

Movies, TV and...

by david platt

More Highlights Of A Quarter Of A Century Of Writing and Reviewing

THE TROUBLE with writing an anniversary column (our 25th with the paper), and singling out some of the highlights of a quarter of a century of writing and reviewing for the Daily Worker, is that a few hours after the column has been set up in type you are reminded of other high spots that deserved to be mentioned such as:

- The time when the 55th St. Playhouse printed 25,000 copies of my review of the French film *Grand Illusion* and passed them out at Union Square during a May Day rally . . .

- The time in 1930 when I spent a memorable few hours at Malibu Beach with the late Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein. He was then in Hollywood under contract to Paramount.

- The time when I met the late Hollywood actor Jean Hersholt and his wife at a cocktail party. And when I informed him that "Greed" (a movie of terrific realism for its time which Eric von Stroheim had made in 1924 with Hersholt in a leading role) was playing that evening at the Museum of Modern Art, the three of us grabbed a taxi and hopped over to see it. Afterwards Hersholt explained that what we saw was only a small part of the original film which ran thirty or forty reels and that most of it has never been seen publicly and probably never will.

- There was the time when a former film critic of the N. Y. Times and Howard Rushmore tried to redbait me out of the N. Y. Film Critics Circle, but none of the other nineteen metropolitan newspaper film critics would back them up, not even the two second-string Times reviewers.

And speaking of the Times, years ago that daily reprinted without comment a paragraph or two from something I had written about the anti-Negro movie *Birth of a Nation*. The reprinting of the story wouldn't be worth mentioning at this time except for one thing. The Times story was datelined Moscow. Their correspondent had picked it up from a Soviet film journal which asked and received permission to reprint the Daily Worker article. He had passed it on to his N. Y. office as having been written in Moscow by one, David Platt.

There was no mention of the D. W. in the Times story. And so it was not surprising that for some time afterward readers of this paper would stop me on the street to ask 'when did I get back' and 'how was it.'

WHEN I first came to the Daily Worker there was a feature section in the weekend paper but none in the daily. I am proud to have been present at the birth of both the feature and film departments in the Daily Worker which as the years rolled on played an increasingly important role in the cultural life of the nation with its day to day crusading for realistic and democratic films, plays, books.

I cannot close the book on my first 25 years with the Daily Worker without mentioning that it was at the suggestion of my good friend, the late Harry Alan Potamkin that I joined the business staff of the Daily Worker in 1930.

Potamkin's death at the early age of 33 in 1934 was a tragic, irreplaceable loss.

He was a Marxist and the most brilliant film critic of his time. His influence upon my own thinking was immense.

★

THE other day an angry reader reproached me for "hypocritically attaching your dogmatic wagon to the running race-horse of revisionism".

So that there will be no misunderstanding of what this column stands for I offer, on this, the beginning of my 26th year with the Daily Worker, a short statement of what I believe:

I believe in socialism, more so than ever before, now that steps are being taken to throw overboard old sectarian habits which blocked our view of the American scene.

I believe more strongly than ever before that without American-Soviet friendship there can be no permanent peace and I intend to devote a good part of my energies as editor of the feature section to help bring about improved cultural relations between our country and the Soviet Union.

I believe that the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin should be used carefully as a mariner uses his compass and sextant to light up the way to his goal. I do not believe that those teachings were meant to be used verbatim disregarding differences in history, traditions, time and place, or as a weapon with which to recklessly smash down all viewpoints but one.

In the realm of the arts I believe in the fullest interchange of ideas.

For example, the ideas of art expressed by Salvador Dali are repellent to me, but if Mr. Dali wanted to use the feature section of the Daily Worker to defend his views I would not hesitate to open our pages to him and to all who agree or disagree with him.

Finally, I am strongly opposed to a return to the former atmosphere which choked off dissent and controversy and led to a kind of conformity on the left. Experience teaches that official support for only one viewpoint in the arts and sciences can be harmful.

The more freedom in the arts—inside and outside our ranks—the better.