexibility is necessary: The form of a production, he said, should be determined by

1. The play—its content and the author's treatment.

2. The social and historical surroundings in which it is produced — hence the ideological link of the theatre to its time.

3. The theatrical collective—that is the class and ideological orientation of the members, and the degree and nature of their craftsmanship.

A modification of any one of these factors necessitates an alteration of the whole plan of production. Every play requires a solution of its own, one that will fit the script, but this solution will differ in each period of social life, and two productions of the same play at the same time in different theatres will demand different interpretations. [It must be remembered that we in the United States have few "theatres" in the sense of the Soviet collectives with their distinct individualities and permanent personnel. This, with the much larger theatre audience and the repertory system, made possible the phenomenon of simultaneous and successful productions of *Yegor Bullitch* by two leading theatres in Moscow—each production distinctive yet valid. However the point made by Vakhtangov is applicable to our less developed theatres. For example, an amateur theatre with social purpose which set out to do *Parade* would obviously have to work out a production plan different from that used by the Theatre Guild with its financial resources and technically skilled — but ideologically heterogeneous — actors. — Ed.]

In other words, what is fitting in the production of one play is false in working upon another. What is true today is fallacious tomorrow. What is good

in one collective is bad in another. To coordinate these factors organically, to estimate their interaction and reduce the form of the production to an integral unity—that was the task which Vakhtangov set himself. "Why was *Turandot* successful?" he used to ask his pupils. And his answer was, "Because harmony was rightly guessed in it."

THE roots of the creative method of the Vakhtangov Theatre are deeply imbedded in K. C. Stanislavsky's system. At the same time, after the influence of the October Revolution, Vakhtangov subjected the artistic principles in which he had been trained to a searching criticism and a radical revision. In certain respects he assumed an artistic position opposed to Stanislavsky's. The latter had arrived at the formula, "The audience should forget that it is in the theatre." "This led him to a blind, to a tragic blind," Vakhtangov said, "The audience should not forget for one single instant that it is in a theatre."

Yet Vakhtangov, notwithstanding the seemingly diametrical opposition between his position and Stanislavsky's, still continued in his creative work and in his teaching to make use of Stanislavsky's methods. What is this? Inconsistency? Discrepancy between pronouncement and practice? No. Because Vakhtangov's negation of his teacher's creative position is not barren and skeptical; his work establishes a bond with the tradition behind it and aims to retain the positive aspects of the latter. In other words, this is a dialectic negation, carried out with realistic appreciation of the circumstances.

A creative method of art takes shape according to two factors: the social orientation and intention of the artist (which leads to his choice of content and his attitude towards it) and the medium that is the working material of the art. What are the philosophic roots of Stanislavsky's school and what are its social orientations? Before exploring this question, I must make plain what I refer to when I say "Stanislavsky's school." The vast creative experience of Stanislavsky comprises such a variety of data, so many enunciations, that for any assertion about his art theories one can always find in his statements or his practice sufficient basis for a counter-statement. Nevertheless, in all this comprehensive practical and theoretical stock one can feel the presence of a basic line. This found its practical expression most clearly in the Chekhov productions of the Moscow Art Theatre and its theoretical formulations in his statements shortly before the World War. Toward 1920 Stanislavsky added

to the system a number of demands upon external technique which complicate and give a somewhat different character to the whole structure. With these later opinions of his I am, regretfully, very inadequately acquainted.

As is known, Stanislavsky's theatre concentrated all its attention and art upon the inner life of the acting characters, upon the psychologic, subjective, side of their behaviour. The soul of the hero, his inner world, his psyche, his "inner experiences," his "spiritual essence"—that is what absorbed the actors and directors of that theatre. In revealing this "inner experience" to an audience of many thousands lay the joy of the theatrical artist, the joy of the actor. "And if," said Dantchenko, co-director of the Art Theatre, "the actor have talent, that is, the ability to infect the audience with his experiences, then we shall have the triumph of art."

The actor in such a theatre is indifferent as to the occasions which employ his feelings: the playwright provides the situation, but feelings are brought forth by the actor who uses his "affective recollections." From the point of view of the inner technique of his art, it does not matter to the actor whom he impersonates—a sincere monarchist or a sincere revolutionist, for the feelings of both are the same (universally human), the difference being only in the occasion. One is joyful when the other is desperate, and vice versa—each being right from his own point of view. What concerns the actor are "joy" and "woe" in themselves, the subjective essence of the soul of the created character, and not his objective links with the outer world.

This actor of the natural-psychological theatre also proceeds in an identical way, whether he is acting in a tragedy or a farce. The feelings are the same in both—the difference is in what occasions them. His business is to become sincerely horrified or to break out in sobs. This has to be done in a vaudeville act as well as in tragedy, only in the farce the reason for the character's sobbing is trivial, and this lack of proportion between the paltry occasion and the real woe will be funny. But the "comic effect" is a result which has nothing to do with the actor.

WE see hardly any thought is given here to the idea that vaudeville and tragedy demand various manners of acting, radically different methods of craftsmanship. The evaluation of the portrayed object on the part of the theatre is altogether lacking. To evaluate, to show an attitude to the reality that is portrayed—this the naturalistic theatre would leave to the audience.

The business of the theatre is to evoke sympathy toward each character, to draw the audience into a sympathetic experience and thus to bring the character close to the spectator. The "characters" are the same kind of people who sit in the auditorium. The audience comes to the theatre and finds upon the stage its friends, close acquaintances, relatives. Stanislavsky rejoiced that the audience came to the Moscow Art Theatre not as to a theatre at all, but as if invited to the homes of the Prozorov or Voynitzky families. (*Three Sisters, Uncle Vanya.*) The characters together with the audience talk about the affairs and needs, the hopes and sorrows, of the Russian intelligensia. There are no just, no guilty, people—each is right in his own way . . . all are human. . . .

An idealistic individualism which views the human psyche as an insulated and self-sufficient value. A "universally human" morality as the ethical base out of which character is built. An objective, "beyond class"—and consequently passive—attitude towards actuality. An utterly apolitical character. These are the most characteristic qualities of the social and philosophical outlook of the psychological naturalistic artists. (And, obviously, the outlook is class conditioned.)

From it there follow inevitably certain theatrical results: first, naturalism, which kills theatricality, the pre-eminence of psychologic content over form, that of the subjective over the objective. Second, there follows a uniformity of production methods in treating widely differing plays. "All naturalists are like each other," Vakhtangov said, "The staging of one can be taken for the staging of the other." Since the only criterion of art for this school is the truth of life—a photographic fidelity to the original in life—this theatre has proved incapable of creating a variety of theatrical forms.

The actor's inner experiences being a self-sufficient aim for the naturalistic psychological school, all the methodological efforts, all the pedagogic inventiveness of Stanislavsky's genius had to be turned towards eliciting those experiences from the actor.

"The process of inner experience is the first care in the creative work of the artist," says Stanislavsky in 1911. On this point he rejected any compromise. Like Salvini he held that "the actor should feel agitated when performing a role, whether he does it the first or the thousandth time." But he refuses to recognize, as the Italian actor did, that "there is a difference between a scene and a natural experience," that the artist "while crying and laughing also observes his own estate," living thus "a double life upon the stage." Stanislavsky rejected Salvini's thesis that the actor's art consists in this equilibrium between life and acting. He demanded "a full physical and psychic experience" and believed in making no concessions to conventions.

LET us see then, how the specific nature of theatrical art, that is, the properties of the material with which the theatrical artist has to deal, exerted its influence upon the creative method of the naturalistic psychological school. The medium of the theatre art is the actor—the living man. Stanislavsky believes that the actor's experiences are the main thing. Consequently, to master his material means, at will, at any moment, to be able to evoke any living emotion within the actor. And so Stanislavsky sought ways toward the understanding of the human psyche and of the laws governing man's emotional life. He sought indications in science, studies psychology, turns to the Hindu Yogi . . . but the real sources on which he drew in his creative work were observation of a number of outstanding actors, and his own experience as actor and director. It was upon the basis of these—purely empirical—experiences that he arrived at a number of discoveries worthy of his genius—discoveries which now find their full substantiation in the materialistic sciences.

What is the result? We have a bundle of contradictions. While studying in his own creative practice the true nature of man, discovering genuine psycho-physical laws of human behaviour, Stanislavsky arrived at a contradiction with his own *a priori* starting point. Dealing in his practical work with the actor, a living man—that is with a portion of highly organized matter—and coming in constant contact with objective laws governing that matter, Stanislavsky was compelled to reckon with these laws, to get some knowledge of them, and to use them in order to fulfill the aims he had set himself. But the aims were idealistic. They clashed inevitably with the empirically discovered laws of the materialistic nature of man. Therein lies the root of the frequent contradictions in which Stanislavsky found himself.

He sees the meaning of art in revealing the subjective side of personality. But his experience leads him to a formula: "To work upon a role is to seek for a relation." From this follows the objectively correct view of a character as a complex of its relations to its environment. And thus he came very close to the recognition that the essential in a character is not the subjective aspect of its life, but its objective connections and relations. The subjective side of a character's experiences is the signaling service with the help of which the (biologically expeditious) function of adapting the organism to the environment is carried out. Another step, and the stress will go from the subjective to the objective moment. But this step was not made by Stanislavsky, and so he remains imprisoned by contradictions. They can be resolved only when one understands the dialectic unity of the subjective and the objective, of the inner and the outer.

Stanislavsky becomes convinced, prac-

tically, that feeling will not come of itself; that the more an actor orders or pleads with himself to cry, the less chance there is of his doing it. "Feeling has to be enticed." The decoy for feeling, he finds, is thought, and the trap is action. "Don't wait for feeling, act at once." Feeling will come in the process of acting, in the clashes with environment. If you ask for something, and you do it with an awareness that you really need it, and then you are turned down—the feeling of offense and vexation will come to you spontaneously. Don't worry about feeling—forget it. Remember only your own action (in this case, to ask for something). A counsel of genius. A discovery worthy of genius.

But we see that action is regarded by Stanislavsky only as a means of arriving at feeling as the aim of the creative process. Yet the creative practice of the theatre artist convinces him at every step that action is the essence of the theatre. What matters in the theatre is that I am begging for something while he refuses, and *not* what I feel because of it. Feeling is a subjective moment. It is necessary, but only insofar as it becomes an impulse to a new action.

The contradiction between the inner and the outer technique—that is the most painful moment in Stanislavsky's creative life. When he concentrates upon the inner technique, which he elaborated so lovingly, he feels that along the line of external expressiveness (especially when the playwright's material makes definite demands in this field) there appear yawning gaps. The feeling, already elicited, does not find any means of expressing itself. But when he concentrates upon physical expression, then feeling is not even born, and the demands of inner technique remain ungratified. The trouble here again lies in the dualistic notion of human nature, in the false separation between subjective and objective, the failure to understand that anything external is at the same time in the nature of an internal process, and vice versa. Stanislavsky often approaches this truth, but never masters it fully. He is impelled toward it by his creative experience, but his general philosophic bearings prevent him from arriving at it.

THUS Stanislavsky discovered a number of laws of scenic art conditioned by the properties of the material of this art. The material is the living human organism, subject to biologic and social laws. When standing upon the biologic ground, he discovers genuine laws of human nature. As soon as he passes into the field of sociology, his socio-philosophic fallacies enter into conflict with the truth and he is ready to repudiate truth.

This is no reason for turning our backs on those truths which he did reveal. Stanislavsky uncovered a number of laws of stage art underlying the biologic nature of the actor's creative

work. We are fully entitled to treat those laws as universally valid—possessing the same value for the proletarian actor as for the bourgeois, for the actors of Shakespeare's time as for those of the Italian comedy. We have full right to maintain that it is necessary for any actor to be concentrated upon the stage; to distribute his muscular energy efficiently; to seek his attitude to the surrounding environment; to act without concerning himself with feelings; to motivate (“justify”) his behaviour on the stage; to disclose the inner meaning of the author's text (the “subtext” under the words); to recreate the biography and life conditions of the character; to perform not for himself but for his partner; to struggle against stereotypes; and so forth. No matter what theatre the actor plays in, no matter what class it serves, he has to act well from the point of view of the specific of his art. This is basic to good art. It is essential if he is to hold and convince an audience.

But it is one thing to perform well according to the biologic laws of acting, and quite another to do so from the point of view of class ideology. Imagine a good actor in the part of a White Guard in a proletarian theatre. A White Guard in the audience would say, “Damn it, the acting is quite good—but how the scoundrel besmirches our people!” But the worker in the audience will say, “That's some acting! And how truly it shows up the class enemy!” You see, both agree that the actor plays well—that is from the standpoint of the biologic basis of acting. But from the point of view of class ideology what is good for one is bad for the other.

The ideology will reveal itself in the manner in which the universally valid truths are utilized, the underlying purposes for which they are employed. When the application of the biologic laws begins, then the social orientation (conscious or unconscious) of the theatre is felt. A different purpose will impose a different method of applying this A. B. C. of theatric art.

CAN the Stanislavsky system—the system of the naturalist-psychological theatre whose philosophical root is idealistic individualism—be taken over bodily into the proletarian theatre? Of course not. In Stanislavsky's system the elementary A. B. C. is colored by a definite world view. Unless we use it in a very discriminating way, we run the danger of accepting not only his scientific, but also his idealistic influence. The task is to force out of his system the philosophy with which it is permeated, and to saturate it with a different socio-philosophical meaning.

I myself erred many times in public statements about the system—maintaining that it was universal, and the only basis upon which any theatre, of any tendency, could be built. My statements were countered by those who main-

tained that a method invariably entails a content, and will finally entail its own philosophy. My opponents were of course right. The mitigating circumstance in my favor was that my opponents usually went on to advocate the breaking up and abandoning of the entire Stanislavsky system. The complete taking over of the method is wrong—but it would have been even more false and destructive to have deprived the nascent proletarian theatres of the vast riches that are contained in Stanislavsky's system. The method contains a number of elements and laws which can and should be used. After criticizing the system as a whole, the values should be selected so that we can begin applying them in a manner different from that used by Stanislavsky.

For instance, we pointed out above Stanislavsky's assumption that a character is a complex of relations, and that to work on a role is to seek for relations. That is correct. But how shall we determine and analyze those relations? These relations are the thing which will show one's social viewpoint. It is true that in any theatre an actor should know before coming onto the stage why he comes there, what he is to do there (not in terms of feelings, but of actions). But the basis for the planning of the actions will be different in different theatres.

Even such an elementary demand as concentration of one's attention upon the stage has its own biology and sociology. The fact that the actor must have an object for concentration at every minute—that is A. B. C. But what he chooses as the object of attention, that is already the interpretation of the role, and involves the philosophy of the production.

[Here the author goes at length into the problem of the subconscious, to which Stanislavsky assigns so large a share in creative work. He was largely influenced in his theoretical approach by the intuitivist philosophy of Bergson, which had a wide acceptance at the time. In writing about the subconscious, Stanislavsky inclines to treat it as a mystery, a higher process. But again, in his practice he shows that intuition works effectively only if consciousness has presented it with the proper food for its thought, and, besides, that the subconscious often produces worthless suggestions which the conscious reason rejects at once. Which then is master, and which the servant? The subconscious has been treated in the same way as every other element of nature: before man understood them he went down on his knees before them and defied them—but as soon as he discovered their workings he turned them to his own uses, made them serve his conscious aims. What was god yesterday becomes slave today. With regard to the subconscious, Stanislavsky stood at the crossroad: when he reflected, intuition seemed a divine faculty enabling us to penetrate regions inaccessible to our infirm conscious reason; but when he goes to work, he finds ways of subordinating this divine faculty to his artist's will. He approaches the materialistic conception of the human brain. Although much scientific research remains to be done in this field, all our working hypotheses tell us that the subconscious, like the conscious, is a nervous activity, that it can deal only with impressions received from reality, and that therefore there is no difference in principle between the conscious and the unconscious. This does not mean that

the unconscious is superfluous—all our experience shows that it takes an important and irreplaceable part in the creative process. But it must work by order of consciousness, in the direction pointed out by consciousness, and upon the basis of material acquired by consciousness. In order to set up such working relationships we have to make use of a number of methods discovered by Stanislavsky. He has shown us how to free ourselves of dependence or erratic “inspiration” and command our creative forces at will. That is why we must attack the notion that Stanislavsky's system must be done away with for the alleged reason that it rests upon the work of intuition or super-consciousness, that it does not teach us anything, but leads the student and the actor along some tenebrous mysterious road. Absolute nonsense. It is just the opposite.]

GRUNOV, of the Moscow Art Theatre, was profoundly right when he stated that “until the appearance of Stanislavsky's system the problem of teaching in the theatre was not posited at all, or was on a medieval level: there was the master and the apprentice journeyman, who by serving and copying the master tried to learn something. From the moment of the appearance of Stanislavsky's school . . . we had a practical system of training the actor. Not until then could we have young collectives, the art of ensemble in which there exists neither master nor apprentice, but a working body of actors with a common body of knowledge, an A. B. C. of their craft. . . . Stanislavsky's system arose out of analysis. It resolves the creative work into component elements. It makes it possible to *teach* in the theatre. . . . We don't have to wait for our young collectives to find out every step by long experience. . . . It is in this sense that we hold defective the theory of Meyerhold and that of the old Proletcult, which proclaimed that we have to begin anew. That is the medieval course. We must take from the old whatever has value and build the new on that basis.”

Thus if we subject Stanislavsky's system to a thorough criticism, using the methods of dialectic materialism; if we examine it attentively in the light of modern scientific data; if we force out of it the idealistic world view which creates contradictions within the system itself; if we select whatever is necessary and sound in it (which, essentially, is the materialistic parts), and translate it from the language of idealistic philosophy and subjective psychology into modern scientific terms—we shall then have the A. B. C. of the actor's art. It will be rooted in the biologic bases of the actor's creative work. We will then apply this alphabet for other purposes, and in a different manner.

We can be sure that Stanislavsky will be revered in the history of the theatre as the greatest reformer of theatric art, as the genius who created the alphabet of the actor's art, its first primer, and so brought the teaching of that art from the stage of medieval barbarism into that of scientific and cultural development.

[Another article by V. Zakhava on Stanislavsky's system will appear soon in NEW THEATRE.]

Hollywood Goes in for Color

By GEORGE LEWIS

ALWAYS the most volatile of the commercial arts, the screen, which thrives on the mischievous practice of raising alarms and excursions, is now undergoing a flurry of color consciousness.

This sudden absorption with matters of the spectrum is not as impulsive as it may seem, but the culmination of an adroit, broad-scale publicity buildup. As a result of this revived emphasis on color films, a confused and speculative press is heralding the arrival of another screen "revolution," and a good percentage of the public is paying to see what all the shouting is about.

Box-offices seemingly are thriving wherever *Becky Sharp* plays, but the reaction is not to the merits of the picture, however popular they may be, but from the natural curiosity of the public. Once thus cajoled, however, the picture-going masses will be somewhat suspicious of the next ballyhooed color bait thrown its way; and it will have to be superlative color, production, story and star before the theatre tills will respond to the money of the fans.

Becky Sharp, that absurd and dull piece of fustian resurrected for the debut of the New Technicolor, is a conventionally mounted costume piece of negligible dramatic merit, photographed in an improved three-color process. Those of you who have seen the well-known short *La Cucaracha* have seen the New Technicolor, so stridently heralded from the journalistic housetops. It is passably good from the technical aspect as far as present color in motion pictures is concerned. It has managed to introduce the blue elements which were lacking in the earlier efforts of five and six years ago. It has sharpened its register, the focus is more precise, the colors are deeper, and blurring has been virtually eliminated. Which is all to the good.

The colors, however, are too loud, too emphatic, and lacking in pastels and in other nuances of the spectrum. The skin tones are still fruity, overripe. The total impression is one of a brass band in color rather than a well-modulated symphony.

In many respects the new color has the appearance of an animated commercial colored photograph of the kind now adorning magazine back covers in the interests of cigarettes. It has that brash, noisy overemphasis, which, while necessary to capture attention in an advertisement, is hardly a recommendation for the development of an art form.

An effort was made to overcome this inherent deficiency by employing the talents of Robert Edmond Jones as art director. Always an estimable craftsman, Mr. Jones apparently labored valiantly and managed to avoid the pitfalls which would have produced, in less accomplished hands, a colored patchwork nightmare. As it is, the stagecraft of the artist is reflected in a few handsome settings, shrewdly manipulated for color harmonies, and, all in all, not bad. In common with popular opinion, the scene at the ball before Waterloo, the interiors and especially the exteriors, is done well, but as usual within the still experimental limitations of the medium. This scene proves primarily that swift action by masses, particularly with a wealth of contrasting colors, is possible without the blurring which accompanied such movement in all previous processes.

This blurring was the cause for that common complaint against the earlier colored films that "they hurt the eyes." No such criticism can be levelled against the improved present Technicolor process.

It is not the eye which is strained but the esthetic. As long as color in films has the quality of a gaudy calendar lithograph, there is no future for it, artistically, except in the embellishment of a very natural film form, the animated cartoon. An occasional novelty short, one like *La Cucaracha*, intended solely to entertain, and because of its little story quite in the mood of gay and dramatic color, is also a subject for the color. But it is another thing to impress color into the talking shadows for a full-length feature like, let us say, *Youth of Maxim* or the domestic *The Informer*. In pictures of this sort, clashing colors splashed gaudily even though the settings are in the mood of the film, would be destructive. The sombre, brooding tragedy of *The Informer* in its grey and purple mantle of night seems eminently more suited to the grey and black shadows of conventional photography. Technicolor, or whatever trade name succeeds, will have to run the color range as completely and finely as have the sound technicians in theirs; will have to capture the naturalness which true color in life possesses for the eye; will have to accommodate artificialities in lighting and arrangement for the creation of moods apart from naturalism; will have to offer a fluidity of use and expression which will take it out of the strait-jacket of restricted studio operation and give to films an unobtrusive feeling of rightness.

ALL of the foregoing gives no consideration to the banal *Becky Sharp* as a dramatic effort. The problem of good stories has very little to do with good color; it is trite to observe that no degree of perfection in color will compensate for a bad picture.

In connection with the reception of *Becky Sharp*, some observations are appropriate. In the first place, there is no genuine public enthusiasm for color at the present time. *Becky Sharp* has done nothing more than stir the stock market in Technicolor for John Hay Whitney, its producer and a substantial stockholder in Technicolor (15% to 20%). Even this proved disappointing. The stock fluctuated roughly between 15 and 20 for an approximate range of five points during the past four months of ballyhoo for *Becky Sharp*. It declined sharply shortly after the general release of the picture, and now hovers between 15 and 20 in nervous starts. In other words, selling on a brief rise was undoubtedly conducive to the sudden drop, since there was nothing inherently vital in the rise to sustain prices. Then, too, public interest and the mixed press reception—there were many reviewers who cautiously approached the subject and admitted their unimpressed viewpoint not only regarding *Becky Sharp* as a film story but as a color vehicle—must have caused speculators and investors to shy from the stock. At any rate, now that *Becky Sharp* is entering

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the second and third phases of its run, Technicolor is priced at very little more than its original figure before the band wagon started to play.

What is the situation with respect to color in the producing field? Here it must be remembered that producers own none of the equipment or rights to Technicolor, except as they contract for them on a rental basis. Everything from cameras and cameramen to the development and printing of the film is in the hands of Technicolor at the present time.

The new Technicolor immediately means vastly increased costs to production and distribution elements of motion pictures. This is true not merely because Technicolor jealously guards its control of actual camera work and film development, but because of the costs inherent in the process itself and in its production.

Technicolor today is a three-color process as distinguished from the two-color Technicolor of the past. It has added blue to its range, thus including the three primary colors and affording an approximation of natural color.

In order to produce this three-color effect, exposure is made on three separate black and white negatives running before a single lens. These are combined, in developing and printing, on a single positive print. The costs, as contrasted with single negative black and white photography, are interestingly developed in this excerpt from the trade paper, Motion Picture Herald.

"The average amount of footage shot on a 7,000-foot picture," says the Herald, "is 66,000 feet on the average black-and-white feature. In Technicolor, this immediately is multiplied by three, or a total of 198,000 feet. For this negative, Technicolor gets seven and one-half cents a foot and takes in therefore, \$14,850. These 198,000 feet are developed at the cost of two cents a foot, which brings in an additional \$3,960. Out of this 198,000 feet of negative shot, possibly 99,000 feet would survive the first process of elimination and Technicolor would rush-print these 99,000 feet at 12 cents a foot for an additional \$11,880. From the 200 prints usually made—and 7,000 feet multiplied by 200 prints makes a footage total of 1,400,000—Technicolor's return is \$77,000. Thus Technicolor's photographic income amounts to \$14,850 from negative, \$3,960 from developing, \$11,880 from rush prints and \$77,000 from all other prints, for a \$107,690 grand total.

"In addition to these charges, Technicolor supplies cameras, rented at \$90 a week; a part-time color director at \$125 a week, and one, two or three cameramen, according to requirements, at salaries ranging from \$200 down to \$50 a week."

These figures reveal the chief reason why Hollywood is chary of embracing the spectrum as its newest box-office saviour. The staggering cost, in addition to a decided apathy on the part of the public, is causing Hollywood presently to consider color only for the production of shorts and animated cartoons. That a few features will be ventured in view of the superficial ripple caused by *Becky Sharp* is undoubted; Dr. Kalmus, refusing to reveal their producers, counts on six productions of feature length for the coming year.

Nevertheless, the motion picture producer's pocketbook, lamentably restricted since he put himself in hock to the electrical interests and their bankers during the era of the sound track, is in no position to dabble in color. Once faced with the film charges enumerated above, the producer has to spend considerably more on a color picture than on a monotone film for such items as settings, costumes and locations all of which will have to be treated with considerably greater attention, and consequent cost, than similar preparation for a monotone production.

THERE is another important color process available in the new Kodachrome of the Eastman Kodak laboratories, and this is said to be considerably superior in every respect to the new Technicolor. This new Kodachrome is the development of two young scientists of musical families, Leopold Mannes, son of David Mannes and nephew of Walter Damrosch, and Leo Godowsky, Jr., son of Leopold Godowsky.

Technicolor and Eastman Kodak are parties to cross-licensing agreements which control the uses and development of patents affecting both processes. This cross-licensing arrangement strengthens the positions of the two companies into a dominant focus for color in the commercial and home fields.

The Kodachrome process, now available only for 16 mm. home movies, has the obvious advantage, aside from its alleged technical superiority, of being produced on one film. The film is coated with five layers of microscopically thin emulsions, forming a sandwich effect in which two layers constitute dividing sections. The remaining three, separated by the dividing layers, compose light-sensitive emulsions, each of which is sensitive to a primary color. Thus, red, yellow and blue are possible in combination. The dividing layers are dissolved out in developing.

This process is obviously cheaper. Not only is it a single-film method, but it does not require special filters and similar optical devices for purifying the light projecting system.

Still it does not obviate, in spite of its technical excellence, the artistic and psychological drawbacks to color. Or the production cost as far as preparation and shooting are concerned.

The cross-licensing arrangements existing between Eastman Kodak and Technicolor are more important commercially than technically, and for this reason certain to restrain progress in the theatre field as far as color is concerned. The reason is fairly obvious: Eastman Kodak is in the business of selling negative, and the existing Technicolor process requires three times as much negative as monotone production. Hence, it is certainly to Eastman Kodak's advantage to push Technicolor for theatre motion pictures, and reserve

the single-negative Kodachrome process for the 16 mm. home movie field, a market not even comparable in revenue with the commercial field.

This situation is just another illustration of the ledger considerations that animate Hollywood and the financial exploiters behind it. The element of profit alone, in this case, will undoubtedly impede the legitimate development of cheaper, more effective color for the screen.

Technicolor's *Becky Sharp* cost well over a million dollars. As a novelty rocketed along by large advertising and publicity appropriations, it may get its cost back. But similar ventures, gambles all in a day when studio heads are racking their assistants' brains to reduce production costs, are bound to give the movie tycoons a bad case of the jitters.

In the event they do go after color seriously within the next year, the production cost differential will have to be taken up somewhere. It is my guess that in the beginning such pictures will be sold as "specials" that demand a large percentage of the gross from the exhibitor. And it is possible, as a consequence, that the exhibitor will be forced to increase the admission price. This may not work out so well for the exhibitor, who is finding the working class public in no mood to pay more than reasonable theatre admissions.

HOWEVER, it is idle to speculate pessimistically on the future of color. Color films are certain to come; how soon is entirely a matter of prophecy, and there is no comfort or assurance in such cinematic crystal-gazing.

Hollywood's own prognosticators have been properly oratorical in their pronouncements on the future of color, and equally non-committal, leaving the issue to between-the-lines readers. But the most intelligent summary of the situation, amid all the confusion, is the statement of Ernst Lubitsch, production head of Paramount Picture studios, who said:

"When color films can be made as cheaply as black and white, when they become less artificial looking, when they approximate real life more closely than monotone film, then color will be used in all feature length films."

The public can anticipate a few color features during the coming year. This is inevitable in view of Hollywood's consistently imitative temperament. A cycle in color is not likely, but there will be venturesome souls with elastic bank-rolls and gambling spirit who will attempt to force the present really inadequate color. Such experimentation, if it is done with most of the technical, artistic and dramatic strictures in mind, is nevertheless highly desirable. There is a suspicion, no doubt wholly undeserved, that Hollywood will exploit color as it did sound, manipulating the machine to "save the industry" and doing it in the easiest and least adult way.

American Dancers in Moscow

By CHEN-I-WAN

THE review of theatrical dancers that was recently held in Moscow included recitals by two young American dancers now working in the USSR—Pauline Koner and Dhimah. Both recitals aroused considerable discussion of points vital to the development of a modern dance art in the USSR and to the further growth of the artists themselves.

Pauline Koner was a popular success with her Spanish dances—*Fire Dance (de Falla)*, *Corrida*, *Farrucca*, which she performed with clean-cut rhythm and enthusiasm. Compared to the highly stylized productions of the Academic ballet, these dances, as well as *Bird of Prey*, were a refreshing change from the birds and butterflies in vogue. More significant, for her, at least, were her *Funeral Marches*—for a Rich Aunt, a Politician, and a Canary—although their social satire seemed rather naive against a Soviet background. The main professional interest was in her technical training—her developed sense of controlled, plastic movement, of rhythm and vigor, and her capacity for sustained composition. The exclusive importance of ballet has resulted in a widespread blind devotion in the USSR to its technical training. Koner's performance added weight to the arguments for the new forms of plastic dance training that the development of the mass dance in the USSR has so urgently made necessary.

Dhimah, in her recital, presented *Lament (Cadelli)*, an expressionistic study, and two dances from a revolutionary cycle. An unlucky choice of names (*Lament*, an introspective excitement performed in a robe of bronze tissue, was renamed *Struggle*, which prepared the audience for a revolutionary militant attack, at least) was an impediment. The approach that these dances demanded precluded a unanimous and immediate appreciation from the audience. Moscow is still unaccustomed to the creative method of these expressionistic trends in the "modern dance." Remember that up to the 1920's, the classical ballet was the monopolist of the dance world. Isadora Duncan-ism was a bad second, tolerated, but an outsider. From 1920 to 1926 came machine-dancing by Forregger (more brawn, no sentiment) and the erotic displays of Lukin and Golleysovski, who introduced nude dancing—"the body in all its beauty"—in his concerts at the House of the Soviets. Along with these were various pretty low-grade forms of art gymnastics and acrobatic dancing. Then, until 1931, most of the dance trends based on inspiration rather than sound technique died out. The classical ballet, as bearer of the cultural dance heritage, as the

only successful dance training system, as the only producer of spectacle, was glorified. It produced *Red Poppy*, *The Football-Player*, etc. It was unchallenged.

From 1931 to now comes the almost unnoticed growth of the mass dance culture, national folk dancing, tremendous enthusiasm for jazz dancing, the founding of the reformed ballet group, the Dramatic Ballet group (which have just produced a realistic *Carmen!*), and a few excellent solo dancers, Drutskaya, Chen, Mei. It is these latter who are developing a technique that enables them to approach really significant themes. Characteristically, it is the general public rather than the critics (either old balletomanes, or writers who have somewhat biological ideas on dancing) who give them encouragement and understanding, and rather the public less exposed to ballet than the more "cultured public." But "the times are with us." The proposals of the dance conference following the dance review will give a forward impulse to our socialist dance culture. Both Dhimah and Pauline Koner are actively participating in the work of Soviet dance organization. Dhimah is organizing and training a group. Both performances showed how necessary it is for the new Soviet dancers to study dance attainments in other countries, of which up to now comparatively little is known here.

THE conference followed the review, and was presided over by Pavel Novitski, head of the Theatre Section of the Commissariat of Education. Public critiques of all participants in the review, written by a commission of leading critics, musicians and theatrical workers nominated by the dancers themselves, were discussed, and proposals were submitted to the Commissariat of Education for organizational measures to be taken at this new stage of development.

It is proposed to found a special dance commission in the Commissariat of Education to supervise and encourage the development of the Soviet dance culture as a whole: mass dancing, national dance cultures, theatrical—amateur and professional—dancing, etc. An inclusive dance association will bring together all dance workers for creative discussion, consultations, social activities, and organization of collective work. The scattered forces, now in the physical culture groups, in the clubs, parks, and theatres, will be brought together.

The conference stressed the fact that the center of development of the new dance has shifted definitely from the classical ballet and schools—which

served a valuable purpose in introducing the masses to the art of the dance and handing down the art heritage—to the plastic realist schools and the mass forms of dance and dance training, which now demand the maximum attention. The proposal to form a dance drama studio was met with special applause, since the non-classic dance trends have had no permanent center for serious experimental work and recitals. The realization of these proposals of course depends to a large extent on the further activity of the dancers themselves. Two big problems just now are those of organizational forms of the new dance and methods of training. But either through the efforts of the Commissariat of Education or through those of such organizations as the Central Park of Culture these problems will undoubtedly be settled soon.

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The Dance Unit

By LEONARD DAL NEGRO

TWO trends in group choreography have been prevailing in the social dance: collective thought and composition, and composition the result of the creative genius of a single individual. In a recent article on the New Dance Group which appeared in the May issue of NEW THEATRE, the method of group thought as practiced by its exponents was explained. But that an individual creator can produce work of as high rank is evident from the evident success the *Dance Unit* has achieved in the one year it has been before workers' audiences. Any preference herein stated is divorced from partisanship of any particular dance organization, but has to do only with the type of approach.

The Dance Unit was founded three years ago as a subsidiary of the Theatre Union and was originally known as the Theatre Union Dance Group. It was intended to use the group in productions of the Theatre Union as the need arose. Anna Sokolov, a member of Martha Graham's concert group and a soloist of note, was given charge of the group. She recruited other students of Martha Graham. From that time until the present she has been their only choreographer. And yet, the success of the Dance Unit has not been a personal triumph but a group achievement.

Due to the nature of the Theatre Union's first productions, no opportunity offered to use the services of their dance group. The inspiration to create their first dance came from another source. The American League Against War and Fascism requested that they dance at a huge anti-war mass meeting. The group's now famous *Anti-War Trilogy* was created for this occasion. They took the entire canvas of imperialist war and diplomacy and translated it into a three-partitioned dance. For the first time in ten years (I date the beginning of the revolutionary dance in America with Edith Segal's appearance at a meeting held in Chicago in 1924 to honor the name of Lenin, who had just died), a group propaganda dance conformed structurally and artistically to established principles of dance design. There was no vulgarization of the mechanics of dance, no recession into the mimic gestures of the drama, no need for literary props. *Anti-War Trilogy* was performed at concerts, mass-meetings, workers' clubs, everywhere with singular acclaim; its appeal was immediate and direct. True, the theme is rather generalized (a fault with much dancing of the Left) but what difficulties its reception had are chargeable to the unfamiliarity of the audiences with

the technique used (which is pure and unabashed Graham). The sharply stylized movements, always direct and aggressive, came as a shock to the unaccustomed observer. The Graham technique is stern, almost ascetic in its economy of movement; at first its discipline may confuse those whose dance has been learned at the feet of the enervating sensuality of a Duncan or the acrobatic gyres of a *prima ballerina assoluta*. Critics referred scathingly to "Graham-crackers," scored the use by radical dancers of a "bourgeois" technique. But along with the delimiting attitude that vaunts collective creation in the revolutionary dance above an individual's, the frigidity toward employing bourgeois techniques is rapidly thawing out.

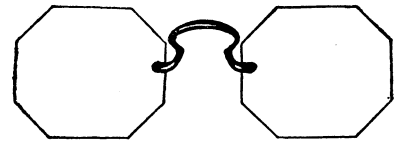
Both of these dances are noted less for their profundity than for the beauty of their design: not the durability of the cloth is what strikes one, but the intricacy and artistry of the weave. The music for *Forces in Opposition*, composed especially for this dance by Alex North (who has been of inestimable value to the Unit as a composer and accompanist), provides a splendid foil for the movement.

SIX months ago the Dance Unit severed their connection with the Theatre Union and became an official unit of the New Dance League. This divorce from the parent organization brought with it serious problems. The Dance Unit with its stalwart dozen performers now had the weighty problems before them of maintaining a studio, paying an accompanist, buying and making costumes, etc. The revenues are slight enough. No group can long exist on the small fees (usually from \$5 to \$10 for the entire group for an evening's performance) they are paid by the working class organizations they dance before. Consequently for a long period they were never sure where they would rehearse next. The problem was partially solved through the generosity of So-

phia Delza, sincere and valuable friend of the new dance movement, who put her studio at the disposal of the Unit.

Structurally the Dance Unit differs in many ways from the other groups in the New Dance League. What differentiates it most is that its small membership is made up of young women whose exclusive occupation, often at great sacrifice, is the dance. The majority of the other groups are workers in industry and in offices, who dance as an avocation, though one that plays an important part in their lives. The Dance Unit have all had a fine technical training with Martha Graham before joining the group; working under the guidance of a single directorial mind their concen-

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Theatre and Trade Unions

By ALICE EVANS

tration is upon executing the choreography designed by Anna Sokolov. Most of the other organizations in the New Dance League separate their membership into three divisions: a beginners' group, an intermediate group and a performing group, with the performing group drawing upon the other two for its personnel. The Dance Unit does not feel the need to train beginners; very sagely, with a whole modern dance school to recruit from, Anna Sokolov devotes her time exclusively to training a single unit of performers. They work extremely hard, meeting, normally, several times a week, and in periods before recitals every day. During the dance season, they have been called upon as often as three times weekly to perform before workers' audiences. Classes are two or three hours long; some time each day is devoted to a discussion of current social problems.

Strange American Funeral, the most recent creation of Anna Sokolov, places them first in the esteem of the workers and intellectuals who comprise left dance audiences. Their meteoric rise to this position within a single year promises much for the future entertainment they can afford the masses. It was danced this June 9th at the New Dance League Festival held at the Park Theatre. The Dance Unit's projection of Mike Gold's dramatic poem about a cheerful Bohemian worker who was killed in a steel-mill, expressed all the cheerful earthy sentiment of the man himself, the agony of his people when he was dissolved to death in living liquid steel, and their sorrow and bitterness at the funeral cortege. The dance was couched in a difficult medium—a revolutionary poem set to music sung by a male voice. Yet—the dissent of John Martin notwithstanding—the sung poem was used to its best advantage: the dance design free and independent of the song's rhythms; no attempt made at interpreting the meanings contained in the poem with direct literalness. Only occasionally the sentiments of the poem and the evolutions of the dance blended both image and cadences. The problem of poetry in its use in the dance was thus successfully solved by the insight of a fine, integrating choreographer.

The musical rhythm was fundamental; the words were as sub-titles in a film. Most of the members of the Dance Unit are spending the Summer at Bennington College, Vermont, where Martha Graham is giving an intensive course in the dance. We can expect that upon their return to the city they will progress to even finer productions. With the strongest and most decisive technique the modern dance has to offer, with a sincere and gifted artist for a director, and a school of well-trained performers to draw upon at will, there is every reason to suppose that the Dance Unit will become the outstanding dance group in America within a few years.

I SAW a thousand workers from the silk and dye mills of Paterson, New Jersey, pack the Orpheum Theatre there for the strike benefit program presented by the New Jersey Section New Theatre League, sponsored by the American Federation of Silk Workers. Against the gaudy curtains of a converted burlesque house, three dramatic groups presented plays that dealt mainly with trade union problems, ranging from *Laid Off* by David Pinski, to *Waiting For Lefty*, both given by the Newark Collective Theatre, and including *Exhibit A*, presented by the Bayonne Theatre Against War and Fascism, the *Union Label* by the Paterson New Art Group.

The most exciting thing about this program, with its high points of audience participation during *Union Label* and *Waiting For Lefty*, was that the silk workers liked it, and their enthusiasm was contagious. But it is important to remember that most of these workers were having their first contact with plays that talked their language and dealt with their lives. The impact of this first experience made them uncritical. It would be dangerous to let this audience responsiveness lull us into self-satisfaction, as we have done so often in the past, and thus make us fail to improve technique to the highest possible standard.

The most general artistic weakness of all groups was in stage management. At the first curtain opening and in each of the plays something went wrong at least once with lights, curtain or properties, and there were long waits which gave the program a damaging air of amateurishness. This is a common weakness among our young social theatres; of many performances throughout the country, I have seen few with good stage management. For theatre of action groups, whose life depends on facility in traveling with plays and putting them on under varied circumstances, the problem of achieving competence in handling spotlights, curtains, and quick scene changes is a vital one.

The second artistic defect of the evening was revealed as a general need for voice and body training by the actors. The level of acting was high, and the weaknesses were simple almost mechanical ones, which can be corrected through training. Such things as constriction of the vocal chords and consequent inability to get volume or emotional color into the voice, were general, as was bodily stiffness. The evening, however, was illuminated by some unusual individual characterizations, such as the old woman in Pinski's play who accepted a lay-off after 24 years of service with bewildered wistfulness. The first five minutes of *Exhibit A*, when the crippled war veteran was helped into his chair, contributed all the necessary bitterness without a word of dialogue. The girl who was fired in *Union Label* brought quiet desperation to her part which raised the incident from a commonplace to a deeply moving one. In this play, also, the spontaneity of the firebrand who asked the boss for steak when he offered his workers sandwiches for an overtime meal, and the characterization of the old maid were memorable pieces of acting. There were many of these also in *Waiting For Lefty*, which I remember particularly for the voice and body facility of Joe, the contagious power of Agate, and the sensitive portrayal of Florrie. In directing technique, *Exhibit A* was weak. The first half was well filled out with dramatic incident, but the last half was left almost completely bare and dropped at the end, so that characterization, emotion, climax were lost. *Union Label* was improved as a play by imaginative direction and awareness of the audience, which made the speed up in the sweat shop a central reality. *Waiting For Lefty* showed a remarkable competence in directing, acting, and staging, which made the same group's careless production of *Laid Off* inexcusable.

DISCUSSING this program from a repertory point of view, *Laid Off* shows a tendency that many of our theatre groups must guard against. The Newark Collective Theatre took a well-written defeatist play by David Pinski and grafted on a victorious ending through the instrumentation of a union in the shop, reworking the play through improvisation. This method is a legitimate one, but the group did a hurried, careless job, and presented it before the script was finished. *Exhibit A* has a weakness of most "conversion plays," giving a somewhat obvious picture of a veteran precipitated into an anti-war demonstration by his own bitterness and the jingoism of his Rotarian brother. But the play has merits of simplicity, characterization, the opportunity for fine acting by the soldier, and might be worked into a stirring anti-war appeal. *Union Label*, showing the struggle for unionization in a sweat shop, made an exciting production, in spite of some talkiness. Although more sophisticated audiences might have been impatient with the elementary political message of the play, it made a deep impression on a thousand silk workers to whom the problem is a vital necessity, and showed the need for more plays of this type. The audience's participation in *Union Label* equalled their response to *Waiting For Lefty*; they laughed, cried, applauded, or made audible comments throughout both performances, and at several points, such as the stool pigeon exposure in *Lefty*, they almost stopped the show.

Some immediate results of this program indicate already the importance of New Theatre groups reaching trade union audiences. After this program, a conference of New Jersey theatre groups was held in the union hall of the American Federation of Silk Workers. Several delegates from the union were present, and when J. Edward Bromberg of the Group Theatre spoke on *Artistic Problems*, asked interesting questions which indicated the possibility of realizing the program "A New Theatre group in every union hall" in the near future. Already the Joint Board of the American Federation of Silk Workers is considering a theatre group within its union, and the Federation of Silk and Rayon Dyers (also affiliated with the United Textile Workers Union, A. F. L.) requested help in writing a play on their struggles. On July 6th, the Playwrights section of the Paterson New Art Group met with Charles Vigoritto and Tony Venturo, leaders of the Dyers' local, and Alex Philian of the Silk Workers union, to discuss writing plays about these unions.

This close relationship between the New Theatre League and the trade unions holds much of value for both, and is being reached in other parts of the country as well as New Jersey. Dramatic groups within the unions are of great educational value, keeping up the membership's morale and stimulating militant action. The International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, for instance, which is the strongest trade union in the country, with its industry almost 100% organized, has a strong cultural department with dramatic groups in many locals. Trade union theatres, coming into the League, bring a vigor and preoccupation with fundamental economic reality, which greatly strengthens our movement. More plays about trade union problems, more bookings before locals of the American Federation of Labor, more dramatic groups within the unions—these should be the nation-wide reverberations of the fine start made in Paterson.

The problem of getting good short-form plays written about the trade unions is one which our experienced dramatists, who claim sympathy with the social theatre, will have to participate in solving. Our amateur playwrights are already working overtime on the problem, but work goes slowly as they must learn craftsmanship at the same time. Before the expert craftsmen in the social theatre, the challenge still stands unanswered.

Revolt of the Actor -- 1935

By ARTHUR HACKETT

WHEN an actor goes to the offices of his union—the Actors Equity Association—he finds on all hands copies of a book entitled *Revolt of the Actor* (available at reduced prices). This book tells of the great strike in which the actors wrested from the managers certain rights, and out of which came recognition of the first white-collar workers' union—Equity.

Nowhere in those offices, however, can he find any information about the new revolt of the actor—within Equity, but against the supine Administration.

This revolt is being led by the Actors' Forum, with which NEW THEATRE readers are familiar. A brief recapitulation of its origin, and its accomplishments up to date might, perhaps, not be amiss.

The Actors' Forum—although at that time unnamed—was formed in the spring of 1934 as an aftermath of the notorious *Sailor Beware* case. Here the actors had been bludgeoned into taking an unwarranted salary cut by the manager, and Equity, appealed to, refused its help. The cast, backed by the sentiment expressed by hundreds of other actors, determined not to accept the cut; and the manager finally backed down.

This incident proved two things to the aroused actors. It proved that collective bargaining was still a live issue; and it proved what most actors were beginning to suspect—that Equity had to be given a thorough house-cleaning if the 1919 strike were not to be a vain gesture.

Meetings were held, and the first victory won when the Actors' Forum succeeded in electing seven members to the Council—which body has complete control of the Union's policy under its constitution. Immediately the fight against the Forum was launched by the administration. The "Red scare" was used; leaders were slandered, Council meetings were packed against the seven. In fact, all the devices common in struggles between reactionary union leadership and a rank-and-file movement were brought into play. The second victory came with the establishment of a Cuts and Concessions Board, which makes it impossible for a manager to cut salaries without the consent of the entire cast, advised by a committee set up by Equity; the third with the passage of a resolution for four regular meetings a year instead of one. A few items in the Forum platform had been temporarily defeated — amendments to the Constitution to make for more democracy, the giving of the franchise to actors not paid up for a year, etc.

This past Spring has seen a particularly vicious series of attacks on the Forum. With every possible device—Constitutional and otherwise—used by the administration to prevent the Forum from electing new Council members, the final vote stood at 343 for the Forum as against 565 for the Regular Ticket. This is, it is true, a defeat, but one that augurs well for the next election.

NEW THEATRE carried last month a brief story about the two latest Forum victories. Rehearsal expense allowance has been won—\$20. per week for Senior Members, \$15. per week for Juniors and Chorus Equity members, following the probationary period. This is a compromise measure, the original demand having been \$25. for all; and the Forum will continue the fight. Another compromise has been effected: instead of the complete abolition of the Junior minimum salary, managers are now allowed to have only 20% of a cast on that basis. The Forum will not abate its demand for complete abolition.

The Actors' Forum will go on; more and more actors are coming to realize the necessity for a re-vitalizing of their union; and NEW THEATRE will keep its readers posted on the new revolt of the actors as they struggle to make of Equity once more the real labor organization it set out to be.

The Negro Actor

ONLY \$22.50 a week. Five shows a day and rehearsals until three, four or five in the morning. Nine months' rehearsal before coming to Broadway. Non-union sets moved by non-union stage hands. These are the every-day occurrences in a Negro production. These are the conditions of the Negro choruses and actors both in Harlem and on Broadway as well as on the road. The majority of Negro productions are completely unorganized. Notable examples are *Run, Lil' Chillun'* and all of Lew Leslie's *Blackbirds'* as well as many other less well known ones. This gives the manager the right to rehearse them as long as he wants to. *Run, Lil' Chillun'* rehearsed six months, *Africana* for nine months and some have even rehearsed a year and more.

The chorus girls are worse off than the actors. In the Harlem vaudeville houses they are mostly touring companies. They play five shows, seven days a week for \$22.50 a week (the union minimum is \$30.00 per week). In addition to this, they rehearse sometimes until five in the morning for the next

week's show. On Broadway, also, the Negro choruses are unorganized and work for sub-minimum wages, not only in the regular musical shows, but also on many of the movie theatres which use stage shows. Besides this, there have been at least two occasions when Equity has not demanded bond from the managers for Negro actors, although they did demand bond for white actors, in the same cast.

Even more than with the white actors, engagements are few and far between, and when the actor is an Equity member and receives the minimum salary, the minimum is generally the maximum he can get.

The union administrations have tried to avoid taking the blame for these conditions. Actors Equity explains that it is doing the Negroes a favor by letting them play without paying the fifty-dollar initiation fee. If the same logic were applied to white actors, there would be no union.

Of course the Negroes have no representation in the government of Equity. Of the few of them who at one time or another managed to join, the majority were swept out when the depression reduced the total number of dues-paying Equity actors from approximately 10,000 to about 2,500. It is dangerous to the white actor to have hundreds working in his profession under sub-union conditions. This can benefit only the managers. Then what excuse is there? Is it that the Negroes do not want to joint the union? First of all this is not true. Secondly, even if it were, it would be the business of the union to make the Negroes want to join the union as an essential part of its function of protecting all workers in its trade.

It becomes the business of the unorganized Negro actors to insist on participation in the unions in every instance, and of the members of Actors and Chorus Equity to eradicate any tendency to chauvinism in their own dealings with Negro actors, and see that the Negro has equal working rights and conditions. *In their own interest* they must demand that their unions organize a solid front of Negro and white actors.

ON June 30, Equity took a sudden interest in Negro actors. The same organization that had permitted them to be exploited so ruthlessly in commercial ventures like *Africana* and *Run Lil' Chillun'* forbade Rose McClendon, Austin Burley, Chick McKinney and other Equity members to appear on a program of short plays for the benefit of the Negro Peoples Theatre. As a result, the entire program had to be abandoned at the last minute. A number of Negro entertainers appeared instead, presenting the same type of "hot numbers" that pander to the tastes of white patrons of swanky night-clubs. The audience was amazed and disappointed

to see, instead of *Exhibit A* and other strong plays of social protest that were scheduled, the kind of self-caricature of the Negro people described in the July Negro Number of *NEW THEATRE*. The entertainers are to be thanked, not criticized, for filling in; but the Negro Peoples Theatre representatives must be criticized for not giving adequate explanation for the complete and unfortunate change of program. The real blame, however, rests with Equity's last minute interference. We hope that Negro and white Equity members will take action to insure that Equity does not confine its interest in the working conditions of Negro actors to interfering with their benefit programs.

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Stabilization ?

THE relief administrations, both city and state, have long been zealous in their endeavors to make the relief projects "self-sustaining" and "self-liquidating." Recently this has been generalized to include the professional and cultural projects, heretofore exempt. What happened to the School of Music, Dance and Drama when it was turned over to the Federal administration on July 1 forbodes the new trend. At its inception the school levied no fees. Thousands of unemployed students of these arts flocked to it for lessons; accordingly a charge of ten cents per hour-class was instituted. Multiply this by 2,000 students, the majority taking at least three classes a week (the instructors too few for the overcrowded classes), and it is plain the school turned a pretty penny. Ostensibly these fees were to pay the rent, upkeep and salaries for the project, but since no other project in New York was obliged to "pay" for itself, it was clearly meant as a model for self-liquidation. Immediately the project "went Federal," a new fees policy was announced. Whereas all fees had heretofore been payable weekly, the entire term's tuition must now be paid in advance—a great hardship for the majority of unemployed students; scholarships for those on Home Relief were to be discontinued pending investigation—as though being on Home Relief at \$2.75 a week were not certificate of need enough! The administration coolly told the protesting Student Council that this policy was necessary, for eventually the Works Division must stop paying the teachers' salaries, and therefore anticipatory steps must be taken to "stabilize" the school. Stabilization obviously must take place at the expense of those in whose supposed interests it was founded! An indignant letter published in the New York Post yielded slight concessions, but it is plain that the Federal Administration intends to freeze out all the "deadheads" and scholarship students.

While the School of Music, Dance and Drama has been a boon to thousands of indigent students of the theatre arts, Chorus Equity has been forced to close down its dancing school because of the competition of lower rates and excellent tuition that the School of Music, Dance and Drama offered. Mrs. Dorothy Bryant, Executive Secretary of Chorus Equity, deplored the passing of the school and predicted the eventual shut-down of the Federal project. "When that too is abandoned there will be no class to which the professional chorus boy or girl can go for inexpensive instruction. Further, since anyone may enter the school whether or not he is a professional, and since lessons cost nothing (sic!) we fear that it is encouraging people to enter an already overcrowded profession." Herein is exposed the bank-

ruptcy of the narrow craft-union policy which fails to see that the struggle of the organized professional and that of the unemployed artist and student must be one. Instead of merely bewailing the death of Equity's school, Chorus Equity should demand of the Federal Government that it be given complete control over the stage dancing units in the school. From the unemployed on Equity's rolls, teachers, assistants, vaudeville units, demonstration groups should be employed to teach and demonstrate to even larger numbers than attend at present. Equity should demand that all fees be discontinued, to encourage increased enrolment. Thus the struggle of the Student Council to abolish fees to students, and the demands of Equity's unemployed to be placed in their profession, can resolve into joint action directed against the single enemy—the callousness of the government to the plight of the professional artist and student.

Correspondence

New York City
July 10, 1935

TO NEW THEATRE:

Henry Gilfond's review of the New Dance League solo program of April 7th, which appeared in the May issue of *Dance Observer*, reveals a fantastic illusion entertained by many dancers and critics who are still embracing their Ivory Towers. "Fascist-jingo and reactionary elements," he asserts, are to be feared only by those who actively combat them. Don't bother them, he infers, and they won't bother us.

Even the most reactionary papers daily cite instances of the open suppression in Fascist countries of the palest liberal thoughts and ideas. The tale of the degeneration of culture under Fascism includes in its sweep the least aggressive, the meekest exponents of contemporary culture. Everything that is modern or experimental is suspect. Fascism will not encourage vital ideas since that virus might carry over from artistic to political "notions." In the same issue of the *Dance Observer* a letter from two dance students now in Germany reveals what is happening there under the Fascist censorship:

"Although we are handicapped by not having seen the actual work, it seems to us that the American dance has a social purpose which is more than the mere observation of a truth as the artist sees it; that it has, in other words, a goal; the exposition of a social situation which makes of the artistic material used, a means, not an end in itself. To be specific, such titles as *Time is Money*, *Parasite*, *The Life of the Worker*, *Anti-War Cycle*, and others indicate an interest and insight into a world which is of today and today only. A world which may tomorrow be changed in many of its most important aspects, and so be calling for a new interpretation and a new comment . . . That this is in strong contrast to the present German interest, we cannot help noticing . . . At the Deutsche Tanzfestspiel in Berlin in Demember, where one saw the most promising young dancers of Germany as well as the great people who have spread the tradition of the modern German dance abroad, we were astonished by a lack, not in quality of finished work, but in vitality of conception."

Vital ideas, Mr. Gilfond, cannot live in an atmosphere of suppression. If it still remains a mystery to him "why any of these dancers (on the New Dance League program) should run into difficulties with any Fascist-jingo or reactionary elements," I would call to his attention a recent article on the modern dance—not, mind you the *revolutionary* dance—but

(Continued from page 14)

Weidman-Humphreys' concert group. This article appeared in Hearst's Detroit Times, of January 6th, 1935, and is in effect a direct attack upon every sincere artist experimenting with technique, and so advancing the modern dance as a medium of expression. In spite of the fact that these dancers dealt with themes of the distant past, *Alcina Suite*, ancient Greek ritual, *Dionysiaque*, and Romantic duets, a dance of *Sports* and other perfectly innocuous themes, the following blood-curdling words were the reviewer's response:

"If I were a person of entrenched wealth, living by the sweat of other people's brows, it is not the boys on the soapboxes that I would fear, yapping economic platitudes, it is those half-mad, clairvoyant creatures, the artists . . . The real emissaries of the Rousseaus, the Voltaires and the Marxes are the artists . . . No, it is less as dancers than as a social symptom that the Humphrey-Weidman group is significant. Significant because they have the courage to mock at tradition and because of the response which they awaken. But they are terrifically serious as they smash at the patterns of grace and sneer at both classic calm and the romantic mystery which the old order bred . . . it wouldn't take very many (such) cruel caricatures of the minuet to make it forever impossible for a modern child to take seriously that stately and beautiful product of a red-heeled aristocracy . . . These 'modern' dances aren't typically American. Jazz and our refinement of the old country jig into the 'tap' dance, are the only typical American dances . . ."

Has the modern artist then nothing to fear from Fascist obscurantism? This open cry for blood is directed against those artists whom Mr. Gilfond advises to pooh-pooh the warnings of the New Dance League. Our answer must be to perfect just such forms and themes which the Hearsts are so anxious to suppress. "Pure art," Mr. Gilfond, has much to fear from Fascist-jingo and reactionary forces if it doesn't organize to fight against these forces with all its vitality.

BILL MATONS
New York City
June 12, 1935

TO NEW THEATRE:

Throughout the entire run of *The Young Go First* at the Park Theatre, we were given the most complete cooperation by the crew.

Buddy, Steve, Bill and Frank very shortly took a personal interest in all the doings of *The Young Go First* and this interest was cemented into a warm friendship with the entire theatre by reason of an incident which occurred during the run of the play. The Park Theatre had been leased for several Sundays by the manager of an Italian dramatic company. The second Sunday of the run, the Italian company refused to pay the union rate for the stage hands and threatened to bring in scabs to move the scenery. Charles Friedman, Executive Director of the Theatre of Action, tried to prevail upon the manager of the Park Theatre to prevent scabs working backstage but he refused to interfere. Finally, Friedman went to Buddy and the three other boys and pledged the Theatre of Action to pay them that sum which would make up the difference between what the Italian company would pay and the regular union rate. And that sum was paid to Buddy and the boys in full within a week.

After that the crew became part of the family of the Theatre and we even prevailed upon them to take a bow with the cast at the last performance. With such a relationship, therefore, it was really not surprising that the stagehands decided to throw the cast a party. And what a party it was! The scenery shifters don't do things by halves. The festivities were held in the private apartment William Randolph Hearst had built for himself when he had the theatre (then the Cosmopolitan) erected! Top that for irony! The tables were loaded with a variety of meats, sandwiches and sparkling liquids. It was a merry evening, and an important one, too. For that evening sealed a close friendship between one of the oldest stage hands' unions and one of New York's youngest professional producing organizations, the Theatre of Action.

CURT CONWAY,

chromosomes. The play becomes not only a protest, but an affirmation of belief in man, a poem in dour syllables sung in the teeth of a bleak wind. It is unfortunate that the playwright presents eugenics as a fairly academic theory instead of as a symptomatic social movement, and that he contents himself with a blundering passive faith in time and nature instead of adopting some active principle of change. Thus Bridie frequently dawdles with his main theme instead of supplying it with a compelling dramatic issue. The lack of a forceful centripetal conflict makes the *Sleeping Clergyman* sprawling and jerky; indeed for many the play moved lethargically, like a sermon, and was galvanized into life only by fits and starts.

The one serious importation from France, André Obey's *Noah*, is pleasant fare, but cannot be considered significant. University and "little" theatres owe it a debt of gratitude; here is the ideal salve for abraded souls in a time of brawling transition. Here is "still, sad music . . . nor harsh nor grating," the lullaby of tamed wisdom whispering wistfully of human frailties and contradictions, about which nothing can be done. You can, of course, have faith . . . —"that serene and blessed mood." Hungary exported another Molnar imitation, *The Bride of Torozco*, and Spain contributed two vapid examples of its decayed theatre—Lorca's *Bitter Oleander* and Benavente's *Field of Ermine*.

IN the American department, *Panic* by Archibald MacLeish presents one of numerous instances of how social orientation is reflected in dramatic construction and effectiveness. Taking for his subject the collapse of the capitalistic system of economy as represented by the Wall Street crash of recent memory, the author manifestly commands substantial material. Gifted with poetic expression unapproached by anyone writing in the theatre here or abroad, MacLeish has created a dramatic composition which is a definite contribution to American poetry. If it is not a distinct contribution to American drama the failure is due to dramaturgic ineffectiveness caused by the fragmentary and uncertain character of its social critique. Whatever the intentions of the author may have been, the play sees the drama of economic collapse principally in terms of the tragedy of a super-financier, relegating the worker-chorus to the negative role of pronouncing measured fatalistic judgments. The catastrophe is attributed to seemingly mysterious forces over which there seems to be no control. Instead of effectively signifying the birth-pangs of a new era, because the poor and the downtrodden are given no real action in the play, being confined for the most part to an undynamic chorus, the Wall Street calamity seems to mark the end of the civilized world. Paramountly because of an inadequate identification with the actual social forces inherent in its theme, *Panic* is too static and single-tracked to stand as a full-fledged drama, though it deserves a place in the annals of the theatre as a move in a significant direction—the application of poetic drama to vital topics.

Panic does not carry out its implications of revolutionary change. It is rudimentary rather than confused. Robert Sherwood's *The Petrified Forest* is not rudimentary but desperately confused. All the seductions of dramaturgy are let loose upon the unwary spectator. Sherwood is an expert practitioner, and his play is a seasoned melodrama. But it is nothing more. In fact, its intellectual freight is an impediment rather than an advantage because it adds to the speciousness of the melodrama. The defeated, world-weary lives of the intelligentsia symbolize the decay of our society; this frankly pessimistic play implies that society is dying from the top down. Sherwood has overstated the plight of our writers and thinkers, many of whom are reorientating themselves and renouncing bohemianism and expatriation, but his point is well taken. The prime objection to the play is that it deterior-

ates into a wholly melodramatic merry-go-round featuring a tenth-rate poet-hero's self-pitying posturings. We are requested to sympathize with a supine derelict who "never was on land or sea" and is "the consecration" of the playwright's dream of how terribly the times are out of joint if a poet becomes successively a gigolo and a tramp and loses his will to live. Though at his request an obliging gunman shoots him dead, he never really came to life from the beginning of the drama or the end. A serious effort becomes hokum and piffle because it identifies itself sentimentally with the fantastic decadence which it purports to see objectively. Needless to say, the play is symptomatic of a confused state of mind characteristic of many established playwrights and novelists, and as such could be read with much profit.

Being for and against the same thing is a familiar phenomenon both in psychology and playwriting. *Merrily We Roll Along*, which was trumpeted to the skies by a number of our theatre pilots, is another example of this inner contradiction. Not only does the play fail to understand the forces that destroyed its hero artist's integrity, but the story of his deterioration, linked to nothing larger than a special, private affair, produces melodrama rather than social drama. Moreover, so inevitable is self-exposure in the drama, that the quality of the play contradicts its professed regret that idealism should be crushed by the juggernaut of materialism. Uninspired dialogue, sensational situations, and shabby bohemianism controvert the play's idealistic pretensions, leading to the suspicion that here is merely another example of ready-made, fits-like-a-glove theatricalism. The printed text is as merciful as a floodlight in exposing the hollowness of this composition, though it confirms the impression that we have here a vital subject: that of the degeneration of the artist in a predatory society, which transforms him into a mercenary minion devoid of the integrity that alone can give him personal happiness and creative success.

Paul Green's *Roll Sweet Chariot*, née *Potter's Field*, is as telling a demonstration of "ambivalence"—of feeling *pro* and *con* at the same time—as could be desired. The author's humanitarianism produces an unforgettable chain-gang scene at the end of the play. (Unfortunately this scene was hopelessly caricatured in production.) And yet the scene is promptly dissipated, and its effect partly nullified, by the author's inability to maintain his stance. (That ol' debbil "fairness" has tricked one more dramatist.) It is highly improbable that a chain-gang martinet who has lashed a prostrated Negro eighteen times, and who unquestionably has other such performances to his credit, should break into "loud sobs" and fling "himself down on his face in the grass." Nothing, moreover, comes of the play. The little town of Potter's Field is torn down to make way for the state road constructed with chain-gang labor, and the convicts, followed by the Potter's Field Negro folk, move ahead "toward the beckoning goal." What goal? If the end of Potter's Field and the coming of the state highway are meant to symbolize Negro emancipation the play is sufficiently obscure to be insignificant and meaningless. Lack of a definite point-of-view reduces this potentially powerful play to the level of conventional melodrama in the first three scenes, in which an escaped convict is killed by his wife's lover, and forces the concluding scene into the Serbonian bog of mysticism from which no playwright has yet emerged to tell his tale. It seems incredible that the author of the direct and forceful *In Abraham's Bosom* should have permitted himself to become so completely trapped by his social dualism, especially at a time when other Southern writers like Erskine Caldwell and T. S. Stripling are forging ahead clearly and uncompromisingly toward an understanding of the economic and racial problems of the South.

GOLD EAGLE GUY, a period play dealing with the amassing of early American fortunes, is a serious study of the monster of rugged individualism whose maw is crammed with the destroyed lives of business competitors and associates. Credit is due to the play for its laconic chronicling of the rise and fall of the founder of a California fortune. It is superior to the operatic Belasco treatment of the same subject in the Totheroh-O'Neill drama, *Mother Lode*. But excessive scrupulosity or objectivity leaves the play high and dry—and cold. The play lacks, in the main, emotional involvement and incandescence, without which no drama can live. If there is any intensity in *Gold Eagle Guy* it is mainly, though unintentionally, produced by ambiguous admiration for Guy Button's energy and resourcefulness. Objectivity, too can be a pitfall for the unwary.

To the category of ineffectual plays we may add *Brittle Heaven*, a well-written but slight treatment of the Emily Dickinson legend, and *The Farmer Takes a Wife*, an overpraised little museum-piece revolving around life on the Erie Canal just before the big ditch made way for the New York Central Railroad. In this innocuous fable the heroine, fantastically enamored of the Canal, clashes with her farming lover until the denouement resolves the conflict in favor of domestic happiness and peace. The play's lack of the slightest significance is regrettable because the story has salty characterizations and recaptures a colorful past.

The charge of insignificance can also be levelled—but only superficially—at *The Old Maid*, received lukewarmly at first, praised unstintedly on second thought, and finally cried down again when it had the misfortune of receiving the Pulitzer Prize. As a drama of sensibility, dealing with the tragedy of an upper-class girl who paid with a life-time of unhappiness for the crime of having borne an illegitimate child, it is fairly sentimental stuff that could be dismissed with little hesitation. As a picture of the cramping conventions which support the upper-class regime at the height of its security the play has substance and intensity. The hypocrisy and possessiveness of the jealous cousin who disrupted the old maid's engagement, then fed her the crumbs of charity and finally appropriated her child, while indulging in the luxury of superficial kindness and infallible good breeding, points eloquently at gilded society's clay feet. The trouble with *The Old Maid* is that it lends itself too easily to an elementary, sentimental interpretation. Sentiment tends to conceal its potential incisiveness. Though one would not

demand explicit preachment from every play, this particular drama would have been strengthened by a direct critique of the society it mirrors so well. Very probably no critique was even dreamed of, and this omission accounts for the ease with which both friends and enemies of the play dismiss its potentially larger meaning.

Another tragedy that would have been strengthened by a fuller realization of its implications is *The Children's Hour*, which contains some of the season's most valid characterization and drama. In addition to its easily recognizable merits as a study of a neurotic youngster and of the borderline between normal affection and perversion, the play unrolls a tragic condition possessing definite immediacy—namely, our moral regimentation and our economic dependence on patronage in the professions. The two school-teachers who lose their pupils and their foothold in society because an abnormal child has accused them of lesbianism, are victims of two vicious situations—intolerant puritanism in the upper classes (especially where its dependents are concerned) and economic individualism. Even their private life is not their own while they are depending upon the patronage of Dives and his congregated matriarchs. Where the play fails and seems something of an abortion the fault is one of social neutrality or negativeness. It is generally admitted that the play suffers from "third-act trouble." As Clifford Odets acutely remarked a short while ago, the etiology of this particular disease is a lack of convictions. If instead of attenuating the agony of the victims through another act and contenting herself with mere pathos, Lillian Hellman had faced the issue of social peonage and so-called morality squarely in the last act, the play would have thundered to an impressive finish. It is of course ridiculously easy to write the other fellow's play, but it seems self-evident that the passive acceptance of defeat, the society lady grandmother's grandstand repentance and offer of reparation, and the unclear defection of the lover fail to carry the play forward. It is possible to list this play by one of the most promising playwrights of the season under the heading of "unfinished business."

OTHER meritorious dramas have likewise suffered severely from over-simplification. The frequently glowing dialogue and sturdy Americanism of *Valley Forge* is fortified by the thesis that the Revolutionary War, though started by merchants, was fought and finished by the independent farming class that consti-



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tuted the bulk of the "common people." Apart from minor liberties taken with American history, the most serious over-simplification is to be found in the characterization of George Washington. Deprived to a great extent of his human tributes and class affiliations, the "Father of his Country" stalks through the published play with much stiffness and mechanical aplomb. Worse still, the issue of liberty is both confused and oversimplified. "Liberty" remains throughout the play too much of a phrase and attitude compounded of swashbuckling and tall words, rather than a concrete goal which was never achieved except for the exploiting classes, and is therefore especially confusing if the play is to be applied to our times. A residue of anachronistic romanticism, evident in the above-mentioned weaknesses, vitiates one of the most ambitious dramas of the year. The great and badly needed play on the American Revolution still remains to be written.

Oversimplification is also the besetting difficulty of Elmer Rice's well-intentioned and expert contributions to the season. To attempt a comparison between two social orders on the basis of manners, as in *Between Two Worlds*, is a precarious enterprise. The Russian director's behavior on board ship does not basically clarify the Soviet scheme of things because two fundamentally divergent systems may have superficial manifestations in common. An anti-romantic concept of sex is common at present to Russia, Germany, China and Japan—though it would be patently misleading to make this fact an index of social or political communion. The play struck many people as in the main ambiguous and rather unexciting, because it skirts around vital issues by stressing manners and concerning itself with the insignificant tribulations of commonplace tourists. As a positive statement of principles it never materializes. Indeed *Between Two Worlds* would have been hopelessly bogged in inaction and chatter, if it did not strike fire here and there when blasting the sheltered estate of the rich. *Judgment Day* greatly oversimplifies the struggle against dictatorship, directing practically no attention to the complex of forces involved in their rise and to their larger significance, and closing with a Rover Boy triumph for the vaguely defined party of justice. Much of the dictatorship remains a purely personal matter or at most a simple question of legal justice. It is unfortunate that sterling intentions and deft workmanship do not prevent *Judgment Day* from degenerating into a thin play of innocuous liberal sentiments based on the "Reichstag Fire." Simplification also hampers *Jayhauser*, which represents the combined efforts of a Nobel Prize winner and a dramatic critic. Its view of the Civil War as a conflict between Southern landowners and New England industrialists is far from naive, produces the most poignant situations of the drama, and introduces a rather original treatment of a subject hitherto monopolized by plays patterned after Dion Boucicault's unmentionable *Belle Lamar*. Nevertheless, its naive characterizations, based on the fantastic notion that politicians are apt to renounce the wars they started, its elementary pacifism, and its insensitiveness to the ignominy of slavery send the play spinning in circles of contradiction. Not even its robust speech and salty humor can lift the play out of its intellectual confusion.

THE ADVANCING THEATRE

THE numerous aforementioned dramas—outstanding examples of the theatre of transition—exemplify the dangers of a lack of social understanding. A play lives by its logic and reality; conceptual confusion is the disease that halts its pulse, slackens its pace, dulls its edge, and disturbs its balance. In addition to these plays, the season also comprised a smaller group of playscripts which owed a good deal of their effectiveness to clear and, in the main, consistent orientation toward political and economic realities. Some of these compositions may have been definitely weak in various particulars, but there is no

question that they were immeasurably invigorated by the adrenalin or social meaning. To this category belong such plays as *Awake and Sing*, *Till the Day I Die*, *The Young Go First*, *Tide Rises* and portions of the Sklar-Peters satirical revue, *Parade*.

Thus *The Young Go First*, that diatribe against militarism in the C. C. C., squandered its dramatic effect by dragging in the labor movement and vigilantism by the heels, instead of fusing them with the main body of the drama, marked time, and otherwise betrayed its triple authorship. (In this reviewer's opinion, the lack of political awareness on the part of the boys strengthens, instead of weakening, the effect of the drama by intensifying the pathos of their helplessness and deepening the contrast between their naive expectations and the actual conditions in the C. C. C. camps.) Nevertheless, its sympathetic treatment of the uprooted young men of the nation whose plight is not a private woe but a public calamity produced an overwhelmingly poignant effect and nullified much of the uncertainty of its technique. Art Smith's *Tide Rises* was vitiated by obvious melodramatic situations and by an incongruously operatic quality. But this play too seemed to rise above its limitations. Its subject, the San Francisco general strike, is a stirring, pungently written realization of social struggle, and Smith has to his credit one of the clearest and most mature expositions of class conflict that has yet appeared in the American theatre. That a play as episodic as *Tide Rises* should hang together is miraculous; but the miracle is there, and is to be attributed to its author's clear understanding of the interrelations between business, society life, newspapers and municipal government, on the one hand, and labor organizations, on the other.

Till The Day I Die lacks the verisimilitude and variety of sensitive characterization of *Waiting For Lefty*. But its evocation of the German underground movement possesses the immediacy of heroic drama, a type of literature conspicuously and regrettably absent in our theatre. Only a civilization that has ideals to cherish produces heroic drama, and only when those ideals reflect mankind's noblest aspirations is such drama to be differentiated from persiflage. *Till The Day I Die* has several weaknesses: it tends to be episodic and labored, and its caricatures of Nazi subordinates are objectionable insofar as they minimize the sinister power of the forces which ultimately drive the Communist hero to suicide. But the charge of sensationalism levelled at the author is unfounded, because the torture and terrorism in the play are social realities; they are not synthetic creations of a playwright's brain. *Till The Day I Die* is not sensational, but heroic and agonising. *Awake and Sing* avoids banality only by its fierce indignation against social injustice and complacency. All talk about its fluidity of action and character, such as Joseph Wood Krutch's praise of the play for what it fails to do—that is, for its lack of explicitness, is simply a concealment of the play's inadequacy. Remove the incandescent portions which present the intransigent grandfather, and what remains? A tepid picture of Bronx life, and the story of a girl who palms off a travelling salesman's baby on a greenhorn and then elopes with another man. At best a whirl of minor events and irritations posing and resolving nothing. Surely the young man's conversion to radicalism is a dubious climax which reads like an afterthought, and his sister's elopement is no emerging into the light when she hasn't allowed herself to be particularly inhibited in the past, when her future course is highly uncertain, and when her entire destiny seems to be humming along a private wire. That the development of the plot is deficient in social clarity is the unfortunate, but probably inevitable, attribute of a first effort. (*Awake and Sing* was written several years before *Waiting For Lefty*.) Nevertheless, the presence of the rebellious old man adds iron to several of the situations, deepens the significance of several of the other characters, who must be measured to some degree by the shadow he casts over them, and brings some measure of unity into

the drama. He stands for the dramatist's appraisal of an amorphous and undefined situation which the author of *Waiting For Lefty* has left far behind.

Likewise immeasurably strengthened by a keen social awareness were *Tobacco Road*, very much a part of this season, and *Rain From Heaven*. The former loses much by resorting to a Rip Van Winkle situation—that of the proverbially indolent man whose chief appeal is to an audience's funnybone, but the play remains a standing indictment of a system that can permit so complete a deterioration and waste of human life, and a telling refutation of the romantic view of the South which prevailed until recently and which is still in evidence in such a novel as Stark Young's *So Red the Rose*. The play is also a poignant personal tragedy which would be utterly fantastic if it were not rooted in social realities. No one could possibly stomach the Lesters if they were not representative of a public situation instead of a private cesspool. *Rain from Heaven* would be a tepid if sensitive, high comedy if it were not for its author's partial reorientation. His dilettante understands at last that the artist and the thinker can no longer remain in their ivory towers while the intolerance and sadism of a desperately moribund social order threatens their vaunted independence and very existence. It is illuminating to compare Behrman's and Sherwood's respective treatment of the plight of the intelligentsia in an epoch which cannot afford to grant them the privileges extended to them in times of greater security. Sherwood's hero whines himself into a grave. Behrman's hero, representing genuine culture instead of phony bohemianism, goes out to fight and to die if necessary for civilization. Rejecting the comforts afforded by an attractive liberal-minded English gentlewoman, the exiled German music critic returns to Germany to lend his strength to the underground anti-Fascist movement. *Rain from Heaven* is Behrman's finest play and an indication that another

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major American playwright is clarifying his position and deriving dramatic sustenance therefrom. His minor infelicities and uncertainties would have loomed as major faults if its author had not touched the living flesh of a genuine theme within the charmed circle of a country estate.

OF the remaining important plays of the season, all three—*Waiting For Lefty*, *Sailors of Cattaro* and *Black Pit*—triumphed unequivocally in, and through, the medium of social protest, serving as the advance guard of the new social theatre in America. They need no introduction in the pages of this magazine. *Waiting For Lefty* is the most forceful short revolutionary play thus far written, and goes far beyond the usual limitations ascribed to agit-prop drama because it is freighted with inner drama. Indeed the play's potency is greatest where, as in the "Joe and Edna" and "The Young Hack and His Girl" episodes, it shows how closely bounded by economic considerations is the life we so proudly hail as inviolably private. Conversely the play is weakest where the personal life of the individual is least realized, as in the "Lab Assistant" episode. But there is good reason for noting how the effectiveness of the play is determined by its social inspiration; *Waiting For Lefty* is an effective answer to the art versus propaganda fraternity. Its much heralded original form, with its generally clipped tempo, dynamic transitions, shuttling from private to mass scenes and overflowing into the audience, rises from the leaven of a sense of social conflict. Its most effective dialogue (though sometimes the lines are incongruous in the mouth of the speaker, like "put fruit trees where our ashes are" in Agate's speech) rises from social indignation and full-hearted identification with the downtrodden. Its short scenes, also, do not in the main allow for much substantiation of emotion, but fortunately most of them do not need substantiation; and the few that do, that grind an axe too obviously, (for instance "The Young Actor" and "Lab Assistant" episodes), are swept along by the tempo of the piece as a whole. Though *Waiting For Lefty*, as one playwright remarked to me, is "primer art," one recognizes that it is primer art with a difference, and the stimulus it has given the new theatre movement throughout the country, would alone raise it to a position of paramount importance among the plays of the season.

Sailors of Cattaro is the most potent anti-militaristic drama of our time, and is markedly more effective than *What Price Glory?* or *Journey's End* because the play possesses an active sense of opposition to war, because its victims are common people rather than privileged officers, and finally because it foreshadows the struggle of the future in its retelling of a past event. It raises the question of anti-militaristic tactics, which in turn involves the entire social struggle of our time. Only in its treatment of the problem of revolutionary leadership does it become obscure and uncertain, a difficulty which is directly reflected in the dramatic structure of the play.

Finally, *Black Pit*, though handicapped by its surplus of Slavonic dialect and somewhat uncertain in its motivation when it overstresses the coming of a baby as the precipitating cause of Joe Kovarsky's betrayal, is perhaps the most moving drama of the season. The play grows on one when it is both read and seen. It touches upon one of the eternal themes of the theatre—the question of human dignity. What indignities and self-betrays can be forced upon the human spirit by a relentless profit-motivated system is a theme that would make powerful drama, even if the play did not succeed so well in recreating the life of the miners. The subtle preachment of the play—namely, its dramatization of the fact that economic servitude destroys the independence and self-respect of the individual—is much more devastating than any simple dramatization of a mine strike could have been. The author was wholly justified in making a stool-pigeon the center of his play; the result is effective psychological drama and an incisive social indictment. With this play the co-author of *Merry-Go-Round* and *Peace on Earth* emerges as a mature dramatist.

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This completes the roster of published plays of the season which illustrate the various phases and complexities of the theatre in transition. These plays have not only filled the season with a variety of fare suited for a variety of tastes and interests, but have tellingly demonstrated the rôle of social forces in actual dramaturgy. Social confusion has produced dramatic confusion, while clear and penetrating appraisals of contemporary forces have invariably saved the main line of play even where the workmanship was uneven.

OLD MASTERS AND CRITICS

THE publishing season, however, calls for the inclusion of two distinctly valuable collections, *The Complete Works of Synge*, a handsome and compact one-volume Random House publication, and a Shaw omnibus, *Nine Plays*, which includes *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Man and Superman*, *Arms and the Man*, and *The Devil's Disciple*. Of the Synge collection, which is well worth possessing, it is to be noted that the inclusion of the playwright's travel notes on the Aran Islands shows conclusively how closely he was following a section of Irish life in speech and characterization, as well as general tone, in his famous comedies and tragedies, while the plays themselves are eloquent testimony to the power of social inspiration. They are, one and all, folk-pieces—grimly realistic like *Riders of the Sea*, bubblingly fantastic like *The Playboy of the Western World*, boisterously earthy like *The Tinker's Wedding*, romantic like *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, which is founded on an old Irish legend.

The Shaw collection, lacking such plays as *Widower's Houses*, *Pygmalion*, *Major Barbara* and *Back to Methuselah*, is a less successful attempt to represent the labors of the greatest writer of English comedy. But the major tendencies apparent in the plays included in the volume pertain to the bulk of Shaw's contribution to the theatre. Whatever richness of idea or incisive characterization is present in the plays is in the main a distillation of 19th century English socialism, which was critical rather than actively revolutionary. Its function was in great measure to snipe at the established order of society, and the most accomplished sharpshooter of them all was Bernard Shaw. But as a dynamic, clearly directed force, English (and with it, alas, continental) social democracy was largely distinguished by its confusion. Shaw's plays reflect this fact, which was less obvious while his wit was bubbling and his novelty still exciting and refreshing. His contribution to the theatre, however, remains largely intact; he proved anew, after Ben Jonson and Molière, that the theatre had room for intelligence.

In conclusion, the season had its usual quota of criticism. John Mason Brown's *Letters from Green Room Ghosts* contains charming comparative studies of Sheridan and Noel Coward and Marlowe and O'Neill, which would have been deepened if the author had accounted for the social origins of their contribution. Mr. Brown's survey of American criticism, *The American Theatre, 1752-1934*, edited in collaboration with the late Montrose J. Moses, is an instructive and valuable compilation of reviews by Henry James, Huneker, William Winter, Lewisohn, Krutch and others. Millett and Bentley's *The Art of the Drama* is a useful brief introduction which is especially commendable for its treatment of the social conditions of playwriting and production. *Architecture for the New Theatre*, edited by Edith J. R. Isaacs, contains an informative reference to the commercialism of the theatre by Lee Simonson, and presents a series of projects for theatrical construction, particularly in Soviet Russia. However, no contribution to criticism for many a year has come anywhere within striking distance of Shaw's *Dramatic Essays and Opinions*. Important criticism must be grounded upon a definite point-of-view, and in this respect our criticism is still floundering. There is a definite need for the new theatre movement to supplement its achievements in playwriting and production with criticism which will interpret the theatre as a whole and give it the guidance it so badly needs in this period of shifting allegiances and conflicting interests.

Backstage

SOCIAL DRAMA BOOK SERVICE

TO FILL the needs of some three-hundred acting groups affiliated to the New Theatre League, for plays other than those published by the League itself, the Social Drama Book Service has been created. Thus the New Theatre League adds to its functions and becomes a central clearing point not only for the plays of all publishers, but for all books relating to the theatre, the film and dance. This includes, of course, the large library of theoretical and technical material on these subjects.

The Social Drama Book Service will be guided in selecting books by the literary or dramatic merit, and by the social content. The need for such a book service is apparent from the scores of requests the League has received; acting groups will greatly assist its functioning by using the service as completely and as promptly as possible. 10 per cent discount is offered to all members of the New Theatre League.

NEW REPERTORY

THE Repertory Department of the New Theatre League announces the following new short plays and sketches for summer production by theatre groups:

Stop Those War Drums, by I. Paull. A serious anti-war mass recitation especially for women. 10c.

Capitalist Follies of 1935, by the Chicago Group Theatre. A series of humorous sketches with song and dance, revue style. 20c.

Morgan-Ford Duet, by H. Griffith and I. Paull. A short song and dance satire. 5c.

Day at Bord Motors, by Oscar Saul and Lou Lantz. A picture of how the boss says he runs the factory. 5c.

Triangle, by Ernest Pendrell. A series of three monologues. 20c.

Dear Parson, by Ralph Munson. A monologue in which a working woman addresses her parson. 5c.

Battle of the Bugs, by H. Griffith and I. Paull. A satire in verse for children or adults in which Hearst meets disaster. 20c.

The Repertory Department is also publishing in printed form *Take My Stand*, by E. England, an effective new play on a textile mill strike (playing time: 40 minutes).

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH, one of America's most distinguished poets, author of *Streets in the Moon*, *New Found Land* and *Conquistador*, was the recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1933. His most recent book is *Panic*, a verse drama of the banking crisis, fragments of which appeared in our March issue. ILYA EHRENBURG, well-known Soviet novelist and critic, will be remembered for his *Continuous Performance* in the November 1934 issue of NEW THEATRE. His latest novel published in this country was entitled *Out of Chaos*. ROBERT FORSYTHE is America's best-known revolutionary wit. His new book *Redder than the Rose* came out last month. HAROLD CLURMAN, one of the members of the Group Theatre, directed Clifford Odets' *Awake and Sing*. CHEN-I-WAN is a theatre and dance critic. His *The Soviet Dance* was one of the features of the January Soviet number of NEW THEATRE. JOHN W. GASSNER, is play-reader for the Theatre Guild. JOEL FAITH is the pen name of a west coast newspaperman. NICHOLAS WIRTH is a former editor of DYNAMO. He has contributed poetry and criticism to various periodicals.

FORTHCOMING FEATURES

CHARMION VON WIEGAND'S Marxian analysis of the plays of Eugene O'Neill promises to be a provocative study of America's most famous playwright. This definitive 10,000 word essay will appear as a feature of the September NEW THEATRE, which will include *The Dance in Latin America* by ANGEL FLORES, editor of

Sin Fronteras, and an article by RALPH STEINER and LEO HURWITZ of Nykino, on their experiences, as film makers, in the class in directing given by LEE STRASBERG of the Group Theatre at the Theatre Collective this year.

Scenes from ALBERT BEIN's play *Let Freedom Ring*, which will be produced on Broadway this fall, will appear in the October NEW THEATRE. An essay on Shakespeare by JOSEPH FREEMAN, leading Marxian critic, will also appear in October.

The November issue will be devoted to the publication of creative material: the prize winning plays of the play contests that close October 1st, film scenarios and dance scripts.

MIDWEST THEATRES MEET

The Mid Western Conference of the New Theatre League will be held in Chicago during the month of October. All theatre groups and individual theatre workers in the middle-west should immediately communicate with Robert Riley, New Theatre League, 20 West Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill. Further details on the Mid-western conference will appear in the October issue of NEW THEATRE.

AGAINST CENSORSHIP

An important pamphlet against censorship has just been published by the National Committee Against Censorship of the Dramatic Arts.

Censored, by RICHARD PACK, with an introduction by MARK MARVIN, is a summary of the recent wave of censorship directed against the theatres of social protest. It is an interestingly written, attractively illustrated record of the fight for a free stage, and deserves the widest possible distribution. Theatre groups and individuals are urged to order and distribute this pamphlet, which sells at only 5c a copy, as an important weapon in the fight against censorship.

Due to an error the announcement of two prize play contests in last month's issue contained the statement that the contest for Negro plays is sponsored by Opportunity Magazine and The Negro Liberator. The announcement should have read that the contest is endorsed by these two publications.

PARAMOUNT'S MR. WILKIE

(Continued from page 15)

disembodied roles the Hollywood moguls seem irrevocably to have intended for him. That an actor of Mr. Tone's ability and background is so senselessly wasted is another example of the artist's hopeless position under a bourgeois economy. Another glaring instance of this waste of genius is the moving picture career of Elsa Lancaster, wife to Charles Laughton. In a short film, *What Dreams Are Made of*, directed by Ivor Montague, the translator of Pudovkin's *Film Technique*, she disclosed a gift of mimicry that placed her in the top ranks of such mimics as Chaplin, and Beatrice Lillie, if anything, surpassing the latter. Her performance in *Henry the Eighth* made the film memorable. Then Hollywood took notice and after a tentative start in *Naughty Marietta*, she burst upon the country as the bride of Frankenstein's monster in which role she delivered herself of two shrieks and one grimace. One hesitates to think of what is next in store for her.

Remaining are the three additions to the G-Men cycle, *Public Hero No. 1*, *Let 'Em Have It*, and *Men Without Names*, which, despite their mediocrity of composition, demand fuller treatment than possible within the scope of this review. Suffice it to say, they all alike exhibit unmistakable evidences of Fascist doctrine, such as the setting up of a body of secret-service officers who work silently, in the dark, accountable to nobody but their immediate superiors. Mr. La Guardia's recent suggestion that the city of New York get itself a set of G-Men proves undeniably that the movie campaign of popularization has already borne fruit.

We could go on to *Doubting Thomas*, starring Will Rogers; but rather than try the already exhausted patience of Mr. Al Wilkie, we will offer him the consoling thought that Paramount is not alone in practically always "bating .000".



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John Mason Brown of the *Post* in reviewing *Waiting For Lefty* and *Till The Day I Die* wrote, “You cannot fail to realize that Mr. Odets is holding—nay, commanding—your attention, and that as an emotionalist he has a sweeping, vigorous power which is as welcome as it is thundersome when encountered in our theatre . . . Mr. Odets seems to have employed a machine gun rather than a pen.”

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