

# New Theatre

DRAMA • FILM • DANCE

## THE AWAKENING OF THE ACTORS

-- *Storm Over Broadway.*

A Scene From "Stevedore"

•  
Whither  
Martha  
Graham

•  
Hollywood  
or  
Lenin Hills

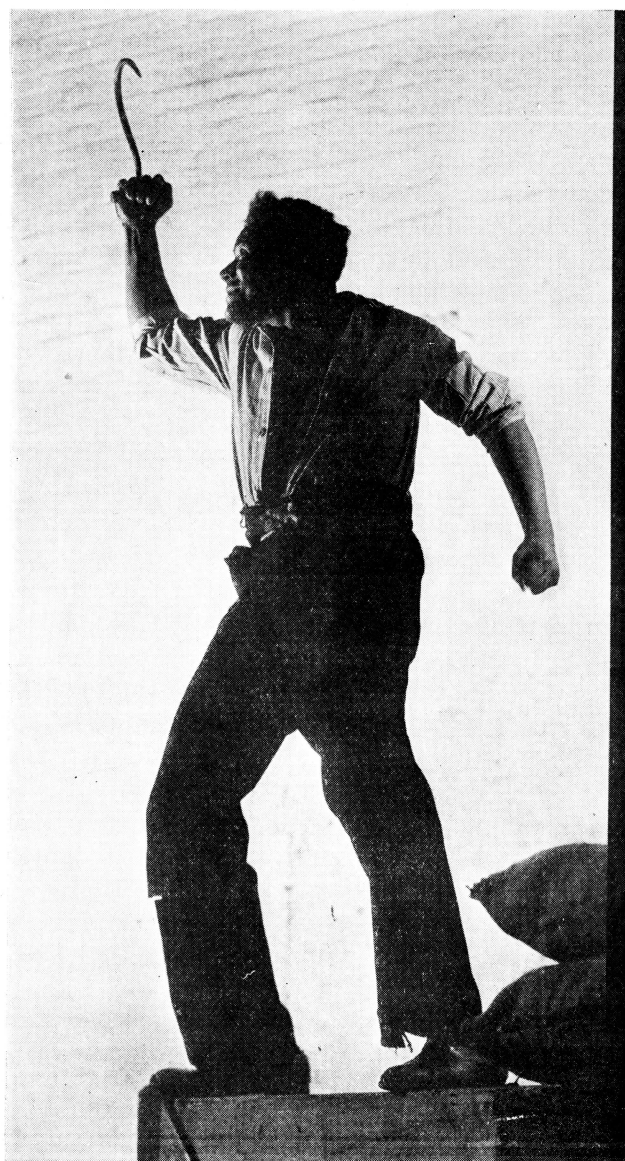


Photo by Ralph Steiner

# NEW THEATRE

Organ of the League of Workers Theatres of the U.S.A. (Section of the International Union of the Revolutionary Theatre), Workers Dance League, and National Film and Photo League.

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## The Awakening of the Actors

### ACT ONE; *The "Sailor Beware" Cast Stops a Salary Cut*

*The real story of the opposition movement in Equity, what brought it about, how it developed, its aims, and what it signifies for the welfare of the actors.*

THE first mass revolt on the part of actors since the actors strike of 1919, occurred on March 5th at the Lyceum Theatre where the entire cast of "Sailor Beware" tendered their notices of resignation to the management.

The circumstances that bright about the "Sailor Beware" campaign action are unfortunately not unique in theatrical procedure. "Sailor Beware" was a shoe-stringer's "dream-come-true", a sell-out hit with a phenomenally low operating cost. Reliable sources claim that the entire "nut" was 5600 dollars, including cast, stage hands, theatre rental, advertising, front office salaries.

Mr. Burr, the producer, through his enterprising press agent, Mr. Richard Maney, received a fanfare of praise from the press and a bouquet of orchids from Mr. W. Winchell when he announced that due to the phenomenal success of the play and to show his gratitude to the members of the sterling cast who had made this success possible, he had raised the salaries of each

and every member of the cast. The above three gentlemen and the press neglected to state that the total raise to the cast was under three hundred dollars.

On Saturday, March 3, after about six months of running, after Mr. Burr had made a profit on the play estimated at 178,000 dollars, including the sale of the movie rights, he asked the entire cast, through his company manager, to take a cut of 30% in salary for that week and every following week until the close. Mr. Burr's excuse was that the play had shown a loss of \$1,000 for that week.

The cast held a meeting and unanimously refused to accept the cut. They notified the company manager of their decision, and their reason therefor: The play had never had a losing week before, in fact, had paid Mr. Burr a fat profit every previous week; in spite of the producer's claim, they even doubted that he had lost \$1,000 that week. (Variety estimated the gross of that week at \$9,100, which, considering the low running cost, still left Mr. Burr a substantial profit.) Furthermore New York suffered that week one of the severest storms in its history; it was therefore no indication that he would con-

tinue to lose money on the play. As the much trumpeted raise amounted to an average of only ten percent of their contracted salaries, the 30 percent cut would lower their original salaries 20 percent.

Mr. Burr was vacationing in the Bahamas, but the company manager said he would notify him of the cast's decision in the matter.

ON the following performance day, just before the curtain rose, the company manager gave three of the actors their notice of dismissal. The intent was obvious: each week, a number of the cast would be dismissed and replaced at lower salaries until an entirely new cast would be substituted. The cast decided that there was only one answer to give to that: they handed in their collective resignation.

The issue was larger than just a wage cut; the actors were defending their standard of living. An acceptance of that cut would have established a precedent for every other hit show in town.

Mr. Burr attempted to replace them with the Chicago company of the same play which had disbanded after an unsuccessful engagement. But those actors refused to scab when they found out what lay

behind Mr. Burr's offer.

Meanwhile Variety broke the story, the Times and the Herald Tribune carried a few squibs about it. None of the other papers mentioned it. Mr. Richard Maney is a very efficient press agent and very popular with the press. It is rather ironic that during that same week of struggle between the cast and the producer a rather large ad appeared announcing that tickets for "Sailor Beware" were on sale eight weeks in advance.

At some time or other Equity was appealed to. Equity held that the producer had a legal right to give any or all actors in his company his two weeks notice, and that the actors may also legally hand in their notices. Everything was strictly legal. Equity could—or would—do nothing.

However, the cast received telegrams of a surprisingly militant nature from the casts of more than a dozen plays

among which were "As Thousands Cheer," "Peace On Earth," "Men in White," "Broomsticks," "Pursuits of Happiness," voicing their sympathies and their support for the stand of the S. B. actors.

On Monday, March tenth, an agreement was finally reached between the cast and Mr. Burr's representative, on the following conditions: Mr. Burr must take back the three dismissed members, the salaries were to remain as is. If, however, the play fell below eight thousand dollars in any one week's gross, they would

consent to take the original salary for that week.

Actors are not exactly notorious for being class conscious. It is indeed too rarely that they have been awakened to the realization that their relations with the producer are identical with the relation of any other group of workers to their employer.

That the company of "Sailor Beware" realized this, and came out in united and militant action, is a particularly healthy sign of the growing social consciousness of the actor. — J. L. S.

## ACT TWO:

### *Equity Members Organize for Action*

THE second act of this "inside" drama began when representatives of five Broadway companies met informally to discuss ways and means of preventing a repetition of the "Sailor, Beware" incident, in which an Equity cast was told by Equity officers, who are paid to defend the interests of the actors, that there was nothing that could be done against such salary-cutting practices on the part of the managers. "Equity is our organization, our union," the actors said. "Surely, there must be some way to make it represent the interests of the actors more effectively."

It was then only a week or two before the special Equity meeting to choose a nominating committee. At once the idea presented itself that this was just the time to get real representatives of the actors elected to the Equity Council, representatives who would concern themselves first and foremost with guarding the actors' interests.

On Monday, March 19, an open meeting was held which more than one hundred actors attended. Here, members of the temporary committee which had

initiated the move reported on the causes of the activity and its origin. The actors cheered each time one of their particular grievances was mentioned. At once actor after actor rose to describe personal grievances, telling how one or another manager had taken advantage of him, and how complaints to the Equity office had been unavailing. The main grievances were listed for further discussion and action. A member from each company represented in the room was added to the general committee of the actors. The meeting was then adjourned until Wednesday, when a program for immediate action (in view of the Equity meeting on Friday) was to be adopted.

At the Wednesday meeting some two hundred and fifty actors filled a room in Bryant Hall, with many standing. Many members of the *Lambs' Club* and other bodies of the profession were present. Past officers and council members of Equity were there. Veterans were present of the great actors' strike of 1919 which, thanks to the sympathy strikes of the stagehands, musicians and other theatrical unions,

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succeeded in establishing "Equity shop."

The meeting quickly got down to business. A slate of names for the Nominating Committee was drawn up and approved by the general body. It was clearly stated and understood that these nominators, if elected Friday, would be guided in their choice of Councillors by the will of the general body. It was also agreed that the general body together with all other actors who could be reached would meet again at the same hall on April 3 to discuss the results of Friday's elections and to begin to formulate a program that would make Equity a stronger factor in defense of the actor's interests.

The general committee of the actors was enlarged by adding representatives from all other casts of which there were members present. Some eighteen companies were now represented. The suggestion that unemployed actors should be represented, to insure that the problem of the unemployed should be adequately considered, was received enthusiastically.

**A**T the special Equity membership meeting on Friday afternoon, March 23, the strength of this movement for a greater Equity was quickly felt. In fact it was anticipated, for an Equity employee handed out notes to incoming actors (not known to be affiliated with opposition groups) recommending a slate of names of their own premeditated choice. Then Edward Henney, stage manager of "Tobacco Road" got up and made what was evidently a prepared speech. Someone had carefully primed him full of the wildest nonsense about the "Red" nature of the new movement. Henney's wild talk about "these people who want to take over and run this government like in—another country" (i.e. Russia) was such an

obvious fraud that Henney was booed and laughed down by the entire assembly. Thus another "red scare" died. After this the chair granted Philip Loeb the floor to explain just what provoked the stirring of the actors.

It soon became clear that the feeling of the general body of actors was that they wanted representatives in Equity who would be in close contact with the actors and who would not sit back and wait for grievances to be brought to their attention, but would be on the alert to remedy them.

The officers and councillors were impressed by the strength of the movement. Some got up to explain that their policy had always been one of the "open door." Their door was always open for actors to come and tell them their grievances. Otherwise how could they tell what the actor's needs were? The fruitless appeal of the "Sailor, Beware" cast to Equity, to name but one instance, seems to have slipped the speakers' minds.

But the actors did not forget this. The completion of the nominations and the voting

saw three members of the opposition slate elected to the Nominating Committee: Jane Seymour, Millard Mitchell, and Jane Wheatley. The newly elected Nominating Committee of nine met the following Monday and named a regular ticket which included four members of the new movement on the list of ten Councillors (one-fifth of the total Council) to be elected in May for a five year term; the four were Philip Loeb, Victor Kilian, George Heller, and Albert Van Dekker. E. J. Blunkall, who is in agreement with the program, was named to fill an unexpired term. In addition, two more members of the opposition, Robert T. Haines and Mary Virginia Farmer, are expected to fill the places of Osgood Perkins and Peggy Wood, who were nominated for Vice-Presidents and will therefore leave their present place in the Council. Many members of the Council have also expressed their sympathy with the new movement. Those Councillors who are really anxious to work in line with the new program will find their hand strengthened now, says the general committee.

## ACT THREE: *The Next Steps*

**T**HE third act began immediately after the Equity meeting, and is in fact still being played. Mr. Frank Gillmore, Equity's president, in an interview published in the Morning Telegraph, expressed himself as "delighted" with the opposition movement. The Telegraph's commentator declared however that Mr. Gillmore had taken the wind out of the sails of the dissenters. Other sheets have sought to give the same impression, implying that the only thing involved was the election of a few more politicians to the Equity Council, that the leaders of the actors' movement have thus been bought off, and

that things are consequently "as they were."

Any actor who attended one of the meetings called by the cast representatives who constitute the general committee, knows that this is a definite misrepresentation. The general committee has made it clear that the real fight is only beginning. On April 3 another actors' meeting will be held—the first of a series—to discuss and work out the planks of a platform to be submitted to the Equity Council and to the general membership meeting of Equity in May. The planks are intended to constitute a program based on the expressed wishes of hundreds of representative

actors, a program that will strengthen the hand of Equity in its dealings with the managers, with the N.R.A., and with any other body involving the employment of the actors.

The welfare of the acting profession depends upon the adoption of a sound and strong program. Already some points in the program have been indicated. There is, for example, pretty general agreement that *there should be no arbitration of claims due an actor by terms of his Equity contract.* A second point of agreement was that *no manager should be allowed to produce while still in default to actors.* Other points to be taken up for investigation will no doubt include *the unionization of film and radio actors,* the establishment of *some form of unemployment insurance suitable for the acting profession* (actors openly expressed their disapproval of the Wagner Relief Bill as inadequate), the need for *more democratic procedure in Equity itself.* A proposal for *closer coordination of theatrical unions* was greeted with cheers by the actors' body.

It is important to point out that some actors, with the best of intentions, will at first advocate points which, though they seem advisable superficially, really divert from the main issue and would ultimately result in the weakening of Equity and to the detriment of the great mass of actors.

Here *New Theatre* believes it is of the greatest importance to the actor to consider some of these points specifically.

**F**IRST, as to the question of dropping or disenfranchising members for non-payment of dues, of closing the books to new members, etc. In Equity as in other stage unions practices vary. But some actors believe more action in this direction is needed. It must be pointed out that this reflects a state of mind which no longer under-

stands the meaning of the word *union.* "In union there is strength! Despite the fact that at least a fourth of the roster of unionized stage employees in 1929 has since been dropped from the rolls, and practically no new members have been added, this course not only has failed to provide adequate work for those who remain, but also has greatly weakened the authority and fighting power of the unions at the same time that the League of New York Theatres exerts itself through N.R.A. and the newspapers to "curb" the unions more and more. Union members must realize that those workers who have been forced out of the unions, as well as those who are being refused admission, will not obligingly lie down to die, but will go to work on any condition, thereby building up a body of scab labor which will be employed by the managers as soon as they feel strong enough for a showdown. Only a unified system of stage organization with a large membership will be strong enough to maintain even the present wage levels.

Secondly, as to the question of restrictions on foreign actors. It is equally shortsighted to exclude foreign actors and acting companies. Aside from the fact that nothing does more to lower the general dramatic standard, and incidentally to lower the public interest in the theatre, such legislation as the Equity Council is now sponsoring invites further retaliation aboard. On the contrary, a firm stand by Equity on behalf of alien actors would make a deep impression on theatre people all over the world and hearten them to the demand that all international restrictions be removed.

Furthermore, this is a point which really involves a small proportion of the profession and serves to sidetrack the two

major issues — making Equity more powerful in behalf of the actors, and solving the problem of funds and work for the unemployed who constitute the great majority of the actors.

**A**S to the question of the other stage unions. For too long now have the managers been able to take advantage of all theatrical crafts by fostering ill-founded antagonism between the actors and the stagehands, and between other theatrical crafts, all of which have so much more in common than they have in opposition. As one actor at the Equity meeting so aptly put it: "Let's stop complaining about the stagehands. We don't want to pull the stagehands' union down to Equity's level. We want to build Equity up so that we will be as powerful as they are."

It is important to realize too, though it is not generally known, that the closed shop so long maintained by the stage unions is not recognized under the N.R.A. code. Under this code the managers need not employ union members if they do not wish to. Only the resistance of the local unions has so far prevented the managers from making a court issue of the closed shop. Members of all stage unions—actors, authors, stagehands, electricians, scenic artists, upholsterers, make-up men, ushers, must prepare for the inevitable showdown by bringing back into the union every last employee, and by preparing the machinery for closer cooperation of stage unions.

*New Theatre* will deal regularly in its pages with future developments of the actors' movement. It welcomes all communications and expressions of opinion on any point of interest to the actors. Its pages are always open to material that will help actors as well as all other theatre workers.

# DOVZHENKO

## *Soviet Cinema Director*

**H**IS birth certificate states that he is thirty-eight years old—but this is not important. He is the father of only four real films, but plans and ideas for ten others are awaiting their conception. Old age will have to wait and wait long!

To return to figures: He was born in 1894. His parents were peasants living in a hut.

Zvenigora and Soil spring therefrom—from valleys, earth, tilled with the sweat of his fathers and ancestors. The artist felt and understood all the characteristics of the soil and the people living on it.

The admiration of the "idyllic charms" of village life and the cunningly contemptible attitude towards the peasants and "wheat growers" were equally foreign to Dovzhenko. His arsenal contains a number of artistic weapons which he uses to portray the peasants he knows: keen hatred, deadly irony and the sting of the most pungent satire against the propagandists of savagery, backwardness and superstition. His irony is full of sympathy and it is inspired with the desire to free the great mass of poor peasants from the clutches of darkness—understanding admiration and love for the peasants who are struggling for the new life.

Dovzhenko writes in his biography: "In 1922 I was transferred to Kharkov. From there I was sent to work with the consulate of the Ukrainian Republic. Worked with the consul in Berlin. Left. Began to study art."

**T**HERE arises an interesting theoretical problem: motion, the form of the cinema, tempts the workers of "still" mediums: painters, cartoonists, sculptors. They work with film

forgetting their artistic experience. Dovzhenko, however, brilliantly fuses in his films the art of the painter with the most intricate feeling for musical rhythm; the insight of the talented writer with the clearness of a journalist; a poetic power that unites all these to create warmly emotional lyrical images.

In 1925, left the palette for the desk of the scenario writer.

In 1927 director Dovzhenko, with cinematographer Zavelev, artist Krirevsky, and actors Nademsky, Svajenko, Dodorjony and Atavoi, produced Zvenigora from a scenario by Pogansen and Urtik. It was the first real Ukrainian film. It initiated a new era in the history of the Ukrainian kino. The opening of an epoch of great achievements, with Dovzhenko at its head.

With Zvenigora Dovzhenko earned a reputation as a daring creator and a destroyer of cinematic tradition. Zvenigora was a philosophical and epic film. In it Dovzhenko found room for tender irony, melancholic lyricism and tender smiles. But not so with Arsenal, his second

major film. Here Dovzhenko becomes virile, cruel and merciless. As virile and cruel as the epoch it portrays. Soviet Ukraine was the birthplace of Alexander Dovzhenko's genius and talent. Thus the reason for nationalism of his films: Zvenigora, Arsenal, Soil, Ivan. From the Bolshevik point of view Arsenal is a film that treats the problem of Ukrainian liberation from national and class oppression as would a revolutionist.

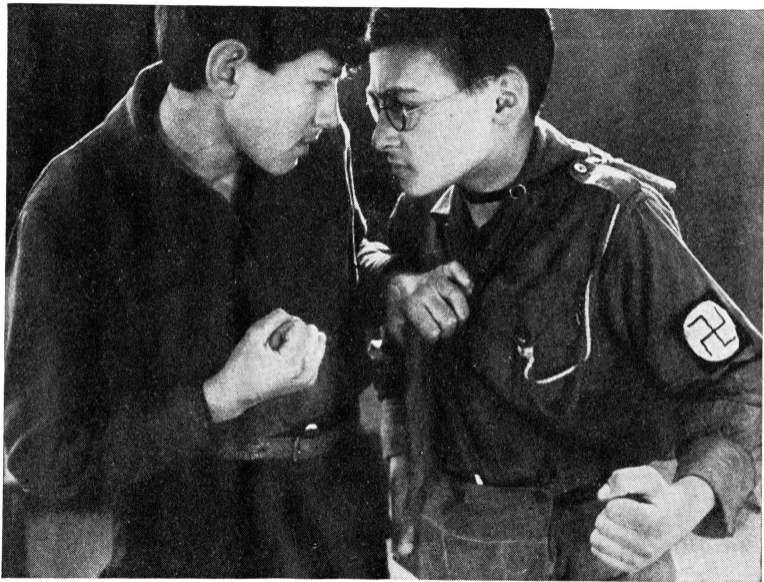
Dovzhenko detests the Ukraine of the kulaks and mercenary "patriots." All his enthusiasm is devoted to the Ukraine of the working masses. The poem of the Ukrainian worker, created by Dovzhenko, is one of the most valued treasures of proletarian culture.

Young Soviet cinematographers learn from Dovzhenko, the eminent revolutionary artist. His cinema is revolutionary not only in words but in deeds: not only in content but in form.

Excerpts from a book by M. BAJAN, Translated from the Russian by Claire Brody.



Broken Shoes, New Soviet Film, Released by Amkino.



Broken Shoes, New Soviet Film, Released by Amkino.

# WHITHER MARTHA GRAHAM

MARTHA GRAHAM is an artist who consistently turns away from the depiction of the life around her. One does not doubt that a person of her sensitivity and perception can be moved by the exciting and profound implications, artistic and social, of the world in which she lives. Yet, perhaps out of sheer terror for the contemporary scene, perhaps out of an artistic inability to cope with so turbulent and brutal a present-day existence, her research and her endeavors, her movement and her thinking, fly from this palpable, real, aching-to-be-interpreted world to past periods, lost civilizations, and ancient or medieval art forms. Her interests zigzag unpredictably across the centuries with a virtuosity and a brilliance that leave her audience gasping in an attempt to keep up with her, or even go back with her. She will be, on one night, medieval, pre-Aeschylean, pre-white man Indian, and more recently, pre-classic.

A review of her recent solo recital not only presents her in this panoramic light, but suggests, to my mind, a searching for *psychic* integration, (apart from the technical integration of her movement), that becomes almost tragic in its frustration. Her path is a passionate pilgrimages to find substance on which to build. So we see her, in her eagerness to take root, and in her fear lest she choose too hastily, "painting a large and suggestive social canvas," performing historic cycles, and seeking, paradoxically, to find herself by losing herself in the ages.

Her single dances in this recital, while complete units, serve as prelude and interlude

for these more expansive creations. *Prelude*, with which she opens her program, is that, —no more, no less; *Lamentation*, a revival by popular request, and *Satiric Festival Song*, a scintillating and witty parody, I suspect, of herself. All the other numbers are part of these cycles, and we shall deal with them chronologically.

*Ekstasis* was created at a time when she sought severe simplicity and purity of line. These "lyric fragments" are Greek; recreations in the pure simplified style of this early period; it draws us from this world into the land of nectar and ambrosia and high Olympus. The dance fragments are lyric, lovely, pure,—and of another day.

*Frenetic Rhythms* is a cycle of three dances, called "dances of possession." Despite Miss Graham's disavowal of literal content in her dances, her naming of them demands of the audience a consideration of each title in relation to the dance. Not being of the inner circle who confer with Miss Graham on the "meaning" of her dances, I feel my interpretation as good as any. It seems to me then, that she goes through the ages, depicting the current obsession of that time; the first—primitive, the possession of the body through rhythms of terror at the unexplained and unanticipated; the second—medieval, the possession of the spirit and flesh by the rhythms set up through religion and mysticism; the third — modern, (a distinct achievement for Miss Graham) possession of the mind and soul by the rhythms of contemporary decadent living with its vice, its abandon, its gripping

and sinister cruelty, its jazz and mechanical intimations.

When this third dance was first performed, one had hopes that Miss Graham had at last remarked the stirring qualities extant in the rhythms of contemporary activity. Surely, the enthusiasm this dance evoked in her audience was not altogether due to the emotional excitement her sheer virtuosity always exacts from these on-lookers. Here the applause was more lusty, more sympathetic; she struck responsive chords in the hearts and understanding of her followers because this dance expressed *them* and their lives, expressed the milieu in which they lived and in which they moved, the rhythm and the madness were their own.

BUT Miss Graham withdrew from this field hurriedly. Her two new cycles seek to recreate another time, another place, and still not in complete identification with that time and place. Although these cycles are sincere as creations, they show a peculiar lack of faith, in that they both contain elements of satire and parody for the subject matter she chooses to deal with. They sketch the dance expression of another century, that century of court dance, of dance in the reign of the royal aristocrat, with its superb and unperturbed hypocrisy. *Phantasy*, three short dances, choose titles from this early classic period: *Prelude*, *Musette*, *Gavotte*. Though they move as dances on the stage, they fail to contain the strength and power usually found in the work of Miss Graham.

*Transitions* as a new direction of Martha Graham was the *piece de resistance* of the evening. The four dances are called: "Prologue," "Theatre Piece No. 1-Sarabande," "The



atre Piece No. 2-Pantomime," and "Epilogue."

These dances (again I hasten to add, I imagine) outline the majestic, hollow grandeur of that period of the court. "Prologue," preceding the court dances proper, opens with tambour and flute sounding attention to what follows,—as if a page were to announce the beginning of the entertainment. Then comes "Sarabande," classic and horrible, with the exaggeration reminiscent of "Pavane by Angna Enters in which she recreates the murderous Medici court. The third dance is "Pantomime," with, I quote John Martin, "the impersonal voice of the child furnishing the main part of the accompaniment. Now he is spelling out words W-a-r, M-a-r-c-h, D-e-a-t-h, B-r-e-a-d." Finally, the epilogue, a dance that, in its shifting and wavering design, seems to pose the question, "Whither?"

**W**HY all this fervor and passion for the 17th century? Is it that Miss Graham, by presenting that period in history, really means us to

make a transition to this one? Then why not dance this period? Why masquerade the intention of the work in the trappings of another age? Two answers suggest themselves. Either the creator finds herself artistically unable to detach herself from the world in which she functions, view it with impersonal, farseeing, prophetic eyes, and rebuild it into an artistic crystallization for the audience to view in all its vice and virtue and prophecy of change. Or else the creator misguidedly believes that by combining a criticism of present society with a recreation of the past, she plans a more important artistic unity, a sort of portmanteau masterpiece, a killing of two birds with one stone. Or perhaps we attribute too much to the artist's intention. Perhaps Miss Graham merely wants, at this time, to do "Sarabandes" and "Gavottes," and "Musettes?" Perhaps in her next recital, or in the one following, having peregrinated through the ages, she will come to the present by a process of elimination.

But that is not sufficient. If

she is artist enough to mold exciting choreographic dances from subject matter that needs this kind of historical documentation, why not let the world of today be the document from which to be inspired? Can she not see its tumultuousness, its terrific, directed activity, its portents of revolution and change, its prophecy of a new and brighter society, its vast masses of people, of workers, whose struggles, heroisms, joys, aspirations, and very movement form the lifeblood of inspiration? The audience of Miss Graham is rapt and admiring, her leadership in the field of American dance as yet unchallenged. Yet if she must always turn away from the quick and the living, if the world of today is too much with her, how then can the temporal onlooker really be one with the artist, and grow through her growth? Let her explore the social canvas of today. We want *our* world to be presented to us. And a dancer like Martha Graham could do it well,—if she wished.

— EDNA OCKO

## ARMORED TRAIN

by VSEVOLOD IVANOV, presented by the Apprentice Players at the New School for Social Research. Staged by Keppo Phelan.

As professionals operating on a full-time basis with backing by a number of anonymous angels, the Apprentice Players succeed in giving a certain smooth fillip to this production, demonstrating a mastery of the mechanics of staging and offering concrete evidence of the development of individual talents; but this young progressive bourgeois theatre group may be said to have failed to understand the class nature of the conflicts and con-

traditions inherent in the personalities of both peasants and White Russians, and consequently in the situations of the play. The rhythm of the sustained rise of the play—the capture of a White Russian armoured train by the revolutionary proletariat in 1919—was absent because the director and the actors, remote from the working class both in life and "art," could only be abstract in their approach. There was no "affective memory" of characters because there could be no base of experience to support the interplay which is the essence of acting. This lack of comprehension of the fundamentals of revolutionary

theatre is reflected in the obvious disparity between the dynamism of the play itself and the static, finished nature of the "classic" setting of platform arrangements blended with light treatment. The script moves on its toes; the sets attempted to complement it on flat feet.

The Apprentice Players are sincere and hardworking, and if truly progressive will profit by the mistakes in this production, the most glaring of which is the presentation of a revolutionary play without a previous investigation of the approach of revolutionary theatre groups. Such an investigation or visit is heartily anticipated by the workers theatre.

— PETER MARTIN

# HOLLYWOOD OR LENIN HILLS

*Harry Alan Potamkin's last article, now published for the first time.*

With the growth of the Soviet cinema, a new opportunity has been opened to film artists outside of the Soviet Union. Heretofore the director of films in Europe has completed his career with a contract in Hollywood. I say "completed" advisedly, for Hollywood has meant, for the more sensitive artists, something near to aesthetic suicide. A few European artists like Dreyer and Clair have resisted the bribe. Today Hollywood is making bids to directors but courts foreign stars. And Hollywood is scared of a talent of too great a force or scope. It conspired against the eminent Soviet director Eisenstein, although it has accepted the pretty young actress Anna Sten, who received her training in the Moscow school of the cinema.

However, another magnetic field has been set up, a field magnetic to character, which Hollywood is not. The Soviet studios have incited the more

authentic artists to make films in the Soviet Union. The new studios in the Moscow suburbs of Lenin Hills (originally Sparrow Hills) will be more and more a mecca to talented cinema artists oppressed in other lands. Nor is the field limited to Moscow. Unlike America, where inspiration and creation are concentrated in one vested interest area, Soviet Russia has released numerous free centers of production. National autonomy has been followed by cinema autonomy for White Russia as well as for the R. S. F. S. R., for the Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, etc., and each has its cinema studios.

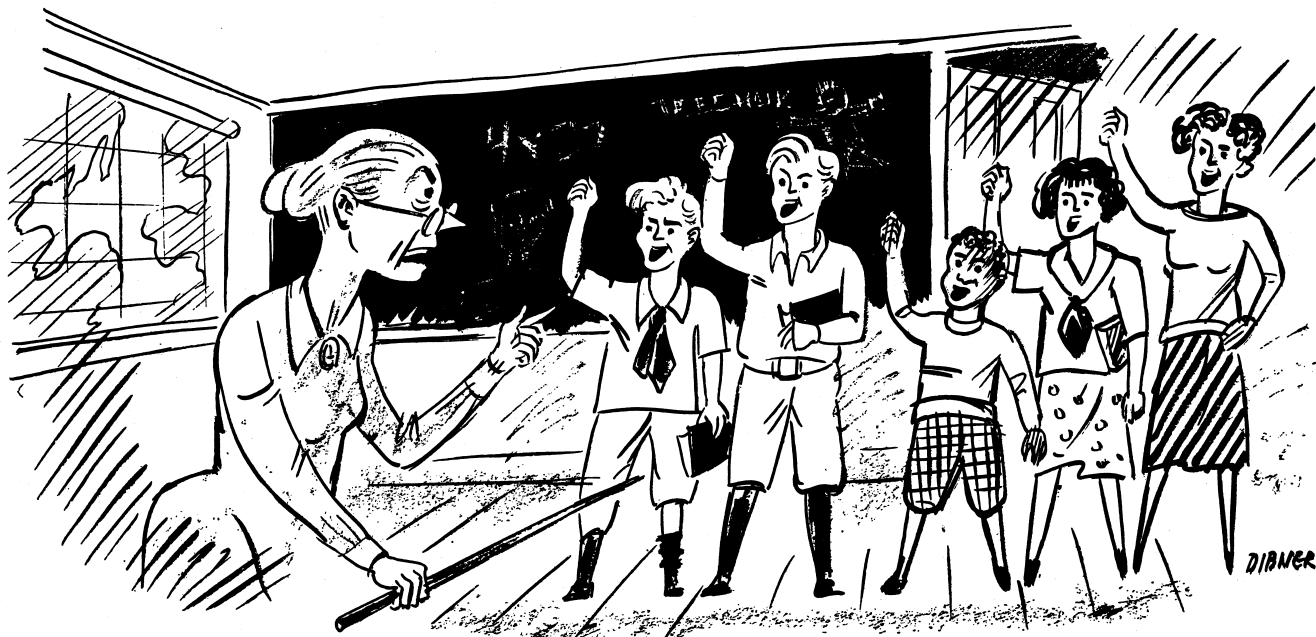
To the U. S. S. R. have come not only social-minded directors (of the theatre) like Erwin Piscator from Germany, but even an experimenter in effects like the German Hans Richter, and the young Dutch documentarian Joris Ivens.

The foreign artist who works in the Soviet Union is likely to get as much as or more than he gives. The ex-

perience is one in maturity. Ivens upon returning from the U. S. S. R. has declared that he is through with preoccupations with "things" and experimentation with forms alone, and will now concern himself with "people." This is a great improvement: Ivens' films were always interesting technically, but he saw the people of the record as incidental.

With the inviting of foreign artists, the Soviet cinema is also extending its frontiers to include more subject themes from the experience of the world proletariat. Bela Illes' novel of the Hungarian revolution, "Tissa Burns!", is on the calendar, with the author as co-director. Balasz, the critic, has been asked in to cooperate on a film of the Hungarian revolution. (Balasz, together with the French critic Moussinac, is organizing an international of the workers' cinema, of which the Workers' Film and Photo League is the American section.) "The Revolt of the Fishermen," by the German author Anna Segher is another anticipated picture.

(Cont. on page 10)



Schoolroom Scene from "Strike Me Red," children's operetta by the late Harry Alan Potamkin. Produced by Young Pioneers of America. Director, Will Lee.

# National Theatre Festival

*Chicago, April 13, 14, 15, 1932*

All eyes are on Chicago this month. From Canada, where the dramatic group of the Progressive Arts Club of Toronto threw the government into a panic with "Eight Men Speak," a play exposing the framing of eight militant working class leaders, come twenty delegates representing groups throughout the Dominion, and the cast of the Toronto players. From Los Angeles, the winning group of their March 17th and 18th competition come with delegates from numerous cities along the Pacific Coast. From New York, the Workers Laboratory Theatre, touring through Lakewood, Youngstown, Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Columbus, will represent, with a Newark group, and the New York Ukrainian Dram Circle, the Eastern Coast. Groups from Cleveland, Youngstown and Gary, delegates from cities all over the country, representing besides theatre groups, working class organizations of all kinds, are converging on Chicago for the Second National Theatre Festival of the League of Workers Theatres.

The Festival preparations have definitely proven two things. First, growing demand of workers for a revolutionary theatre which takes its inspiration from workers' struggles. In Cleveland, where the

(Cont. from page 9)

Other themes taken from the class struggle in the capitalist world will be used by the Soviet cinema, and more directors and actors from the capitalist countries will be given opportunities denied to them in Hollywood and elsewhere.

HARRY ALAN POTAMKIN

groups participating in the section festival include Swedish, Hungarian and Finnish groups, an International Workers Order and a John Reed group, besides the Robeson Players performing as guests, the demand for tickets was so great that an overflow performance on the following night was necessary. In New York the Workers Laboratory Theatre, presenting a Premiere of Revolutionary Drama, packed a house containing fifteen hundred seats, sold standing room only to a hundred others, and turned many away. In Los Angeles the Rebel Players presented "Squaring the Circle" for ten consecutive days. Elsewhere, even where the groups are younger and consequently lack the polish of the older groups, the enthusiasm with which the workers theatres are greeted testify to the demand for a workers theatre carrying a positive message to embattled workers in their struggles against hunger, Fascism and war.

The second thing proven is that the workers theatre is not yet ready to answer that demand adequately. Artistically and politically, most of the groups have not realized their potential strength. The slogan "Theatre Is a Weapon" still awaits its fullest realization. At the Second National Festival, at the performances and conference, the problems will be crystallized. Here, through the exchange of experiences, theories and opinions, a broad plan of action for the next two years will be laid down.

Participating in the discussions at the conference will be a representative from the International Union of Revolutionary Theatres of which

the League of Workers Theatres is the American section. After the conference he may go on lecture tour through the United States. From Chicago comes further news that Limbach, the noted revolutionary artist and cartoonist, may attend the conference with a view to doing sketches.

Every theatre group that has not already done so should immediately elect delegates to attend the conference which is the most vitally important phase of the development of workers theatres in the United States and Canada.

— OSCAR SAUL

## *Festival Program*

First evening of competition:  
Friday evening, April 13

First session of Conference:  
Start 10 A. M. Sharp, Saturday, April 14th.

Reports:

- 1) Two years of League of Workers Theatres.  
(Political situation, Concentration work: Trade Union and the Revolutionary Theatre, Farmers and Negro Theatre).
- 2) Creative Problems of the Revolutionary Theatre  
(Repertory, Production, Training, Allied Arts).
- 3) Revolutionary Theatre and Press.
- 4) Problems of Organization  
(Organization of groups, sections, districts. Theatre management. Organization of audiences. Organizational matters of League of Workers Theatres. International Union of the Revolutionary Theatre).

5) Report on Canada.  
Supplementary Reports from Districts.

Second Night of Competition:  
Saturday, April 14th, 8 P. M.  
Second Session: Sunday, April 15th, start 10 A. M. Sharp.

Sessions of Commissions:

- 1) Concentration Work
- 2) Repertory
- 3) Production
- 4) Training
- 5) Stationary Theatre
- 6) Theatre Management
- 7) Organizational Matters of L. O. W. T.

Third Evening of Competition  
Afternoon Session Sunday,  
April 15th:

Reports of Chairman of Commissions, discussions, and resolutions.

Third Evening of Competitions: Sunday, April 15, 8 P.M.

Evening's Dramatic Competitions at Turner Hall, 820 N. Clark St.

Morning and Afternoon Conferences at People's Auditorium, 2457 W. Chicago Ave.

## NEWS and NOTES

**NEW YORK.**—The Shock Troupe of the *Workers Laboratory Theatre*, Theatre of Action, which won the New York Section Festival competition, leaves on April 2 for a tour to Chicago, stopping at Lakewood, Youngstown, Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Columbus. Other stops may be arranged. The remaining troupes, which include the cast of Lev Slavin's *Intervention*, Dramatic Dance and Dramatic Chorus, will fill the bookings at home. The latest addition to the theatre is the Puppet and Marionette Group. . . *The Theatre Collective* will present *Marion Models, Inc.* by the end of April. John Bovington is leading their Dramatic Dance group. The studio, in coopera-

tion with the L.O.W.T. is giving a course in fundamentals of directing. The objective of the Theatre Collective, which does full-length plays, is to build a professional revolutionary theatre, and to that end they urge all interested to come to 52 W. 15th St. for an interview. . . *The Ukrainian Dram Circle*, which will represent the foreign language groups of the New York section in the National Festival, is planning a tour on the return trip.

**BOSTON.**—*The John Reed Club Theatre Group*, continually growing more active, has recently added to an already extensive repertoire, *Nanking Road*, a play on the far eastern situation, *Alfred Kreymborg's America, America*, and *Nazi But Nice*, an anti-Nazi revue. The group performs regularly in Worcester, Brockton, Lawrence, Providence, Quincy, as well as Boston proper. With the development of their present membership and the recruiting of new ones, the group contemplates a production of 1931.

**CHICAGO.**—*The Blue Blouses* are busy playing every Saturday and Sunday evening for workers' clubs, Unemployed Councils, etc. The *Bulls See Red*, *Scottsboro*, and *Hands Off*, are in the repertory. . . *The Morris Winchewsky Club*, one of the four Jewish Workers Clubs which have theatre groups, has headquarters of its own, with an excellent stage, and skilled technicians. . . *The Chicago Workers Theatre*, one of the first stationary workers theatres in the country, and the only one in Chicago, presented *Marching Feet*, Feb. 23rd, 24th, and 25th, to packed houses, and again on March 3rd and 4th. The presentation showed great progress, the performance being superior to last year's presentation of *Precedent*.

**HOLLYWOOD.**—*The New Theatre of Hollywood* which was organized from the Collective Theatre, The Free Tom Mooney Congress Dram Unit, and The Experimental Theatre of the John Reed Club, is planning the production of several full length plays. The group, which has many professional theatre workers among its members, has already produced Em Jo Basshe's *Doomsday Circus*, besides numerous shorter agitprop pieces.

## SECOND AMERICAN WORKERS MUSIC OLYMPIAD

The Workers Music League is holding its second annual American Workers Music Olympiad on Sunday, April 29 at City College auditorium, 23rd St. and Lexington Ave., New York City.

The Olympiad will be divided into two sessions: The afternoon concert participants include the Pierre Degeyter Symphonietta (the first professional musicians orchestra in the U.S. working class movement), the Freiheit Mandolin Orchestra, the F.S.U. Balalaika and the W.I.R. Band, all affiliates of the W.M.L.

The evening concert will be the competition of workers choruses in their own languages, for the W.M.L. banner. The International Music Bureau, of which the Workers Music League is the American section, has offered a prize of a library of music to the winning chorus. Italian Workers Chorus, the Ukrainian Workers Chorus, Finnish Workers Chorus, Aido Lithuanian Chorus, Yugoslav Workers Chorus.

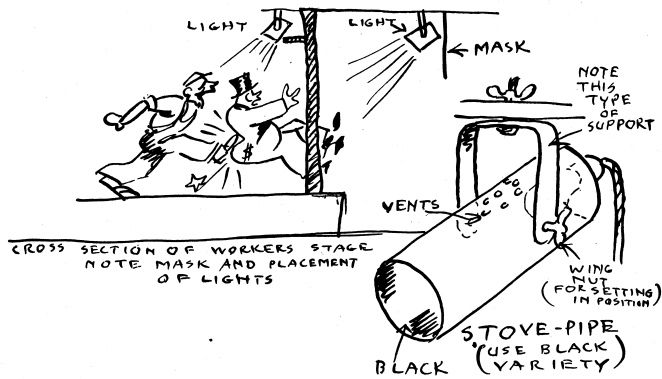
Admission for the afternoon concert is 35c, for the evening 50c. There is a limited number of seats for the evening concert. Combination tickets for the afternoon and evening concerts are 75c. All tickets are on sale at the Workers Music League, 5 East 19th St.

# How to Make Your Own Lights

The first problem in lighting a stage is to get light on it. The second, to put light where you want it. The third, how you want it. The third, in order:

*Getting light on a stage.* Working in a small room or stage the lights are usually overhead. Often an ordinary lighting fixture is our only source of light. In that case, play beyond the light, not under it. Light coming from directly overhead throws shadows over the face and is of no value. The same light, if you play back, shines on your face, letting the audience get a look at you.

If you are not satisfied with this get some coffee cans, punch a hole in the bottom, run wire and socket through and you have a miniature spotlight. Paint the inside of the can black to avoid light spill-



board or drapes out in the auditorium so that lights shining on the stage are concealed from the audience.

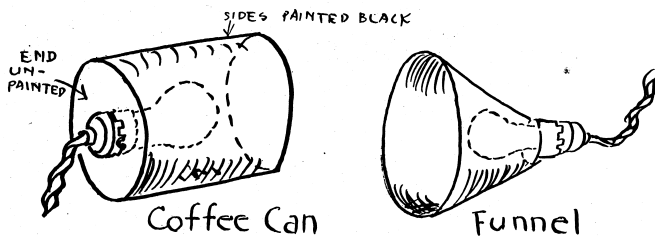
*To get the light where you want it,* a stove pipe with holes punched in the top for ventilation and a socket soldered into an end piece makes a nice spot. You can hang this where you want it by making a yoke to fit over the stove pipe. Don't overlook the possibilities of a desk, a cabinet or any piece of

go to the nearest junky and buy up some old auto headlight and searchlights. Get a bell transformer (cost 50c). Feed regular house current into the transformer. Then bell wire will be sufficient to carry the current to your lights: result—A spotlight as good as the real thing (almost) or floodlights and borders that are hard to beat. And if you are clever you can buy radio rheostats from the 5 and 10 and rig up a neat switchboard and dimmer bank.

This stunt is ideal for theatres of action. The complete outfit can fit in a suitcase. It is light and can be set up in a few minutes in any hall, workers center or home.

Above all, remember, good lighting can be achieved by contrasts. A fifty watt light, even a candle, can be dazzling if the background is kept dark. Keep backgrounds subdued and the light off the scenery and on the actor.

— D. H.



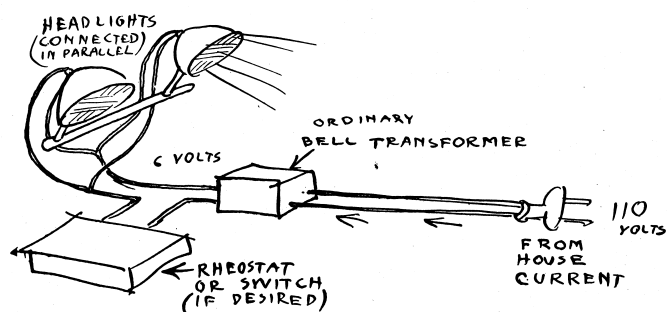
ing. Remember not to paint the bottom of the can, which is behind the light. The bright metal will act as a reflector.

If you have a bit of money go to the five and ten, get a large tin funnel, cut off the neck at the point where it corresponds to the thickness of a socket. Solder the socket into the funnel and you will have a fine floodlight. Remember to light the stage as much as possible from the front so as to throw light on the faces of the actors.

It may sometimes be necessary to hang a mask of card-

furniture. They may be used to conceal light sources. An open door, a window, and a fireplace are traditional light sources.

If you are getting on and want something more elaborate



# The Eyes of the Movie

"The Eyes of the Movie," by the late Harry Alan Potamkin, is a most timely document because the basic class character of the motion picture industry is analyzed and exposed almost simultaneously with the decision of the Roosevelt regime to take over the control from the reactionary "independent" Hollywood producers and place the industry under the wings of the Blue Buzzard for more decisive action against the working class. The pamphlet is a veritable arsenal, stocked with factual information which will serve to enlighten the audience as to how and why the bourgeois film, more than the church, radio, press, blinds them from the miserable chaos in which we live and serves to deaden them from the struggle for a better world.

"The movie was born in the laboratory and reared in the counting house. It is the benevolent monster of four Ps: Inventor, Investor, Impresario, Imperialist. They pilot the course of the motion picture. The course is so piloted that it is favorable to the equilibrium of the ruling class, and unfavorable to the working class."

Potamkin shows how the Investor, indistinguishable from the Imperialist, achieved interlocking control of the movies for their unified purpose—the control of the greatest means of propaganda for the purpose of dividing, distorting, and destroying the rising struggle against the rule of monopoly capitalism; for the purpose of gearing the entire population for another Imperialist World War.

Readers will be amazed and delighted to find that Potamkin was able to deal with many phases of the movies, scarcely touched anywhere else. It is a tribute to his mastery of the field he specialized in that he

could analyze and describe in the short space of a pamphlet:

*Racial Minorities.* (The treatment of the Negro, the Indian, and the Jew in Hollywood.)

*Struggle for Domination of the Movies.* (Warfare among the sections of the bourgeoisie for censorship control of the movies and thus for control over the working class which makes up the bulk of the movie audience in the industrial centers.)

*Independent Films.* (Inevitable disembowelment of commercial independent films that happen to have any guts by the long arms of censorship, financial control, dependence on the monopolized commercial distribution apparatus.)

*The New Opiate.* (The unrelenting barrage of "nouveau riche" middle class ideas and hopes directed at the workers, bankrupt farmers and small business people "designed to create an unreal world of luxury, glamour, freedom and power, as a substitute for the real world of privation and misery, jails and degradation.)

*War Films.* (The inseparable connection of films as a war making instrument from films as an instrument of private ownership and profit.)

## *The Negro, the Jew and the Indian*

Citing the early films, "The Governor," "The Birth of a Nation," "One Exciting Night," and the later "Hallelujah!" and Little Farina of "Our Gang" fame, Potamkin shows how the movies have not only degraded the Negro people but have shamelessly incited the whites to outright war against the Negro people. For instance, the rise of the twentieth century

Klan was inspired by the revival of the picture "The Birth of a Nation."

The Jew, like the Negro, has been subjected to the same degradation, to the same clownish character, or has been sentimentalized as a hopeless addict to religion. "A Man's Man," "Solomon's Son," "The King of King's" characterize him as either the clownish figure that will feed the fires of anti-semitism or the ascetic who will convince more Jews to stick to worrying about the Divine Bookkeeping System.

The Indian too like all other national minorities has been accorded treatment,—sometimes romanticized, rarely glorified—but always in justification of the wholesale slaughter and uninterrupted centuries of exploitation that have all but exterminated the Red Man from his communal land. Here again, Potamkin cites from the films that have either justified the brutal expropriation of the Indians or films that have done what is just as bad—those of the romantic gestures of regret: "The Silent Enemy," "Cimarron," etc. "This is the gallantry that slays and then forgives," Potamkin wrote.

## *The Struggle for Domination*

Beginning with "every reactionary agency and institution in our society has its hand or wants its hand in the movie. . ." there is a description and interpretation of Film Censorship that is of utmost importance to the entire working class. Showing how various sectors of the ruling class have been in struggle with each other for over 20 years on the question: "Who will control the movies?" Potamkin clears the confusion that exists among many as to just why the Church has always been so anxious to gain control

—why, for instance, the Rev. Canon Chase, spokesman for the Federal Council of Motion Pictures has opposed the unofficial reviewing body the National Board of Review,—or why the Rev. Canon Chase has been opposed to internal censorship by the industry itself (the Hays organization). Why this apparent contradiction? Potamkin shows how this apparent contradiction is solved when it is understood that since the advent of the movies the Church has lost control of great masses of workers who have left the Church. Thus the struggle of the Church against censorship by the movie industry, against censorship by the National Board of Review (which today amounts to little else than an endorsing body for the industry), is clearly a struggle for hegemony, for dominance over that great mass of workers who are part of the 70 million paid admissions to the movie theatres weekly.

Even the D.A.R. recognizes the importance of keeping some control. Think of it: the Daughters of the American Revolution have a Committee for Better Films. The better films they advocate of course are the "George and the Cherry Tree," "Johnny Get a Gun" type.

All too briefly—and this due to lack of space—does the pamphlet deal with the "class legislation," the class nature and purpose of the various censorship codes, and with the necessity of extending the fight against all forms of governmental and industrial censorship. This fight today is a matter of utmost necessity; for, as Potamkin says, "it is a question of which reactionary agency will benefit from the profits of control." *Today it is the Roosevelt government, assisted by the police departments throughout the country which have taken over control and are attempting to suppress all*



*films which in anyway indicate the growing world struggle against Hunger, War and Fascism.*

#### *The "I's Want War*

Giving most space to the most important I, (Imperialism) the pamphlet gives a brief survey of early war films, through the World Imperialist War films, the allegedly pacifist post-war films, up to and only touching on the flood of jingo films that are being ground out today in feverish rush to "prepare" for war. It is to be regretted that this final Imperialist phase of the industry (coincidental in history with the weakest stage of the filthy industry as a capitalist industry) was not brought up to the important historical date (March 4, 1933). For it is with the coming of the Roosevelt government that the full grown Imperialist function of the movies has become operative. Since Roosevelt came to power, since the Blue Buzzard flies over Hollywood, the industry has consciously taken on the task of preparing the workers of America for another era of good will and bloodshed. Climaxed by "Defense Week" only last month, the rapid fascization of the industry since Roosevelt first took a hand in the movies by editing "Gabriel Over the White House" little over a year ago, could very well make another pamphlet.

*Ed. Note: The Movies—and the Voice of the Audience*

The readers of New Theatre and the revolutionary workers of America will be paying high tribute to Harry Alan Potamkin when they take this pamphlet in hand and distribute it by the thousands. For—the Hound & Horn, Close-Up and other Potamkin readers notwithstanding,—Potamkin's entire motivation in all his later writings was revolutionary. And his pamphlet like his operetta, and his book on Lenin, and his dozens of articles were meant to be spread far and wide and purposefully — for arousing great masses of workers. (men, women and children) for active struggle against reaction in the movies, in literature, in life.

— TOM BRANDON

*THE EYES of the MOVIE, by Harry Alan Potamkin, New York, International Publishers, 10c and 25c, 32 pages.*

#### *PEACE ON EARTH ON BROADWAY*

Peace on Earth drew an audience of 125,000 people during its sixteen weeks on Fourteenth Street, but its potential audience is far greater than this. When a war situation arises in this country such as the play prophesies, a million workers in New York City alone will be drafted. Peace on Earth has something vital and important to say to them. The play has been moved to the Forty-Fourth Street Theatre under the A. L. Jones management, with the production and cast unchanged. The Theatre Union urges everyone who saw the play on Fourteenth Street to support the new venture by telling their friends to go now to the Broadway showing.

— CHARLES R. WALKER

# International Workers' Theatre Olympiad

(cont'd from Jan. issue)

## II. THEATRE OF ACTION

The change from 'Agitprop' to 'Theatre of Action' does not mean a complete elimination of agitprop, which, when politically and artistically mastered, will remain as an effective and necessary type of revolutionary theatre. But like other 'small' forms (pamphlets, short stories) it is limited in its possibilities of expression. The revolutionary theatre has to create new types, able to express contents not covered by the method of agitprop. Hence the new tendency towards a broadening of the working basis, mainly pointing out three directions: to win over new creative forces, to conquer new theatrical means and methods, to find the correct political approach to the broadest possible audience.

Some of the groups appearing at the Olympiad showed very interesting experiments in this direction: some still in the stage of searching and experimenting, some already successfully using new methods.

### 1. SEEKING NEW METHODS

DENMARK—*The Oslo Blue Blouses* tried something new by giving over the direction of the group to a professional theatre man and by having professional actors playing side by side with untrained workers. Concerning the art of direction the group gained through a wider use of scenic means, interesting groupings. The use of song and music raised the quality of their productions above the average. The experienced actors, however, were not used sufficiently to the artistic advantage of the group. Instead of entrusting them with tasks,

which could not be carried out by amateur players, they were put in 'one line' with them, a dangerous misinterpretation of the otherwise indispensable group spirit.

FRANCE—*The Blue Blouses of Bobigny* tried to introduce the element of humorous entertainment, based on the bourgeois vaudeville and revue style. Instead of satirizing and exposing the bourgeois use of these theatre types, they used the same methods without a political content.

BELGIUM — *The Belgian Blue Blouses* experimented with a new technique which derived directly from the conditions and achievements of the agitprop theatre so far. It is the 'spoken stage setting.' No longer ignoring the stage—as the old agitprop did—and not overloading the scene with properties from the regular stage, the players themselves describe the stage to the audience. These explanations are not connected with the production as a whole. This method not only stimulates the imagination of the audience, it also lightens the tenseness of the old agitprop without diminishing its serious political appeal.

### 2. USING NEW METHODS

FRANCE—*The Group "October"* presented a group recitation *Citroen* (Citroen is the French Ford). It was a perfect synthesis of Marxian analysis, artistic creation of word and movement, of propaganda and entertainment: a masterpiece of agitprop art, that kept the very critically minded audience spell-bound for 15 minutes. *The Battle*

*of Fountainebleau*" was a new venture in the field of the revolutionary theatre, in its approach towards the subject matter as well as towards the form. It was a satire on the imperialist war, with a treatment of a content that went far beyond the usual schematic agitprop cliché, capitalistic interests contra proletarian interests. It indicated the subject in its entire complexity: from the peace-talking secretary of war to the bourgeois mother who worries about the most becoming mourning dress after she had driven her son to die in the imperialist war. The whole play was full of original ideas, creative imagination, "esprit."

The sarcasm was carried to the utmost limit, but it never appeared forced or artificial, as the subject matter itself and the strong creative power behind the work drove to this limit, which made the audience through its laughter conscious of the tremendous reality behind this Aristophanean comedy.

CZECHO-SLOVAKIA — "*Echo—Left.*" Around the piano four young men (they are comrades, the members of the Communist Party)—this is the whole outfit. They sing: The "Song of the League of Nations," the "Song of the Liberal," the "Song of S. P. Official," the "Song of Solidarity." Between the songs, short recitations. Without pathos. Pointed satire or statements. These tunes will never be sung on parades or mass demonstrations but they stick in your memory and you will hum them long after you hear them. And with them you remember the pointed, simple, politically clear lines.—Revolutionary cabaret. A valuable enrich-



ment of the workers theatre. A form which we cannot afford to neglect in this country. We have the forces to do it: composers, song writers and performers of talent.

### III. RELATED ARTS (Dance Groups)

*Norwegian Folk Dance group.* This group showed original Norwegian folk dances in original Norwegian folk costumes. It might also have been a feature of a church fair or a fascist entertainment. The revolutionary or counter-revolutionary significance of these experiments depends on the situation in the respective countries or districts, if these danc-

es are still in style, then it is correct to use them as basis for political, artistic educational work. But as a revival of old manners and costumes they represent an attitude diverting from the vital issues of the class struggle.

*New Dance Group—Berlin.* Here is a technically well trained and artistically highly developed group which conveys its message in an impressive and powerful manner. "The Old People," "Jail," "Gossip" are the themes of this performance. A correct selection, as they represent social content. The approach towards these contents, however, is defeatist.

They show the suffering without protesting. They show social misery without showing its origin and without pointing out the necessity for and the way towards its overcoming. The appearance of this group, which came from fascist Germany and had to return to it, at the Olympiad of the Revolutionary Theatre, must be greeted as a courageous manifestation of genuine revolutionary spirit.

— JOHN BONN

(*The Russian groups that performed at the Olympiad will be reviewed in the next article by Nathaniel Buchwald.*)

## Two Years of the Workers' Theatre In Canada

IN reviewing the activities and growth of the Workers' Theatre in Canada, it is first necessary to deal briefly with the professional theatre (or lack of professional theatre) in this country. This is necessary in order to be able to estimate what difficulties the workers' theatre has, insofar as it must not only develop a workers' theatre, but has as its task to introduce modern theatrical forms in its plays as well. I will deal later with the attempts the workers' theatre has made in this regard.

It can be quite clearly stated that Canada has no professional companies playing all season, such as there are in the United States and in the European countries. The theatre houses in existence bring down stock companies that play for a month or two and then due to lack of interest in them are forced to close. But for the most part, road companies are brought down. These stay for a week and go on. In Toronto, for instance, most of the theatres are shut tight and I dare say that the same is the

case in other cities throughout the country.

There is, however, a "Little Theatre Movement," a movement of amateur dramatic organizations who put on various one-act plays and a good deal of Shakespeare, etc. Such "Little Theatres" exist throughout the country and it is on this field that the workers' theatre has not done sufficient work to draw them closer to us and show them the value of a really vital theatre. Only when the ban was placed on "Eight Men Speak" did the Workers' Theatre circularize some of these "Little Theatres" with protest resolutions. In the future, this will be followed up.

### *Organizations and Growth of Workers' Theatre*

IN March 1932, the first Workers' Theatre group of the Progressive Arts Club was organized in Toronto. At the very beginning the work, with the elements in the group, was very difficult due to the

uncertainty that existed as to the role of the workers' theatre and the type of plays it should do. However, with the drawing in of more politically developed members, the Workers' Theatre started work on "agit-prop" sketches and became active in the various campaigns that were carried on at that time by the workers of Toronto.

Since that time, groups have definitely been established in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, London, Windsor, Winnipeg and Vancouver,—groups that are taking an active part in the struggles of the workers and are determined to develop a strong workers' theatre in Canada. Over 100 connections have been established throughout the country with various groups. These are given leadership as well as assistance by our executive which supplies plays, educational materials, etc., and have been drawn into the first International Workers' Theatre and "Masses" Ten-Day Campaign that is being conducted from March 15th to 25th.

It is impossible in this article, to deal in detail with all the valuable dramatic contributions the Workers' Theatre has made to the struggles of the workers in Canada. Let us consider just a few of them.

#### *Some Achievements*

**W**HEN Nick Zynchuk, an unemployed worker, was shot during an eviction in Montreal last year by a policeman, the workers' theatre in that city reacted very quickly by writing a mass recitation on this vicious attack of the ruling class and by performing it at the funeral of the murdered worker. We can definitely say that this mass recitation is the best one so far produced and written in Canada and has brought to hundreds of thousands of workers throughout the country the necessity for organization against such police terror. Zynchuk, through this mass recitation, becomes a fighting symbol for the working class of Canada.

During last summer two tours were undertaken by the Workers' Theatre, one by the Toronto group and the other one by the Windsor group. Both of these tours brought results not only in the organization of groups in the places visited but, what is of still more importance, brought a call to struggle to the workers in these localities. While on one tour the members of the Workers' Theatre participated in a strike that was in progress during that time. Workers were convinced that we were not only "actors" who were something different from them, but on the contrary, came from them, prepared to picture their struggles. This is important to mention because in Canada, there are a great many misconceptions and misunderstandings as to the role of the workers' theatre. We can overcome this misunderstanding only by active partici-

pation in the struggles of the workers and prove our role to them,—that we are a theatre of the workers.

Now we come to the most recent and greatest achievement so far of the workers' theatre—the production of the full-length play "Eight Men Speak," written, produced and performed for the first time in this country. On Dec. 4, 1933, 1500 workers, university students and other interested people packed the Standard Theatre to capacity to witness the first full-length performance of the workers' theatre.

It is significant to note that out of the cast of 40 people taking part in this play, at least half of them had never been on a platform before, not even to make a speech. But not one forgot a line, not one forgot his character but played consistently throughout the performance. These people were workers convinced that the play *Eight Men Speak* was of great importance to the working class of Canada because it exposed the attempt to murder Tim Buck, workers' leader serving five years under Section 98 and because it called upon the workers to give their answer to the government on this attempt.

The workers of Toronto gave their answer by filling this theatre to capacity, gave such a strong answer that the Ontario government was afraid of the sentiment this play aroused and placed a ban on it in the Province of Ontario. Throughout the whole length and breadth of the country, dramatic groups are asking for this play and the workers' theatre is preparing to print this popular play in pamphlet form.

Of course, the play as a first attempt, has many shortcomings: the scenes were choppy in places, some of the parts were not well developed, the theatre rented was not

equipped well enough with lighting, etc., to enable us to make the play as powerful as it might be. However, with these drawbacks, we can say that the workers' theatre has attempted to bring to the theatre a fresh and progressive note and has shown that it is capable of introducing a more modern stage technique in its plays. It is evident from the response to the performance that the workers want more of such theatre.

#### *Some Shortcomings*

**T**HE workers' theatre however, has some serious shortcomings which must be overcome. The question of study, artistic, technical, and theoretic, has been neglected. There has been no unification of the groups throughout the country with a central body to coordinate, advise and lead them on the basis of their collective experience. For this reason the workers' theatre welcomes the opportunity to participate in the National Workers' Theatre Festival at Chicago in April. Here, with our main groups in attendance, we hope from the exchange of discussion and opinions to get a clearer conception of our problems, artistic and organizational, so that we can truly be a mighty weapon in the workers and farmers struggle against capitalism.

R. GORDON

---

One of the newest affiliates to the Workers' Dance League is the "Daily Worker" Dance Group directed by Carol Beals. The group meets every Monday evening at 8 p.m. at the headquarters of the "Daily Worker" Volunteers, 35 East 12th Street. Beginners interested in a theoretical and practical class are being given instruction in the history of dance and practice in modern American technic leading to performance with the group.

# “They Shall Not Die!”

So rapidly do events move in the theatre (as elsewhere) today that whole periods of development are often encompassed in one or two years. Only two short seasons ago, the Siftons' unemployment play, "1931," burst like a bombshell on Broadway, inaugurating a new dramatic trend. The bourgeois critics declared it was "propaganda" and therefore not really a play. Now the Theatre Guild, most respectable of Broadway producing organizations, stages "They Shall Not Die," John Wexley's revolutionary drama of the Scottsboro case.

In "They Shall Not Die" John Wexley has brought to powerful artistic life two of the three major aspects of Scottsboro. His first act, one of the most stirring scenes ever presented on the American stage, is a brilliant dramatization of the social attitudes and terrorism by which the Southern white ruling class seeks to keep the Negro down. The last act shows the machinery of "legal

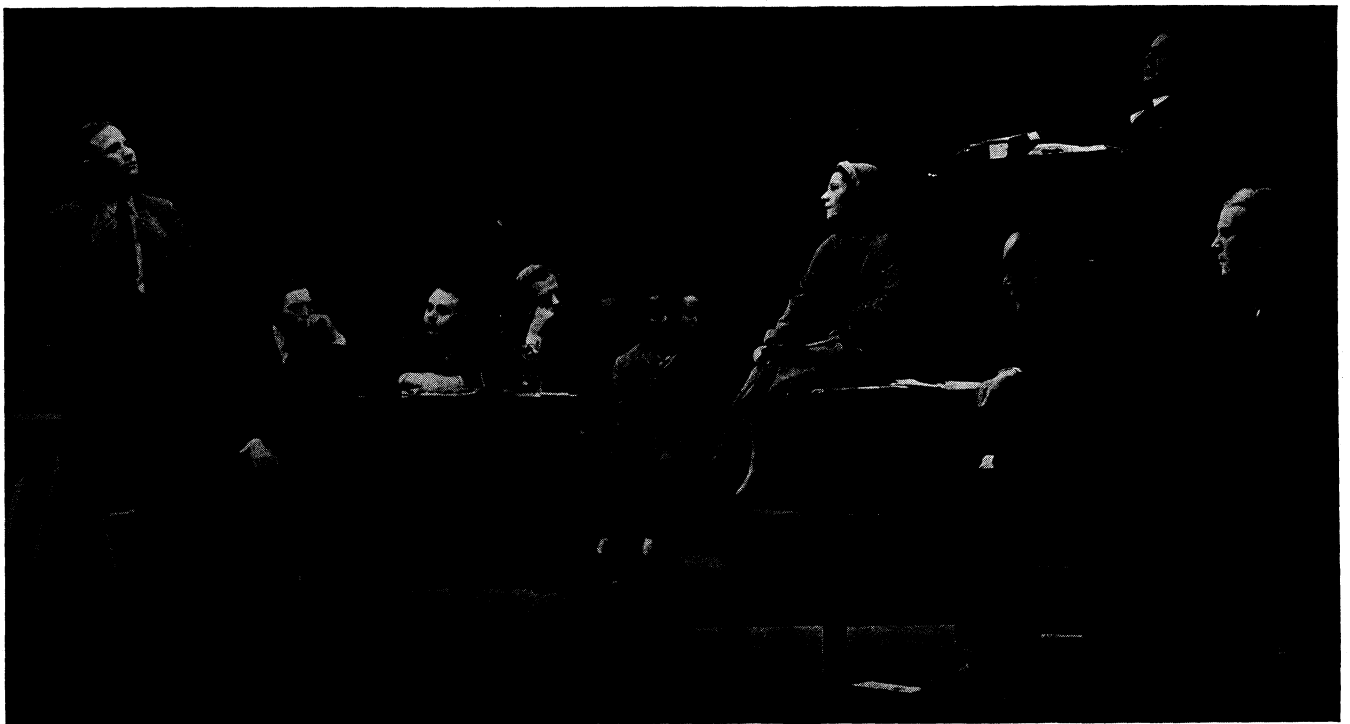
lynching" — the court, determined to burn the innocent Negroes despite the overwhelming weight of the evidence—in order to keep the Negro people down.

The main weakness of the play lies in its scanty treatment of the third and most dramatic aspect of Scottsboro—the struggle outside the courtroom, the organization of mass pressure, with millions of Negro and white workers all over the world making known their determination that the Scottsboro boys shall not die. Whereas Wexley has presented the first two aspects in terms of human character and social viewpoints in conflict, and though he has clearly brought out through the speeches of his characters the role and work of the International Labor Defense (in the play, the "National Labor Defense" or "N.L.D."), yet the third aspect is relegated to a few speeches and not presented in terms of dramatic action. The result is that what is probably the best revolutionary play

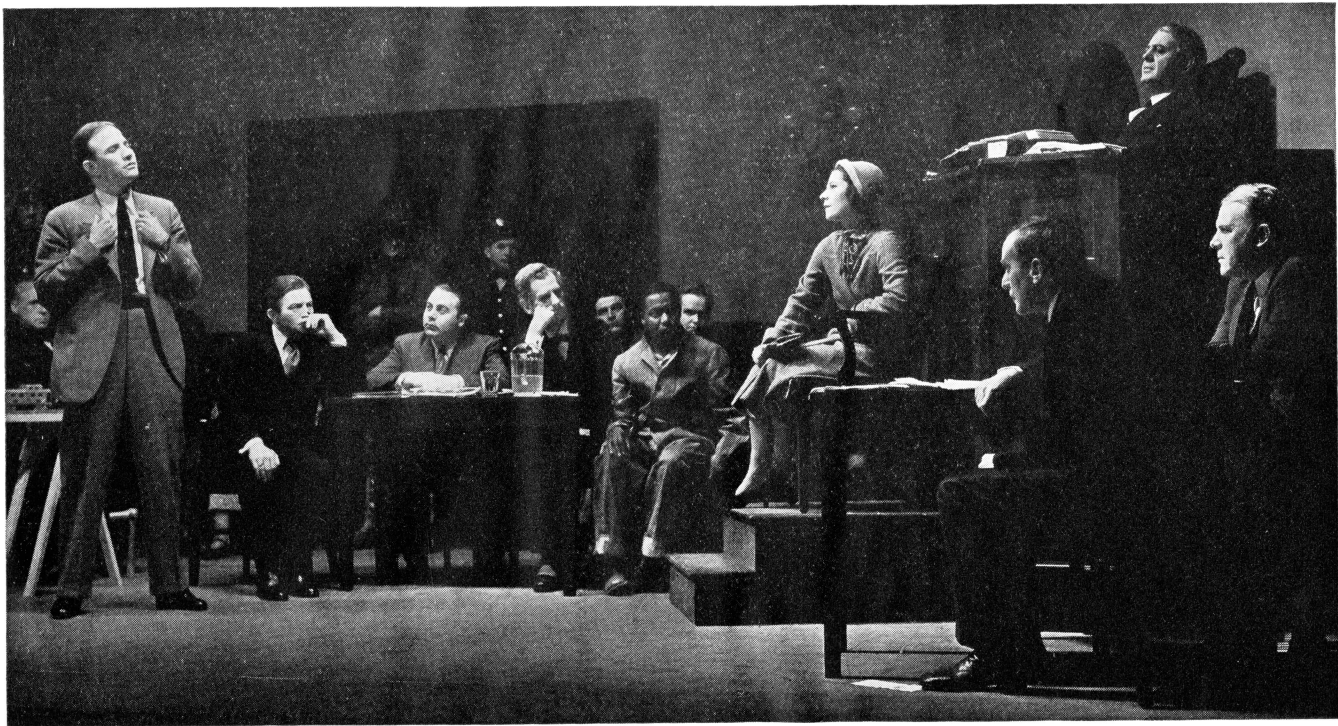
thus far to achieve professional production in this country just misses being a truly great drama.

Though the Theatre Guild was no doubt influenced by the widespread interest in the Scottsboro case, it was nevertheless a courageous thing, from the commercial viewpoint, to stage the play at all. The Guild produced it handsomely, as is its custom. A fine cast was assembled. The production was faithful to the text—

But—and here is the most important point about the production—the Guild gave a revolutionary play the same kind of treatment, stylistically, that it gives to a drawing room comedy or a "Strange Interlude." "Realism," the production board, with Phillip Moeller directing, decided. And to them realism means literal faithfulness in the representation of characters, locale, tempo, and so forth. And thus the sets seek to give a picture of the jails and the courtroom as perhaps the really were (but Lee Si-



Courtroom Scene from "They Shall Not Die." Theatre Guild Production.



Courtroom Scene from "They Shall Not Die." Theatre Guild Production.

monson has managed to prettify them, and has, for example, made Lucy Wells' poor-white home a high walled, spacious place where the directions called for a small cramped shack). And since the director's imagination ran along conventional channels, he did not sense what is obvious to those who have been in contact with the revolutionary theatre in any country—that whether or not they are included in the script, this play artistically as well as every other way demands the significant utilization of the masses who play such a heroic part in any great social struggle like the Scottsboro case.

A Piscator would have done it. Any revolutionary director with a bit of imagination would have essayed it. And of course such a conception would have resulted in an entirely different type of production. The play would have abounded in dynamically staged clashes. The action would have shifted rapidly from locale to locale on sets with several playing levels, with rapid mass actions on the upper ones alternating with the action below in the courtroom. (A look at Mordecai Gorelik's projected designs for "They Shall Not Die," reproduced in the February numbers of *Theatre Arts Monthly* and *New Theatre*, would give a good indication of what could be done along this line). In short, this revolutionary play would have had a revolutionary production.

One other point about this production is very important. There is a tremendous potential audience for the play. But this audience cannot afford to pay prices that begin at \$1.10 and go up. If the Guild is wise, it will quickly make special arrangements with labor and other organizations enabling their members to see the play at special prices.

— BEN BLAKE

## "THE PURE IN HEART"

by JOHN HOWARD LAWSON.

Music by Richard Myers.

Staged by Edward Massey.

Settings by Jo Mielziner.

John Howard Lawson is honest to himself, and a poet. But he is still tied up in knots; at least he keeps saying he is and aren't we all.

What's eating his people? They cry, "a way out, a way out." There is a way out, only Lawson keeps it from them, and they become more and more tied up. Talk, talk, and more talk. The end is annihilation.

After "Success Story," I thought Lawson had cleared away his torments, and that the next play would point the way. Not at all. His people

still cry for the gold at the end of the rainbow, still see that it's nothing but tin, the system still twists and chokes them, and the end or solution is death. "Let me out of it," is the audience response.

The sets, the lighting, the sound effects and the music make the external features very attractive. The music is jazzy yet mournful, and together with the outline of the skyscrapers makes an integral background. The play is stylized and experimental. But the punch? There is no punch.

Somewhere in these plays there is a buzzing about workers—when will John Howard Lawson make that a real voice?

— JENNIE HELD

## "SQUARING THE CIRCLE"

V. Kataev, translation and direction by Herman Brownstein. Presented by Rebel Players at the Orange Grove Theatre, Los Angeles.

**R**EBEL Players again demonstrated the rapid development of the workers theatre with their presentation of the Soviet play, "Squaring the Circle," at the Orange Grove Theatre in Los Angeles. The single setting, designed and built by themselves, is simple, yet creates the proper atmosphere the minute the light is switched on in the first act.

The play concerns itself with the morale and manners of two comrades who share the same room during the time of housing shortage. Each one brings home a wife one day and complications set in. Abram finds he cannot get along with his wife and what is more has fallen in love with Vassia's wife. And Vassia, his room-mate, in the same predicament has fallen in love with Abram's wife. Each couple asks themselves the question: "Is it ethical or

unethical, is it in line with Party ethics to register one day, divorce the next and register the following day."

Flavy, the Party organizer, was asked his opinion. The opinion handed down was that it would be quite ethical for an exchange of wives, so to speak, that the revolution would not suffer for it.

In spite of the fact that there were a few rough spots that could stand some polishing and that a bit more time could be spent on direction, the play was very well received. As one of the local critics put it: It was a "new experience in the theatre." Outstanding characterizations were: Paul Belmont's interpretation of Yemilian the poet, Jeri Shulman as Ludmilla, and Joseph J. Posell as Abram. Other leading characters were: Al Eben as Vasia, Rhoda Montgomery as Tonia, and Milton Sherman as Flavy. The play was translated and directed by Herman Brownstein, member of Rebel Players.

— VICTOR CUTLER

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# The Dance

## AN OPEN LETTER

*To Workers' Dance Groups*

The Revolutionary Dance movement is without question vital and important, and there is every reason to believe that it will eventually assert itself in the non-political field of dance activity in America. The recent dance program given at City College, at which all the revolutionary dance groups in and near New York appeared, has brought several issues to the fore, which I, as representative of many politically sympathetic, professional dancers, would like to have discussed.

What is the aim of the proletarian dance? Is it to proselytize? Does it wish to state the problems of the proletariat, or solve them as well? Is it to renew the enthusiasm of convinced class-conscious people? Is it to afford a method of entertainment to them that will yet be within the realm of their deepest convictions? Does it wish to create an art form that has a single and definite ideology, or does it wish to establish a form of propaganda that uses *the dance as its medium*? Of course, there is no reason to limit the proletarian dance to any one of these objectives; but it seems to me that when composing a revolutionary dance, one of the first considerations should be its ultimate purpose, since that purpose must mould the form of the dance.

If a dance attempts to convert, it must try to reach an audience outside its own circle. Accordingly, the political issue must be kept in the background, and the dance must carry its message by a more emotional ideology. By doing

this, a place is made immediately on programs that would not consent to the appearance of such dances, were the political statement made too obtrusive. Might it not be advantageous to form an "Innocents" dance organization that would create within the workers' ideology, but that would direct its efforts to reaching outside audiences?

The Joos interview of the New Theatre ended with a regret that Joos had stated his problem, but had offered no solution. In America, we are still lacking in awareness of these problems. Might it not be of value to spend energy in presenting the worker's difficulties as such, as often and to as many different audiences as possible? It is done in literature; why not in the dance? It is obvious that had Joos ended his "Green Table" in formal propaganda fashion, he would never have been permitted to play on Broadway at all, and thousands of people would have been denied witnessing this effective statement of the horrors of war.

From the viewpoint of the pure, political propagandist, the criticism of the ending of the "Green Table" is open to question. No one can deny the importance of the dramatic in any propaganda work. Could a final scene shooting down the politicians, even figuratively, have been more effective than the biting satire, the contrast of the preceding scenes of the effects of war with unconcernedness of the Green Table diplomats? Granted that there is but one solution to the workers' problem, does it not rather

weaken than strengthen every dance, by ending it with the symbolic singing of the Internationale? The audience might be carried away by the dramatic mistreatment of the Negro in the dance called "Southern Holiday"; and psychologically, it might be much more effective to leave him mistreated, than to see his problem solved so easily by the onrush of red-coated dancers.

Our third question leads us back to the City College performance. Why did the Duncan Group, which despite its somewhat technical immaturity, and lack of that sophistication which, for instance, the Theatre Union Groups possessed receive the biggest ovation of the evening? Was it despite these reasons, or because of them? Technical immaturity is nothing to boast of but simplicity of form and directness of statement seem best suited for said purpose. Was it not also, because on a program of woe and struggle, it gave the proletarian an idea of the joy that might await him in the future? This is not pure entertainment. It is propaganda of a different sort. It lifts the worker for the moment into a better and freer world that is still very much his own world. The worker needs relaxation. The dance seems, of all arts, best suited to give it to him.

Apparently, the policy of the groups is divided: to create dances that find their inspiration in the problems of the worker, or to create propaganda that uses the dance as its medium. In the latter case, the dancers still commit themselves to follow a certain procedure, and to recognize the limitations implied in the activity of "the dance." It is platitudinous to say that the dance is movement of the body; that what then is expressed, is done so, and is projected

through body movement.

This is not the purist speaking. One usually finds that remaining within the medium produces a better result than going outside it. The surrealist movement in painting, in which painters pasted on their canvases everything from glass to orange skins, had a short life; whereas, the true innovators, who discovered different means of using paints and brushes, have had a lasting significance. The revolutionary dancer, if she wishes to broaden the possibilities of expression in her medium, can do a great deal in broadening the possibilities of movement within the body, and within space, by means of theatrical use of platforms, levels, etc.

An idea in itself, may be a very powerful one; but if it is not an idea that can express itself in movement, if it is not a dance idea, or rather a danceable idea, it does not belong in dance propaganda, but might be more effective in literary, pantomimic, or spoken form. An idea like "The Blue Eagle," one of the New Dance Group's offerings, is first of all a broad *topic*, an intellectual idea, involving numerous problems of politics, economy, nationalism, internationalism. It has within it *many* motives for the legitimate theatre or for the agitprop groups. The N. R. A. signs, carried by two of the dancers, in helping to fortify the intellectual concept, minimized even the possibility of regarding the idea of N. R. A. as symbolic—if that's what the group wished its audience to do.

The dance propagandists might succeed in creating more effective and more inspiring dances if they held more consideration for the medium which they have chosen to employ.

— BLANCHE EVAN

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## Brief Dance Reviews

RUTH PAGE, in a sense, typifies the bourgeois concert dancer of today. Like most of them, she has succeeded in acquiring a certain amount of technical competence in her art, yet employs it on subject matter unworthy of either time, energy or talent. The quintessence of such an art can only be a virtuosity that entertains for the moment, yet leaves one utterly unaffected after the performance. The themes were religious (Rustic Saints Day), defeatist (Resurgence, Possessed, My Sorrow is my Song), meaningless studies in pure movement (Pendulum, Variations in Euclid) and harmless little pieces (Humoresque, Songs)—in short, the wares of the "ivory tower" inhabitant who refuses to see, hear, or know about the disquieting struggles of the masses below.

BELLE DIDJAH — Forrest Theatre. Coincident with the revival of historical costume stories in the movies and motivated by the same desire to distract from the disturbing economic crisis, there has taken place, within the last month or so, a new wave of exoticism in the concert dance. Belle Didjah is the latest contribution to the list of native American dancers (Dance Observer, note) who derive their inspiration from non-American sources. Her "Impressions of the Orient" only comprised one

third of the program, yet because of its featured position and advance ballyhoo it assumed a significance grossly disproportionate to its true value. The dances of this part were sufficiently genuine so far as costumes and music were concerned, but, unfortunately, contained little more.

The middle portion of the program, consisting of what might best be described as theatrical dance sketches, was most successful. "Subway Angel," in particular, in the form of a dance pantomime, was a convincingly realistic presentation. Incidentally, here is a form of dance readily adaptable to a revolutionary art and one that a class conscious artist might employ to good purpose.

In "Religious Cycle" Miss Didjah sought to depict "four great cultural periods of history." "Gotham," the period of today, is presented as one of "jazz enthroned and social unrest" (which to Miss Didjah means a few convulsive twitchings) and as an embodiment of many of the essential traits of the previous periods (Egyptian maturity, Dionysian abandon and medieval Christianity). Nowhere is the role of the working class even hinted at. As a dance, it failed to successfully focus its theme.

The audience (at \$3.30 top) was enthusiastic in its response.

— BEN WOLF

*A Workers' Animated Film Group* has been organized by A. Prentis and Leo Hurwitz. The purpose of the group is to get together a number of artists, writers, and film-technicians who will work collectively to bring out revolutionary animated cartoons. The first cartoon to be made by the group will be based on Helen Kay's *Battle in the Barnyard*.

*STEVEDORE* — "Steve-dore", Paul Peters' and George Sklar's play about the Negro and white longshoremen on the docks of New Orleans, is now in rehearsal with Michael Blankfort directing. The opening has been set for Wednesday, April 18th at the Civic Repertory Theatre by THE-ATRE UNION.

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## News and Notes

BOSTON.—Also a new group. This Film and Photo group is composed of several members of the Boston John Reed Club and a couple of professional photographers. As we go to press we have no news of any further activity. All persons in Boston area interested in Film and Photo work should communicate with Israel Prager, 77 Westminster Ave., Roxbury, Mass.

DETROIT.—Film and Photo League, Jack Auringer, Secretary, 4246 Waverly. This group has been engaged in showing 16mm films and taking part in the campaign against the Nazi film, S. A. Mann Brand. A class in elementary photography is being started and a 16mm film is being planned.

NEW YORK.—The New York Film and Photo League announces a new film publication, *Film Front*. This will be the official organ of the N. Y. League. The first issue will appear May 1st. Articles, and film reviews will be welcome. The deadline is the 15th of the month preceding the publication. The Harry Alan Potamkin Film School is making excellent progress with its first film, *Waste an dWant*.



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