

# NEW

JUNE 1934

# THEATRE

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# NEW THEATRE

JUNE 1, 1934

THE Broadway season now fading was marked by a number of important developments. Mediocre plays and a number of excellently staged productions continued the general line of past seasons. A slight financial boom puffed up the mid-season. Musical shows became increasingly social in their topics—in a manner that indicates they will soon blossom into a positive reactionary force against the labor movement, for jingoistic nationalism and war. The trend in “straight” plays, although not as clearly marked, showed similar tendencies.

A dramatic high spot was the Theatre Guild's production of *They Shall Not Die*, John Wexley's revolutionary drama of the Scottsboro frame-up. The play “failed” since its natural mass audience—workers and students—were effectually barred by the customary high Broadway admission scale. Had the Guild made special arrangements with workers' organizations, the play would have run for many more weeks. *They Shall Not Die* was a powerful, well-built play, as stirring an experience in the theatre as any play of recent years.

But the outstanding development of the season was the successful establishment of the Theatre Union as a producing organization. Its first production, *Peace on Earth*, a revolutionary anti-war play by George Sklar and Albert Maltz, ran for sixteen weeks to an audience of over 125,000. Its second production, the current *Stevedore*, Paul Peters' and George Sklar's play about the super-exploitation of Negro longshoremen and the growing solidarity with their white fellow workers, seems destined for an even longer run. We look forward to next season in the expectation that the Theatre Union will give us not only revolutionary drama but also revolutionary staging.

The Pulitzer Prize for drama, after a controversy in which the prize jury's choice of *Mary of Scotland* was overruled by the “advisory” committee, went to Sidney Kingley's *Men in White*, an inconsequential play brilliantly staged by the Group Theatre.



OF vital concern to the workers in the American theatre is the rise of an actors' movement within the Actors Equity Association with a program in opposition to the prevailing policy of the present high officials of Equity. Aiming to make Equity a more powerful factor in defense of the actor's needs, the actors' opposition movement has already rallied hundreds of actors around its program, which calls for putting an end to the granting of cuts and concessions to the managers; for greater democracy in Equity and control of important matters and decisions by the general membership instead of by a few high-salaried officers; for an intensive campaign to organize all actors into the Association, thus increasing its fighting power; for cooperation with all other stage unions in defense of the interests of all theatrical workers and for unemployment insurance to take care of the high unemployment among professional employees. The program of the new movement is not yet worked out in all its aspects. Research committees have been at work gathering data which is then presented to open meetings of Equity members as the basis for action. All questions are decided by majority vote of the actors present. A general committee consisting of one member of each Broadway cast plus several representatives of unemployed and C.W.A. actors, serves as the executive body between meetings.

The strength of the movement is indicated by the fact that Frank Gillmore, Equity's president, has considered it politic to permit several nominees of the opposition to be included on the regular slate of Nominating Committee without a fight, in the hope that this would take

the wind out of their sails. But a number of opposition nominee's candidates have already been placed in regular nomination by the recent special meeting of the association. And the work of formulating a sound fighting program in the interest of the actors goes on.

There is no question but that this movement will stimulate the rise of similar movements in the other stage unions.

NEW THEATRE invites actors, stagehands, and other theatre workers to contribute articles on their problems.

NEW THEATRE is proud to announce that circulation has doubled in the past six months. Also, that the success of “New Theatre Night” in New York (reports on out-of-town “New Theatre Nights” have not yet been received), permits NEW THEATRE to appear in the improved format of this issue. This format not only marks a distinctive improvement in appearance but also increases volume of contents 40 per cent. Moreover, steps have been taken to get articles on the theatre and film by outstanding writers, articles that will raise the quality of NEW THEATRE to a higher level than ever before. Sections of new full length plays, and new plays adaptable for production by workers groups will be published regularly.

So far so good. But two grave problems remain.

The first is the failure of NEW THEATRE to publish enough adequate material on the workers' theatres themselves. The editors realize this is a serious shortcoming, a shortcoming that will have to be rectified at once if NEW THEATRE is to do its part in developing and directing a vital revolutionary work-

ers' theatre in America. But part of this failure must be attributed to the failure of the best writers in the theatre groups to send in material on their groups' work and on the workers' theatre in general. We cannot publish what we do not receive. It is ironic that many of the groups whose delegates were so caustic in their criticism of NEW THEATRE at the National Theatre Festival have not sent in so much as a single letter, let alone articles. This condition must be changed at once. June 15 is the deadline for the July issue. The editors urge worker correspondents and writers to send in material at once.

The second failure is that of the out-of-town groups. While most of the New York groups and a few of the out-of-town groups have done their part in distributing NEW THEATRE, most of the groups have failed seriously in their obligations to the magazine. It was agreed at the Festival, despite the criticism of NEW THEATRE, that every group would activate its membership in support of NEW THEATRE, just as the magazine on its part would try to give the groups the kind of magazine they want. Nevertheless, most of the groups are only selling part of their comparatively small bundle orders (these figure only one or two copies to a member), and almost no subscriptions are received through the groups. Not only this, but over half of the groups owe money to NEW THEATRE for copies sold. If this keeps up, and NEW THEATRE continue to be handicapped financially by these negligent groups, the names of each delinquent group will be published on a special delinquent's "blacklist" column.

Another thing. There have been groups who indicate the intended let down of their work this summer by cutting down on bundle orders. These groups should read and consider Al Saxe's article on the summer theatre work possible and necessary—particularly this summer with the intensification of the New Deal drive toward fascism (Birmingham, Toledo, Minneapolis, etc.) Part of this summer work has been indicated by Saxe's article. One important point overlooked is the opportunity to influence the bourgeois little theatre groups. NEW THEATRE is the most effective medium in winning over the more thoughtful members in these groups who, can

swing whole groups over to the revolutionary theatre. NEW THEATRE urges the groups not to cut down on NEW THEATRE bundle orders but to use their magazine "as a weapon in the class struggle."

Editorial changes are being made to comply with the wishes of the groups as stated at the Festival. Now it is the turn of the groups to support NEW THEATRE, to help make it a mightier revolutionary weapon in building a new theatre.

**F**OURTEEN hundred people jammed the Civic Repertory Theatre in New York and more than 500 others were turned away at the first "New Theatre Night," held May 20, under the auspices and for the benefit of NEW THEATRE. The evening in all its aspects was a demonstration of the growing strength of the new revolutionary theatre that is rising all over the land. The Theatre Collective presented a scene from *Marion Models, Inc.*, their forthcoming play about the needle trades. The Artef presented a timely piece, *War Against War*, done in Jewish. Members of the Repertory Playhouse Associates staged two numbers: a scene from Virgil Geddes' ironic comedy *In*

*the Tradition* and the dramatic poem *America, America*, by Alfred Kreymborg. Bobby Lewis and Tony Kreber of the cast of *Men in White* did satirical sketches and songs. Georgette Harvey and the *Stevedore Singers* from the cast of the current Theatre Union hit, presented several songs. And the Shock Troupe of the Workers' Laboratory Theatre concluded with *Newsboy*, their dramatic montage which won the National Workers' Theatre Festival. petition, this spring.

It was significant that all these diverse types of theatres and players—some definitely revolutionary, others not, professional and non-professional, Negro and white, foreign-language and native—gladly participated in a joint program for NEW THEATRE, donating their services in behalf of the magazine which they recognize as a major force making for a social vitality to American theatre, a theatre rooted in the masses, a theatre that serves as a weapon against hunger and exploitation, fascism and war.

Significant, too, was the tremendous turnout of playgoers—workers, artists, students, intellectual and professional people, including theatre workers from Broadway. The audience of the revolutionary theatre is there. The next step is the organization of this audience.

# NEW THEATRE

Official Organ of the LEAGUE of WORKERS THEATRES and NATIONAL FILM and PHOTO LEAGUE.

JUNE 1, 1934



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# Take Theatre to the Workers

*A Program for Theatre Work This Summer*

By AL SAXE

"What do you mean, theatre work this summer? It's absurd. It's insane. Whoever heard of theatre work in the summer? Why, the season ends abruptly somewhere in the lazy months and doesn't begin again until the cool brisk fall. We have enough trouble trying to keep our members together—trying to solve our production problems during the winter without attempting to carry on through the summer. And anyway, summer is a swell time to disband and take a rest. Everybody goes away for the summer anyway, so where would we get actors? Besides, you never get an audience to the theatre in the summer time."

\* \* \*

THESE are just a few of the arguments advanced in workers theatre groups for a complete or almost complete letup of activity during the summer. Very well revolutionary theatre workers—*requiescat in pace*—it is time to change our slogan to "Theatre is a weapon in the Class Struggle—only during the Winter."

We cannot allow this condition to continue. The question of summer work must be taken up seriously in every worker's theatre group. This summer we approach closer and closer to new imperialist wars. And as we have seen in Birmingham, Minneapolis, Toledo, etc., the last few weeks, a nation-wide series of strikes are flaring up against the intolerable "new deal," with police, militia and deputy-thugs terrorizing the workers. It becomes more important than ever that the workers' theatre be active, carrying its message of struggle and organization to every section of the working class.

What is to be done? How can we answer the problems of lack of technical forces, of absent actors, dwindling audiences, etc.?

In the summer, with the exception of the summer little theatre and a few "hit" shows, the bourgeois theatre rolls up its sidewalks. With the Broadway season over, hundreds of technicians, professionals, semi-professionals from the art theatres, and from the stock companies find themselves with even less to do than in the wintry season of part-time unemployment (except for "summer theatre" work which nets hardly any). Also educational regimentation is practically at a standstill with hundreds of thousands of students returning home with little or nothing to occupy their time—no work, of course. All these combine a tremendous reservoir of trained forces left motionless. We must make every effort through publicity, through constantly planned activity to draw them into the workers' theatres.

What activity is possible in the summer? This basic problem facing the theatre groups was sounded at the National Conference. It is necessary for the workers' theatres to turn the proscenium towards the factories, shops and fields. Here is immediate work. Out-

doors—on the streets and highways throughout the land—our audience is waiting for us. Perform in front of factory gates at lunchtime. Perform in parks and public places wherever workers gather. Make your group a genuine Theatre of Action.

The Shock Troupe of the Workers' Laboratory Theatre of New York, for example, in line with this program has chosen the Marine Workers Industrial Union as their concentration industry. Members from the playwrights' group are already at work gathering material, and, by taking active part in the marine workers' struggles, are getting first hand information on the problems facing the marine workers. The production problems are relatively simple. No worry about stages—the docks themselves are natural open-air stages—slightly elevated as though the builders had considered the possibility of shock troupe performances. Soon the workers on the docks will be flocking to an unusual free show—unusual in that it will deal with the problems facing the marine workers.

But this is not the only medium for summer work. Several of the workers' theatre groups have already put on political side shows, revolutionary circuses, etc. Last year the Workers' Laboratory Theatre of New York produced their own version of the "Century of Progressive Poverty"—a tent

show with musical bits, vaudeville skits, etc.

It is necessary to analyze and study the forms which the bourgeois theatre makes use of during the summer. They have hundreds of travelling shows, chautauquas, medicine shows, etc. We all know how the lid blows off when "the circus comes to town." Those of us who are in the larger cities can learn from the various outdoor amusements at the "Riverviews," "White City" and "Coney Islands." These are forms which you and I and the worker next door have been nurtured on, which can be readily understood. Here you will find loads of activity for script writers, technicians, costumers, actors, musicians, directors, etc. Full details of the summer shows which have already been produced by the Workers Laboratory Theatre and other groups can be gotten by writing to the League of Workers Theatres repertory dept.

It is important for all groups who have already participated in summer activity or who have plans to do so to send in complete plans and writeups, including organizational, financial and artistic experiences in such work.

Let us make our workers' theatres active in the class struggle this summer, straight across the 3,600-mile stretch from the docks of New York to the Bay of Frisco—from coast to coast let us carry out our slogan, "Theatre is a weapon in the class struggle."

## Lawson Crosses the Class Line

By LESTER COHEN

JOHN HOWARD LAWSON, Broadway playwright, was picked up in a Birmingham, Alabama court last week, jailed, grilled, ordered to leave the State.

Why?

Because he crossed the class line.

Funny thing. Just yesterday—Lawson was a respected citizen, an honored artist of our time, his plays appearing in Broadway theatres (two of them this winter), his pictures shown in the movie palaces of the world, his position in Hollywood exemplified by his unanimous election to the presidency of the Screen Writers' Guild, his associations indicated by his being asked to participate in the formation of the N.R.A. code for motion pictures.

And today, John Howard Lawson is a seeming disturber of the peace, an exile from the fair State of Alabama—a public enemy.

Why?

Because John Howard Lawson crossed the class line, because the range of his interests extended beyond ordinary respectabilities.

He heard of the terror directed against workers and sympathizers in the present strike

of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company properties. He didn't quite believe the things he heard, he thought he'd go down South and see.

He did. Didn't see much. Didn't get a chance. As soon as he started to ask questions, as soon as he seemed appalled at company-thug murder masquerading as deputy-sheriff legality—he was picked up, jailed, cross-questioned, told to get out of the State.

Why?

Isn't a playwright to interest himself in such matters? Isn't a playwright to have a social conscience? Isn't a playwright to have a point of view on murder when committed by corporations? And who is to tell a playwright in what to interest himself—a company thug, a police court judge, or a one-way ticket out?

The answer rests with Lawson, with other writers who are experiencing the mass-life and mass-problems of our time, the writers who will give us the living literature and the living theatre of the modern world.

And to get it—they have to cross the class line.

# Towards a Revolutionary Theatre

By JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

*The Theatre—The Artist Must Take Sides*

**D**URING the past few years, the work-theatre groups throughout the United States have been contributing increasingly vital and exciting material toward the creation of a revolutionary theatre. But the professional activity of Broadway, following its own stodgy and unimaginative course, has been very little affected by this ferment of revolutionary ideas. In past seasons, Broadway has seen a few scattered and partially clarified attempts to present a working class point of view. But the season of 1933-1934 has been tremendously significant—because it has seen the first flowering of revolutionary plays, dramatizing the class struggle directly and uncompromisingly, defying the traditional pale-pink art-for-art's-sake attitude of the professional stage.

The three outstanding productions of the year were: *Peace on Earth*, *Stevedore* and *They Shall Not Die*. A critical analysis of these plays reveals certain serious faults: *Stevedore* is the most successful of the three, because of the direct violent simplicity with which its theme is presented. But one cannot over-estimate the historic importance of these plays in the development of a genuine American theatre; they represent the first conscious and maturely developed expression of the revolutionary trend.

This theatrical awakening has been largely due to the initiative and organizing ability of the Theatre Union, which has shown great skill in production and great energy in building up the support of a working class audience. But the readiness with which this audience has responded, the heartening enthusiasm with which *Peace on Earth* and *Stevedore* have been greeted, show that the need for a revolutionary theatre is urgent and deeply felt; these plays have reached a new and intensely responsive audience; the vitality of these productions has flowed across the footlights and created an electric excitement among the spectators.

The revolutionary theatre is on the threshold of its vital growth. The past season has seen the beginning. The coming season will see a further development; at the same time, it is inevitable that the split between the theatre of the workers and theatre of the reactionary bourgeoisie will become gradually more pronounced. As the class struggle grows more intense and more openly apparent, it is reflected more clearly in the various arts: The compromisers, the escapists, artists who chatter about "pure art" find that they are no longer able to hide behind their aesthetic liberalism. The artist is *forced* to recognize the elementary facts of the economic struggle; he is *forced* to take sides.



John Howard Lawson

In 1934, this intensification of the class struggle is proceeding rapidly. The New Dealers, the Liberals, the Socialist leaders are no longer able to hide in a fog of radical verbiage. The fog is lifting, and the liberals are revealed all dressed up in military costumes giving the fascist salute. The same process is going on in the theatre: the veneer of aesthetic liberalism is wearing thin. The division between the reactionary bourgeois theatre and the emerging theatre of the working class becomes inevitable.

This process is of the utmost importance to every theatrical worker. I am writing the present article in the hope that it will reach some of the stage-employees who are affected by this problem. I believe there are many members of the theatrical profession who are orienting themselves toward the left, but who, like myself, have been slow in definitizing the matter in terms of their own activity. At the present time, it is urgently necessary to face the issue decisively—and to help toward the building of the revolutionary theatre.

**WHAT** does this mean in concrete terms? It means active participation in the rank-and-file movement in Equity and other labor organizations; it means agitation for more working class plays and producing units; it means co-operation with workers' theatre groups; it means vigorously exposing the bourgeois-reactionary character of the Broadway stage. Organized activity along these and similar lines can have a very pronounced effect in clarifying the situation.

In the first place, we must realize that Broadway, with the whole tradition and point of view which it represents is militantly reactionary. To think that the proletarian

drama can find a place for itself in the Broadway showshop, or that the exploitation and production methods of Broadway can be adapted to the use of working class drama, seems to me to show a complete misunderstanding of the situation. There can be no compromise along these lines. The revolutionary theatre must be completely divorced from the Broadway game.

Of course, I am referring to Broadway as an institution and not as a physical area. I don't infer that there is necessarily anything fatal in the geography of the Times Square district, nor that its playhouses are unusable.

**B**ROADWAY, however, is a business organism, whose methods of operation are as clearly defined as those of Wall Street: a certain sort of financial set-up is involved: an investment of from \$7,500 to \$60,000, which is gambled recklessly on a first-night impression. Due to the size of the investment and the high over-head, an exorbitant price must be charged for tickets. For the average play the public refuses to pay this price, so arrangements are made for cut-rate disposal of the tickets, but the advertised price is solemnly maintained at the box-office, in an effort to catch a few unwary and ill-informed people who don't know about the cut-rate system. Someone should make a really complete analysis of Broadway finances: the facts and figures are as fantastic as a fairytale. Like other features of a capitalist economy, the most obvious thing about it is that it doesn't work.

We all know that Broadway is in an extremely sick and debilitated condition, both commercially and artistically; theatres are empty; there is widespread unemployment; the entertainment offered is of a surprisingly low order; the mediocrity of the successes being almost on a level with the mediocrity of the failures. This is natural enough: Broadway is sick because it represents a sick bourgeoisie; the tawdriness of its productions reflects the psychology of a dull and blase audience. The intellectual level of the theatre (even of its more or less highbrow and "distinguished" successes) is about on a par with the pap dished out in motion picture houses.

The Broadway product has a slight aura of art and sophistication about it, but its standards are exactly the same as those of Hollywood. The movies appeal to an infinitely bigger public because of difference in price and the greater variety of entertainment. The theatre serves a limited clientele—who can afford to be over-charged, and who are tickled and deceived by the fake sophistication of the stage. Narrow-minded producers and reac-

By JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

*The Theatre—The Artist Must Take Sides*

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tionary critics labor under the delusion that the small number of Park Avenue socialites and out-of-town buyers who can afford orchestra seats represent the country's best aesthetic taste. It is perfectly true that this small upper-class group is the sole support of the current theatre. Since the spectators are a New York product and are practically non-existent in other cities, the break-down of the road is easily explainable.

On first nights one sees the arch-type, the cream of the cream of the Broadway clientele. The first-night audience, composed of wise-cracking critics and over-fed drunken people in evening dress, looks like a cartoon of the idle rich in *The New Masses*; these comic representatives of the exploiting classes snore or chatter through the performance; their taste runs toward inconsequential sex, conservatism and familiar epigrams; their taste is fairly well reflected in the small shallow attitudes of the bourgeois critics. They make the Broadway successes: they find screaming humor in the stale bawdy jokes of *Sailor Beware*, they find poetry in the juvenile mock-heroism of *Mary of Scotland*; they find wisdom in the *Saturday Evening Post* conventionality of *Ah Wilderness*.

These plays, of sharply contrasted types, are fairly representative of Broadway: they are in the best tradition of *art-for-art's-sake, entertainment-for-the-sake-of-entertainment*. All of them have been highly praised by newspaper critics as being well-written, effective, and free of the embarrassing curse of propaganda. Even a casual analysis of these plays reveals that they are saturated with ruling class sentiment and ruling class psychology; their point of view is just as partisan as that of *Stevedore*, thus graphically illustrating the fact that critics are completely blind to propaganda when it's on their own side. The authors who write this immature stuff are the real artists in uniform. In fact, the capitalist uniform very much resembles a straight-jacket.

THE case of Eugene O'Neill is particularly interesting, because his reputation has been based on his uncanny ability to reflect the bourgeois mind of his day. O'Neill's development is a perfect chart of the intellectual temperature of the past few years. The arty sexuality of *Strange Interlude*, with its Sunday-supplement-use of Freud, was exactly what the doctor ordered for the aristocrats bored with excessive stock market profits. *Mourning Becomes Electra* had a similar motif, but it also involved an escape to the past, which permitted a more mystic and more intense presentation of the sex theme. At present, the economic situation has changed and O'Neill has changed with it. This year he offered a complete escape into Catholic mysticism on the one hand (*Days Without End*) and a new-fascist glorification of the American home and American idealism on the other hand.

It is logical to suppose that O'Neill's next

play will continue the reactionary line which he seems determined to follow: he will doubtless evolve a mystical patriotic philosophy, with considerable emphasis on American manhood, race hatred and the purifying "beauty" of war.

In following this line, O'Neill will, of course, express the prevailing temper of Broadway, and the temper of the well-to-do audience for whom he writes. In opposition to the revolutionary theatre, the class character of the bourgeois theatre will express itself in open partisanship against the working class and in favor of imperialism and open dictatorship. During the past few months, the New York newspapers have shown a pronounced swing toward kindness and tacit approval in their mentions of Hitler: I am sure that the same tendency will show itself in the New York playhouses. "After all," as so many liberals are beginning to say, "he may go to extremes, but he saved the country from Communism." I'm willing to offer considerable odds that you'll hear that sentiment across the footlights next fall.

The reactionary theatre will continue to show signs of decay: it will appeal only to restricted audiences, and will offer repetitions and unimaginative material. It will continue to serve as a propaganda weapon, justifying the vagaries of capitalism in terms of art and psychology. This is an important function, and one of which capitalism is not wholly unaware. There has been considerable talk of a federal subsidy for the ailing stage; it is entirely possible that such a subsidy will be forthcoming, and will, of course, be placed in the hands of safe financiers in whose artistic integrity the government can have complete confidence.

On the other hand, federal assistance may not prove necessary; the motion picture magnates are taking a lively interest in Broadway production, realizing that the legitimate field is a valuable artistic adjunct to the cinema. Whether under direct government control, or under the wing of the trustified movies, it is obvious that the bourgeois theatre will lick the boots of capitalism with due servility.

Therefore the lines of the conflict are drawn with great sharpness. On one side there is the living force of proletarian art, offering fresh themes, fertile experimentation and real integrity. On the other side, one has a dying and exhausted art, preserved by artificial respiration, lacking in force or freedom of expression.

THE alleged conflict between art and propaganda is, of course, an absurdly non-existent issue; critics who raise this question either fail to understand or are simply endeavoring to conceal their own function as defenders of reaction. The role of the daily press in preserving the status quo in the theatre and preventing the development of new forces, is extremely important and worthy of careful study. The critics pretend to a certain urbanity and lack of prejudice, but they exer-

cise an almost autocratic power over stage production—and the whole weight of this power is thrown toward mediocrity and bourgeois sterility. People are occasionally misled by the apparent liberalism of the critics: the favorable reviews of *Stevedore* are a case in point. It should be observed that these reviews showed an unbelievable lack of understanding of the meaning of the play and the social forces involved. The easy-going acceptance of *Stevedore* was on a par with the easy-going way in which the gigantic Communist May Day demonstration was reported in the capitalist press: it simply meant an attempt to avoid the issue.

In spite of the chatter about "propaganda," all the genuine aesthetic values are on the side of proletarian art. Creative work draws its whole inspiration and meaning from the vital forces of its period; in our day, the vital forces at work are the growing strength of the revolution, the upsurge of a new class.

I myself, like many sincere artists, have struggled for many years to give expression to the ferment of current events. I have laid considerable emphasis on experimentation in form, and have endeavored to do pioneering work along these lines. But the creation of new forms is closely allied to the understanding of new themes. Aesthetic growth is still absolutely impossible without a full realization of the revolution, a correct understanding of the role of the working class.

In the years from 1920 to 1928, it was very natural that the rebellion against conventionality in the theatre should be individualistic and semi-liberal in character. Michael Gold is accurate in speaking of the "shoddy liberalism" of the New Playwrights Theatre. On the other hand, one must realize that the New Playwrights operated at the time the prosperity myth was at its height. It seems to me that this group played an important part in initiating the first steps toward a class-conscious theatre. These steps were tentative and lacking in political clarity, but the New Playwrights did an important job, both in the quality of the plays produced, and in the confused but courageous insistence with which they raised the slogan: "The theatre for social protest... a theatre pledged to the production of plays revolutionary in method and theme."

But we are now living in an era of revolutionary change. Confused and half-hearted liberalism is no longer possible. The Theatre Union has succeeded in defying Broadway tradition and in successfully presenting workers' plays for worker audiences. This is a great beginning. Class-conscious workers in the theatre should propagandize for an extension of the movement appeal to other workers, attack reactionary press and reactionary management, stress the need of developing new audiences, expose the shoddy standards of Broadway. There is only one direction in which the drama can move forward: it must join the march of the advancing working class, it must keep pace with the quickening momentum of the revolution.



# From a Director's Notebook

Written for the Workers Laboratory Theatre

By STEPHEN KARNOT

... Problem arising in conference discussion: What is elementary production procedure for newly-formed, inexperienced workers' dramatic group?

Note: First element is script. If no scripts are at hand, first task is

## Organization of Script-Material

As much literary material as possible to be gathered. Must not necessarily be in play form:

Narrative poems.

Short stories (based on action).

Mass recitations.

Self-contained acts or episodes from long plays.

One-act plays.

Short dialog sketches.

The gathering of material is task for entire group. Divide group into teams of two or three. Each team to cover definite source of material. Typical sources:

Back files of periodicals (liberal, "social", revolutionary).

Public libraries (social and revolutionary drama).

Daily and weekly press.

Repertory Service of League of Workers Theatres.

Contact local sympathetic writers for direct production.

All this work to cover a period of two to three weeks. By end of first week, play-reading committee of three begins to read accumulating material with view of selection for production. They make no immediate decisions, but formulate analysis of each piece of material and categorise it. In order to do this, there must be applied certain

## Guiding Principles of Script-selection

The first consideration is *content*.

What is basic idea of script?

What is "moral" of story?

Does script agree with our social-political viewpoint?

Will it add to the class-consciousness and general understanding of our audience?

To what class does it address itself?

Does it express itself in the language and concepts of our audience?

What audience do we intend it for?

Does it present a problem vital to the auditor?

Does it offer a solution to that problem?

What will be the ultimate effect in the auditor; will it rouse him to action?

All these questions and more must be answered by play-readers. In general, from militant, class-conscious workers viewpoint the play must

Deal with vital problem of personal and social implications;

Present this problem in graphic, comprehensive terms;

State the problem clearly; and

Postulate the solution;

Reveal, by demonstration or implication, the connection of personal problem with social forces;

Finally, educate, instruct, guide not only to thought but to *action*.

The second consideration is

## WHICH FORM?

What are the abilities of our actors?

Plays involving depth of individual characterization unsuitable for untrained actors.

What are abilities of director?

Untrained actors may successfully undertake plays of *action*, group conflict, mass movement, etc., if *director* is adept at handling movement, grouping, timing, sound, etc.

What is the nature of our theatre—is it stationary or is it mobile? That is, is the audience to come to us or are we to go to the audience?

In first case, forms involving considerable settings, lighting, etc., are possible.

In second case, such forms are greatly limited.

What are our technical facilities?

This is not an insurmountable problem—can be solved by ingenuity in direction.

To what audience shall the play be presented?

This is most vital consideration. Form and style of play must be one with which our audience is familiar. Suitable content, if presented in alien form and style, risks danger of being distorted, or at best, neutralized.

What is the general and theatrical cultural level of audience?

This can only be accurately determined after experimentation. However, certain broad demarcations are noticeable. Existing types of American theatres find their audience among roughly definable economic groups—with a good deal of overlapping. This varies with locality, and, among foreign-born, is affected by remnants of national cultures. It is therefore necessary to find or remodel script into the form which roughly corresponds to the *specific* audience.

When the plays have been selected with all these questions in mind, it will be seen immediately that no script fulfills all demands. The play-readers will select two or three which most closely approximate the demands, analyze their shortcomings, make recommendations for alteration and revision. Then plays are read to membership as a whole, plus play-readers comments, and after discussion one is selected for production. Necessary to remember that alteration, cutting, re-writing of script is part of production process—script is never to be slavishly followed but to be considered as more or less raw material.



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# To Eva Le Gallienne — "at 33"

An Open Letter

By PAUL ROMAINE

DEAR EVA:

I have just finished your autobiography after reading several reviews of it and one or two critical articles. They ranged from gushy encomiums to Michael Blankfort's solid if somewhat hasty review in the *New Masses*—hasty in the sense that your book involves more than just yourself—it is an expression of the thoughts and desires of a certain section of the American theatre; a section that is blindly seeking a way out of the throes of this decaying economic system.

You are not so much to be criticized for what you are as for failing to see that your direction in the theatre is a blind one and refusing to accept any other. Your childhood amidst comforts and securities, bohemians ("... My impression is of people attractive, well groomed, who smelt nice and as a rule had well-modulated voices..." p.7) "Nannys" and "Bessies," topped off with romantic literature, could hardly have conditioned you to develop other than you did. Your "hardships" were not the deep and often tragic ones millions of people must face in early life. There was always someone or other ("Uncle Will, R.H.P.," etc.), for you to turn to when the going got a little rough. This you make clear throughout your book.

The first actress to influence you deeply with her art was a romantic one, Sarah Bernhardt, to whom your devotion reached the logical but absurd extremes of copying the 800 printed pages of her "Memoirs" by hand, a feat the slushy critics have made much ado about. Your reaction on first seeing Bernhardt act gave you "... one ultimate goal ... the theatre; the power of the theatre to spread beauty out into life. To be a worker in, a part of such power seemed to me something worth struggling for." And here is where I take up the gauntlet with you in the "struggle." But first to define our two positions with a few admissions.

When we first met ten years ago I was eighteen and you were twenty-five. Though I was conscious at the time how much we had in common I never realized its extent until I read your autobiography for by simply placing your name in Duse's place it might be a short portion of my own autobiography upon first meeting you. I was steeped in romanticism, devoted to the theatre which was my life and filled with all the same ideals—perhaps more extreme than your own. If you remember, I even organized the *Jongleurs de Dieu* of which you wrote in one letter, "If it weren't for the fact of having to go to Paris to play this spring—I should have been tempted to ask permission to join you for a while. ...



Eva Le Gallienne

It all sounds thrillingly beautiful!" And later you wrote, "What happened about the St. Francis idea? I thought so very beautiful and worth while—tell me—." How much we were akin then only you know—how far we are apart now only I know. We have one thing left in common—a love for the theatre, but your love takes you backward because you are still a romantic idealist (in spite of all contrary claims) and mine takes me forward because I am a Communist.

You still speak in reverent tones of a theatre audience such as follows: "The great Theatre was packed with all the most interesting personalities in Paris. Mother pointed some out to me ... Ida Rubenstein, who sat in the left-hand stage box, tall and regal; wearing a huge ermine wrap with an Elizabethan collar and seven paradise plumes in her elaborate coiffure. It was a magnificent scene! Jewels, strange perfumes, ladies in extraordinary 'creations' ... men in evening dress with boutonnières. ... " Immediately flashes to my mind audiences I have known in recent years: poorly clad workers and farmers, physically and mentally hungry, sitting in dim halls that were often cold and smelly; standing in front of shop gates on strike for a few more crumbs, or on the snow covered highways of the Middle West picketing farm produce—all watching, listening to a theatre-of-action sketch dealing with their problems, usually written and given by youngsters as cold and hungry as they and who represent one of the hundreds of workers' theatre groups that are springing up like mushrooms throughout the United States—this is the audience, this the theatre that breathes new life and faces the realities of today, the audience and theatre that will flower in full bloom tomorrow, when the weeds are all yanked up by their roots amidst which they struggle for growth today.

YOU speak of how all your mother's and your own plans were swept aside: "She little dreamed that a great monster was shortly to be let loose on the world, and that personal plans, however well made, however excellent, would be wiped away in the chaos and horror of the Great World War." You will experience the same again, Eva, in a short while. The capitalist world is a seething cauldron beneath a none too placid lid that even now rattles from the steam beneath it. Suddenly it is going to blow off; and where will all your plans and Theatre (with a capital T) be? In the last war your theatre mouthed the propaganda of the millionaires in order to pile up more profits for them by sending more boys to their death; now it is busily engaged in the same thing while preparing for war while our theatre is fighting it with anti-war propaganda and will continue to do so when the kettle bursts.

Next, you came to America because you "thought of it as a vast, free country of inexhaustible possibilities, where opportunities for work would be greater and more varied." Among the seventeen million unemployed, today, are tens of thousands of workers in the theatre who might disagree with you; and even you discovered that "... in this country it is extremely difficult to raise money for the theatre, at least for idealistic purposes." You might have better said, "at least for a theatre of ideas." You have been dependent all your life upon the millionaires for your work in the theatre—how could you help becoming their lackey? Throughout your book you are forever running to Otto Kahn or his ilk for money. On page 172 it's a Mrs. C. C. Rumsey ("always an enthusiastic backer of artists") who "supplied the necessary money. ... " On page 186 it's the American Ambassador Herrick to whom you explained your "growing plight" and who gave you "letters to various wealthy people. ... " On page 187 it's Ogden Armour who is "flinging a bundle in my lap. ... " (\$3,000.00). On page 246 the Civic Repertory Theatre is "... definitely dependent in our present situation on the faith of a few wealthy patrons who felt as we did about the value of our particular type of theatre in the community." As a cerebral actress you have then begun to realize your servitude if not before—but no, for on the next page the most you misunderstand is that you are "compromising" by playing the sacred "Alice in Wonderland" on Broadway! Has the significance of your own statement on page 211 concerning Isadora Duncan ever been grasped by you? You speak of her first recital in Europe after she had left the Soviet Union and how, because of her "lack of backing," she was

*An Open Letter*  
By PAUL ROMAINÉ



Eva Le Gallienne

"unable to include many of the new things she had worked out. . . . How monstrous it seemed that an artist of her importance should be hampered in such ways!" Of course, it is monstrous, Eva, but the solution is the Bolshevik way out of the crisis of capitalism. In Russia, Isadora had but to ask for what she wished, and that at a time when Russia was struggling with grave problems no longer facing her (Russia) such as counter-revolution, food shortage, etc. Outside of Russia Isadora could grovel in the dirt before imbeciles and the most she usually received was sympathy and empty promises of help.

Concerning Duse who appears much in your book and to whom we both owe a great deal in different ways. What I want to say will have to be confined to a separate article or a personal letter, but here let me mention one thing. You say, and I agree, "She looked always toward the future; she had an unflinching belief in youth; she loved all truly living things." I am glad you put in the word "truly" because she considered theatre here a decadent mess. The bourgeois theatre is still a living thing, I'll grant, but it is so rotten that its smell drives even hardened nostrils like mine away from it—that's why I cleared out seven years ago. Its "future," the workers' theatre with its robust "Youth" is the thing that still gives me faith and courage in it. When you say, ". . . No! It is not from without that the theatre is in danger; it is from within," (p. 251) you are cutting the mouldy core of the matter in two, that's all. The core is the profit system, *within and without* the theatre—burn this with the rest of the garbage of capitalism and I'll listen to your ideas and ideals for a theatre.

You once wrote me that you "long so to escape from, and the sooner you and other things of life, which somehow one allows to accumulate round one. The elimination of

all material complications is so restful to the spirit. When I finish my work in Paris, I shall try and escape by myself somewhere, I think to Italy—and steep myself in Stillness and Peace and Solitude among much Beauty." (Those caps are irritating!) These are the very things you must face, Eva, not try and escape from and the sooner you and other workers in the theatre face them honestly the better off the theatre will be. Besides, there is no escape. There is no "Stillness and Peace and Solitude" or beauty anywhere—much less in Italy then (1925) or now. This is a period of "wars and revolutions"; a period of the collapse of capitalist economy and culture throughout the world. Where will you go?

AND now I have about half finished this criticism which is already too long for any magazine. I have not touched upon your mystical analysis of the theatre or of the actor and the arts that both encompass. Nor have I spoken of your fascist tendencies, "If I were Mussolini," etc. All this is for another open letter to you "At 35" and which I hope to write, since these are things that are vital to all of us, especially to those thousands of young idealists in the American theatre whose leader you are. Suffice to conclude now with a point of irony.

In your theatre of Civic Repertory on Fourteenth Street, which you have "temporarily" (?) moved out of, was a production of the Theatre Union called *Peace on Earth*. The Theatre Union is a group of workers in the theatre who have faced the realities of the collapse of the existing economy and culture and have cast their lot with the revolutionary theatre movement. They breathe youth, vitality, and see the realities in the life about them, portraying these realities in such plays as *Peace on Earth* (an anti-war, social

drama) and *Stevedore* (a play about Negro and white dock workers).

Their audiences have been workers from the sweat-shops and factories, trade unions and mass organizations. They are eager and vigorous in their applause, boos, hisses and cheers. Robert Keith, an actor who has played many leads on Broadway and who played the leading role in *Peace on Earth*, said, "I've never played to an audience like that before in my life. These are the people who should make up the audience of the theatre. They are honest; they have feeling. To play before them makes the actor feel again that the theatre is a great art."

And your audiences, Eva? (With the exception of the children, which I want to take up in my next letter.) They are dull, doped—before they come into the theatre by the swirl of capitalist newspaper, pulpit, radio and movie injections of opiates, and after they get into it by stuff like the *Cradle Song*.

In your last letter to me (1926) you wrote, "I hope Europe will do you good—it will either kill or cure you—one or the other. Don't take yourself so damn seriously! But then you are a child—so I suppose that's natural." It didn't kill me, Eva, because in the Place de l'Opera one night I first heard the "Internationale" sung and got my first clubbing in the demonstration taking place there. I took myself more seriously than ever and realized my childhood days of romanticism must end and that there were other people and things in life besides myself. Today I've succeeded in cutting most of the debris of decadent bourgeois thought from myself and have a position of honor—a member of the Communist Party. And you? You are where we parted ways seven years ago—a decadent prop of a collapsing theatre.

## JIM CROW? OH NO!

FROM a telephone conversation between Paul Peters, co-author of *Stevedore*, and Miss Sitgreaves, secretary of the Actors' Dinner Club:

Miss Sitgreaves: "We are a sister organization (to the Stage Relief). We co-operate with the Stage Relief Fund. When they started they cut into our resources and they gave us in return \$200 a week. For some time, however, they have not given us anything, because they are short of funds.

"We have not discriminated against colored people, because they automatically understand that we are in a different position. We cannot have the place filled with colored people. People pay \$1 for a meal here and they would not want to sit next to colored people. I know I wouldn't. I wouldn't go into a place like Schrafft's or any other good restaurant where you pay \$1 for a meal and sit next to a colored person. In fact, no first class restaurant will allow them. Now, you know that.

I've never had them here, but I don't discriminate against them. Furthermore, our waiters, all professional people, work for nothing and they wouldn't want to wait on Negroes. I wouldn't ask them to. I know that I have scruples about serving food to Negroes. So you see we don't discriminate against them, but we don't want them here.

"This is fair enough, because we've never asked them to appear on our floor show or to contribute a nickel. Bill Robinson offered to appear at our benefit on May 23—he appeared two years ago, too. We had some people from *Jezebel* come down here and sing; but Mrs. Owen Davis explained things to them, and they were very sweet about it and left immediately after their performance. They didn't try to sit down and eat or anything. Now, understand me, I don't want any controversy or unpleasantness about this. We don't discriminate against colored people; but we can't have them here; and they under-

stand that, and don't come. That is all."

Not quite all, Miss Sitgreaves.

Negro actors have always been among the readiest to donate their services for every sort of charity. The Negro members of the profession have been among the hardest hit of all by the economic crisis. Yet despite their great need, they are the victims of the rankest kind of discrimination on the part of some of the leading theatrical relief organizations. Sometimes this discrimination is not so open as the kind practiced by the Actors' Dinner Club. Sometimes it is polite discrimination—like the promises of relief given by the Stage Relief Fund. Not so often in the North is there such an open statement of Jim-Crow policy as made above by you to Paul Peters.

No Miss Sitgreaves, the last word is not with you. The last word will come from the thousands of actors and other theatre workers, Negro and white, who condemn your insulting attitude and action.

# Facing the New Audience

*Sketches Toward An Aesthetic for the Revolutionary Theatre*

By MICHAEL BLANKFORT

## INTRODUCTION

IN line with the growth of the class-conscious revolutionary workers in this country have come, as would be expected, radical literary and dramatic movements. Revolutionary ideology carries with it the plasm of a new culture, and the theatre plays no small part in it. In the last five years there have been more plays written and produced which have concerned themselves with the conflicts of the working class in this country than in the whole of the last three decades. Today there are enough plays to give body to the phrase "revolutionary theatre" and now is the time to question some of our old aesthetic standbys and see how they fit in. With the new theatre, new problems arise.

All that we have read, seen, studied, has to be turned over in the soil of our times. Accepted theories have to be tested by the fire of the new culture which is growing up inside the old. The so-called classic essences of the theatre have to be examined before the worker's audience, for it is out of them that the new culture, in all its forms, must grow. Our task is no new one. In England, the Independent Labor Party, many years ago had to meet the problem when they started a worker's theatre. Piscator in Germany and Meierhold in Russia met them and recorded their achievements. Today, in America, we must do the same. The plays of the Theatre Union and the Workers' Laboratory Theatre have shown us what we can do and what mistakes we have made.

Of the several elements in the theatre, we have selected the audience as meriting our first consideration for a great deal of what we have to say to the playwright depends on what we find in the audience. It is an essential, if not the most essential, ingredient of the revolutionary theatre.

## THE AUDIENCE

What is this awesome body of human beings without which no play can survive? What are its prejudices and appetites,

First let us differentiate it from *mob*, for it is due to a lack of this differentiation that many writers can uphold the naive advice given to them by smug and reactionary critics.

While it is true that mob and audience have similarities, their differences are more important. The mob demands unanimity of opinion; audience has no such power. Mob can act; audience is relatively passive. Mob rationalizes its acts psychopathically; mob is headstrong, impulsive and dogmatic. Audience is capable of none of these things. Mob is anti-social, while audience is exactly the reverse. Mob is anarchy; audience is com-

munism. And the one final and most important difference: in a mob the lowest common denominator is the criterion for its thought and action, and in the audience, the less gifted minds are always ready, nay eager, to accede to superior intelligence, taste and action.

Unless these differences between mob and audience are kept in mind we are apt to follow the naive and individualistic advice which one of the reactionary critics, Mr. J. E. Spingarn, gave to playwrights. "Don't think of your audience," he wrote, "for that is the best way of serving it in the drama." Thus a particularly vicious form of art for art's sake can grow out of the confusion of audience with mob. That is why it is necessary for us to be clear about them.

But even after we have distinguished the two groups we are met with the question whether or not there is an audience mind. There are many conflicting opinions and there are many pros and cons, but it would be pointless to stop and list them, for despite the differences they may have on the "audience mind" all psychologists agree that the only approach to the subject is via the individual. Individuals reflect their class and culture. They are a smaller image of the world's larger picture.

In any modern textbook of psychology you will find a description of how the individual, in a group, responds to a social stimulus. This response involves more than the physiology of complex sensori-motor arcs; it involves the *psycho-physiological* as well as the *class* history of the individual; in short, a social response, especially a response to an art form, includes the machinery of the whole human person. "Every individual has within him the possibility of definite modes of response which constitute his personality," wrote Dr. Herbert S. Langfeld in his book, *The Aesthetic Attitude*.

A theatre audience consists of many personalities. These personalities, walking on two legs, leave the relative security of their chrysalis, meet up with others, their wives, mistresses, friends, husbands, lovers, even their relatives; they go out of their way, suffer the subway (or the taxi); and finally, after a great deal of travail, settle into little pools here and there. You will find them in the magnitombs of New York, or in a windworn crossroad Roxys. They are in barns, in old mills made over, in a cheap store in a mining town, in Chicago's upholstered seats. They are everywhere, daily.

What is the magic in the theatre which brings millions of patrons to its shrine?

Once in a while Mr. George Jean Nathan gets tired of the sound of his voice, and out of the jelly of his half-truths emerges a bit

of sound observation. An example of this is in his brief essay, *The Audience Emotion* from *The Art of the Night*. He writes:

"A theatre audience enters a theatre with the deliberate intention either of forgetting itself for a couple of hours or of being reminded of half-remembered phases of itself, of its life and of its dreams and despairs. . . . It comes into the theatre ready and willing an eager to be made, or the nonce, other than it is." Mr. Nathan, as is his custom, misuses his sagacity to prove that human nature never changes. However, it is not his bad psychologizing that interests but rather the gist of his observation.

When John Jones goes into the theatre to forget, or to remember, or to be made other than he is, he is expressing some sort of a wish. About the specific nature of his wish, and of its fulfillment, we will have more to say later, but one thing is clear; he and the myriad personalities which compose the audience have this in common; they have a wish to see themselves as they were, or as they would like to be; never, if we follow Mr. Nathan, are they interested in seeing themselves as they *are*. Although this might seem strange and unseemly, let us accept Mr. Nathan's description for the time being, for in this section of our essay, at least, we are referring to the same audience as Mr. Nathan—the bourgeois audience.

The press may be said to be more informative and the radio more entertaining, but whatever the wish is, the theatre\* is the only art which can satisfy it with any effectiveness and for any large number of people. There is reason to believe that Lunacharsky was referring to only one side of the class struggle when he said, "Whenever the class struggle grows tense drama steps up to the front, because if all literature serves the class struggle, the drama, by means of the theatre, is the most active force . . . it affects directly large masses of people."

But Lunacharsky realized, of course, that the drama could be utilized by both sides. We, too, intend to show this. We will show how the wish is utilized by the bourgeois playwrights and how it must and can be utilized by the revolutionary playwrights, but before we do so, it is essential for us to know more about the wish proper.

## THE WISH

We can forgive all things in the theatre,

\* As you have undoubtedly noticed I have not made a distinction between theatre and moving picture audiences. The theatre and the cinema differ at many points (technique of production, variety of representation, distribution, admission scale, etc.) but the audience appeal of both depend essentially on the same thing; the ability to satisfy the wish.

the proscenium, the obvious mechanisms, the distortion of the fourth wall removed. We can adjust ourselves to its improbabilities, its perversions of a life we may know better than the playwright, its platitudinous use of accidents, its frauds, its miserable nostrums, but the one thing we can never permit is the failure to show us our own faces as we would like to have seen them on looking into our respective mirrors. The wish is the thing, and not merely the play.

Professor E. B. Holt, whose work in the field of psychological response has been overlooked by psychologists as well as critics, defines the wish by saying that it includes: "impulse, tendency, desire, purpose, attitude and the like." In *Animal Drive and the Learning Process* he writes, "An exact definition of the wish is that it is a course of action which some mechanisms of the body is set to carry out, whether it actually does so or not. . . . We should do well if we consider this wish to be, as in fact it is, dependent on a motor attitude of the physical body, which goes over into *overt action* and *conduct* when the wish is carried into execution." (The italicized words are ours and are of importance when we come to consider the construction of the revolutionary play.)

Holt gives us the physiological background of the wish. Let us examine it from another aspect, because the wish described by him is only half the story.

When John Jones becomes aware of those familiar peristaltic movements in his mid-region he seeks out food. Hunger drives him, as it would a white rat or a marmoset, to his food box, a cafeteria. Psychologists use the word *drive* to describe his behavior. But when loosely viewed Jones may be said to be fulfilling a wish, "the wish to eat." This kind of wish, however, is not the one which is of immediate interest to us merely because it is essentially undramatic, and will remain so until something else happens to it. If John Jones, for example, is unemployed and has no money to buy food, or if someone tries to get what he has away from him, then drama begins, antagonist and protagonist appear, the wish takes on new character. Thus we see that the crude "wish to eat" does not become a wish in the dramatic sense of the word until it is thwarted or is in conflict with something. Out of frustration and conflict therefore emerges the wish which is the basis of our inquiry.

This formulation covers the one of Mr. Nathan's although it may not seem so on the surface if it, but "the wish to see ourselves as we were" and the "wish to see ourselves as we would like to be" can come only out of a disgust or weariness with what we are. This disgust or weariness, in turn, must arise from some frustration or conflict in ourselves, or else it would be the most natural thing "to wish to see ourselves as we are."

If all wishes, therefore, arise out of life conflicts, then it is by means of these same conflicts as projected in the theatre that

wishes are satisfied. Brunetiere resolved this in his law which states that the drama is the representation of the will of man fighting against something, "in conflict with the mysterious powers or natural forces which limit and belittle us." His observation although perhaps a little too simple is, nevertheless, the blood source and the very heart of all drama despite the carplings of the William Archers and the Henry Arthur Joneses. In the Greek plays it was the inflexible will of the gods, against which the human was pitted. In *Hamlet*, two wills, both in the same person, struggled against each other. In *Hedda Gabler*, Hedda's will entered the jousts with Lovborg's. In *Ghosts*, there is the representation of a will fighting against the un-moving and immalleable past. In *The Weavers*, the will of one class strives mightily against the will of another.

But in these plays as well as in the psychological laboratory a man's wishes have usually been conceived of as though the man himself was no more than a complicated around in a material world without the slightest reference to some of the most important aspects of that world; wage-slavery, exploitation, war, etc. And when plays deal with these things like *What Price Glory* and *Journey's End* the result is apt to be a sort of half-baked and romanticized realism plus a liberal allotment of sex or mock heroics. Even Gorki's *The Lower Depths* failed to show in the misery of the pre-war hobo or *lumpenproletariat* any more than a soul sickness.

"It is not consciousness that determines social existence," as Marx said, "but, on the contrary, it is social existence which determines consciousness." Today only a fool, or a philosopher like Mr. Will Durant, or a critic like Mr. Spingarn (and we are cursed with many of them) would be willing to deny that. If the psychological conflicts determine the wish, then, in most cases, the psychological conflicts are determined by man's struggle against economic forces, and the culture which these economic forces create.

It should be clear, however, that if most wishes arise out of an economic or cultural conflict, some do not. For example, the "wish to live" which grows out of a conflict which John D. Rockefeller may have with a cancer is quite different from the "wish to live" growing out of a steel worker's struggle to get enough to eat (although he too may have a cancer). The "wish for health" may be for one type of audience strongly psychological, and for another type of audience decidedly economic.

This can be illustrated in another way. One of the most universal wishes in a capitalist world is the "wish for economic security," and yet it is neither as strong nor does it occur as frequently in J. P. Morgan as in a C.W.A. worker. Still another illustration may be found in a dramatic portrayal of the "wish to marry" which is thwarted by a lack of money. Such a play might emphat-

ically arouse a working class audience and leave an upper class audience cold and a little incredulous.

Thus, we see that what may seem to be, superficially, a psychological wish is really an economic wish with its roots in the conflicts and contradictions of our present day culture and economy. And, furthermore, we have observed that specific audiences have a specific character and quality of wish. So decided is that that it takes no great prophet to foretell whether a group of people is an audience for (*i.e.*, will have its wishes satisfied by) the Theatre Guild, A. H. Woods, musical comedy, burlesque, or the Theatre Union.

These general observations concerning the wish give us a new approach to the problems of the revolutionary theatre; its audiences and its plays, as well as giving us another way of tackling and evaluating the plays of the bourgeois theatre. By using this tool new light may be thrown on the class content of plays and related problems. These questions will be discussed in another series of articles. Our next step, however, will be to show how the wish is satisfied and the relation of the wish-fulfillment to the struggle between classes and their respective cultures.

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## Brief Review

NEW FACES

*An Intimate Revue*

ONE of the recent issues of the Sunday *Times* ran a long article on *New Faces*—not altogether new; though rather young. This article told of the hardships encountered by the group and its leader in their attempt to put the show on. They showed their stuff to theatre people, to angels and to the late Otto Kahn. But they could only muster some 54,000. I can't help thinking what a workers' theatre could do with that. Well, the story goes, that even with five cents left for coffee or carfare, they carried on until—with the help of Elsie Janis—they made it. Made what? The money of course. They say it's a success, and I saw a man buy three tickets for \$3.30 each.

Now, with apologies to Mike Gold, when I was a youngster, I went to a settlement camp. There we gave our own shows twice a week. Sometimes the show was hilarious, and sometimes it was just a go by. But did we hire a hall? And does some mild satire on Noel Coward, Greta Garbo, Katherine Hepburn et al, deserve a hall? These *New Faces* have put on an empty show. They seem too anxious to please and so say nothing and do nothing to ruffle anyone. They have neither the originality of the old *Grand Street Follies*, the freshness of the *Garrick Gaities* or the bite of *Strike Me Red*.

And if the show really is a success, I can't answer for it. JENNIE HELD.

# No Greater Treachery

By LEO T. HURWITZ

**NO GREATER GLORY**, directed by Frank Borsage for Columbia Pictures.

The movie audience of 80 millions weekly in the United States is still very innocent. They go to the movies for amusement, entertainment and blissful forgetfulness. That they are not aware of the paralysis of protest that Hollywood films inspire is naive. That they are not aware of the reactionary propaganda of the key films of this era, such films as the N.R.A. shorts, the weekly news-reels, *Gabriel Over the Whitehouse*, *Washington-Merry-Go-Round*, *Heroes For Sale*, and now, *No Greater Glory*, films whose fascist tendentiousness colors the whole Hollywood production, is innocence of a sort that calls for the broadcasting of protest and exposure in front of every neighborhood theatre in the country.

The production of *No Greater Glory* gives one a fearsome inkling of what the movies of the near future will be like when Hollywood is completely mobilized on a fascist and war program. The plot-hypnosis that American film technique has achieved, the entertainment, comedy, heart-wringing pathos, sympathy of character and break-neck action and dialogue that Hollywood can turn on as with the twist of a faucet, promises to make the demagogic showmanship of Hitler look like cheap sideshow ballyhoo. If at a time like this, when movie production is only beginning to act in direct collusion with Wall Street and the White House, when the main motivation is still primarily money-grab, and secondarily the shaping of minds toward the status suo, if at such a time a *No Greater Glory* is possible, — what can be expected when the tottering capitalist state will find it necessary to use the movies, its most far-reaching and persuasive instrument of propaganda, as its right arm in fascist incitement and treacherous deception of the rising masses?

*Variety* summarises the story of *No Greater Glory*: “. . . the presumptive argument is that there is no greater glory than to die for one's country. In this instance it is a lumber yard, used by the Paul Street boys as a playground, coveted by a rival gang (the Red Shirts) whose rendezvous is threatened . . . The story centers around a neurotic boy whose ambition is to be an officer, but whose stature keeps him in the ranks, the lone private. In an effort to win his rank he goes with two older boys to recapture the Paul Street flag. He is drenched, first in a stream, then in a fountain bowl and finally in a torrential rain. He develops a cold which finally turns into pneumonia. The boys regretful, give him his coveted promotion, and the boy, delirious, struggles from his bed to take part in the decisive fight. He dies as he wrests the flag from the not unwilling hands of the opposition

leader. As the little soldiers sound taps for their dead comrade a steam shovel bites into the playground.”

John Dewey, Roger Baldwin and other purblind liberals are quoted as having said that this is a pacifist film showing the futility of war. Only oversubtle Pollyanna minds could make such a judgment on an obvious pro-war picture, whose emotional appeal is directed to fictitious glories and heroism of war. They place more weight on the flash shot of the steam shovel at the end (whose slight pacifist meaning is counteracted by the concurrent reflection of an old war veteran that whatever the results, “war is inevitable,”) than upon the seventy-five-minute build-up of sympathy for taking up arms to “defend” one's country, for loyalty to the flag, for the honor of uniform and rank, for the heroism of dying for one's country, for the fun and glory of the military atmosphere and discipline. The liberals to the contrary notwithstanding, *Variety*, that cynical unillusioned trade sheet for the amusement industry declares “its presumptive argument is that there is no greater glory than to die for one's country.”

More than ordinary war films, *No Greater Glory* has a treacherous poignancy. Acted by a cast of children, directed by Frank Borsage to create a soupy sentimental atmosphere around the kids who behave so much like Hollywood adults, and frankly cast in the

mode of an allegory of war, the film more effectively conveys its vicious propaganda to grown-ups and children alike. By the sympathy it creates for the little Nemescek who wants so much to wear a uniform like all the other boys in the gang, by his heroism and final “glory” when he rises from his sickbed to take part in the final battle to defend his country, this picture helps incite a fascist war psychology among the misled workers and the middle class. I can think of no more effective recruiting picture for the many fascist bands that are arising all over the land.

There is no space to speak of the unimaginative direction, the fake distortions of child behavior and emotions. This film cries for a ringing answer by the militant working class. To this end the Film and Photo League has issued a statement endorsed by the Young Pioneers, the Young Communist League, and the American League Against War and Fascism, calling for the boycott of *No Greater Glory*, calling upon workers organizations to distribute leaflets and conduct demonstrations in front of theatres, and to demand that Columbia Pictures withdraw the film from circulation. Only by such active exposure of reactionary films can filmgoers be awakened out of the deep sleep of their critical faculties. There will be crowds around movie theatres, this time not clamoring to enter, but shouting demands for the boycott and withdrawal of fascist films—ready to fight against the further fascization of the film industry.







# The Stage Was Not Set

*The Inside Story of the National Theatre Festival*

By ANNE HOWE

**T**HE League of Workers Theatres (L.O.W.T.) of the U.S.A., in the short period of its existence, has grown into a mass organization and has become one of the most advanced detachments of the international revolutionary theatrical movement."

This is what the International Union of the Revolutionary Theatre (I.U.R.T.) wrote in its greetings to the Second National Festival of the L.O.W.T. How true this is is illustrated by the Festival itself, which was attended by an audience of almost 3,000, and by more than 120 delegates representing more than 5,000 members, and by the preparations for the Festival. We have actually carried out our plan laid down in August, 1933, something quite a few of our members at the time considerable impossible. Thirty independent workers theatre groups, both theatres of action and stationary groups, have paid up their dues since January, 1934. Thirty-five dramatic sections of the Jewish Workers Clubs have affiliated with the L.O.W.T. on their National office. Contact was established with and delegates were sent from many more groups who consider themselves affiliated but have not yet paid dues. New sections were organized in New Jersey, Chicago, and on the West Coast. The Middle West and the West Coast organized into districts. Three regional conferences, the Eastern, Mid-Western, and the Western have been held with as many delegates at each as at our first national conference. Preliminary local contests were held in New York (4), New Jersey, Cleveland, Chicago and on the Pacific Coast, involving approximately fifty theatre groups and drawing audiences of thousands of workers and intellectuals. Seven groups raised enough funds to come to Chicago, where they gave surprisingly good performances. The tour of the Shock Troupe of the Workers Laboratory Theatre of New York was not only a great experience for the audiences in the cities where they performed but was also a source of inspiration to the group itself. The Ukrainian Dram Circle of New York, and the Blue Blouses of Los Angeles toured back to their home towns, performing in various cities and making valuable contacts. The presence of the Canadian delegates at the Festival may soon result in a national organization of the Workers' Theatre groups in Canada.

So far, so good. The League of Workers Theatres is on the right track. But we must not be blind to our shortcomings, for there are still many. Our preparatory work which was part of our general work serves as a god example.

Although the groups finally reached Chicago, it was a hard struggle. The organiza-

tional preparations were started too late, and were not always carried through with the spirit and enthusiasm which the situation demanded. Thus, the Jack London Dramatic Group of Newark, N. J., could not get to Chicago to participate in the Festival, although their preliminary competition was held as early as March 7. Delegates from Philadelphia and San Francisco did not reach Chicago. And this in spite of the fact that the National Office sent out the plan of preparation, which included the tasks of the groups and sections, as early as August, 1933.

The basis for these mistakes is the same as for a far more serious and almost fatal one: the complete failure of the Chicago section in preparing the Festival until the National Office sent somebody there. It is true, the Chicago section was very young and inexperienced. But the Chicago groups, when organizing their section last November, had voted to arrange for the Festival in their city, and had pledged full co-operation. Because of their inexperience, certain shortcomings and mistakes of the leading members in Chicago, have to be excused. But there were also instances which were cases of pure negligence. Three weeks before the Festival, no attempt had been made to get housing for the out-of-town delegates, and no tickets, posters, or leaflets had been printed. The preparations for the Chicago local contest was bad, and the affair was a failure. No funds had been raised. A few functionaries proved irresponsible, let the work slip, and finally dropped out. The others did not check up on them well enough, and didn't know how to help themselves.

And here we come to the basic problems. One of the main reasons for the organizational difficulties is the failure of our local functionaries to develop initiative, to plan their work, and carry it through. Too many groups are still waiting for letters from the National Office, when they have to determine the price of a ticket, or similar things. Too many of the groups did not learn how to adapt a theoretical article, a change of policy, an outline for organization, to their local conditions, and transform it into action.

But there is also the lack of co-operation and the lack of confidence of the groups in their local leadership, a factor which hampers the work and keeps the local leadership from developing. The groups have a tendency to take a negative attitude towards local leaders whom they either know for a long time or sometimes do not know at all. This attitude, which right from the start creates a barrier between the new leadership and the groups, has to be abandoned. Co-operation and com-

radely criticism, too, has to take its place. For, how can we expect to develop new leaders (and we need ever more), if we do not give them a chance.

These problems, unsolved, were the cause of the failure of the Chicago section in preparing the Festival. But the situation changed immediately after work was started with the proper plan and division of activities. The co-operation of those groups that could be reached during the last three weeks was splendid, the Jewish, German, Slovak, Finnish, English speaking groups, and others, giving financial contributions, providing housing, and supporting the Festival to the greatest extent. I doubt whether any out-of-town delegates or groups at the Festival would have guessed the previous situation, if they hadn't been told.

And now we come to a bit of self-criticism on the part of the National Office. Although some progress has been made during the past year in giving the groups service and guidance, it still is entirely inadequate for the needs of the groups. Repertory service, supply of directors, teachers, and speakers, outlines for training, etc., are not meeting the demand. (These problems will be taken up in more detail in another article). The contact of the National Office with the Sections, and also the sections with the groups, has been based too much on purely organizational work. We have been asking the groups constantly for one or the other thing, demanding work and cooperation from them, and have not given enough in return. And while we have to overcome our organizational difficulties, and have to keep on asking the groups for cooperation, it can only be done if we give the groups better aid, train and develop them better artistically and politically. The basic problem is rather to give the groups the much demanded service than purely organizational arrangements. Thus, the attitude in our National work and section work has to take a sharp turn. Groups should not be called to section meetings too often, just for the sake of the meeting, or to arrange one or another affair. The groups will come and cooperate much more readily if they know they are learning and gaining something by attending section meetings and affiliating with the L.O.W.T.

We have made a start in the right direction. We have functioning repertory committees in New York and Los Angeles. We have started training classes. The local and national competitions cannot be overestimated as a good opportunity to gain by the experiences, ideas, and experiments of other groups. The sections will have to arrange more such combined affairs or exchange performances, lec-

tures and discussions at section meetings, training courses, etc. The help of sympathetic professional theatre workers has to be secured and put to use for the benefit of the groups.

The National Executive Committee has to be reorganized to lead more phases of our activities. The former small Nat. Ex. Comm., consisting of only New York members who were already overworked, had to be enlarged. Not only the fact that it was too small, but

also that it consisted of members of one city only, who never or very seldom had a chance to get in direct contact with groups from other cities, accounts for our tendency to over-emphasize the work of the New York groups, and to base our policies on the level of their work. Our change to a nationwide Ex. Com. will eliminate this condition.

Not all has been said yet. There will be more detailed articles on other problems and

phases of the work. We want the response of the groups to these articles, so that we can have a good after-conference discussion which at the same time will be pre-conference discussion for the next one. We cannot separate our National Festival from our day-to-day work, although it has been a high-spot, a big step forward to more and better work. It has been the end of a large campaign, and the beginning of a larger one.

# STEVEDORE CAST VOTES "NO"

## Stage Relief Fund Discriminates Against Negro Actors

By HERBERT KLINE

### 1. Harlem Actors Ask for Food

**A**BOUT a year ago Leigh Whipper, speaking for the destitute and in many cases starving unemployed actors of Harlem, asked the Stage Relief Fund for boxes of food to be distributed at once to these needy actors. Mr. Ashley Miller, executive secretary of the fund, promised to get in touch with the Red Cross immediately about arranging such a distribution. After waiting for a week to hear from Mr. Miller, Leigh Whipper went to see him again. He stressed the need of these Harlem actors, for immediate relief; Miller then told him that the Red Cross said they must have the signature of some reliable person in Harlem to sponsor such a distribution in order to insure the actors getting the food.

Although Leigh Whipper, as one of the most prominent Negro actors, should have been considered as reliable enough to sponsor this relief himself, he ignored this slight, and secured the signature of Mrs. Clara B. Bruce, assistant manager of the Rockefeller-owned Paul Laurence Dunbar Apartments. Mr. Miller accepted this signature, and promised that the matter of relief would be taken care of at once.

Nothing was done.

A week later Whipper went back to the Stage Relief Fund to find out why Mr. Miller had not kept his promise. As Whipper tells the story:

"When Mr. Miller told me he was still working on the proposition, I realized—finally—that he was just giving me the run-around. I told him never mind and that I'd take care of it myself. He seemed relieved. I took it into my own hands and went to the Red Cross immediately, and that very night Mr. Mosely, then of the Urban League, now playing with me in *Stevedore*, was busy distributing food tickets to needy Harlem actors. Even the unmarried ones, who would have been excluded from relief, ordinarily, were fed."

Thus Leigh Whipper who wasn't considered as sponsor for such a distribution was able to get in one day the relief that the

mighty Stage Relief Fund said they could not arrange in several weeks—believe it or not!

### 2. The Stage Relief Fund Offers a Benefit

On June 23, 1933, Mr. Ashley Miller wrote Deacon Johnson, the noted Negro musician, to co-operate in arranging a benefit for the unemployed and needy actors of Harlem.

"He made it specific that the benefit should be held in Harlem," says Leigh Whipper, "thus discriminating in the very beginning by not offering a general benefit somewhere along Broadway."

With 85 per cent of the theatres along what is called "Broadway" closed and thus available for such a benefit, despite the fact that Negro actors had given their time and talent free to hundreds of benefits which seldom did anything at all for them, Mr. Miller had the audacity to propose a Stage Relief Fund benefit in poverty stricken Harlem where four out of five adults were unemployed. Another variation of the Hoover-Morgan block-aid relief plan of letting the poor feed the poor, only this time the dirty deal was to the tune of "Happy Days Are Here Again."

Nevertheless, a number of prominent Harlem citizens, who were asked to sponsor such a benefit, gladly accepted.

"They figured some kind of benefit was better than none at all," says Whipper, "and they hustled to do their part."

A committee was formed, and this Harlem committee met with a committee from the Stage Relief Fund at the Algonquin Hotel. It was decided that Deacon Johnson was to arrange the benefit. He was to receive \$15 a week for expenses. It was agreed also to try to get Ethel Waters and Bill Robinson for this program.

Later, when Johnson was told by the Stage Relief Fund to get the Harlem committee to advance him the \$15 agreed upon until the

night of the affair, Dr. Godfrey Nurse of the committee gave him a check for \$25 payable to the Stage Relief Fund. The Fund refused to cash this check unless they were given a written statement to the effect that Ethel Waters and Bill Robinson, among others, would appear.

"In short they wanted to use the names of these two stars to insure that the fund wouldn't lose a cent," says Whipper, "So with this and after all the slights and insulting letters and false promises, the Stage Relief Fund faded out of the picture and we did our best to take care of our own."

### 3. The Stage Relief Fund Asks for a Benefit

One would think after all of this that the Stage Relief Fund would not have the audacity to ask Negro actors to donate their services to the Fund. But—recently, after the success of *Stevedore* was assured, the Fund asked Theatre Union to play a benefit performance. Since they were unaware of the facts described above, the executive board of Theatre Union asked the cast of *Stevedore* to play such a benefit the night of May 20. The *Stevedore* actors, under the leadership of Leigh Whipper (now starring as "Jim Veal") called a meeting. After Whipper, Moseley and other Negro actors described how the Stage Relief Fund had evaded giving aid to needy Harlem actors, the entire cast, both Negro and white, voted against playing the benefit. When the board of Theatre Union was informed of this decision, they called in representatives of the Stage Relief Fund to present their side of the story. Mr. Brock Pemberton's and Mr. Ashley Miller's excuses for the shameful neglect of the Harlem actors described above, failed to satisfy the board, and Theatre Union approved the decision of the actors and cancelled the benefit.

On June 10, Theatre Union and the *Stevedore* actors have arranged a benefit performance at the Civic Repertory Theatre for the Actors Fund, which Leigh Whipper says does not discriminate against Negroes.

# Workers Theatre from Coast to Coast

By OSCAR SAUL

THE National Festival over, the workers theatre groups have returned to their individual tasks with renewed energy and inspiration. As the reports come in the tremendous value of the Festival grows more and more apparent. Individual groups lay new, broader, plans, new sections of the League are formed, and many of the groups begin to think seriously of establishing stationary theatres.

Reviewing the groups from East to West (according to latest report received) the following is the activity in the theatre groups today.

## New York

The Theatre Collective, which has been working on *Marion Models, Inc.* announced May 30th as the date of the premiere performance. The Labor Temple at Second Avenue and Fourteenth Street will house the play. Jack Shapiro, John E. Bonn and Olga Shapiro are the authors and Dorothy Yockel is the director. Arrangements are being made for special blocks of tickets to be sold at the Theatre Collective at 52 West 15th Street.

The Workers Laboratory Theatre, producers of the prize winning *Newsboy*, is preparing its outdoor show. The theme, *Chamber of Horrors* will include the contradictions of capitalism dramatized in short satirical skits. Groups throughout the country who cotemplate cessation of activity for the summer should take their cue from the W.L.T. and orientate their work to outdoor performances.

## Newark

The theatre section of the Jack London Club of Newark (230 Court Street) now number forty members who are divided into two sections, the Stationary group and the Theatre of Action. The Stationary group which is rehearsing *Can You Hear Their Voices* intends to produce during the second or third week in June. In their letter they state "The aim of the Theatre Section of the Jack London Club is to develop a strong revolutionary theatre patterned after the manner of the New York Theatre Union." Considering the difficulties, financial and artistic, attendant upon the founding of a stationary revolutionary theatre it would be interesting and important to get a detailed report from the Jack London Group describing progress, problems, etc. The Theatre of Action of the Jack London group performs regularly and is now working on *Newsboy*. The group conducts political discussions every Wednesday night, to which all are welcome.

## Philadelphia

"The John Reed Theatre Group is planning to hold a 'Theatre Night' in June, which will contain some innovation in the character of the repertoire. Listed on the

program are *Freedom* by John Reed, an episode from Pogodin's *My Friend* and Moliere's *A Physician in Spite of Himself*. These plays differ greatly in character and artistry from the conventional agit-prop used by this group for several years, and the experiment with them is the result of demands by both the audience and participating players for more serious dramatic efforts, for greater artistry of presentation." This report from the John Reed Group of Philadelphia raises an important question. Is the agit-prop form to be discarded because it cannot be developed into a highly artistic and effective theatrical form? The assumptions in the report lead us to that conclusion. The conclusion however, is open to debate. One of the most powerful and clear. To say it is not a highly the short agit-prop play such as *Newsboy*. It requires no props, it is short, its message is powerful and clear. To say it is not a highly developed theatrical form is incorrect. The demands made upon the actors are more severe than those made by the realistic play. The emphasis is upon the actor and the word, the perfect setting of a mood, perfect timing, rather than upon plot, scenery, etc. The emergence of new agit-prop forms out of the old give rise to a powerful political and artistic weapon. While the John Reed Group is to be commended on its mastery of the realistic play, rounded repertory should include something of the *Newsboy* variety, and musical political satires. The group's latest organization development is the planning of a stationary theatre.

## The Workers' Theatre of Cleveland

The Cleveland section has decided to hold a spring or summer festival. The plan, which will involve four groups, is to play for four or five consecutive weeks, going from one neighborhood to another. In this way a full evening of theatre will be presented in several working class neighborhoods. This is an effective means of mobilizing several groups, who individually may have meagre repertoires, for the presentation of a solid evening of theatre. Going away from the Workers Centers into neighborhoods is to be emulated as an effective means of reaching new working class audiences.

Following the Chicago Conference the John Reed Club Theatre group of Cleveland has undergone a reorganization. They have instituted probationary periods of six months for new members and established a rehearsal schedule of three nights a week. Classes in acting and the political significance of the theatre have been established in conjunction with the Workers School of the city.

## Gary

The Workers Dram Group writes: "The truck that was to bring the cast broke down just outside of Gary (Indiana) and all the

money in the gang was used to pay bus and carefare to the hall. I had just sufficient money to pay for dinner and fare back, landing Gary with seventy five cents to pay a dollar taxi bill. Also the girl cast in the part of Mrs. Roberts could not come, so I taught Francis Semokaitis the entire part from 5 p. m. Sunday until we went on." Despite all the inconveniences of the trip this member writes: "I hardly have to tell you how thrilled we are with being awarded the third place tie with the Los Angeles group." With this enthusiasm still undiminished the group, besides proceeding with its own productions (*Newsboy* will be their next project) is leading the organization of a powerful Indiana section. A call has been issued to thirty-five organizations in Gary, Hammond, East Chicago, Indiana Harbor, and South Bend. The call is an invitation to the organizations to attend a section meeting at which the lessons learned at the Chicago conference can be extended to the groups who could not be there. Its purpose is also to form dramatic groups in the organization in which they do not as yet exist. All groups in that section of the country desiring more information can get it by writing to Bernice Kibert at 1545 Washington Street in Gary, Indiana. The program of the section is to include the development of the League of Workers Theatres, New Theatre, Classes, Political education and local festivals.

## Los Angeles

The Rebel Players which toured to Chicago from the West Coast reports on their booking and mishaps. Performances were given in Rock Island section, Kansas City, Mo. (twice) and Mena, Ark. (Commonwealth College). "In the Ozark hills one of the cars decided that the grass was greener in the other fellow's yard and went over the bank to see. The car turned a complete somersalt. However, nobody was badly hurt." Four of the players, despite the mishap, continued to Los Angeles in the undamaged car and arrived there at 12.15 p. m. May 1st, in time to perform *Recruit*, at the May Day demonstration. One of the important decisions of the group made after their return, was to take bookings only week ends, and leave the week days for rehearsals and classes. This was done in order to promote the artistic level of the group. The training problem however is still unsolved. There are difficulties in setting up the school apparatus, and getting teachers. One of the handbooks on the Festival is being prepared with this problem in mind. It will discuss the training problems of the groups in detail and give definite directives for procedure. The Rebel Players also report that the District apparatus has not been functioning properly and consequently is losing touch with the groups. If

it has not done as yet, all the groups on the west coast should get in touch with the Rebel players and arrange for speakers to report on the National Festival Conference. This is the best way to start the district functioning properly. The experiences of the conference will here, as elsewhere, stimulate activity. How about it west coast? The Rebel Players are located at 2702 Brooklyn Avenue, Los Angeles.

#### Canada

The conference held in Montreal resulted in the solidification of the section. The section has twelve groups and is affiliated with the L.O.W.T. The Progressive Arts Club of Montreal is undertaking the establishment of classes to be held during the summer. In Toronto the groups have already secured teachers. At the conference competitions a German group won first prize with an original play on Nazi terror. *Newsboy*, performed by P.A.C. won second place and a Jewish group placed third with *Troops*.

At the conference in Chicago one of the major criticisms levelled at *New Theatre* was the fact that it did not adequately reflect the workers theatre movement. This criticism has been accepted as just. It will never be remedied however if the proper material is not forthcoming from the groups. More groups have failed to report than have reported. Although every group maintained that the magazine should print more workers theatre material they have not conscientiously undertaken to supply such material. Since the dead line for the July issue of NEW THEATRE is June 15, all groups should send in material at once. Write—now!

By popular request, a second "New Theatre Night" under the auspices and for the benefit of NEW THEATRE will be held Sunday evening, June 3. An even more interesting program than that of May 20 has been arranged. Members of the *Men in White* company will present a revolutionary play *Dimi-troff* (Reichstag fire defendant). The *Artef* will present a new play. Three new sketches will be staged by the Workers Laboratory Theatre. Asadata Dafora Horton and his company will present scenes from their native African opera *Kykunkor, or Witch Woman*. Individual stars will also appear. H. W. L. Dana will preside over the affair.

All roads that Sunday evening will lead to the FIFTH AVENUE THEATRE, 28th St. and Broadway, New York City.

Virgil Geddes is now, as O'Neill once was, a fresh voice, original, sincere, potentially a revolutionary. NEW THEATRE will publish soon a full length study of this important playwright, whose fourteen plays deal mostly with poor farmers and workers. Just published are four new plays *From the Life of George Emery Blum*.

## Workers Theatre: A Criticism

By CONRAD SEILER

THE competitive theatrical festival of the Workers' Theatres of the West Coast, held at the Orange Grove Theatre in Los Angeles, is now over, and criticism is the order of the day. It is not my intention to give a report of the accomplishments of the various participant groups—and there were definite accomplishments, particularly on the part of the New Theatre of Hollywood and the Blue Blouses—but rather to indulge in a bit of purposeful self-criticism. It should be born in mind that this criticism is meant to apply not only to the local workers' dramatic groups, but also to the workers' theatre movement throughout the United States.

The most pertinent criticism to be levelled at the workers' theatre of this country is that it is pitifully deficient in *craftsmanship*. After all, acting or play production is as much a craft as piano playing or brick laying. Barring a few excellent New York organizations—notably the Theatre Union and the *Artef Players*—there is a pronounced tendency among workers' cultural groups to present plays in a slipshod manner, with little or no consideration for anything but correct ideological content. Workers with no training and no natural aptitude for theatrical work are urged to act; insufficient time is devoted to rehearsals; direction is bad; lines are only half mastered; plays are mounted without taste or intelligence. Too often the workers' theatre is a mere replica of some inept bourgeois group—mediocre amateurs with an implacable yearning to exhibit their mediocre "talent." All this is horrible, not because it violates certain principles of "pure art," but because it militates against the effectiveness of the workers' theatre as a medium of revolutionary culture. No one at the present time expects our theatre to have all the facile slickness of the bourgeois stage, but surely a modicum of expertness would not be out of place. The workers' theatre, as now constituted, with all its gross inefficiency, may still appeal to some audiences already converted to the essential truth of proletarian ideals, but non-revolutionary audiences—the kind we must attract—are used to the smoothness of the bourgeois theatre and the films, and consequently the lumbering, painfully trying performances given by so many workers' groups will excite nothing but amused tolerance or derision.

The workers' theatre must become efficient, and efficiency can only be attained through study and training. Diction, stage technique, voice projection, directing and all the other arts appertaining to the theatre are indispensable for adequate stage presentation, whether in the bourgeois or in the workers' theatre. You cannot expect a worker, who has spent all his life slaving in a factory, to give an acceptable performance of any role without adequate preparation, any more than you can expect a

person without musical training to sit down and play a Beethoven concerto.

Every workers' school should have a course on the art of the theatre, conducted by capable instructors. It is not so important that such instructors have the right "political line"; but it is of utmost importance that they *know* the theatre.

Every professional workers' dramatic group—like the *Theatre Union*—should have a school of acting for less experienced groups, with instructors recruited from their own organization. The sooner this is done, the sooner will the workers' theatre develop into a powerful force for the dissemination of revolutionary thought and culture.

The greatest demonstration of the advancing theatre will take place the first ten days in September, when the annual Soviet Theatre Festival takes place in Moscow. All the leading theatre of the peoples of the U.S.S.R. will present plays. Meyerhold's Theatre, the Vakhtangov Theatre, the Gorky (Moscow Art), the Kamerny, the Theatre of the Revolution, and other outstanding companies from Moscow and Leningrad will take part, as will the famous Georgian, Jewish and other national theatres. While fascist countries' governments often seek to establish one or two fine art theatres because of the publicity and "prestige" it affords to the fascist patrons, the Soviet government supports and encourages the formation of dozens of distinguished professional theatres, to say nothing on the tens of thousands of amateur ones.

Tours are being arranged by a number of travel agencies, including Intourist, official Soviet travel agency. Information can be obtained from the agencies or from the League of Workers Theatres, 42 E. 12th St., New York City.

The new, enlarged *International Theatre*, 64-page bi-monthly issued by the International Union of the Revolutionary Theatre, was due to reach this country shortly, as we were going to press. It can be ordered from the League of Workers Theatres, 42 E. 12th St., New York City.

Anyone who has been carrying on theatre work among the children of workers and farmers is asked to send in information about this work, with copies of the plays used and any other material that will help the International Union of the Revolutionary Theatre analyze all experiences and prepare data on children's dramatics. In the U.S.A. information should be sent to the League of Workers Theatres, 42 E. 12th St., New York City.

# MARCH OF THE MOVIES

By DAVID PLATT

## *Marionettes* (Soviet)

This most recent Soviet film is the work of Protopanov, Director of the classic satire on organized religion, "Festival of St. Jorgen." *Marionettes*, like its predecessor, is brilliant satire against monarchism and fascism and achieves added power through the use of marionettes intelligently employed throughout the film to correctly suggest an analogy between a puppet theatre (with apologies to the theatre) and the performances of the kind of puppets usually jerked around by munitions manufacturers, also behind the scenes.

The locale of *Marionettes* is the not-so-mythical kingdom of Bufferia, on the border of Soviet Russia. Strangers coming into Bufferia are swiftly picked up on suspicion of being spies in the pay of the Communist International and are given the customary hospitality of the kingdom.

In this depression-infested land however, fascists, liberals and Socialists vie with one another for the privilege of leading the country out of its "red" and into their purses, while beyond the stage, calm and collected, sit and plot the puppet-jerkers, who have other plans for Bufferia, plans against their prosperous enemy across the border.

The munitions makers pull certain strings in the marionette show and a court barber, whose mind runs only on whipped lather and razor strops, having become imbecile through long contact with royalty, finds himself suddenly on the throne—King of Bufferia. This is the signal for some of the grandest satire on the ruling class the films have given us. At the royal reception, the King succeeds with his razor-sharp words of wisdom, in welding all parties close together. When the nobility ask him point blank to restore them to position and power, he replies with motions as though he is about to cut off a lock of hair: Nobility wants a tonic, clipper No. 2 right. And the nobles, earnestly moved at this show of profundity which they agree means just what his majesty says, nod their heads, bend their knees and all but collapse in thankfulness and admiration. When the liberals ask his highness to describe lasting cures for Bufferia's crisis, he scratches his left leg, flaps his tongue around his teeth and answers: Plenty of facial lotions, hot compress and a load of disinfectant. This practically overwhelms the court including the "vests for the unemployed" Socialists, who leave the palace convinced that at last a man has come to the throne who speaks in symbols that augur peace and prosperity aplenty for Bufferia.

In the meantime the puppet-jerking munitions manufacturers have not been idle. Preparations are made for an "accidental" attack against the Soviet Union. The picture closes with a warning that such an attack may soon materialize unless something is done to

put an end to the marionettes and their manipulators who rule the Bufferias of the world in the interests of war and fascism.

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## *Black Shirts* (Italian)

This Italian Fascist propaganda film is in New York City awaiting distribution. It is called *Black Shirts* and tells Mussolini's "own story of the rise and accomplishments of Fascism." In fact Mussolini wrote, supervised, and even makes a special appearance at the end of the picture to make sure he is given due credit for his accomplishments.

*Black Shirts* was brought over from Italy by Vincenzo Melocchi and Luigi Di Giorgio, representing Luce, Italian Film Institute, one of Mussolini's chief propaganda agencies; these two gentlemen are now fortified at the Park Central Hotel, New York, impatient to meet all potential buyers of the film, especially representatives of Silver Shirts, Friends of New Germany and American Fascists, Inc.

Even a trade paper like *Film Daily* characterizes *Black Shirts* as "fascist propaganda sympathetically and dramatically unfolded." According to their review of the picture, the film which successfully depicts "the war, fascism and Mussolini's forecast of greater glory for Italy . . . traces the fortunes of a peasant family from 1912 through 1932 and is well-constructed to carry the larger tale of the development of the fascist state."

When this same film was shown in Montevideo, Uruguay, under the title "A Man and a Nation," the management of the theatre was unable to continue the performance because of the continual cries of "*Down with Mussolini and Fascism—Down with All Fascist Films!*"

\* \* \*

## *Stand Up and Cheer*

The gist of this preposterous N.R.A. propaganda musical produced by Fox Films is that the depression is a purely mental state emanating out of the minds of workers accustomed to thinking too long in terms of unemployment, poverty and gloom, which can be quickly and painlessly cured by a little medicinal song and dance artfully applied.

To this end a Department of Amusement is established in Washington with Warner Baxter as Secretary and charged with the task of making America laugh-conscious—with a vengeance. Mass campaigns of musical enlightenment are forthwith organized against poverty and misery. An insatiable longing for tap-dancing and mammy songs is created in the army of unemployed and hungry workers who by now have completely forgotten where it hurts them most, so effective has been this vicious laugh salve of Fox Films.

Thoroughly engrossed, even while waiting

for home relief and charity handouts, in songs like "I have worries galore, but if I can laugh so can you, stand up and cheer, prosperity's here," the workers soon begin to eradicate from their systems all thoughts of poverty and gloom, leaving only cheer and two legs to stand on. Finally the depression, worsted at last by organized musical, sneaks back to its hole and prosperity turning all corners at once bursts forth in battle array. A victorious N.R.A. parade showing workers marching side by side with the military and police, closes the show.

And this we understand is only the first of a long coming string of films glorifying the N.R.A. being put out to detract attention from the vast nation-wide strikes that are upon us, involving hundreds of thousands of workers fighting against the comic opera of "recovery." Let's say—Stand Up and Fight—Not Cheer!

## From Hollywood

Miss Dorothea Wieck, we hear, has not been very successful in gaining sympathy for Nazism in Hollywood, although she did pick up quite a bit of change for her hubby's Nazi paper in Berlin. The Nazi gentlemen who executed her contracts and paid out the cash that went to Hitler's gangsters were none other than our own Messrs. Adolph and Eugene Zukor, Emanuel Cohen & Co. Like the Cohens who own and administrate Columbia Pictures, these folks have interests in Germany that "would be harmed, if we endorsed any movement against Nazism or if we gave any funds to the American Committee for Protest Against German Fascism." The distance between outright fascists and anti-fascists is no greater than the distance between rich Jews and "Jews Without Money."

\* \* \* \* \*

Representatives of the National Recovery Administration have concluded arrangements with Paramount, Universal, Pathe, Fox and Metrotone for the production of a barrage of newsreels and shorts to be issued weekly from now on. This barrage will be like the flood of N.R.A. shorts last fall, with this difference: The "shorts will be produced for a longer period of time, and will be a call for patriotism. ("It is unpatriotic to organize and strike against the N.R.A. codes.")

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## "I PROMISED THE MEXICAN AMBASSADOR . . ."

In Mexico City the censors and high government officials have approved of Upton Sinclair's version of *Que Viva Mexico*, the butchered version peddled under the name of "Thunder Over Mexico." An article by

Sam Brody and Tom Brandon in the *New Masses*, last September, quoting Sinclair's words, that the butchered version was made with the collusion of the very government the film meant to indict. Mr. Sinclair has achieved the approval of the bloody government he tried so hard to whitewash; in all probability this would-be Governor of California will achieve similar approval from certain upper layers of the corrupt Democratic Party of California. Our telephoto-lens tells us that not only is Mr. Sinclair *persona non grata* among the workers and peons of Mexico but likewise among the workers and peons of sunny California. We venture the opinion that this famous liberal will not only be hissed off the screens of Mexico but off his election stump in California as well.

\* \* \* \* \*

Winfield Sheehan of Fox, is reported by *Variety* to be in the habit of going up to San Francisco every now and then for a little political chat with three friends—an undertaker, a grocer and a priest. Sheehan is the executive who recently told his whole lot to "lay off fantasies and get down to pictures of real life, with real characters."—an order issued because box-office receipts have taught Mr. Sheehan that the movie audience of today doesn't cotton to the guff he's been dishing out. We suggest to Mr. Sheehan and other enterprising executives that instead of getting the lowdown from priests, grocers and undertakers, they call upon the organizers of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union in Imperial Valley or in the San Joaquin Valley, or drop into the San Francisco offices of the Marine Workers Industrial Union, or drop into San Quentin and see Tom Mooney. W.P.B.

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GILBERT AND SULLIVAN

*Pirates of Penzance*

Staged by Lee Daly, Setting by Franklyn Ambros, Musical Director, J. Albert Hurley.

THE Pirates of Penzance prove with their unusual rhymes that they are far more gentle and honest than the British Admiralty. The operetta starts with a chuckle and though it continue to laugh all the way through, it ends with a feeble smile.

Gilbert and Sullivan deserve much more in the way of acting and staging. Many times during the evening I felt that most of the chorus, that is, the pirates and the maids, should have worn masks. Their personal expressions seemed often to intrude.

The words are terribly funny, but they are not often heard. In some operettas it is better to forget the words and listen to the music, but not in Gilbert and Sullivan,

Theatres of Action have begun to use the Gilbert and Sullivan form, with great effectiveness. But the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas themselves cry for revolutionary interpretation. J. H.

# "What A Racket"

By A "BROADWAY" ACTOR

At last he was there. His long dream had come true. The dream he'd had for years had come true. Ever since he first heard of Eugene O'Neill who had been his god, And here he was, maybe following in O'Neill's footsteps. Who knows? Who can tell a thing like that? Nobody can. He walked into the Tudor "green room." Lovely. It was worth the fight he had with his family and the hard work to earn the money to come here and learn how to be an actor, a director, a playwright. Anything in the theatre he wanted to be. The theatre would be his for the asking when he finished here. Especially for him. He'd work hard. He'd get a reputation in the school and then go straight from there to Broadway. Before he was thirty he'd be a famous director on Broadway or maybe even a playwright. They couldn't stop him. No half-way stops at "Little Theatres." Straight to Broadway. That would be his motto. He'd think of it all along the way.

He'd been right that first day. He was doing it—heading straight for the White Way. He'd been here six months and all his work, both playwriting and acting, was fine. And it wasn't hard. It was exciting. All night crews. Sometimes not going to bed for three nights in a row. But most important of all he was a social success. Everyone liked him. In fact everyone laughed at him. They all thought he was very funny. He was drunk all the time now. They invited him to all the parties because he amused them so much. He didn't know how he did it. But he wouldn't let that bother him. He was learning to drink, and you had to know how to drink to be a success on Broadway.

Now he is out. He had his master's degree. And right away, of course, he had a job. He was to go to a summer stock company. He didn't know what his job was but with his "Habit" of success he'd be directing a show with all the Broadway producers watching it before the summer was over. Suppose he had to be in the box office for a while. What of it?

He was still in the box office. Yes, he had to acknowledge to himself that he'd been

there six weeks; the thing was closing up because of bad management and he had got no further than the box office. Well he could tell "them" on Broadway that he'd done other things, lots of other things. They wouldn't know. And he had that master's degree.

So this was Broadway! Two seasons of it now. Months and months of walking the streets. Going into producers' offices. Lying them, cajoling them, wisecracking with them . . . and always nothing. Worn down shoes and raveled trousers. Living in a cellar in the Village where you wouldn't have to pay any rent. Getting drunk when you could find something to get drunk on. And in his desk a master's degree. A piece of paper. He guesses he'll make a lampshade out of it. And remember when he scoffed at "Little Theatres?" He couldn't get one of those jobs now no matter what string he pulled. Christ, what a racket to place your bets on!

\* \* \*

The problems of actors in the plight described above are being taken up by the rank-and-file opposition who will present important resolutions and amendments at the current annual meeting of Actors Equity Association, to strengthen the rank and file voice in that union, and to strengthen and make more self-respecting the position of actors in every way. Among the matters on which they will demand consideration are increased appropriations for C.W.A. projects for actors, providing more jobs and adequate payment of fares and baggage fees; salaries for summer theatre jobs—this year there will be more summer theatres than ever, and the danger of exploitation of actors greater; and appropriations for wide-spread publicity and the gathering of complete statistics on the economic problems of the craft. And when the actor has found a job, this group aims to provide adequate protection in the matters of salary cuts, of unjust dismissal—because of union activities—and of real representation on the governing board of Equity. Unemployed actors are cordially invited to help in the fight. Watch the daily papers for announcements of meetings. —THE EDITORS.

## WIN A PRIZE . . .

Help Build New Theatre

Frank Miller of Unity Theatre, who sold 277 copies of the May issue of *NEW THEATRE*, challenges any one to match his record. (Miller says that anyone who has energy enough to cover all theatre and cultural affairs can sell hundreds of copies).

To the individual selling the most copies—1st prize, John Wexley's *They Shall Not Die*; 2nd prize, a year's subscription to

*NEW THEATRE*.

To the workers' theatre group showing the greatest improvement in its sales of *NEW THEATRE* (not necessarily the largest sales), a first prize award of *Stevadors* by Paul Peters and George Sklar. Second prize, an original drawing from *NEW THEATRE*. Write at once for a bundle order of *NEW THEATRE*.

# Voice of the Audience

## UKRAINIAN TOUR

### TO NEW THEATRE:

On our way home from the National Festival of Worker's Theatres, the Ukrainian Dram Group of New York appeared with its play "Oh, Yeah?" before the Ukrainian workers in Chicago, Hamtramck, West Side Detroit, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh.

The question before us was whether they would understand the meaning of the play and accept it. We were doubtful, for definite reasons. Among the various immigrants that live in the United States, no other nationality gives so many plays as the Ukrainians, and especially those Ukrainian workers organized in the United Ukrainian Toilers' Organizations. There is even a saying that when two Ukrainians meet, the first problem at their meeting is entertainment. There can not be found, even among the smallest organization, a group that during one year will not try to arrange a few evenings of entertainment. The workingclass newspaper, Ukrainian Daily News, during the winter period was full of announcements of performances. But, as even among Ukrainian workers, is very far from the needs and tasks of working class theatrical art. The repertoire is not only too old but is far from the life of present life here. It deals with the life in the old country, particularly the life of peasants, or else it does not deal with any problem but with nonsense; the old form, realistic, with all the furnishings on the stage.

Because of this, a certain point of view towards dramatic art was created. It's true that for a certain time, in the ranks of the United Ukrainian Toilers' Organizations, where the theatrical movement is most highly developed, there are efforts made to lead the theatrical work on the right path. There is a committee that permanently gives various suggestions and instructions to the dramatic groups, selects and proposes new repertoire and encourages them towards the new art. But this is not enough. The new plays are very scarce. Therefore, the plays that are old as to content, form, and taste are still in the majority on the stage.

We appeared with a play that was not only entirely new in content and form, but also was a contrast to all other plays known among Ukrainians now. It is hardly a play as they know it, but a Placard. We felt certain that our audience would not understand it and it would reject it.

But our fears were overcome. Such a success as we had had never before been known by any other Ukrainian travelling group or performers. In every one of the above-mentioned places the halls were overcrowded. Our appearances were met with great ovations. The people whom we thought could not change their old theatrical ideas surrounded us and requested to create and stage plays more in this form! And we came out with a strong understanding that they like something new; they will gladly and enthusiastically accept a new form if it is better than the old. To make the workers' theatrical art better than the old, better than the bourgeois, not only in content but also in form, or in content but also in form, or in other words try to raise the art level of appearances of working class theatres, is the immediate task of the entire League of Workers Theatres.

The program of the evenings where we appeared were added to by the appearance of the local art groups, mostly choruses, ballets, and orchestras. This gave us the opportunity to see their good and bad sides. Where time permitted us to do so, we held meetings with those groups and exchanged our experiences and suggestions. From our performances they drew much benefit, and we had a chance to get acquainted with their shortcomings in artistic and musical activities in those places, so that in the future we would know how to help them.

The general demand from them was to have as many such tours as possible. This should be taken to heart by all outstanding groups of the League of Worker's Theatres.

No articles, instructions, suggestions and appeals for a new form of art would be able to do what was done by tours, by living examples, plays that could be seen. Many of our dramatic groups could not stage anything new because they do not know how to start it, how to imagine it. They have no examples. If our outstanding dramatic groups could go out from time to time at least to the larger industrial centers, they could help very much to improve the workers theatre in general, and also workers' dramatic groups which they would meet on their way. From the financial standpoint, as the experience of the Ukrainian Dram Group shows, this is not very difficult. The Ukrainian Dram Group looks forward to more such tours.

M. Han.

## SYMPOSIUM

### TO NEW THEATRE:

Apropos of your symposium on May 6th, *Broadway and the Propaganda Play*. As a Tower of Babel it was a howling success. As a place and time of analysis, constructive criticism, clarification and formulation of guiding policies—it was a dismal failure. As an active worker in the workers' theatre movement I am moved to violent protest at this sort of confusion-sowing affair. We look to the New Theatre Magazine (the official organ of the League of Workers' Theatres of the U. S. A., section of the International Union of the Revolutionary Theatre, Editor) for sound theoretical guidance not only within its pages but in every moment of its extra-literary activities.

I have no desire to attack the speakers personally. Geddes, Blankfort, Sifton, Lawson are all fellow-travelers of merit, and their confusion on the difficult and various problems of revolutionary theatre is as much due to a lack of real theoretical guidance from the workers' theatre movement as to their own individual deficiencies. As for Frank Merlin, if his inclusion on the program was "audience-bait" it must be condemned as rank opportunism. If it was done in an effort to be "liberal," then the complete failure of anyone from the editorial board or the leadership of the L. O. W. T. to answer his fascist demagoguery, his wisecracking slander of the Soviet workers (on the question of "internationalism") and his glib distortion of the class basis of the Broadway theatre and his wholesale whitewashing of its vicious policies—this total absence of one word of criticism or even of protest, I say, lends the whole affair the unmistakable odor of "rotten liberalism."

The organization of the program and the chairmanship of the discussion was so inchoate as to practically preclude any proper criticism from the floor. The anarchic and slanderous outburst of some maniac from the floor also remained unanswered. What is the result of this "symposium"? Several hundred sympathetic and interested newcomers to the revolutionary theatre movement are thoroughly confused and left with the impression (if not the conviction) that nobody in the movement has any idea where in the hell he's going.

This situation must be vigorously combatted. Permit me to inform the readers of NEW THEATRE that the workers revolutionary theatre has a clearly defined, Marxist approach to the questions of drawing in the professionals, utilization of bourgeois theatre methods and the relationship of the revolutionary theatre to the Broadway theatre. It also has a definite (but by no means dogmatic) approach toward the problems of form and style. The unfortunate (speaking politely) part of the situation is that all

this information has been confined to the heads of a few individuals and to the rare pages of the organ of the International Union of the Revolutionary Theatre, "International Theatre." It is therefore, immediately urgent that the New Theatre undertake to publish in its pages (or in special pamphlets) an exhaustive series of articles by competent writers on these subjects.

If "home talent" of the sort is not immediately forthcoming, it could do nothing wiser than to reprint in toto several of the outstanding articles from *International Theatre!* for example, in issue number four, the leading article on "Work Among the Artistic Intelligentsia"; in the same issue, *The Creative Methods of the Theatre of the Revolution!* the article by Lunacharsky on *The Theatre, the Revolution and Stanislavsky*. These and many others are of vital importance and are practically unknown, and will provide real food for analysis and discussion among the future theoreticians and practitioners of the revolutionary theatre in America. Let us not forget, in our commendable efforts to learn from the American bourgeois theatre, that in the final analysis we must turn to the Soviet theatre for guidance and clarification.

Yours in the struggle for a real revolutionary theatre,

Theatre Worker.

## STEVEDORE

### TO NEW THEATRE:

Here are my impressions of "Stevedore," a Theatre Union production.

It depicts the life of the Negro masses truly and convincingly.

How vividly it shows the iron ring of brutality which surrounds them.

How poignantly are felt the threatening forces which constantly press them.

When they sing and dance you feel that this is only a slight, minute rest before the beastly oppression will again resume its vicious course.

You become a part of the play and the consciousness of being in a theatre leaves you entirely.

That is why in the last scene, when the white workers join the Negro workers in a united attack against the white gorillas, a joyful feeling of strength and hope enters your heart.

Sincerely yours,

An Actor.



"Without Revolutionary Theory There Can Be No Revolutionary Practice."

V. I. LENIN



# Men In the Modern Dance

EZRA FRIEDMAN and IRVING LANSKY

"DANCING is the supreme manifestation of physical life and the supreme symbol of spiritual life." This definition of dancing by Havelock Ellis cannot be construed in any manner so as to render males unfit, and females especially fit, for practicing this art. As a vehicle of expression and as a physical and intellectual stimulus, the dance can serve and benefit both sexes equally well. Despite this fact, we find that the overwhelming majority of dancers are women. Men shun the dance as a feminine art.

There is a historical reason for this which goes back to the days of Louis XIV of France. In those days, it became the style for courtiers to appease the vanity of their mistresses by placing them in the imperial ballet. The requirements were not the artistic ability of the ballerina, but the amount of influence the courtier had with the king or his ballet master. Naturally, the dance suffered greatly, with sex appeal more desirable in a dancer than talent, and with eroticism the main content of the dances. Even when other than erotic subjects were used, they served merely as a convenient framework for displaying the bodies of the dancers, whose position in decaying feudal society made other than erotic interpretations impossible. Decaying capitalistic society has produced a parallel condition, the libidinous contortions of "Follies" girls that are palmed off on sucker audiences as dancing.

The men of the Louis XIV era avoided taking part in the ballet because it bore the stigma of being a collection of prostitutes. They feared being placed in that category, although many courtiers belonged in it. It was thus that the conception grew that the dance is exclusively a women's art, and that if men participate in it their virility is thrown open to suspicion. This dance phobia persisted, and still persists in the minds of men, even though the art became somewhat less coarse and more respectable under the influence of a rising capitalist class; before it fell back into its slough of lewdness along with bourgeois decay.

No excuse for it, however, exists in modern revolutionary dancing. This type of dancing cannot be said to belong to any one sex exclusively. Its reservoir of subject matter, the class struggle, certainly pertains to both sexes alike. Furthermore, abstention from dancing on the part of men is harmful to the art and is deterring its progress. Men can increase its strength and aggressiveness. The partial emancipation which women have gained through struggle in the past few years has not yet completely overcome their physical handicaps, the product of ages of repression. Men are required to supply this lack, for there are movements which they can do much better than the average woman.

Most men suffer from the remnants of bourgeois over-consciousness of sex. They are constantly in fear of doing something which might be considered effeminate. This unhealthy state of mind is the fruit of the bourgeois and pre-bourgeois dual standards, one standard for men and one for women, the unnatural differentiation imposed upon human beings in order to perpetuate the false ideological basis for the first great exploitation of one set of humans by another, the exploitation of woman by man.

Revolutionists cannot tolerate the dual standard. They recognize in it an enemy of progress by virtue of its cutting in half the potential energy and initiative in those fields of activity where either one or the other sex is excluded. The dance field has suffered markedly in this way. Revolutionary dancers are therefore especially interested in destroying the dual standard, only it is the men, the would-be expropriators, who are suffering from the repercussive effects of their own tyranny, who must be freed this time. The dance is as manly as any other art. Greek manhood, which for virility compares favorably with today's, regarded the dance as an important cultural activity.

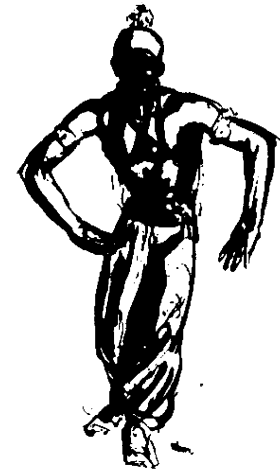
Grace is merely the efficiency of movement, and is exactly the same as form in sports. No one can call this a categorically feminine attribute. Diving and figure skating are sports indulged in largely by men and it is the most graceful man who wins. Many sports, especially the two last named, come very near to dancing. The only difference is that sports consist merely of movement, frequently beautiful and entertaining to the spectators as well as participants, whereas dancing, and especially revolutionary dancing, adds to all of these properties that of expression. By means of the dance a picture can be painted, a lesson taught or a story told. Sports give us healthful exercise and bodily development; dancing gives us all of these, adding intellectual, to physical and mental benefits. Men should not close to themselves one of the avenues of vital expression merely because of a notion, certainly not true of revolutionary dancing; that the dance is essentially feminine.

The physical requirements of a dancer are the same as those of an athlete. Any man who can participate in athletics should not hesitate to take up dancing if he feels so inclined. Any man who desires to express himself emotionally and intellectually, who possesses bodily strength, flexibility, coordination and sense of rhythm, or desires to develop these qualities, is in place in the Workers Dance League. Requirements are the same for men and women. Both sexes are given the same exercises in mixed classes.

The women of the Workers Dance League

have an important part to play in overcoming the idea that the female sex has a monopoly on dancing. They must never throw up their hands and exclaim when a man finally plucks up enough courage to join a dance group, "At last! We have a man in our class!" Mistakes of this order are probably responsible for driving away most of the few men who have thus far joined the League. None but the hardest males can withstand that blast. Tact is required to abolish in a short time prejudice which have been rooted for centuries.

The Workers Dance League appeals to young men who are interested in dancing to join its ranks. They should not shrink if at first they appear conspicuous by reason of their small numbers. Good revolutionaries jump at the opportunity of breaking down baseless conventions which retard our advance. Conspicuousness is an agitational advantage. Men who join the Workers Dance League will be doing a service to themselves, by deriving physical, mental and intellectual benefits, and to the revolutionary movement by knocking another block from under the barrier of the dual standards and by increasing the effectiveness of the dance as a weapon in the class struggle.



ONE of the most surprising successes of the tail-end of the season is *Kykunkor*, a native African opera by Asadata Dafora, of African tribal songs, dancing and acting. It opened at Unity Theatre, on East Twenty-third Street, and quickly drew S.R.O. houses made up of such various elements as writers, musicians, dance-lovers, society and workers' groups. It is now playing at the Chanin Auditorium, on the 50th floor of the Chanin Building, and turns people away nightly.

The undoubted sincerity, authenticity, and sometimes amazing acting and dancing, as well as the lure of "African" novelty, have a good deal to do with its success. Worker Theatre actors and dancers might learn a good deal from watching these Africans, who rehearsed together for more than a year before presenting their production, and who combine naturalness and art to a high degree.

# A Letter to Blanche Evan

*From the Workers Dance League*

**T**HE confusion of her ideas, questions and criticisms make it difficult to answer Miss Evan directly, since she does not pose her question, etc., directly. On one side she challenges, then answers, if *this* is what you want to do, here is a better way of doing it. Then she challenges again the correctness of our policy, and once more suggests ways and means of carrying out our policy. Some of these are fine suggestions, some we can discard, some we ourselves are still arguing about. But at least when we argue ways and means, we are clear as to the goal.

At the beginning of her letter, Miss Evan poses seemingly pertinent, direct questions: "Does it (the Workers Dance League) wish to state the problems of the proletariat or solve them as well? Is it to renew enthusiasm of convinced class-conscious people? Is it to afford a method of entertainment to them that will be within the realm of their deepest convictions?"

These first three questions are simply answered. Our function, like the function of all art and cultural activity, is to state problems, show solution to these problems and entertain. We state problems because we are keenly conscious of these problems and as sincere artists cannot help but bring them forward in our art expression. We show a solution, because every thinking individual come to certain conclusions. We have ceased wondering about life and the world. We are convinced, and this conviction is reflected. As to entertainment, if the definition understood is a broad one, we say yes, that is also our function. But it is not divorced from these other functions. If our work were not interesting and enjoyable, our convictions, (which we wish to project to a broad audience) would be futile. They would not evoke the emotion that is necessary to convince. You cannot convince if the medium you use is boring. Of course, we ourselves know that many of the compositions presented fail miserably in this. Our dancers still have to learn the correct use of their medium, they still have to learn how to convince through their art.

Then we come to Miss Evan's last two question in the same paragraph: Does it (the W.D.L. again) 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*. And here we are forced to smile. Perhaps Miss Evan might have put the question better this way: Are you interested in art or are you interested in propaganda? Then we could answer once more very directly and simply. There is no division. Although propaganda is not necessarily art, art is propaganda. If we have failed to be artists, that is our problem and we face it. But no artist, if he is honest, can fail

to recognize that no matter what he is saying, he is saying something. This something is the thing with which he expects to evoke some response from his audience. If he says nothing, he is no artist. He is a mere virtuoso, and even the bourgeois world has a minor place for the virtuoso.

We definitely have something to say. We are aware of sharp social conflicts. We are on the side of the oppressed people, the workers, and we rally with them in their revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the oppressors, the capitalists. We see the forces of progress, of peace, of universal freedom choked by the black forces of fascism, the naked brutal dictatorship of the capitalists. And this conviction (whether our members have come by it through intellectual decision, through economic struggle or through an emotional reaction to the rapidly increasing mass actions of the workers all over the world)—this conviction is the inspiration for our work. And as part of a movement that faces things realistically, even to hand to hand battle on the barricades, we are ready to be realistic in our convictions. We leave our studios and go with the workers to give our support in the medium we understand best—the dance.

If Miss Evan's appeal was only to understand our medium better, or, as she stated it at the conclusion of her letter, "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": if, this is the appeal, this we appreciate thoroughly. And we invite her and others to join with us in the process of building this medium in the field of revolutionary art, either by participation in dance activity or by continued constructive criticism toward a better use of our medium. We are young, we have not yet found the way to mold most effectively into our dance the things that inspire us to dance. We have a hard road to travel. But we are sincere, we are willing to buck all the obstacles. But in spite of all difficulties, ours is an alive vital movement which opens up new horizons and a new life for the dance art.

\* \* \* \* \*

## ANOTHER GOLDFISH OUT OF THE HOLLYWOOD BOWL

Man bringing in script: "But Mr. Goldwyn, you simply *can't* use this one, you simply *can't*. Why the women are all Lesbians!"

Mr. Goldwyn (it is rumored) answered: "What of it! So make them Americans, my boy, make them Americans."

## Nazi Propaganda

**A**S WE GO to press we learn that *The Film and Photo League of New York* and *The Anti-Nazi Federation of Greater N. Y.* have launched a campaign of exposure and protest against *S. A. Mann Brand*, the Hitler film. Unable to secure a Broadway theatre due to the mass protests and picketing that aroused the anti-fascists of N. Y., the Bavarian Film Distributors were able to chose only a little movie house in the outskirts of Yorkville among the German population. The *Yorkville Theatre* at 96 Street and Third Ave., owned by a Jewish business man, Mr. Scheinnman is the only theatre in town that dared to collaborate with the local Nazi agents in showing *S. A. Mann Brand*.

The Nazi organization, "The Friends of New Germany" have been canvassing and forcing Yorkville shopkeepers to buy tickets. The Motion Picture Division of the Board of Education of the State of N. Y. (Film Censors) have approved the film after the Nazis removed most of the bloodcurdling cries against Jews fully aware that the mass anger of the Jewish population of New York would crush the film and its perpetrators.

Unexpectedly on Saturday May 26, without advertisement in the press *S. A. Mann Brand* opened. The same day The Film and Photo League issued a call in the workers and general press and in leaflets distributed in Yorkville calling for boycott and protest action. This call was answered with a mass meeting in front of the theatre of over a thousand workers and anti-fascists, most of whom picketed *en masse* in front of the theatre. Both The Film and Photo League and the Anti-Nazi Federation will organize mass meetings in front of the theatre until the film is driven from the screen.

A statement issued by the The Film and Photo League says in closing, "It is the immediate job of all workers, all anti fascists to send protests this moment to Mr. Scheinnman the theatre owner, to the film censors (80 Center St.) and to gather in great masses every night at 7:30 in meetings at the corner of 96th St. and Third Ave. in mass support of the picket line in front of the theatre."

"The Nazis have a tacit arrangement with the Yorkeville police which has resulted in a police attempt to chase demonstrators from the corner permanently. It is a burning necessity for us to mobilize the widest support for the fight against *S. A. Mann Brand*. This fight against the Nazi attempt to whitewash their bloody reign of terror with a disgusting attempt to portray the trade union workers and leaders of Germany as degenerates—is a fight against the spread of Nazism, in support of the heroic German working class that is now preparing the doom of Nazi rule. It is a solidarity action in the fight for the freedom of Ernst Thaelman, leader of the German working class. Drive *S. A. Mann Brand* from the screen!"

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