

NEW

MARCH, 1935



THEATRE

DRAMA

ARCHIBALD
MACLEISH

Panic

M. MARVIN
Our Hall

FILM

PUDOVKIN

The Youth
of Maxim

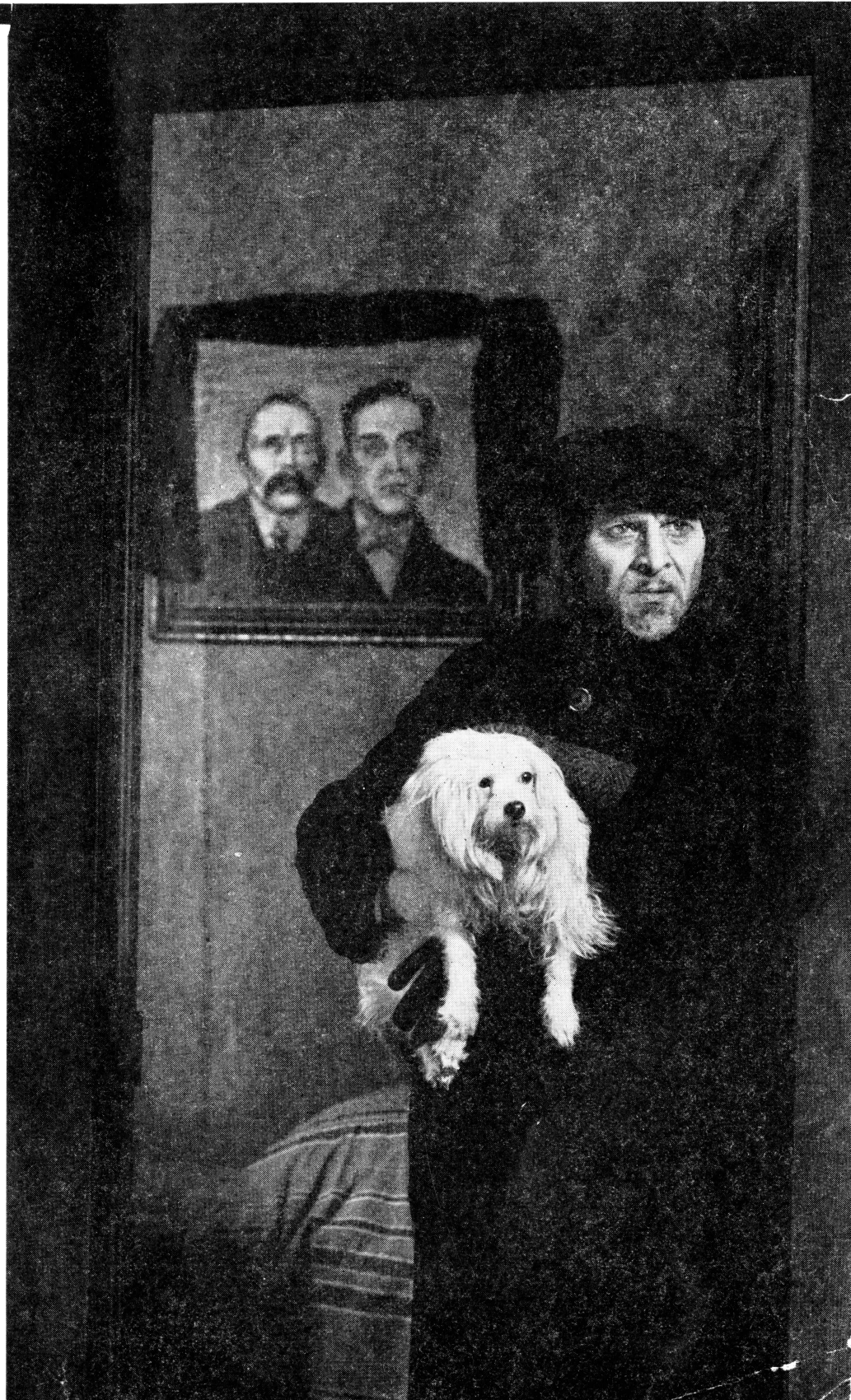
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NEW THEATRE

MARCH 1935

GORDON CRAIG, who has been one of the most effective of the *enfants terribles* of the European theatre, has had the courage not to do as the Romans. He was invited to the Volta Congress, sponsored in Rome as another attempt to stimulate art under Fascism. Craig, once a co-worker with Stanislavsky and a pioneer in the art of modern stage design, answered a string of formal speeches with this analysis of the condition of the theatre in contemporary Europe. In a letter made public through the London, *Times*, he says:

"While certain Europeans have rejected those reforms suggested in the last thirty years which were not immediate money makers, Russia accepted the reforms, added to them, and leads the European theatre. The Russian theatre seems to be years in advance of all other theatres. It is the one theatre which does not sulk or put its tongue out at progress."

This was not what was expected of a delegate to Rome. It followed pomposities like the official Fascist statement of Silvio d'Amico:

"The theatre's sole salvation can come through the Poet . . . from him who shall recapture and speak the Word."

Craig went on to insist that emergency grants would not cure a sick theatre. The only remedy, he said, is in state grants; "The depressed theatres have suffered for years under the tyranny of cynical commercial men—profiteers."

Craig answers the Fascists with praise of the Soviet theatre. Controversies such as the one emphasized at the Volta Congress show up the commercial theatre for the real estate game that it is. When a theatre, like the Soviet, opens its doors, dramatic art has its prosperity; while the Recaptors of the Word bring It to empty houses.

TWO pioneer American revolutionary theatres, the Workers Laboratory Theatre and the Artef have just taken important steps toward the goal of becoming full time professional theatres. Although "Broadway" has never been able to maintain a repertory theatre, and Eva Le Gallienne gave up her Civic Repertory Theatre downtown, the Artef will soon be established as a full time repertory theatre. The Artef players will give nightly performances of *Recruits*, *Yegor Bulitchev* and *Dostigayev* for the remainder of the current season. At the same time a new play, *The Reapers* by the brilliant Yiddish



Art Theatre

Lithograph by Pearl Binder

writer Siskind Lev, has been placed in rehearsal. The members of the Artef Collective will rehearse during the day and will, for the time being, become professionalized, receiving nominal wages. At the same time, plans are under way to professionalize the entire Players Collective at the commencement of the 1935-36 season.

THE Workers Laboratory Theatre," its director, Alfred Saxe, explained in outlining the new name, new plans, and new plays of the organization, "is emerging from a lusty childhood into an equally vigorous adolescence. It is in the stage of deepening its artistic work, concretizing its mass audience and raising its level of efficiency."

Many well-known theatre people have already agreed to serve on the Advisory Council of the new Theatre of Action, as

the W. L. T. is now called. These include Paul Peters, Lee Strasberg, Moss Hart, George Sklar, Albert Maltz, Charles R. Walker, John Henry Hammond, Jr. and Edward Dahlberg. The Executive Board consists of John Howard Lawson, Herbert Kline, Alfred Saxe, Charles Friedman, Stephan Karnot and Jack Renick. Two new plays *The Young Go First* by Peter Martin and George Scudder, and *My Dear Co-Workers* by Edward Dahlberg, are already in rehearsal, with an opening date scheduled for late in March. Although the Theatre of Action is primarily a mobile theatre it is intended to present new plays for a run of a week or two at some mid-town theatre before giving them in Workers Clubs, Union Halls, etc. NEW THEATRE readers are invited to celebrate the advance of this fine workers' theatre at the Theatre of Action Ball, March 8 at the Hotel Delano.



THE danger of fascist suppression of culture developing in these United States is brought home vividly by a bill introduced into the House of Representatives which would establish a federal censorship of motion pictures. The bill, among other provisions dealing with trade practices and "immoral" films, would declare unlawful any motion pictures "of stories or scenes which ridicule public officials . . . the U. S. Army, the U. S. Navy, or other governmental authority; of stories or scenes which emphasize bloodshed and violence without justification in the structure of the story; which distorts representations of the national life . . . or disturbs public peace or impairs friendly relations with other countries," etc. etc.

This bill, a logical continuation of the Legion of Decency drive, would ban any Hollywood film which contained even a small measure of social truth, or dealt seriously and honestly with problems of morals and customs. It would ban newsreels and other films produced by the labor movement. It would keep the great masterpieces of Soviet cinema art from the American people.

Every reader of **NEW THEATRE** should act at once to defeat this pernicious bill, which would violate constitutional rights of free speech and criticism, and which would put the broadest repressive powers into the hands of a Federal Motion Picture Commission. Send your individual protest against this bill, which is known as "H.R. 2999," to the "Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce," House of Representatives, Washington, D. C. Get your friends and acquaintances to do the same. If you are a member of any organization—theatre group, cultural club, trade union, etc.—get your organization to send its protest. Notify **NEW THEATRE** of your action. Help defeat this fascist-like attack on the cinema. Act now!

MORE than 2000 writers have signified their earnest affiliation with the workers in the fight for Unemployment, Old Age and Social Insurance Bill, H. R. 2827. The Dramatists Guild, the Authors Guild, and the Screen Writers Guild together constitute the Authors League which sent Elmer Rice to Washington to appear before the House Labor Sub-Committee on Feb. 5. He said:

"The Authors League speaks officially for practically all the authors of this country and has endorsed H.R. 2827 because it is the only pending bill which offers authors protection from . . . the haunting spectre of insecurity."

Equally important is the Authors League action in joining the Interprofessional Association for Social Insurance, the organization of which Mary Van Kleeck is chairman. Membership in the Interprofessional Association not only means joining the immediate fight for enactment of the Workers Bill, but also means a step toward further and closer cooperation of professional groups in facing social and economic problems.

I AM going to write a play with a working-class slant. How best can I dramatically express its ideology? I'm a playwright. What advantage is there for me to join the Dramatists Guild? Is there any other organization like it? How can I, as a playwright, effectively use my craft against the forces of war and fascism? Is it my business as a playwright?"

These and a thousand other questions will be discussed, analyzed, and, if possible, resolved at the American Writers' Congress to be held in New York City in the latter part of April.

The writer's problems will be fought on three fronts. The first of these will concern itself with his *political* orientation; the second with the *economics* of his business, and the third with the peculiar problems of his craft. On these three main points specialists will address the Congress. Subsections and caucuses will further enlarge upon their remarks. And out of these dissections, proposals, analyses and resolutions two things are hoped for. That clear thinking on the problems of our craft, and our relation to the labor movement will emerge. And that a League of American Writers will be formed which will function along the lines of writers' groups in France, pre-nazi Germany, Soviet Russia and other countries where there are sections of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers.

In order for the American Writers' Congress to be thorough and effective it is essential to hold a considerable amount of pre-congress discussion. Toward that end a number of smaller groups of each craft will be called together so that they may crystallize their common problems and prepare them for the Congress. Such a meeting of playwrights will be called in the near future.

NEW THEATRE heartily endorses this Congress and by way of co-operation is

planning to devote part of its April issue to several pre-congress discussions. The American Writers' Congress has been called and endorsed by the following playwrights: Paul Peters, Herbert Kline, Paul and Claire Sifton, George Sklar, John Howard Lawson, Lester Cohen, Melvin Levy, Albert Bein, Samuel Ornitz, Michael Blankfort and others. Also among a great number representing other crafts are Erskine Caldwell, Lincoln Steffens, Waldo Frank, James T. Farrell, Michael Gold, Horace Gregory and Theodore Dreiser.

AN astounding event took place on Broadway on February 17th. The Center Theatre, of Radio City, in a benefit for the Daily Worker, had its standing room sold out for a repeat program that could not begin until 9:45 P.M. These four thousand people crowded the theatre to see a revolutionary dance recital. Nor is that all. One dance on the program, *Charity*, by the New Dance Group, stopped the show; for more than ten minutes there was applauding, cheering, whistling, demands for encore, while back stage the event was so unanticipated that for a time no one knew exactly how to continue with the program.

A review of this recital will appear in the next issue, but **NEW THEATRE** now would like to congratulate the Dance League not only for its courage in planning a program of this sort, but for the remarkable way in which it has forged ahead. In a brief period of three years, it has gained for itself a mass audience and an artistic development that has grown phenomenally from enthusiastic amateurishness to high professional standard. It has, in addition, recruited young dancers and groups ranking with the best the dance world has to offer. **NEW THEATRE** extends its congratulations.

NEW THEATRE

Organ of the New Theatre League and Workers Dance League

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Paul Muni Denies All

And J. Edward Bromberg Makes a Comment or Two

By EMANUEL EISENBERG

A LOT of shock, distress and incredulity went into circulation on Sunday, January 12, when the motion picture section of The New York Times published an interview with Paul Muni secured during his brief recess from the workshops of Hollywood. This recess was spent at the Hotel Pierre, Fifth Avenue and Sixty-first Street, and Muni leaped at the occasion to run to earth the foul suspicion of "being a sociological crusader among actors." Characterizing him as an amiable and frank witness, the Times reporter quotes the actor thus:

"I have not the slightest interest in the message a picture may convey. I have no prejudices, nor do I hold any briefs for ideas—in pictures. I am a realist and, in the theatre, I am concerned with a realistic fact that exists: that here is a character which I am called upon to interpret. It makes no difference to me whether I believe or disbelieve in the character's ideas. It is important for me to believe in the character as a man. A human being is a very interesting guy. All I ask of a role is that it show a human being, not an abstraction.

"I have always avoided being brought in as a crusader. My politics is the business of acting. Nothing else matters. It may sound dull, but I really am not concerned with the depression, or with communism or capitalism. Not concerned and not worried. If communism comes along, swell! If fascism, it's all right with me. I'll take my chances with the other fellow. My work is the theatre. I work in it like a scientist who works on an invention, not knowing whether his discovery will be constructive or destructive. That's my feeling about a picture."

The reporter, remembering *The Valiant*, *Scarface*, *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, *The World Changes*, *Hi, Nellie!*, *Bordertown* and thinking of the not yet released *Black Fury* (a story of coal miners rebelling against conditions and organizing), went on to ask how it was that, with his indifference to crusading, Muni's pictures could for the most part be classified as sociological dramas.

"The reason, I suppose, is my insistence upon a role that is vital and lifelike. It so happens that characters like that are found in the more human, the earthier and the timely stories."

Because this kind of thinking is such a fantastic hangover from the days of babble about Pure Art, Working Above the Battle, and Scientific Detachment, and because Muni has been accepted as a "sympathizer" for several years, your easily inflamed correspondent rose to a considerable altitude of impatience and indignation at the first reading of these lines. Was it possible

that other actors shared such views? And might the happily moribund causes of individualism, isolationism and estheticism have been supplied with even the most fractional shot in the arm by the publication of this interview with a famous and gifted actor? The thought was too appalling to entertain. The only thing was to start getting around.

DISTRESSINGLY enough, the first questions hurled at a group of casuals confirmed only the worst suspicions. (All interrogation was of course conducted in the Broadway theatre sector. Where else would one be uncertain about points of view?) For the great part, actors have been reduced to such a level of faithful puppetry—in pursuance of vicious traditions and out of a frightened gratitude merely to have a job—that the sheer invitation to look critically at their roles leaves them gasping and in a fine sweat. These misguided people think of themselves as "workers" in the worst sense of the word: dutiful operators guided by the hand of benevolent despotism.

It seemed advisable, then, to tackle the more important ladies and gentlemen of the theatre, since these, in their exalted capacities as Artists, would have to acknowledge Soul and Idea behind their work. Your over-ardent inquirer had reckoned without accessibility. Alfred Lunt found himself utterly unmoved by a hopefully provocative letter. Ina Claire wrote to say that she was *terribly* sorry to have no time for appointments before she went off on the road but she *did* want it known that she agreed with Paul Muni *completely!*

Kenneth MacKenna, a graciously intelligent man, was glad to talk—but, as a Sensible Liberal, this actor is so concerned lest drama be cluttered up with blatant and undramatic messages (whether in the name of monarchism, fascism or communism) that he is interested almost wholly in assuring the coming into being of Good Plays, not caring especially how this is to be achieved.

Margaret Wycherly, initially agreeing with Muni that an artist should uncritically interpret and sensitively perform, soon found herself admitting that she could never enact a harmful or reactionary character if the play proper did not finally triumph over this person or trenchantly demonstrate the nature of her harmfulness.

For a clear evaluation of Muni's outlook, we interviewed J. Edward Bromberg of the Group Theatre. He commented:

"While it's possible that good old 'pressure' is operating again and forcing sympathetic actors either to modify their public statements or change them completely,"

said Bromberg, "I doubt if that's true in Muni's case. I think he really means what he's saying. It's just that he hasn't thought it through.

"Muni is trying to say that his job is acting and he wants to keep active. So do we all. His mistake lies in reducing this job to 'science.' Certainly there's a definite craft, a definite training and discipline that prepare the actor for his job: but can he proceed with a characterization like a carpenter blankly planning a table? I think it's pretty safe to say that the interpretation would be about as flat and unexciting as the table if both craftsmen went at their jobs without enthusiasm, without conviction, without 'ideas.'"

"A carpenter works best with good wood and a sense of high usefulness. Similarly, an actor performs best with a play he can believe in and a part stirs his own experiences, memories and immediate observations. What are an actor's essential materials if not experience? And what first-rate mind or first-rate talent can claim that his particular experiences have not conditioned him into one point of view or another?"

AT this point Bromberg was interrupted and asked what he himself would do if he were offered a role he disliked heartily or disagreed with totally. First maintaining that he would reject it outright, he halted to reconsider. "You see," he said, "it's impossible for anyone who respects the theatre and takes it seriously to talk merely about *parts*. My first interest is in the whole, the play itself, what it has to say, its reason for existence. If the author has produced something sound and true and exciting, then I don't care if the particular part I'm assigned to is small or large, pleasant or unpleasant, socially articulate or neutral,—so long as the whole is a good thing that I can admire and want to participate in. And that—at least I hope and would like to establish so—is the point Muni really meant to make: that, once he's chosen an impressive sociological drama, he doesn't care what his role proves in itself, if only the full play has guts and value and truth.

"As for the stage under fascism, it seems to me overwhelmingly obvious that such a regime would mean a drying up of all the creative theatre juices; plays would be slavish projections of one monomaniac's mind; roles would grow thin and colorless and dreary. You can't tell me that Muni, with his zest for roaring and powerful parts, would continue his indifference to the possible coming of fascism if he took one look at Germany or Italy today.

"And that last point about scientists not caring whether the invention turns out constructive or destructive isn't just a confusion; it makes almost no sense. Who ever heard of an honest or valuable scientist who had any impulse to work on an invention unless it was toward a good and valid end? It might eventually be misused, it's true, (Continued on Page 28)

OUR HALL

By MARK MARVIN

IN winter the Hall stands prominently out among the decaying frame houses and the sagging sign boards that no longer attempt to entice the passing motorist. The Hall is old, and its age is reflected in its sway-backed roof, its rotten under-timbers, its treacherous steps, and its weather-beaten window-sills that soak up the cold winter rains. The Hall has been standing a long time, but its reason for existence has changed with the changing years. Only those who seek hidden meanings can realize how this inanimate and crumbling material object reflects the most intimate interpretation of American history since the war with Spain. Go up to those loose, wind-rattled clapboards with scientific ardor and apply the stethoscope of Marxism: you will hear the frenzied heart-beat of an immense nation in its final spurt of illusory health, and the intimation of coming death-gasps.

Once our Hall was simply a hall, like thousands of others throughout the land—a place to meet one's friends and talk and dance and drink. When the factories began to appear in the neighborhood and poor Jews, negroes, and industrial workers settled in around them, the hall became the property of the *Arbeiter-Ring*, a group of Jewish workers and petty merchants who met to discuss socialism somewhat as a philistine discusses heaven after a good dinner among friends. But the *Arbeiter-Ring* lost its appeal and its following and disappeared.

The Hall is situated in the midst of a rich city crammed with food, bristling with powerful, creative machinery, fine modern homes, sunlit hospitals, stores piled high with warm blankets and clothing, and large theatres with modern stages used only as bases for the silver screen of Hollywood. The Hall lies two miles west of the million-dollar Elks Lodge with its marble floors, its spacious leather-cushioned lounging rooms. And not two blocks away is Washington school—rickety, drafty, and over-crowded with students. Stone Island is one of the large industrial centers of the Middlewest but half of its factories are permanently shut down. Grass grows in the streets in front of many factory gates in the summer time. Like recently discovered Mayan cities of Yucatan, Stone Island is growing back into the wilderness. Soon, if things continued like this, Stone Island might again become recognizable to those sturdy pioneers who murdered the Fox tribes and took their lands away.

A mile and a half away from the Hall stands the green-moulded copper-domed Court House, and the principal business square. The Hall is certainly decrepit looking but the Court House is even worse. It is positively repulsive with its long out-

dated gingerbread architecture, ugly enough to be a fitting monument to the philistines who now run the show. The Ku Kluxers snatched a negro out of it once, and lynched him down the river away, near where an underground station from chattel slavery days used to be. Inside their Court House musty law books stand guard over the property of the rich and the powerful. Their Court House, no doubt, but one day it became our stage—the New Theatre played on its steps during a relief demonstration. We were afraid that we would be beaten up by the deputies but when the sheriff saw his own nephew in the play he told his men to go easy. The Relief Superintendent became very angry with the Sheriff because of this and charged him with "abetting Reds" in a letter to the local papers. It was the best publicity the Unemployed Council had ever received, for, if the sheriff's nephew could be in the Unemployed Council then any one else could feel safe there too.

NOW there is a large sign over the weather-beaten door of our Hall which reads:

NEW THEATRE
Stone Island, Ill.

Outside of the movie houses the only theatre in town is the New Theatre. Before 1929 there had been a Little Theatre which did some very interesting work. However admission was granted to subscribers only and, since subscriptions were very high, only well-to-do people could afford to go. When the crisis came these patrons of the arts decided that drama was a useless luxury, and they allowed their Little Theatre to go bankrupt and disappear. As if to justify this attitude the members of the School Board discharged the teacher of drama of the local high school a year later claiming that dramatic instruction was a "frill" which the tax payers could ill afford.

Inside our Hall there is a small stage that was built by the *Arbeiter-Ring*, in the last year of its possession of the Hall, and left unwittingly as a precious legacy to us. The long Hall is crammed full of second-hand theatre seats and long benches fashioned roughly by sympathetic carpenters years ago for the crowded meetings to protest the murder of Sacco and Vanzetti. On the walls between the windows and about seven feet from the floor are large portraits of Marx in a flowing beard and frock coat and of Lenin with his cap on. These portraits were done by an itinerant ex-newspaper cartoonist who stayed in town awhile to see a girl and pass the summer away. Now we have our own artist,

a scenic designer who graduated *cum laude* from the Dramatic Department of the University of Iowa and who could not find a theatre job in two years tramping around the country. He returned home and to his surprise he found a thriving theatre. Now in his spare time he fashions sculptures of Lenin and Stalin and Dimitroff. He says our new learning is similar to that of the Renaissance, that the constituted authorities now use lynch-law and tear-gas to suppress the advance of culture as once the Holy Roman Church used the Inquisition. He has promised to do a mural for us embodying this idea. This same mural will compare the re-birth of the new theatre today with the re-birth that came at the end of the Middle Ages.

In our Hall there is a Workers' School, an Unemployed Council, a John Reed Club, a library, an art gallery, a Sunday Open Forum, and the New Theatre. John Reed spoke here; they say that Mayakovsky slept here one night bumming his way out to the west coast; Ruthenberg and Mother Bloor and Foster have spoken from the stage. People who come down for the first time are often speechless to think that so much cultural work can be carried on under the sponsorship of impoverished workers. They know that the Public Library has had its appropriation cut in half and they wonder how we can keep up with our activities. They do not realize that a new book in our library sometimes means going without a necessary item of clothing or dessert for dinner.

* * *

The theatre group is at work. It is cold outside, and there is little heat within. Young men and women are working on a scene from Paul Peters' play, *Dirt Farmer*. Three of the cast have walked seven miles in the bitter cold to attend rehearsal. They do this four times a week unless by chance they bum a ride over. A tall gaunt coal miner from out near Atkinson is speaking. He has the part of *Joe*, the militant farmer who leads the march on the town to obtain food for the starving farmers denied adequate relief. He says the lines simply and with great power:

"Listen everybody. We're going to Elmira now. The thing to remember is that we're going to force them to give us food, all the food we can get. To do that we got to stick together. If we separate, if we go one by one, they'll cheat us, they'll tell us we ain't starving . . ."

The director, the discharged dramatic teacher referred to before, interrupts him with a sharp "Stop!" *Joe* listens closely as she criticizes his interpretation of the role. The criticism was just and again they go over the scene, for the twentieth time perhaps.

They will get it right and when they do they will have achieved the full significance of the quotation painted over the proscenium: *THEATRE IS A WEAPON!* Not a blunt instrument, not a blackjack, but a fine, beautifully wrought art that re-



Phil Bard

creates life and shapes its course. They will take *Dirt Farmer* into small towns along the concrete ribbons that wrinkle the surface of the prairies, and toiling farmers will observe and learn and return home to talk about a theatre that really concerns itself with their lives. And as they bury their surplus hogs and cattle in quicklime they will recall line after line from the play which makes militantly articulate their previously incommunicable plight.

IN the back room a class is on: it is the Theatre Workshop where those not busy in current productions study the social basis of the theatre, stage technique, playwriting, scene designing, etc. An attractive blonde girl who works by day in a bakery is talking: she is comparing bourgeois naturalism with revolutionary realism in literature and drama. The whole nineteenth century movement to photograph life, with undue emphasis on sex, is pointed out as a movement that strove to face some of the unpleasant facts of capitalist society but which was unable to alter these facts or even to properly expose them since it had no clue to their origin. As a contrast she offers examples of revolutionary realism which is naturalism, if you

wish, plus a key to the interpretation of society—Marxism. Our realism, she explains, as in *Dirt Farmer*, reflects day-to-day life but it contains the dialectic of struggle out of misery and points a very concrete way to improvement. The young bakery girl is on fire with her idea—she does not speak in the polished evenness of suave radio lecturers. Her speech is ungainly, some of her arguments a bit too schematic, but every word is charged with intense conviction.

A warm discussion follows her lecture. Eager youths jump up to quote from Lunacharsky or from a recent critical article in *NEW THEATRE*. A husky chap just home from a CCC camp is puzzled. He can't follow the discussion but his former school-chum can; he makes up his mind secretly to do a little reading. Toward the end of the discussion an elderly sympathizer comes into the room. He is constantly plaguing the group with ideas for plays that are usually worthless. This time he has a really amusing suggestion. He has found a place where there are a thousand broom handles to be bought for almost nothing. He wants the New Theatre to prepare a play which will inveigle Stone Island workers into buying these broom handles as a means of self-protection against the grow-

ing fascist menace! Every one laughs at his naive interpretation of the theatre's purpose and he gets angry and walks out to distract the director with his idea.

Out in front again a different cast is working on an election skit. This is the weapon that the workers will use against the national radio hook-ups and the reactionary press. This skit is an uproarious comedy to be performed not on the stage but on the floor of the theatre in the midst of the audience, on street corners, or before factory gates. A pill vendor sets up his stand and in a few minutes he is selling the fake pills of the demagogue to a dubious audience. Every one listens carefully, for every sentence is close to home, the charlatan's promises of past campaigns are exposed in their proper light, and the hypocrisy of the NRA, of rising prices, of falling wages, becomes apparent. By the time the class-conscious worker appears on the scene the audiences are carried away and listen to his words as if they are striving to memorize them.

With the election skit and several short plays the New Theatre toured many small towns bordering Stone Island. Many workers saw legitimate theatre for the first time, and they rejoiced in a theatre which could

(Continued on Page 28)



BARD



The Youth of Maxim

By V. PUDOVKIN

THESE are days of triumphant joy for all workers in the Soviet cinema. We are now in the midst of a great and happy celebration. It is not merely the celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the young Soviet cinema that is responsible for this spirit of proud jubilation. This important jubilee comes at a time when our cinematography records the greatest artistic triumphs thus far achieved. Only recently, for the first time in the history of the Soviet cinema, the *Pravda* devoted a leading editorial to the film *Chapaev*. But a short time ago entire pages in our dailies were filled with enthusiastic comment of spectators. And still fresh in our memory is the sight of Red Army detachments parading the streets of Moscow with placards bearing the proud legend: "We are going to see *Three Songs About Lenin*."

But then, you might say that is just a "lucky streak." A series of "accidental successes"? I recall how western reviewers, rudely propelled out of their complacency by the world-wide success of *Potemkin*, called it just a "lucky incident." They were grievously mistaken, these critics. Now, as before, it is not a matter of a few isolated instances of success, of a few individual producers hitting the bull's eye.

These successful artists are not just bright meteors suddenly and unexpectedly appearing on the Soviet cinema horizon. Each of them has a "creative biography" of his own and a good deal of experience.

A few days ago I witnessed the presentation of the new film *The Youth of Maxim* produced by the Leningrad directors G. Kosintsev and L. Trauberg. The plot is characterized by simplicity and clarity. During the Czarist regime, in the years of darkest reaction, a young worker finds himself drawn into party work. He is driven thither by the cruelty and brutality of the capitalist hirelings and by his growing class-consciousness carefully nurtured by the party comrades. Towards the end of the picture Maxim becomes a full-fledged bolshevik.

The enormous difficulty of the problem forced by the authors lay in the creation of an atmosphere of stirring emotion which, according to the conception of the authors, was to permeate the entire picture. This difficulty was successfully surmounted by the authors. The picture succeeds in transmitting to the audience a strong emotional impulse, a feeling, noble and austere—closely akin to the one that seizes upon us when we rise to the melancholy strains of the funeral march, played in memory of fallen revolutionary fighters, or when we look at a portrait of Lenin in his youth—tempered with a sense of joy, pride and happiness when we compare the dark past, the glorious present and the radiantly hope-

ful future. Yes, this film is a decided success! Another great achievement. After the heroic epic of *Chapaev*—the lyrical dramatization of the *Youth of Maxim*.

The picture opens with a New Year's celebration in Czarist St. Petersburg, with all its merriment and abandon. Moskvina's amazing photography, Shostakovich's music, the brilliant montage all combine to produce a masterpiece of "formal" art of the very highest order. The finale is exceedingly simple: the hero, a young Bolshevnik, just released from prison, is seen going down the hill into a wide plain stretching before him. Somehow this simple setting deeply stirs the spectator. In the plain lies Russia, its future hidden in this sweeping expanse of open country. The easy natural movement of the young man speaks of power, confidence and a will to conquer.

In this transition from the formal splendor of the opening to the simple but profoundly moving finale is reflected something of the creative biography of the authors themselves, as well as most of our artists. A work of art is impossible, unless the creator is wholly and unreservedly engulfed by it, unless he is passionately in love with it. It is this love that creates

the magnetic influence which never fails to be transmitted to the audience. To learn to love that which is of vital interest to the masses, which deeply stirs them—is to become an artist in the true and full meaning of this word.

We have gone through a hard school, a long and arduous period of learning. We have shattered heads and hearts but we have learned how to repair the damage efficiently, when this is necessary.

The wise and firm policy of the party helped us a great deal. Members of the Central Committee of the Party and the Komsomol worked with our directors in the selection and analysis of scenarios. Our creative growth has been marked by the direct help and care of the Party. The results speak for themselves. Our productions are "hits." They carry a tremendous appeal, they deeply stir the audiences, they get a warm response from millions. And if the production of *Chapaev* has taken on the importance of a political event, what may the future hold in store for us! We are very fond of calling our vitality and confidence in victory—"optimism." But really in order to express our consciousness of the new life all around us, the pride we take in our common victories, the firm, clear conviction and joyous confidence in the future, which we do not for a moment doubt—a new word must be coined. The old word is no longer adequate.

Translated by LEON RUTMAN



The Youth of Maxim, dir. by G. Kosintsev and L. Trauberg

Lenfilm



The Youth of Maxim, dir. by G. Kosintsev and L. Trauberg

Lenfilm

Too Much Reality

By FRIEDRICH WOLF

WHEN Joris Ivens wanted to produce his great film *The New Land* (the film is based on the draining of a part of the Zuyder Zee in Holland) in Paris, the presentation was forbidden by the Censor with the sentence: "*trop de realite*"—"too much reality." The Paris Censor thus unwittingly paid Ivens the greatest tribute that could ever have been made to a modern cinema director.

Wherein lay the incriminatory nature of this "excess of reality?" The subject of the film, featuring as it does an outstanding engineering feat, is, though very unusual, throughout of a "newsreel" character, never intentionally aggressive. On the contrary, this gigantic work of the "peaceful conquest" of an enormous slice of land, wrested from the sea with the help of Dutch finance capital and the latest technical equipment, might have become a convincing demonstration in favor of the existing social order. And this is the very essence of Ivens' achievement: What might have been a justification has finally developed into a forceful indictment. As Lenin said, "Things have a way of speaking a language all their own." All that is necessary is a "mere trifle" to make the facts speak.

How did Ivens accomplish it? As far as the first part of the film is concerned, he managed to get some private citizens interested, who financed it as a sort of "industrial film." The picture shows how the monster elemental force—the Sea—repeatedly breaks through powerful dams, erected at the price of tremendous efforts, only to be subdued finally by that greatest of all elemental forces—Man, armed with his newest stupendous weapon—modern engineering technique. This struggle of the Titans of our time—Nature—Man—Technique—Ivens portrays in a clear, austere, magnificent montage. Only a past master in the field of film montage could have handled this material with such consummate skill. This conflict of Giants—Man, Sea, Technique—forms the first part of the film. With the help of a dam 34 kilometers long a new land is born. Already wheat is growing in the fields, rows of neat houses are springing up as if by magic, telegraph poles, fertile land,—a new world. But simultaneously, growing by leaps and bounds, a third (social) Monster Power is coming into being—the Crisis, the World Economic Crisis. And while Man, by virtue of giant effort, wrested this land from the sea in order to have wheat grown on it, one at the same time sees catastrophic fall of prices on the world wheat exchanges; one beholds the amazing spectacle of a world suffering from a *surplus* of grain—



Joris Ivens

too much to keep the price level up. We then see thousands of tons of grain thrown into the sea in an effort to stem the precipitate downfall of prices. At the same time we witness a terrible scarcity of bread for millions of destitute workers, starving children in New York, Paris, Berlin, London—all presented in clear, natural, *factual* montage. That is where the "excessive realism" starts. Here "things begin to speak their own language." For there is nothing more actual, more demonstrative, than this proof—plainly confronting the eye and possessing the irrefutable logic of a mathematical proposition—this proof of the senselessness and barbarism of this much vaunted system of "peace and order." "Demonstration" (demonstratio—quod erat demonstrandum) in its original meaning, as used by philosophers and mathematicians, stood for "what was to be proven." For the thematics such as this, the film—the montage film—possesses, as no other medium of art does, the power of conclusive proof. It is literally and figuratively—a "Demonstration."

HIS second great film—"Borinage"—Ivens produced under much more difficult conditions. The film pictures a miners' strike in the Belgian coal mines and triumphant socialist labor in the Don Bas (coal mining region in the Soviet Union) Only one who has himself gone through a great strike, facing the terror of guards, police and even troops, can realize the skill, knowledge, endurance and courage necessary to film these events correctly and on a mass scale, especially under conditions of illegality. Such scenes as the wholesale eviction of entire miners' communities from their miserable colonies—permeated with an appalling implacability and yet presented without a trace of sen-

timentality—cannot be "staged." There is about them an atmosphere of actuality that no "art" could possibly reproduce. The first part of *Borinage* unrolls a picture of suffering of the "damned on this earth," almost inhuman in its cool clarity—something we have never before witnessed in such setting. Yet in the midst of this deep, dull, monotonous oppressiveness, there appears a lightning-like perspective, a bright, keen, flaming ray of light: the miners, slow to move, but unyielding throughout, oppose the eviction of a comrade and are finally driven out of the mine; still unconquered, they demonstrate carrying before them a picture of Karl Marx, painted by one of them. This scene bears the imprint of almost childish primitivity and conveys a sense of unmistakable reality. At the same time it bears the mark of having been produced by a man who profoundly understands the art of realistic montage. For, it is clear, that sheer "true to Nature" presentation, "naked reality," does not in itself contain the compelling force of proof: the emotional appeal inherent in facts has to be brought out. We are not mere on-lookers, we want to change this world! The manner in which the arrow is poised and let loose will determine whether the spectator is to remain neutral or to be profoundly stirred. In this sense, Ivens reached greater heights in *Borinage* than in *New Land*, for in some portions of the latter he still shows traces of being dominated by the material he is handling.

The second part of *Borinage* takes place in the Soviet Union; it shows the new way, the way out for humanity. As in the case of that other great master of the montage film, Dziga Vertov, the development of Ivens proceeds in a very laborious, in the beginning not very apparent, but, on the whole, entirely consistent manner, leading up to the highest achievements in his latest productions. In his first films *The Bridge* and *Rain*, Ivens shows a strong tendency to "formalistic experimentation"; there is an element of "playfulness," of juggling with his newly-discovered material. After all, how could it be otherwise? Holland had no large film industry of its own, and he was compelled in the beginning to confine himself to smaller "industrial" and "cultural" films. The most interesting in Ivens' development is the way he came to Marxism. His film work, the material he handled, the "things that spoke their own language" brought him to Socialism. It is unthinkable that a man with eyes to see and a warm heart beating in his breast could remain indifferent to the eloquent language the "things spoke." And only through being in the ranks of the workers could he perceive and comprehend the true proportions, the background, correlation and perspective of the "thing." And here I think of the inspired words of the young Karl Marx (1844): "The petrified proportions of things must be made to dance, by singing their own melody to them." These words seem to me to express the very essence of the art of film montage.

Translated by LEON RUTMAN



Joris Ivens

FRAGMENTS FROM "PANIC"

By ARCHIBALD MACLEISH

NOTE: *Panic* is a play of the banking crisis of two years ago. Its protagonist is a sort of composite, non-historical, Ford-Morgan-Carnegie, industrialist and banker, the most powerful figure of his time. Its theme is the conflict between the individualism of the protagonist and that sense of the inevitable extinction of the existing economic order which is one of the deepest, if not always the most commonly recognized, convictions of our generation.

The stage represents in part a street before an electric news bulletin of the Times Square type and in part the office of McGafferty (the protagonist)—the shift from one to the other being made by lighting and without curtain. The action covers an hour and a half of a late February evening in 1933. The street crowd before the news bulletin constitutes a chorus not in the Greek sense of a group commenting upon the action of the play but in a more active sense: the street crowd is the external world against which the action of the play takes place.

McGafferty, faced with the beginning of the banking panic, attempts to form a pool to stop it: he is unable to overcome the bewildered terror of the bankers who feel the opposition of a force they cannot understand: a delegation of radicals breaks in, jeering at the bankers, promising the collapse of their world, making explicit their sense of terror; McGafferty meets them, as he has met the fears of the bankers, with contempt: the crisis increases: McGafferty attempts to fight his sense of imminent disaster: is

unable to oppose it: is met on all sides by its seeming realization in the development of the panic: attempts desperately by dishonest means to extricate himself: fails: is destroyed by the belief in his own destruction. On the street, in a development coincident but not parallel with this development, the street crowd swings through the emotions of the people. Beginning with terror in the face of the panic, it first takes refuge in its confidence in McGafferty: then admits the fear that the forces of destruction are greater than McGafferty—greater than any man: then turns against McGafferty for his failure: then looks desperately beyond him for an unknown leader and protector against disaster: then, with news of McGafferty's death, accepts the deep tidal flood of the time as a flood setting not toward death but life—a flood to accept and follow.

The first fragment printed below is a fragment of the early chorus at the time of the first news of the bank panic. (It is written in a three-beat line in couplets linked by assonance.)

The second is a speech by one of the radicals in McGafferty's office. (It is written in a five-beat, accentual line as is most of the rest of the play.)

The third is a speech of McGafferty's during his attempt to rid his mind of the radicals' words.

The fourth is the final chorus after the news of McGafferty's death.

1st FRAGMENT

The light in McGafferty's Office is out. The pulsing flash of the bulletin board begins in THE STREET—the flashes picking up the staccato rhythm of the Bankers' voices. The first glimpses of light show the Street almost empty—a few faces lifted to the board. As the flashes continue men and women come quickly toward the light out of the dark behind, speaking as they come.

VOICES IN THE STREET: What's it about?

What is it
Saying?

What about banks is it?

What about banks? Is it runs on the
Banks is it?

What does it say?

What about runs on the banks is it
Saying?

What about banks?

Is it
Runs on the banks is it? Christ! is it
Runs on the banks?

A MAN: On the banks.
(reading) *Thousands in throngs. Thanks us for
Keeping calm in the Crisis.*

A WOMAN: Why is it happening? Why is it?

A MAN: Price of a woolen blanket!
Price of a decent bed!

A WOMAN: After it all: after everything!

A WOMAN: Our Father who art Thou in Heaven:
Forgive us our daily bread!

A MAN: Keeping calm in the crisis!

A WOMAN: Keeping with downcast eyes
In dark streets at daybreak
Frightened files: laborers:
Foreign women: they shuffle
Onward little enough
Clutching at bank-book papers.

A WOMAN: Onward as those that escape in
Dreams the seeming pursuers—
Fleeing they only move by
Inching steps: stumblingly!

A WOMAN: Silent: their eyes humble:
The meek umbrellas over them.

AN OLD MAN: A man's savings pared from the
Heel of every loaf—
He hungry: sparing the
Smallest mouthful: purchasing
Old age painfully—
Fear of death urges him.

A YOUNG MAN: To be frightened — to fear death — is
Nothing: is man's lot: is
Many ages' wisdom!
Fear of hunger is misery!

A MAN: Fear of sickness — abandoned!

A MAN: Mute in motionless panic
Many at street corners
Stand staring before them:
Spitting: speaking little:
Fearing a greater ill.

A WOMAN: Father who art Thou in . . .

A MAN: Thanks us for
Keeping calm in the crisis!

AN OLD WOMAN: Surely a curse lies on us!
No common evil!
No! . . . the luck leaves us!

AN OLD MAN: The good man in his chair: the
Child at its play will perish — by
What hand ignorant —
Either for what sin —
Whether his own or another's or
Everyman's — or for nothing:
Whether by God's blow or
God's blindness!

AN OLD MAN: Knowing
Never for what fault or
Failing of ours is altered the
World's future suddenly —
Spilling of what blood:
Thing done or not done:
Holy duty forgotten —
Knowing neither the fault nor the
Finder — nevertheless
We know well His messenger!
Death we have always known!

A WOMAN: Where the eyes of death are
Shown are shown against us
Signals of God's enmity!

A WOMAN: We have beheld them — thousands —
Dead man in blameless house!

2nd FRAGMENT

The workers have forced their way into McGafferty's office. He meets them and their jeers with contemptuous irony. One of them, a blind boy with white ecstatic face, approaches him:

THE BLIND MAN: Yes . . .

He'll tell you . . .

And you'll hear him . . .

Listen!
Listen McGafferty! The day will come!
This time or the next time — now or
after —
One crash or the certain crash beyond!
You'll sleep between them and forget—
but we won't.
Once the need has left you you'll forget.
Men forget in good years with the
grass green.
Men will say 'That's done now' — but
it's not done:
Say 'That's over' — It will not be over:
Say 'What fools we were to fear it.'
Fools! —
But not to fear it: to forget to fear!

3rd FRAGMENT

McGafferty, alone with an officer of his bank after the workers have been driven out, faces the meaning of their words.

MCGAFFERTY:

What makes their hearts so sure?
Who told them? How can they know?
Who'll destroy us?
Christ it's always one man makes a
world:—
One man called Magellan: called
Lenin:
Called Cromwell: Rothschild: Leo-
nardo:
One man making one man's bed to sleep
in:
Making his bed in the brown water —
De Soto —
The trees float on it: making on foreign
street in the
Dangerous cities his cold bed: exiled:
Cancer eating him: running his own
risk:
Raising his face in the sun . . .

4th FRAGMENT

McGafferty has killed himself. The news is spelled out by the electric bulletin. The street crowd gathers.

VOICES: (breathlessly)

Who is it

Dead?

Who does it say?

Who — is it he?

Is it suicide?

Who is it?

Dead! — McGafferty's
Dead!

It's him — it's McGafferty —

Dead!

He's dead!

McGafferty's

Dead!

A WOMAN:

It's the end of them — quit of them!

AN OLD WOMAN:

Bellies bitter with drinking the
Weak tears do you fear the
Fall of the walls and the sky
High over you shining there?

A MAN:

Mouths bitter with hate and the
Aching of tears have you tasted the
New water that springs in the
Hollow of thirst in your fingers?

A MAN:

Eyes blind with the sleet and the
Freezing of night have you seen how the
Wind's in the rising east and the
Mountains of morning increasing?

A WOMAN:

The roof's fallen! The sun
Stands on the sky with his wonder.

A WOMAN: The wind — the wind's in the house!
 A WOMAN: The walls open arousing us!
 A MAN: Wildly as swollen river the
 Dark will of the world
 Flooded on rock rushes
 Raving — bearing the brush down:
 Breaking from ancient banks.
 Cities are buried. The man
 Drowns in his door who opposes it.

VOICES: Follow it!

Give to it!

Rushing of time in us! Go with the

Silence of fate a trumpet! Make of the

A MAN:

Make of the time a drum!

March with it!

Shout with it!

Run with the
 Marching men: with the thunder of
 Thousand heels on the earth —
 Making of mortal burden a
 Banner to shout and to break in the
 Blazing of sunlight and shaken there!

VOICES:

Take it!

MANY VOICES:

Man's fate is a drum!

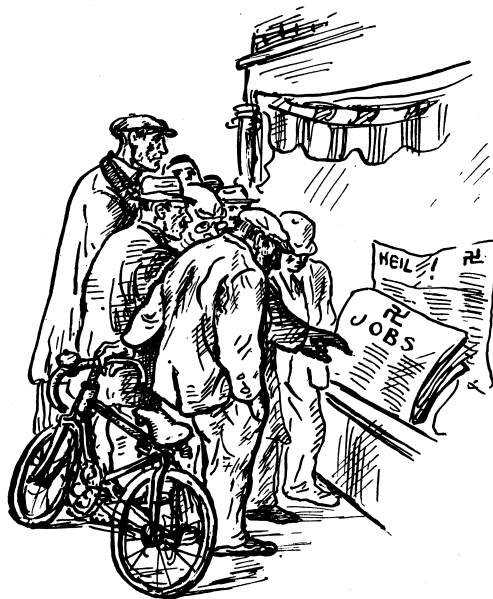
Be taken!

The trumpet of
 Time in our ears and the brazen and
 Breaking shout of our days in us!

German Theatres Underground

From an interview with
 RUDOLF WITTENBERG

YOU might see a newspaper stand, or a gathering in front of the windows where the papers are displayed for those who cannot afford to buy them. One man reads a headline out loud. He seems to be a Nazi. He is asking, "Why was Dr. Feder fired? Wasn't he working for National and Social Liberation?" Another reproves him, "You must have patience. Wait. It will come . . . in a thousand years, Hitler says." A bystander chimes in. He is seemingly without political concerns. "Don't discuss so much. Do your work." And another answers him, "I have no work. I am on relief." The discussion grows. All the major political issues are dragged into the light and dissected. If the police come, the crowd disperses. The man who began the discussion is not suspected. He looks like a Nazi—he argues like a Nazi! The people on the street have been involved in this sharp political discussion without knowing that they have been drawn into a play. The main points were carefully rehearsed before the actors came on the scene. This is the way the agit-prop theatres have to work in Germany now.



Philip Reisman

It is Rudolf Wittenberg talking: newspaperman, novelist and playwright, another author in exile with burned books behind him, who follows a clear path of fighting Hitlerism. He is in New York now, working with the Neue Deutsche Theater Gruppe, writing a revue for them.

Those opposed to Hitler, he explains, must go where the people congregate, and bring home to them the concrete truths of the Nazi policies. Hitler has (in the news-

papers) been "waging war against unemployment." So in Berlin you may read that in Hamburg a victory has been won, and in Silesia it is printed that men are going back to work in Berlin. . . . A pair of actors sit among the unemployed who jam the government employment bureau. After an hour one of them gets up, disgusted.

"There's no work here! I'm going to go to Hamburg."

The other actor, very excited, "Hamburg! You're crazy."

"Yes, Hamburg, Hamburg. Why not? There is employment there."

"In Hamburg there is work?"

"Yes."

"But I come from Hamburg. There is no work there." He describes conditions there. "But," he says, "in Berlin there is work." They fight.

"It's in the paper," says the Berliner.

"In Hamburg there is no work. In the Hamburg paper it says there is work in Berlin. Look!"

"Look!"

They bring out the two papers and compare them, show them to the workers.

"There's something crooked here."

Thus the actors "perform" in the parks, in the streets, in the "warming halls" where the unemployed sit all day when there is no heat at home. They go into the Nazi organizations, into Herr Goering's own recreation groups, the "strength through joy" centers, founded to take the workers' minds off their stomachs. These informal meeting places need entertainment. A few players come and offer a program, old folk songs, peasant songs, finally a playlet. There can be no radical content in these, but the old songs tell of oppression, and the skit may perhaps satirize company union representatives. The actors develop their contact with the workers, discuss with them, learn from them.

ANTI-FASCISTS are working in the amateur theatres, too. These often spring from clubs where the members stage occasional plays. They are less closely censored, because they reach fewer people, than the professional stage, and they are important because they reach middle class families. These groups have a tradition of

performing old plays, classics. But with politically clear actors and directors taking leadership, the classics are given point. Engels analyzed such treatment of the cultural heritage: as taking it over, preserving it, and finally raising the standards set by it.

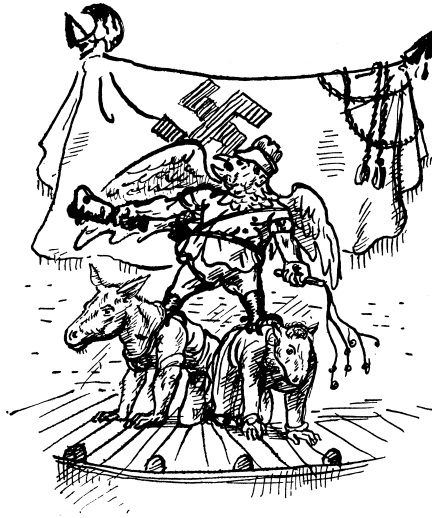
Don Quixote was presented by one of these amateur groups. The aim of the leftwing leadership was to show, in the spirit of the sixteenth century, and with an understanding of the class alignment of that time, how the rising class had inevitably to break thru the feudal restrictions. This was to put before the audience an historical example of class struggle, so that they could make the application to their present case. The production stressed a second point: in tilting against windmills, the hero was spending his strength against petty issues and wasting it in individual, and therefore futile, fighting.

It was arranged to have a children's dramatic group play before a similar club, and their presentation of the Grimm brothers' story, *The Musicians of Bremen*, childlike and simple as it had to be, used one tableau which no one failed to understand. In the story the animals make a pyramid, one on top of the other, with the burdened donkey at the bottom and the rooster airing his voice at the top of the pile. . . .

The professional productions of course cannot use even such round about devices as these. Actors—and there are many of them still left in Germany—who are working against the fascist dictatorship, cannot express themselves in their performances. They work to strengthen the opposition in the actors union, and to organize and radicalize the members of their own profession.

The cultural front is a political front. The theatres know it, and the police know it. The outstanding professional—one of the most famous actors in the country—who took leadership in the union opposition work, and who advised and helped the workers' theatres, was Hans Otto. He was enormously popular, and the Nazis tried to win him over. They offered him fine parts and tried to bribe him. But he continued the opposition work, and the Nazis murdered him.

Dangers? The dangers are the same as in any underground work. But the theatrical work is important. It goes on. After Hans Otto's murder, many theatre groups sprang up, named for him. And the measure of his work is that many successors had been trained. There is always danger. At first, after Hitler came to power, the workers' theatres lost many members, because they were careless, not sufficiently prepared for underground work. The secret police would discover a group. They would be arrested. Now they have learned. Very few are found out. At the same time, the police are becoming cleverer too. When a stool pigeon makes his way into a group you can't recognize him so quickly. He may meet you, sing and act with you, for a month—two months. Then some morning you are home in your bed and the police



Philip Reisman

come. You don't know too much about the people you work with. You don't know their addresses. It is better not to know. But because this is necessary you cannot check; the man you sit next to in a rehearsal may be a spy.

The workers' theatres were not well prepared for this. Until the last moment—until January, 1933—they had democratic illusions. *We could not conceive of fascism in Germany.* In Italy—yes, but in Germany it was not possible. And until about 1932 the left theatres had been very sectarian. They played before audiences who already understood their viewpoint, they shouted slogans, and were very well pleased when this audience applauded. In the last year before Hitler came, they began to understand that they should play wherever workers and middle-class people met. Then they began to approach the amateur groups with whom they now work, to go to the professionals for help and to ally themselves with the sympathetic professionals. They organized boycotts against pro-fascist plays and movies. They prepared vaudeville skits and offered them in the local movie houses.

WHAT about the exiles? Are they working? Yes, overtime. Many of the theatre exiles are in Czechoslovakia. The professionals are rousing the Czech actors to the danger of fascism there. They work in the union. There is also a left-wing professional theatre, Studio 34, in Prague. The workers' theatres are active among the German-speaking workers, of whom there are many. Both these groups aid the work in Germany; the professionals by collecting money and literature for the professionals in Germany, and the workers' theatres on their tours by rousing interest and funds among the German minorities in Bohemia in behalf of the factory workers in Germany.

In Prague other exiles are preparing a repertory for use in fascist countries. They are beginning to adopt the old plays of all countries, in somewhat the way that *Don Quixote* was treated in Germany. They avoid the mistake of "left-co-ordination," by which I mean, they do not force a new

content upon classical plays. They do not play Hamlet as a revolutionary, as a young intellectual against the bourgeoisie. They treat the play in its historical context, and try to discover what revolutionary import the play had when it was written, to understand it in relation to the philosophy, the economy, the class circumstances of its time.

"Herr Wittenberg," we asked, our heads swimming with comparisons between the work he described, and our own theatres here, "generalize from all this. What have the workers' theatres and the other left-wing theatres learned from working under fascism?"

"You know," he said, very earnestly, "they have had to improve their technique. Sometimes in the old days these theatres were satisfied with slogans, or they would talk their own special language of economics so that only their own members—and the real reactionaries—knew, or cared, what they were advocating. Now they have to use their wits. They have to learn what their audiences are suffering and thinking. They have to clarify their own political thinking, to define exactly what they want to say. And then they must find subtle and dramatic ways of saying it—so the artistic technique has to be refined too, and brought under full control. At the same time, as fascism stifles artistic and intellectual freedom in the legal theatres, many theatre workers and parts of the audience are turning to the left theatres. Fascism, you could say, in this way is helping us. Only I wish we had learned sooner. You must be wiser here."

Our Contributors

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH, who has been criticized sharply in the left-wing press for being anti-radical, has been active of late on the writer's commission investigating the Ohrbach strike. His drama of industrial crisis, *Panic*, will open at the Imperial Theatre, Friday evening March 15.

FREDERICH WOLF, the author of *Sailors of Cattaro*, is scheduled to arrive in New York on April 1 for a lecture tour, which will be sponsored by the New Theatre League. LEO T. HURWITZ notifies us that new members may apply for admission to *Nykino*—the film production division of the Theatre of Action at 42 E. 12th St. New York City. People experienced in some phase of movie work and writers interested in doing scenarios for short enacted films are needed especially. MARK MARVIN, formerly editor of *The Left* and co-editor of its successor *Left Front*, is now the national executive secretary of the New Theatre League.

ILYA EHRENBERG will contribute a brilliant article on the films and war to the April anti-war issue of *NEW THEATRE*. An article by one of the firmest conscientious objectors during the World War, H. W. L. DANA will describe how the theatre was used by the war lords of various lands.

In an effort to combat "jingo" propaganda for war in the drama and film, *NEW THEATRE* will print 15,000 copies of the April anti-war issue.

Why Improvise?

By MOLLY DAY THACHER

ALMOST every lively workers' and amateur acting company in the country is having a try at improvisation. They know that a popular—in a sense, a workers' theatre, the *Commedia dell'Arte*, existed for two centuries on improvisation alone. Troupes played to crowds as well as courts of every important ported themselves—and never had a formal play script until a stationary theatre was built out of their tradition and Molière added the playwright's contribution. To make town in Europe, entertained, satirized, sup-actors get up and *act* without depending on any set lines—it sounds like a magic key to acting and a way of filling out many of the bare plays with which the workers' theatres are contending.

Properly handled, improvisation can help in both these ways, and in others, but there is no "magic" result in the theatre without sober technical understanding. If a cast of actors decide to improvise and simply stand up in the rehearsal hall to begin, the results are likely to be discouraging. They will be self-conscious; they will waste their concentration on making up things to say; the scene they are creating will fall suddenly to pieces when they disagree about the circumstances they are inventing; and finally they will fall back on the worst tricks and habits that they used in projecting memorized lines.

If you are going to improvise, you have to know what you can expect to gain from working this way, and how, as a director, to set the problems for the actors. There are two fields in which improvisation has proved its value: in general training for actors, and in preparing productions. The practicability of using it to actually create or "write" plays remains to be tried (in spite of the recent *On the March* built up in this way by the Theatre of the New Workers School). It would be sheer theorizing to pretend to discuss this use of improvisation. Be sure of one thing, there is no short-cut to the creation of good plays, and no company will be able to improvise them until they have first learned how to improvise, and to use improvisation in rehearsing the scripts they have. They will also need someone, director or playwright, with a sure sense of dramatic structure.

The first thing improvisation can do is to give actors an understanding of what acting is. This sounds fatuous: but the fact is that for the last fifty years professional actors, imitated by amateurs, have relied more and more on the lines of the play until their whole aim has become to memorize lines, to say them convincingly with an indication of the appropriate emotion, to let the lines tell the story and convey the feeling and carry the whole burden of the play. Try stopping your ears and watching a conventional performance: it is made up of recitation of lines

and execution of stage directions. How much more interesting and varied a man is in real life, meeting every situation really for the first time. His "speeches" are only one part of his being. It is the actor's job to put that whole being on the stage.

AS a director you start work with the actor: it is only through *his* body and *his* feelings and *his* personality that you can show those of a character. Start then with the actors as themselves. Except with children or people of exceptional stage faith, don't ask them to jump into characters outside themselves. If they have not improvised before, start them with a simple situation and let them play themselves. They are going home from work—their own jobs—on the subway. They are strangers to each other. The train stops between stations. (You will have to give them a signal for any external event like this.) The train waits and waits there. Let the improvisation run on fifteen or twenty minutes. *The problem for the actors is never "to think of the right things to say."* If they are doing that, they are outside the situation, and cannot believe in it. Their concentration should be on the place, the subway, the movement of the train, and on the activities they are engaged in there, reading evening papers, doing home-work, looking at the advertisements, planning the marketing. When the train stops, their activity will become, more or less gradually, to find out what is wrong. The best actor may be the one who does not speak at all.

One difficulty will arise: someone will shriek, "There's a fire!" The other actors will decide they don't want to have a fire in the scene: they will pretend they didn't hear him, or they'll say (as actors), "No, there isn't." If they are really inside the scene, this sort of conflict won't come up. They may take up the idea of fire, begin to see and smell it themselves, or they may decide the man has a case of nerves, and they will quiet him to avoid panic, but it will be a reaction within the circumstances.

If you want to plan for more variety in the scene, make one actor the guard. Don't ask him to characterize—*He himself* has gotten a job as a subway guard. Take him aside before the improvisation begins and tell him at a certain point to come in and announce that there is no danger but that they will have to stay there all night—or that there *is* a fire. In this case the people will naturally believe in the fire.

When the actors are able to play this kind of scene, begin giving them circumstances and actions which demand more of their imaginations, and add dramatic interest. Tell one he is on his way home from two weeks in the hospital; a strike leader is going to a meeting with important infor-

mation; another is a detective; another has to get home to a baby; a newsboy; a blind panhandler; a pickpocket. Give each one a clearly stated simple line of action: to sell the *NEW THEATRE*, to arrange the agenda for the meeting, to shadow the striker, etc. Give them each a second action after the car stops, or let their second beat of activity come naturally, in the circumstances, out of the first.

Never give the actors too many instructions before they start. The more you describe the situation, the more you will confuse them. They will begin trying to remember and indicate everything you have told them. They should learn to use an improvisation itself to find out about the circumstances of the scene, and who the other people are. If one of them wants to know, let him ask his neighbor for the time, or the date on his paper, or whether they are on an up-or down-town train.

Group improvisations like this are good because they keep the whole company working. But they are helpful only if the director can watch closely enough to give individual criticism after it is over.

TRY also improvisations using two or three people, so that the rest can watch. For example, as an exercise to teach the playing of actions, a scene in which the "lines" will not express the actions directly. A Home Relief investigator is taking routine information about an applicant. Then what they say will deal chiefly with the information demanded in the blank she fills out. But if you tell the applicant that he is a reporter looking for material for a story on the city agencies, then his action is to find out all he can about the investigator and the procedure. If the investigator is tired, then her action may be to finish with the man as fast as she can; or if she is trying to make good on the job, her actions may be to find out if the man is telling the truth. If the actions are played, the audience will sense them, even though they may not be able to tell from this scene alone that the man is a reporter.

This sort of work will help the actor's imagination, free him of self-consciousness, stimulate him to an awareness of his surroundings in a scene, suggest "business" to him, give him a real—not only an intellectual—understanding of words in relation to action. It will also give him enough training in improvisation to be able to use it in the preparation of plays.

Why improvise when you already have the lines? For various reasons, according to the needs of the director. Specific problems are isolated this way. For instance, it may help an actor to understand the nature of a scene or a relationship. Take *God's In His Heaven*. A boy comes back to his home after months on the road. He does a lot of

talking about the tough life he has been living and he brings an animosity for his parents because they are like the people who have injured him. Better than any amount of talk or reading about panhandling and vagrancy laws, would be an improvisation in which he comes into a strange town and begs for handouts and is refused. Let the actors who play his father and mother be the ones who turn him down. Then he will come into the home scene with a real, not an intellectual, grudge against them.

Or one can go quite outside the characters of the play for an analogy of mood or feeling. The parents and the brothers and sister-in-law are trapped by economic forces, but they refuse to admit it. If you have trouble in getting this feeling from them, try some analogous situation where the mood is similar, but sharper and uncomplicated by other circumstances. The four of them are in the top story of the house, cut off by a flood. If a rescue party does not come in a few hours, the house will collapse into the water. The father refuses to admit such a possibility. His brother knows it is there, but is afraid to say so. Give them various routine actions to pass the time, but make the circumstances strong.

Then there is the improvisation of the scene of the play itself. Let the actors

read the play and familiarize themselves with it, without memorizing it. Block out the smaller sections of it so that they know what their actions are in each: to set the table, to apologize, to keep peace, to complain. Improvise to play those. Reread the play. When the scene is repeated after the actions are learned, add another element and work for that. Give particular circumstances (which the playwright may or may not have indicated) to build the characterization or mood that you want. One sister-in-law resents the other—give her the circumstances that the other spilled ink on her only good dress before dinner. She can't complain about it, but she can't forget it. A small thing like that may give the right relationship better than a long, psychological analysis.

Don't try to get actions and mood, and sense of place, and feeling, and character all at once. In one rehearsal, work to master one problem. Tell the actors clearly what you are working for. Put the improvisation clearly and simply without too much detail. When they are through, criticize on the basis of the problem you set, and not for other qualities. The test of a director is the penetration and exactness and helpfulness of his criticism. And always remember that the problem for the actors is never "to think of the right things to say" but to create and live a situation.

tremolo, sputters: "This man is a Communist!" the courtroom breaks into spontaneous laughter. The judge pounds with his gavel. He cannot stop the laughter—it is contagious, it is triumphant. It runs its course before proceedings can continue.

On the evening of the last day, Newton is defending himself. He stands before the jury, his broad shoulders contrasting strangely with his thin face. He has been charged with profanity and disorderly conduct towards a policeman. He begins quietly in his low clear voice, with the clipped definite speech of a Harvard graduate. His emotion rises and you hear it thundering behind the clipped tones, the quiet manner:

"I have the greatest contempt for policemen," he says. "I have had too much contact with their prevarication and cowardice to have anything for them but contempt. But I have sufficient words in my vocabulary, I believe, to express this contempt without resorting to profanity."

The jury sits up and looks startled. What is this? But some of them hate cops too. Some of them are impressed by the strangely-quiet nobility, the finely-tempered strength of this Negro Communist. In spite of the States Attorney's rabid speech, calling on the ancient hackneyed prejudices, in spite of all the legal traps, in spite of the howl of press, red squad, landlord and prosecutor for the maximum penalty—two hundred and costs, or four months in jail—the jury argues for three hours and brings forth a ten dollar fine. The case is appealed, and Newton is free.

Throughout the entire proceedings sits a young girl who is writing a play about this Newton case. The courtroom scene will be her third act. She is former vice-president of the University of Chicago Dramatic Association, now working on the Repertory Department of the New Theatre League. Writing into her play the sullen power of two hundred workers sitting in a courtroom for two days—the drama of class struggle ruthlessly outlined before the judge's bench—the excitement of personalities confronting each other over fundamental human values. Could there be a better school for playwrights than such a courtroom?

A CROWDED, smoky hall in the dingy end of Chicago's downtown. Cold, tired workers just returned from picketing the Evans Fur Company on State Street, nervously pacing the floor, joining in staccato conversation with their fellow members of the Fur Workers Industrial Union. A sudden burst of applause, as the door opens and twenty-five workers file in. They are just released from jail—arrested that morning on the picket line. The cops are picking them up as soon as they get in front of the shop—fifteen yesterday, twenty-five today. Last night two girl strikers were beaten up by members of the rival A. F. L. union at whose instigation the Evans Fur Company broke their contract with the industrial union. The chairman raps on the desk and calls the strikers to order.

The Living Theatre

By ALICE EVANS

IT'S not help we're asking. It's fighting together for the same things—homes and families. Irish or Negroes—it don't make any difference. If we're apart, we're licked—if we're together, we win. Are you with us?"

"Am Oi crazy, or is he talkin' good sense?"

With these words the Irish woman decides to help her Negro neighbors resist the eviction notice served them. She shouts across the back stairs. When her friends arrive with rolling pins, we know that the struggle is as good as won.

The Workers Laboratory Theatre is presenting *Eviction* at a community meeting in a settlement house across the street from the home of Herbert Newton, Negro Communist, and his wife, who have received an eviction notice for daring to live in an all-white building in the heart of Chicago's black belt. The audience is composed largely of Socialist members of the neighborhood Workers Committee on Unemployment. Many of them have agreed with the Irish woman that the problems of Negroes are "none of moi worry!" until they see her confronted by an eviction notice herself, tell the landlord:

"Oi'm only two months behoid in me rint. An' me auld man can't help it if he's out of a job. An' moi kids are goin' to have a roof over their heads—see!"

The lesson sinks home. The audience pledges to fight the Newton case, and makes a mental note to find the rolling pin.

The test comes two days later. A collection of shabby furniture is out on the street. A baby's crib—a washing machine—books and papers. The Newtons have been evicted. Although the white tenants in the building have signed a petition demanding that this Negro family stay, the landlord's greed for preserving property values persists.

Up and down the street go members of the Workers Laboratory Theatre. They knock from door to door, telling the neighbors. Soon sixty Negro and white workers are in front of the building. Four of the huskiest are chosen to break through the door—four others to carry in the washing machine. As dusk gathers, a silent procession, each carrying one piece of furniture, files carefully through the door. In five minutes the Newton family is at home.

Two weeks later, we are in the courtroom next to the largest jail in Chicago. At the trial of Herbert Newton, charged with disorderly conduct. Two hundred workers sit in the courtroom for two days—they do not talk, they scarcely move. They sit there—sullen and defiant and powerful. The judge knows they are there. The jury knows they are there. When the landlord, his face red, his voice

"While we are waiting for news from the committee that has gone to see the NRA board, we will have some entertainment from the workers' theatres."

A girl in a red sweater takes the floor: "The Chicago Workers Theatre will present *Perkins and Green*. You will meet someone you know in this sketch."

Frances Perkins, wearing a business-like bustle, and Bill Green, with the familiar cigar, enter arm in arm. To the jaunty tune of the Man on the Flying Trapeze, with clever dance steps, they introduce themselves:

"Oh I am Bill Green
Of strike-breaking fame
And I'm very clever
At that little game—"

The Fur Workers recognize the enemies they are dealing with even at the moment—as their committee meets the NRA board. Hisses, boos, and delighted laughter accompany the two through the sketch and as they swing off the stage in a final self-righteous fury of motion—"And we lead the strike gently away!"

"In the next play, you will meet someone else you know well—one of the strikers at the Evans Fur Company. The Workers Laboratory Theatre will present *Recruit*. Imagine yourselves in front of a U. S. Army Recruiting station."

A young Negro workers is confronted first by an army officer who tries to make him into a disciplined recruit, then by a girl striker, against whom the officer urges him to use his bayonet. For tense minutes he wavers, then he decides. He turns his gun upon the officer and drives him off the stage, to the delighted howls of the audience. He turns to the girl striker, who tells him:

"The Fur Workers are striking
For a Union of our own—
Down with the breaking of contracts
And the bosses' wage-cut song."

The young recruit is with her now:

"I'll stick with the workers
And fight with you.
I've got a gun in my hands
And I know what to do.
Against bosses' terror
This will come in fine.
So, let's go, people—
To the PICKET LINE!"

The audience is roaring and ready for the picket line itself. The program ends with a song, the audience joining in the chorus. "Write Me Out My Union Card" is begun, the resonant voice of the young Negro worker from the Laboratory Theatre leading the way:

"Oh, come with me
To the picket line
We'll stay there
Till the bosses sign

Time to fight those hunger blues away."

The whole room is singing now. And still singing as the theatre members, carrying their properties with them, quietly leave the hall.

* * *

THE tiny office of the New Theatre League that has become somehow a symbol of the creative fury of the young workers' theatre movement in Chicago. Nine people in four square feet of space—all trying to work. One typewriter pounding furiously away. From left to right, we have: A handsome middle-aged actor from the German professional stage who wants to get connected with the workers' theater; a studious-looking Negro who directs a South Side church group and wants a play—"They're still conservative, but interested in social problems;" a blonde young girl from the YWCA who wants a theatre group to perform for them; a young furniture worker, turned actor, discussing *Waiting For Lefty* with a girl who has tears in her eyes. She has just finished reading the play in NEW THEATRE and is eager to begin producing it. Here is the director of the Russian Dramatic Circle, formerly with the Moscow Art Theatre, with a manuscript under his arm. He has just written a play, *Human Aid Society*, and wants it translated. The organizer of the Fur Workers Union has come in. He wants to know why the theatre groups have stopped performing every day at the strike hall after the first week.

"Don't you have more than six programs

in your repertory? What would you do if a strike lasted three months? We need you there to keep up the strikers' spirits, and where are you?"

The organizer of the New Theatre League can only shake her head, and determine that we build our repertory.

Here is a tall young man who reports the formation of a theatre group at the University of Chicago, sponsored jointly by the National Student League and the League for Industrial Democracy. He is a Socialist, a former stock company actor, now writing his master's thesis, on "A Marxian Approach to the Theatre." Next to him is an excited young teacher with a proposal for the New Theatre League. He thinks we can arrange to have our theatre groups perform at the workers' education classes in the city. Thus we would reach the widest possible audience of non-revolutionary workers in every corner of the sprawling metropolis. In our excitement over this proposal, we forget that it is almost midnight and ten hours since we have eaten. We troop downstairs and next door, to our friends in the little Greek restaurant. We swap two NEW THEATRE magazines for two cups of coffee and four doughnuts and begin serious discussion of the Chicago theatre front.

Let Us Have Dance Critics

By EDNA OCKO

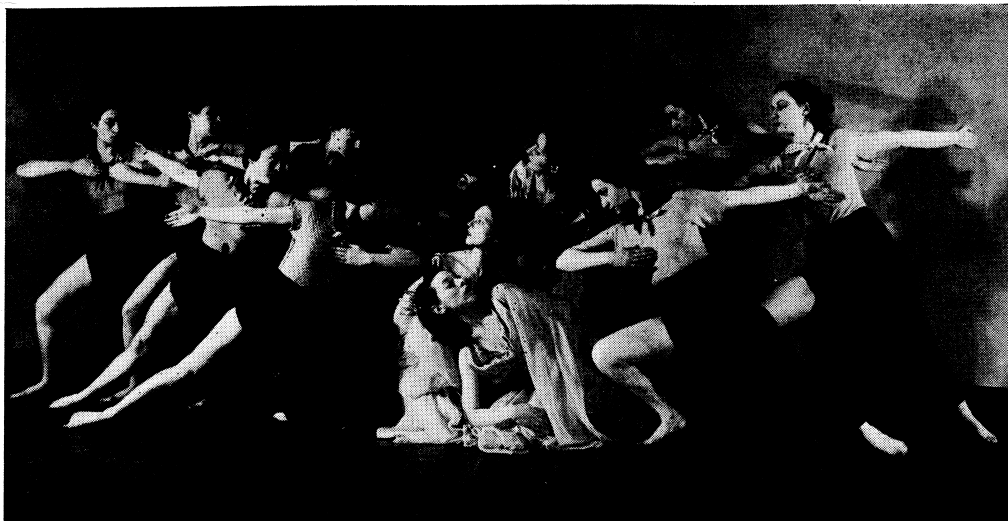
HEARST slides them in and out of professors' textbooks, Robert Garland unearths them while "Waiting for Lefty," they rear their ugly heads in three out of every five motion pictures, and the Messrs. Henry Gilfond and Ralph Taylor, under the generous aegis of the *Dance Observer*, have been trailing a terpsichorean red herring through the pages of the magazine with a pertinacity that should guarantee them the dance editorship of any Hearst newspaper in the country. Especially Henry Gilfond. This amiable elementary school teacher with epic poetry and an unprinted novel to his credit, entered the dance field with an impassioned plea for dance critics in the November issue of the *Dance Observer*. "Let us have dance critics," he cries, "vigorous critics. A vigorous art needs a vigorous criticism. Let us have dance critics."

This proved an open sesame. The next issue found him listed as a member of the Editorial Board with a meaningless article to his credit, *Dance, Definition, and Direction*, and a still more amazing review of the Workers Dance League solo recital. At this time Ralph Taylor, not to be outdone by the newcomer, chose his peculiar assortment of red-baiting to liven the pages of the magazine. And between the two, the modern dance was made safe for democracy and the New School series of dance recitals.

Let us begin, as Mr. Gilfond would

say, at the beginning. A year ago, the *Dance Observer* made its initial appearance. We quote from its first editorial: "Our sympathies will lie with those dancers whose expression is the result of a search for a form and content responsive to contemporary ideology." In the same issue, the Workers Dance League, just organized, is reviewed by Ralph Taylor. The League seemed to warrant encouragement: "The Workers Dance League as a whole projects a strong sense of enthusiasm and energy and we can look forward to the establishment of what may develop into a vital center of dance activity." One would be led to suspect that were this League to become the vital center, none would be happier than Ralph Taylor. Alas! This was not to be; as the League grew stronger, Mr. Taylor felt a little worried; he decided the little red herring needed an airing. In reviewing a recital of Tamiris, therefore, he ridicules the "mock heroics of our 'militant proletarians,'" and the opening gun is fired.

In the December issue, he and Henry Gilfond, evolve ways and means of discrediting the artistic standards of the revolutionary dance movement. Ralph Taylor is extremely effective; at least he writes English, and his comments are innocently interjected in reviews of other dances. He uses the work of the League as touchstone for all that is tasteless or trivial. For instance, when speaking of Martha Graham's *American Provincials*, he finds that "beside



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Tamiris Group, Workers Dance League Recital, Radio City, February 17.

this caustic brew, mother-liquor of worm-wood and acid, the potions of our dogma-bound social satirists become as pallid pink tea." In his review of Ted Shawn, a discussion of literal symbols in the dance versus pantomimic ones, leads him to say, "Unconfused by the various species of herrings (mostly of the vivid Red Variety) being dragged across the current controversies about dancing versus propaganda charades, the dancer can perceive what happens when movement gives way to pantomime." Farther on in the review, entirely unsolicited, mind you, he grows "reminiscent of the puerilities of the proletarian propagandists." All this is not by way of establishing his validity as a dance critic: he has done good work in a barren field, no doubt, but despite his devotion to the art of the dance, his viciousness lays him open to an accusation of unwarranted and unnecessary red-baiting.

With all due humility, we read Henry Gilfond, and with that same humility admit defeat. He just doesn't make sense. For examples we quote two excerpts from his piece *Dance, Definition and Direction*: "It follows in the order of things that the ideology of an Art will reflect and be reflected in its language; then the ideology of the Dance is an admixture and a confusion, and the Art itself cannot emerge healthy, being confounded in its beginning and its birth, which is the culmination of the seedling which is the idea" and "Score needs defining. Composition needs defining. Dancer needs defining. First, in the language of a renaissance art, the need is to define its name. . . ." Lest we misunderstand, he hastens to explain, "The purpose of this article has been, thus far, to denude, to remove as much as possible, extraneous matter that to date has paraded under mistaken comprehension and served only to confuse a fuller understanding of the art."

NO clearer picture of artistic and critical befuddlement could be shown than in his review (sic!) of the solo recital of

November 25. After deciding that "applause is not always a measure of merit" (Mr. Gilfond repeatedly states a belief that dance audiences are generally "dull" or stupid), he is sure that the acclaim given these dancers was not for their good qualities. One cannot tell just how he ascertains why the audience applauds; he does say that "pantomime will draw the greater acclaim; the audience is limited. The dancer must draw the line."

Occasionally he gets a little mixed up. Jane Dudley on one line "has nothing to say"; two sentences later he discovers "there is much the dancer has yet to say." He believes that Miriam Blecher, will not be able to dance until "hunger reaches her belly." Sophie Maslow's dance "was a clever reduction of the Russian ballet to a two dimensional pattern," whatever that means. He misuses the word "counterpoint" and establishes a point exactly opposite to his original meaning.

A confused Mr. Gilfond is utterly harmless; his pointlessness lowers the literary and critical standards of the *Observer*, but in no way is he actually dangerous. In the January 1935 issue of the publication, however, a year since the issuance of the first editorial, an unsigned article appeared. It is at this point that we wish to call to the attention of the *Dance Observer* the fact that they have sanctioned the appearance of an article as disruptive to an organization as it is insulting to its members.

Under guise of a discussion of the series of dance recitals sponsored by the New School of Social Research, Mr. Gilfond, for he is the author, lists three difficulties that have handicapped dancers procuring a hearing. The cost of a recital, the need to give full-length programs and finally "what touches on sense and sensibilities." "We," I quote, "must pry into approach and convictions." Because, "There has been a swift movement amounting almost to flight on the part of the young dancers into the ranks of the various workers' dance movements with varying shades of red and pink at their mast-

heads. They are welcomed, offered students, studios, encouraged by mass approval, mass acclaim, and given the concert stage," because, "it was the only theatre and the only audience open to them" they should not be criticized. They were desperate. Calling the alliance of dancers with the revolutionary movement an "escapist" gesture, even while admitting there are some dancers "who are basically tied up with the proletarian movement, with the proletarian ideology, and whose dancing is the expression of profound conviction," he discovers "too many ill-placed names, too many individuals, young, who have neither the background nor the understanding of their associates to create other than superficial works on an unfamiliar plane." Granted that the sincere revolutionary dancer will not quit the ranks of the revolutionary dance movement, whom does Mr. Gilfond want for the New School Series?—the dancers "without background"? "without understanding"? He is welcome to those dancers; we should like to know which lists he perused containing so many "ill-placed" names.

WE wonder exactly how much of Mr. Gilfond's personal confusion characterizes the editorial policies of the *Dance Observer*. If he represents them, the magazine is guilty of hostility to an organization which in its way is making a genuine contribution to the modern dance. At the same time, the *Dance Observer* is casting an inexcusable slur on the honesty and integrity of the very dancers it might want to recruit for the New School programs.

Miss Sophia Delza, organizer of the series, denies emphatically that she had any such cleavage in mind. The Workers Dance League is also in receipt of a letter from Paul Love which we are at liberty to quote. It says in part: "The unfortunate wording of the editorial has nothing whatever to do with the actual program we are attempting to build in the eight concerts at our disposal. . . . I am ready to say publicly, unpublicly, privately or however, that that purpose (to present a cross-section of the modern dance), will be sadly unfulfilled if your work is not a good part of it. . . ."

Someone should put Mr. Gilfond and the rest of the Editorial Board who shared the responsibility for that article with him to rights. If the *Dance Observer* is fighting for recognition of the modern dance, is desirous of strengthening a dance front and extending a dance audience, then it will at all times encourage a United Front with those organizations who subscribe to these beliefs. Splitting the camp of the modern dance, just when all forces are needed to achieve a common goal, is poor strategy.

In the meantime, all dancers in the Workers Dance League are urged to participate in the series, not as individual members, but as representatives of the League, so that the New School audiences will see the sincerity, the conviction, and the high artistic quality of revolutionary dancers.



Tamiris Group, Workers Dance League Recital, Radio City, February 17.

Siskind

Recording Dance Scripts

By ELISE HAROLD

FREQUENTLY, in contemporary dance discussions, it has been remarked that the dance alone lacks the forms of permanence on which the very existence of all other arts is predictable. In reply, it has been pointed out that the dance as an art is in its infancy and has not yet had an opportunity to develop in this respect. Certainly it would seem that some of the arts, particularly the visual arts, demanded and achieved objective permanence earlier than music, literature or the dance. These others, however, did have one medium, that of folk lore, by which they were handed down from generation to generation, and eventually evolved a language by which they too might be recorded. In the case of the dance, this transition takes place considerably later than in all other arts. At a time when literature and music had a long history behind them, the dance was still being perpetuated by folkways.

It was the ballet which first became sufficiently crystallized as an art form to lay the foundations for the transcriptions of dance "steps" and gestures. The language of the ballet is chiefly verbal, or literal—the various movements are characterized by words or phrases. That this is possible is due to the highly formalized and consciously limited movement vocabulary of the classical ballet.

It is necessary to establish a means of recording, for the creator, and for other dancers now and in the future, the significant dance compositions of today. A simple, exact and comprehensive system of dance transcription not only would promote a broader acquaintance and understanding upon the part of a vast and potential audience, but would contribute largely to the growth of the young student of the dance in the field of original composition.

Rudolf von Laban alone among modern dancers either here or abroad has succeeded in devising a system of dance annotation to which he gave the term dance script. Unfortunately all of Laban's principles and theories have not been translated into English, so that the average American dancer has had no opportunity to apply his contributions in this field. The writer's knowledge of the details of the Laban script is not sufficiently complete to warrant a criticism of its effectiveness, but that it is scientific in its analysis and presentation is generally admitted. Generally too, it is claimed that it is excessively complex, that it is not absolutely comprehensive. Undoubtedly it requires intensive study—a particularly laborious application which we might expect of an occasional dance director or choreographer, but hardly of any great number of dancers. And, since one of the outstanding characteristics of the modern dance is the fusion of choreographer and

performer, this problem is a pertinent one.

With the Laban script at present unavailable to the American dancer, what can be done in this direction independently? The fact that no common system of annotation has thus far been attempted is due to the divergent schools and frequently inchoate state of the modern dance in this country. Although certain schools of the dance have already or are in the process of evolving clearly formed principles and qualities, the differences between their styles is tremendous. In the ballet the basic approach was that of an arrangement of already existing and rigidly defined movements to present objectively an ideal or emotional or functional concept; in the modern dance, movements or "steps" are created out of a mental or emotional or functional state in the dancer, subjectively, and theoretically at least, for the first time at every creation of a new composition. This method results not only in different "steps," but in different and more indefinable bodily conditions of tensions, contraction, expansion, vibration, swing, and even in such elusive qualities as activity or passivity—as they are named by various schools. Finally in practically all cases, movement takes its source from the inner impulses of the torso, rather than from the comparatively simple and more immediately visible gestures of the extremities upon which the dance vocabulary of the classic ballet was dependent.

NUMEROUS as these difficulties may be, they are not insurmountable, and the need is such that some attempts should be made to overcome them.

As an initial approach, let us outline the exact nature of the problems presented. In the recording of a dance for the purpose not only of recalling its details to its creator, but for dissemination and the building up of a dance repertoire available for dancers and dance groups other than the originators, certain general needs must be comprehended.

In any general consideration we can make the following analysis of the components of dance composition: theme, atmosphere, style, what is commonly called "floor pattern," the less well grasped elements of gesture pattern, and finally the musical correlation of the dance with its accompaniment. We shall also consider the extremely varied realm of dynamics, including such matters as the emotional and functional intensity curves of a dance, its "pulse" in tension, flow and static moments.

Of these, the first three—the theme, the atmosphere, and the style of the composition—can probably be defined by means of description, illustration and analogy. Of the mechanical elements, those of floor pattern and of accompaniment are comparatively simple to record. Floor pattern

can be reproduced exactly according to scale, somewhat in the manner of an architect's floor plan—and it is worthy of the same nicety and proportion. Many dancers would profit considerably if they would make a practice for their own enlightenment of setting down the floor space and design of each of their dances, and of judging by this means something of their intention, proportion and clarity.

The problems of recording dance accompaniment have been almost entirely solved by the use of the conventional musical system of annotation. Even in the cases of accompaniment by primitive percussive instruments it is possible to record tempo and meter exactly and to indicate at least to its nearest equivalent their tone values and pitch.

This leaves the most difficult elements—those of gesture and of what we call dynamics, still to be considered. Gesture, if it is to be accurately transcribed, must represent the following elements: Purpose, body division (whether head, torso, or extremities, etc.), mechanics or underlying muscle or joint function, direction, level, and volume. Accents, crescendi, tempi, and rests can, of course, all be indicated by musical symbols.

WHETHER the staff system can be adapted in a way similar to the Laban annotation—vertical staves with lines and spaces allotted to head, right and left feet, torso, and right and left arms is questionable. Possibly a combination of the staff, used for the extremities only, and of small action figures for visualization of the whole movement would prove more concrete and versatile.

In addition to such a form of code notation there will undoubtedly develop with time a verbal terminology comparable to that of the ballet by which a dance script might be supplemented. This is particularly true of states or conditions of dance dynamics. Turns in place, "circles without changing front," are evidences of such an embryo terminology in the Wigman method. It is interesting to observe that these more or less set forms have to do in this case with space relations—a primary preoccupation in the modern dance—rather than with leg or arm gesture as in the ballet. There are numerous other examples of this sort both in this and in other modern methods, and a thorough and painstaking compilation of terms used by the leading modern dancers would probably surprise us by its scope.

Too much remains to be accomplished in this field to permit a more explicit analysis without specific examples and a trial application of the above suggestions to already existing dance compositions. By presenting the need, and outlining the major problems involved, it is hoped that this will serve at least as an introductory guide and stimulus toward their eventual solution. Works of too fine a calibre are being created in our very midst to allow them heedlessly to become lost to the people at large and to the dancers of the future.



Time Marches Where?

By RAY LUDLOW and EVA GOLDBECK

EARLY last December, the publishers of *Fortune*, the \$1.00-a-month "class" magazine, the *Time*, the glib and increasingly reactionary news weekly, capitalized on the success of their two-year old radio feature by announcing a newsreel of the same name. The film was heralded as an attempt to "dig into and root out the significance of the story; to give the hidden beginnings, the play-by-play developments, the endings" of contemporary events. Last month in key theatres throughout the land, accompanied by feverish devices of local press agents, *The March of Time* paraded for the first time on the silver screen. In New Orleans students of the Tulane School of Journalism enjoyed previews; in Indianapolis Mayor Kern broadcast words of comment from the lobby of the Palace.

Addressed primarily to middleclass movers who may still be moved right or left politically, *The March of Time* makes a good show and seems likely to goosestep right to the head of the newsreel army. Fooling people with the film is particularly easy. We instinctively believe what we see, and besides we have been taught that the camera eye ("reliable as a machine") give an "objective" view of "facts." A year of experimentation, \$10,000 spent in production a costly promotion schedule, and sinemagoers were offered twenty minutes of expert photography which capitalized on the loopholes in the notion that "facts are facts." The "new kind of film journalism" can do this more ingeniously than the ordinary newsreels; it isn't mere flash reporting—it reconstructs a story. A true story! If you wonder what is fact and what is fiction, you can check up on the news—and the story part is just to make it more

interesting. Everybody knows that things are a little different in a story; art is an interpretation of life. One a month *The March of Time* interprets current history for you . . . Is that propaganda? That is that art of it.

Its work is protected by the "frank" admission that it "arranges" facts—and by the spectators' failure to realize that an "arrangements" of "facts", or of bona fide pictures of facts, in a special sequence can add up to something that has nothing to do with the truth. Add the calm authoritative voice of the commentator telling the audience how to take the "facts," and the device of "reconstructing" any "facts" the cameraman happened to miss, and the possibilities of distortion are limitless. (The propaganda factories of the last war photographed arrangements of corpses, experimented with double exposures, finished off with blood-curdling captions. Their methods were primitive compared to those now being developed by the newsreel companies).

As current history for January, *Time* offered:

Educational Feature. Showing how Jack and Charlie got away with it in the speak-easy days. "Business is better than ever now" within the law. Moral: You're better off if you mind your Uncle Sam, whose favorite nephew is pulling prosperity around the corner. Happy days! Method: Frankly a staged sequence. Omission: No explanation of why the police failed to spot the boys in Prohibition days.

World Problems. A discerning dramatization of London's traffic problems. A fatherly, common-sense, government re-

minds you to be careful. (Minister of Safety Hore-Belisha may have let himself be filmed in this studio-made feature, but in general when identifiable people appear, cuts are taken from actual newsreels and remounted).

Class Collaboration. Fred Perkins, small manufacturer of batteries in York, Pa., can't pay his men more than 25c per hour, less than the Code wage. "How about, men?" "We're with you, Fred! We know what you're up against!" Fred tells Mrs. Perkins, getting a meal in her Sunday best, that he has to go to jail because he can't pay the \$5,000 fine. Elaborately rehearsed by the cinematakers, he demonstrates how he ran his shop before the NRA cracked down.

Big Navy Boost. Big guns—in Japan. Japan broke up naval conference. Wilson (cut from an old newsreel) refused to permit a racial and national equality clause to be written into the Versailles Treaty. Hearst press propaganda (rack at a competitor) offended Japan. (Note the impossibility of photographing "Japan" being "offended," and you see how much leeway is given the commentator). The leader of the milder faction in the Japanese government awaits death. (Pictures of his house in Okitsu, pictures of the man, himself, dubbed in Manhattan.) Japanese masses flowtowing, bowing like heads of wheat in an invisible wind—to nothing one can see until the next shot, which shows the Emperor, the war lord, riding up to—another shot, the Great Wall of China. The whole feature is a study in patches of rather neutral shots, slung together to spell Yellow Peril and to incite armament races. Left out of the picture: the fine resistance put up by the tax ridden Japanese population who are being pauperized like American workers to pay for the armaments demanded by a capitalist clique.

Comedy Touch. (with a jingoist moral) Moe Buxbaum, fined for speeding in a French resort town, insists his fine be counted against the War Debt to the U.S.

Gatti-Casazza sits in the wings watching his last opening at Manhattan's culture palace the Metropolitan Opera House . . . and old man alone with his memories . . . a melancholy figure, incidentally, because he was willing to take part in this sob-art story.

Topics omitted in favor of the above: National Unemployment meets with a wider representation of the American people than the government House; California capitalists invoke old syndicalism law against agricultural workers organizing against unbearable conditions; department store workers discover they are workers organizing against unbearable conditions and carry on successful strikes for the first time; and all the thousand "human interests" stories of the starving and the jobless and the cheated, of the exposures of plans for fascist mobilization by Wall Street figures, of Hearst's sudden spurt of anti-Soviet activities, of Hitler's extension of Nazi activities in surrounding countries, following the taking back of the Saar.



CATHOLIC CHURCH

LEAGUE OF DECENTY

CENSOR

W. P. A.



Awake and Sing

By MARY VIRGINIA FARMER

AWAKE AND SING! by Clifford Odets of the Group Theatre Acting Company opened at the Belasco on February 19th. It has been heralded as a play about a Jewish family in the Bronx. It is about them and about a great deal more. What that wider and deeper content is you have to feel out for yourself for the most part . . . the author is not explicit about it . . . but the ground for its realization is there. *Awake and Sing* ye that dwell in dust . . . thus the prophet Isaiah in his time . . . and in ours, an awakened young artist to those still struggling blindly in the dust that he has left behind him. Awake, shake off the dust of the old greeds, the old fears, the old compulsions which are not yours and which tie you into petty slavery to a family, to an obsolete standard of accomplishment and being, to an engulfing economic system . . . and not alone awake, not alone sing the vitality of the life that you know to be in yourself, but throw that vitality knowingly into action that shall make a future for its functioning. We have only the merest hint of that forecast in the play . . . the line beyond its curtain is not very strong or very clear, but it is there for us to build on for ourselves and for the playwright to build his next play upon, in more unmistakable terms. For I believe that in his next play, we will recognize Clifford Odets as the leading revolutionary playwright in America.

In conventional terms the play has little story or formal structure. It does not proceed according to logical sequences or a melodic line of development, but according to the ebb and flow of feeling and need in its people who give themselves to you in the most minutely modern idiom, highly colored, sharply accented, completely of their kind and condition, yet warmly personal as well, and packed with life. In one sentence a person reveals his most secret being, in another sentence a whole state of mind is brought to light. So idiomatic, so brassy, is most of this talk that in the script it has deceived some people into thinking it to be wise-crack dialogue. Full of humor it is, but it is the humor of emotion and character thrown against situation, never the deliberate fun of the gagster. In the hands of the wrong actors or producer it could doubtless take on that brittle quality. The Group people know what it is and what to do with it.

The play presents technical problems to the director and the actors not only in this special sort of talk, but also in its structure in which the relations and connections of scene and feeling and character are often hidden and subtle, arrived at unexpectedly without the usually demanded preparation. The handling of this harmonic aspect of the play is not always expert. It calls for an

almost uncanny sensitivity in timing, in the feeling for the pulsation in all the signs of the music as well as the notes, in the ability to prognosticate in the key now being played, the tone of the key to which we change in another moment. The task is perfectly accomplished in places, messily in others. Its worst moment is the very opening of the play, one of its best, ten minutes later, and the largest and best stretch of accomplishment in the second act. Otherwise, as a whole I like Harold Clurman's direction of the play, though I am driven to wonder again as I have in the past why it is that certain of the fundamentals on which the Group technique is supposed to be most soundly based seems to be so often lacking in some of the performances and direction . . . the matter of the sheer talking quality of the line, the matter of the relation of character to activities and to objects.

There are two performances in this production which are as fine acting as we will any of us ever see. Morris Carnovsky's work as the grandfather whose rebellion against the life of his class led him in his youth only as far as those Marxian works of which he had time to cut the pages, and in his age to a suicide which is designed to free his grandson for a stronger rebellion, is the best of his career. It is almost an impertinence to praise such a performance, so complete, so perfectly judged and balanced, so authentic in every detail of character, feeling and action. Sanford Meisner's performance as a young man lately come to America and quickly trapped into a marriage with the daughter to save the family's face, is almost as good . . . not so rich, not so mature, but in its own area as fine. Both these performances have all the dimensions of the living art of the actor and are of such a quality of reality that they have an essential style of their own and in another moment could present you with that style as a thing in itself. I have never before seen such a proof of my belief that the truest and most powerful style is founded first upon a complete realization of truth of feeling and dimension of character.

Luther Adler gives a continuously effective and interesting performance. Phoebe Brand plays with her usual charm and more than her usual energy. Jules Garfield, playing his first long part with the Group, gives us work which has depth, purity and strength. Stella Adler was satisfactory to me as the mother only in the second act where for the most part I found her excellent. I did not feel in her the necessary authenticity of character and background. She was not busy enough, not enough driven, not broad enough. There was not enough of sink and baby-carriage and furniture polish and grocery accounts implicit in her relationships, her compul-

sions, her emotional outbursts. They seemed creations of the moment rather than out of a realization of a complete person. Art Smith's performance I cannot hold against him. It seems to me the fault of a hopeless piece of casting. J. Edward Bromberg plays the business man uncle in the family, the symbol of success, toward the last a little tarnished by an uncontrollable strike among his employees, and gives us a somewhat broader portrait than is his wont, yet solid, rich and believable. Roman Bohnen, in two minutes and three lines, brought a whole character to life for us, as true and fine within its own range as any other good performance around him.

The end of the play seems to me wrong and bad in the tone of its performance. It is not strong in its writing and it is played with a strange and unacceptable tone of sweetness and light. This is particularly wrong I feel for the mood of the departure of the daughter and her former racketeer lover for the warm anodynes of Cuba, and it is one of the elements which makes the boy's forecast of his future . . . Marx out of the library into the shop and everything wonderful from then on, seem immature, not as a part of character, but as a fault of craft in author and director.

Reviews

PPOINT VALAINE, by Noel Coward, is a triangle play laid on a fashionable island-resort in the tropics. Granting the sex play a place in the theatre, its value depends, obviously, on its treatment. We are shown three characters: Linda Valaine (Lynn Fontanne), a glamorous female hotel keeper; Stefan (Alfred Lunt), her animal-like lover and head waiter; and Martin Welford (Louis Hayward), feverish aviator representing youth rampant and undefiled. In the shape of the all-wise and somewhat maternal novelist, Mortimer Quinn (Osgood Perkins), Mr. Coward comments on his three concoctions and sentimentalizes over the sordidity of their relationships. Quinn's dialogue has the familiar Coward cackle, as he pecks at the inevitable "dull people" who form the play's social milieu. The play is brilliantly staged and well acted. In a series of ingeniously arranged "curtains," the dramatic potentialities of the situation are indicated, but, by a triumph of British understatement, never written. The final reckoning is postponed until the "big scene" which, in spite of the heroic efforts of the Lunts, never comes off. Emotionally, the play is a dud.

The fault lies in the hollowness of the characterizations. Mr. Coward does not know his people from the inside. He judges them by externalities. If they are uncouth, and irritating to his sensitive nature, he holds his nose and dashes off a clever caricature. He tells the ladies of the matinee audience that Linda Valaine is a woman capable of living with a *Caliban* for years on end, as a concession to her "baser nature," but who yearns to "get

away from it all," a woman with some real aspirations . . . to see something of the world besides Paris and Point Valaine. (What inner resources of spirit!) Stefan is a man with an unsavory past. It is actually hinted that he was once a coal miner, who has washed up. But, oddly enough for a cave-man, he is aware of his own loathsomeness, and is content to revenge himself on the young aviator who has usurped his place by revealing himself as Linda's lover. The boy is rendered speechless at this discovery, conveniently for Mr. Coward, and plods across the stage in what we are to suppose is a state of horror beyond words. Stefan then flatters the ladies by killing himself for love. The vividness of Alfred Lunt's wrist-slicing act almost convinced us that he was playing a real character.

What it comes down to is that Noel Coward is unable to understand the terror and fascination and beauty necessary to a strong physical relationship. Instead, he forces his own disgust on his three characters, thereby robbing them of their identity as individuals. If these had been real people, drama would have resulted, instead of sophisticated hokum.

—RICHARD HUMPHREYS

NOAH is not one of the "shows for sale." It is an exercise in theatre crafts. It is the legend of the Ark rewritten by a tender sophisticate, half to oblige the Compagnie de Quinze who wanted to experiment with mood and movement and a little music in the theatre, half to illuminate through the naive figures of the old legend certain delicate but not very strong feelings about human nature. The translator has worked with relish for the right phrase and the right effect. The animal's masks by Bufano are charming and uncannily expressive, the sets pleasant. One can only guess what the cast might have done with the play if they, like the French company for whom it was written, had been used to playing together and had had time to find a plan of acting to suit the play. As was proved earlier this season by *Within the Gates*, four weeks with a heterogeneous cast is no set-up for achieving a new production method. Pierre Fresnay (who created the Noah part for Copeau) plays with great sureness and aliveness and sympathy, turning the production into a personal triumph. The direction is very commonplace, except for

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(except for the fact that the movement is more contemporary) is practically as useless as the teaching of the older forms.

In two and a half years of experimentation with the actors of the Group Theatre I have been working toward a method of body training based upon the Modern Dance but relating directly to actors' problems.

FIRST, the actor must learn that he has a body. Although the Modern Dance has as its base emotionally motivated movement, if we attempt to teach the actor any specific movement that derives from a specific emotion, we are in danger of setting a pattern for the expression of a given feeling. Where I begin with the actor is with a purely physical technique that teaches him to isolate the various parts of the body and to control them. He learns that each movement must be fulfilled, completed, and never simply indicated. For example, the raising of one's arm from the side to a position overhead can be done in two ways. One is simply to take the arm from its low position and place it in its high one: indication. The other way is, by full concentration on this simple activity, pressing up through space, to create a full aliveness throughout the movement. Also, when one part of the body is being used no other part is dead or static. This does not mean that every part of the body is constantly and violently in motion, but, on the premise that the maximum amount of movement is created by two opposing activities, each movement is accompanied by a counter-movement. The opposing movement is rarely seen, but the life of the movement is stronger because the pull exists. Say that the movement is to sink the knees to the floor keeping a straight spine: the upper part of the body instead of merely going down, is at the same time pulling up. One of the proofs that this approach to movement is organic, is that men—who invariably resist any falsification in dancing, as effeminate—participate without reservations in the work.

The actor must not only be controlled and strong. He must also be rhythmical, flexible, dynamic, relaxed. And since he must be these things in terms of today, many of the exercises derive from present-day activities such as football, prize fighting, tennis, and workers' activities. But although there are definite exercises for the muscular understanding of the qualities mentioned above, it is only in their application through the playing of actions, that is, in carrying out a given activity within a given circumstance that the actor comes to understand concretely their relation to his stage work.

A dancer's rhythm, for instance, is not an actor's. The former derives from the emotion and the content of the dance and is built up in a more or less arbitrary sequence. The actor's rhythm always comes out of the play, the simple action which he has to perform and the given circumstances surrounding it. For example, the actor has to cross the width of the

The Dance And Acting

By TAMIRIS

MOVEMENT as the body of theatre has vanished, leaving only the pattern of words, which has come to be considered the whole of the theatre. Yet the mime and dance were an organic part of the theatres of antiquity and of the Oriental theatres. In the theatre of the Middle Ages and the *Commedia dell'Arte* they told the story of the play, supplemented when necessary by words. Our representational theatre, especially that of the Post-War period with its emphasis on psychological intricacies, has tended to rely upon the script alone, instead of utilizing action and visualization to give it substance and meaning.

Meyerhold has said, "Words are the design upon the outline of movement. We must put the body back." This is true of our new material which is dealing less with purely individualized and psychologized situations, and more with active social forces which impel individuals and masses into action. The new theatres are discovering that their best hold on their audiences is a presentation that is physically alive. But the older type of script, too, is badly in need of this approach. Movement can amplify, explain, comment upon, and give life to whatever is stated in words. It must also be used rightly in those significant passages where there are no words.

Among many other things, we must have body training for the actor. There have been attempts to teach the actor how

to dance and how to move. This is a sign of health, but the problem now is to relate the technique and approach of the dance to the actor, so that they become a usable part of his equipment. The Ballet and the Interpretive Dance have given him little more than the knowledge that these forms are complete in themselves and lead him nowhere. Say he learned to perform a perfect *pas-de-bourree* or *entre-chat* or succeeded in flitting across the stage as lightly as a bubble,—unless he has to play a dancer of a particular school, how can he utilize this training? The highly developed and crystallized form of the Ballet is a thing apart, without roots in society today, without any immediate reason (in stimulus or emotion) for functioning. The Interpretive Dance, with its emphasis on music, has little relation to an actor's problem.

Here is where the Modern Dance can make its contribution. It is basically a creative form. It springs from an emotional need to express certain phenomena that can best be expressed in terms of movement; its creative process, and the laws behind the forms which it evolves are the same as those which underly all other forms of expression.

But there is also a possibility of misusing the Modern Dance in its application to the theatre. If the emphasis in the teaching is on the form, with its own dynamic laws, its own logic, its own drama, then it is open to the same criticism, and

The New Plays

New Masses-New Theatre Prize Winners

By HERBERT KLINE

stage, open a door and exit through it. The rhythm comes out of the simple activity of leaving the room, and the circumstance, perhaps that he hears someone coming and does not want to be seen, perhaps that he is going to take part in a demonstration. The reason for the physical activity will color it. Arbitrary assignment of rhythm on the other hand will falsify the scene: the actor's deciding that here he goes slow and here he goes fast.

Again, the space in which an actor usually functions is not the free space of the dancer, but is broken up by properties and scenery. Therefore, in the training I have made constant use of all sorts of objects: chairs, tables, brooms, balls, glasses, bottles. Suppose an actor has to play a scene of exhilaration in a Victorian set crowded with furniture, and still give a sense of space and freedom. He must be trained so that he will be able to adjust himself to the objects. In addition, his rhythm, dictated by his simple action, must be maintained and communicated to whatever objects he handles. A man in an hilarious mood has to pour drinks from a keg of applejack. If the weight and bulk of the keg break his rhythm, the audience's attention is shifted from the action to the object.

THERE are definite exercises in my method for training the actor's will and concentration in the performance of actions. Preparation for the stage problems described above is the following: The actor is given the simple action of going from one chair to another. When he reaches the second he will be safe from pursuit. On the way he has to leap over a bench, crawl under a table, squeeze between two stands, pick up a flag, adjust to a loud noise, turn a somersault. Through it all, his concentration is upon reaching the second chair.

This method also aids in developing the actors' sense of truth in their connection with and adjustment to each other. What is desired is a real relationship between the players, a sense in each of his own physical position and movement and the timing of his activities and speech, as conditioned by those of his stage partner. The exercises for this end I call Body-Contact work. First we work with the hands. Two actors, seated, place their hands in contact. They have no characterization, no emotion. One takes the initiative by making a movement; the other adjusts to it, the hands remaining constantly related. A series of new movements develop, throughout which there are constant adjustments of each to the other. The thing that is stressed is that there is no arbitrary breaking of a movement, and so each movement is fulfilled, building up an organic whole. The same principles are applied in contact between the heads and finally between the entire bodies.

Although music is used in all these exercises, it plays a comparatively minor role. It is used chiefly to give an understanding of rhythmical beats, and not to set a mood or provoke an emotion.

A NEW theatre is being welded out of the suffering and struggles of the American people, a theatre of insurgents who are sensitive to every shading and development of the life about them. "We, the people" were so busy making America the richest land on earth that we didn't begin, until recently, to question—"for whom?" Now we are tired of giving up our homes to the bankers, of hitting the highways in search of jobs, of wages that are being slashed lower and lower while prices are soaring higher and higher. Even those of us who are still bewildered and misled by the demagogic promises of president and radio-priest are being driven to united action to save homes and families from being broken up. Men and women who frowned upon radical ideas two years, a year ago, yesterday, are being forced to take sides in the struggles of class against class, and there is real drama in the situations affecting their choice. But the playwrights who contributed approximately two hundred and eighty plays to the New Masses-New Theatre play contest have failed, for the most part, to answer the pleas of the audiences and theatre-workers of the new theatres that stretch across the land for "plays that tell about our daily lives and struggles in language that is moving and simple and convincing . . . we're tired of plays with wooden heroes and soapbox speeches, we're tired of 'agitprops,' give us plays with real people in them, people like us."

One playwright who did not fail them has made such an important contribution that his entry has set a new standard of theatrical effectiveness for the short revolutionary play. He has succeeded in dramatizing the New York City taxi strike of 1934 in terms of readily recognizable human characters and in a theatrical style that involves the audience so completely that "we, the people" in the audience are no longer spectators but participants.

The quality that makes *Waiting For Lefty* by Clifford Odets so remarkable is this new playwright's ability to achieve and maintain what might best be described as *absolute audience identification*. By combining the best quality of "agit-prop," direct appeal to the audience—with realism, Odets succeeds in involving us completely in the lives and struggles of his taxi-driver characters. By effective use of a technical device—"the flashback"—we are given, simultaneously, an insight into the background of the individual strikers and the story of the strike-meeting in progress. Clifford Odets is an actor in the Group Theatre company, and has served as a director in the Theatre Union Studio. Every part he conceives, every line he writes is designed with a sure knowledge of stage and audience. Sometimes his stage inge-

nuity is a disadvantage. More often he has poignant situations rather than complete characters! Despite this weakness, Clifford Odets has written a first play that will remain an important contribution to the American revolutionary theatre. *Waiting For Lefty* realizes the slogan of the revolutionary theatres that "theatre is a weapon in the class struggle" more completely than any other play we have yet seen in America. It should receive immediate production by every new theatre group throughout the country and is, without question, deserving of the first prize award of \$50 for the best forty minute play.

The Great Philanthropist, the second prize winning play, came directly out of the Ohrbach strike. The Office Workers Union asked Philip Barber, formerly assistant to Professor Baker at Yale and now head of the Repertory Department of the New Theatre League, for a short play about their strike to be performed by the strikers themselves at a mass meeting to be held the following week. There were no plays dealing with department store strikes available so Barber went home and wrote a short realistic play based on a dramatic incident of the Ohrbach strike.

When a very exclusive testimonial dinner was given in honor of the great philanthropist at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, two girl strikers, swankily dressed in formal gowns were smuggled in. The girls mingled with the society people until Ohrbach began his speech, following his introduction by Mayor La Guardia. Then the girls . . . but, let a brief quotation from Barber's play tell the rest of the story:

When the curtain rises we see the street entrance of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. The doorman bandies words with a taxi driver friend and later with two young pickets from "Storebacks" who march up and down with signs exposing working conditions in the store of the great philanthropist. The taxi driver turns on his radio and we hear what is going on inside:

"As Mayor of this city it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you a man whose benevolence shines like a light. Mr. Harry Storeback—friend of the poor—patron of the common people—generous contributor to the City Hospital—a man whose name is written large in connection with every worthwhile charity—Mr. Storeback!

A sound of clapping from the radio. The doorman outside applauds with mock enthusiasm. "Give him a hand." The radio again—Mr. Storeback speaking:

"Mr. Mayor—my friends—I am deeply touched. It is true that I have done what I can to help those more unfortunate than myself . . ."

Storeback's voice breaks off and we hear a girl's voice, less strong, but speaking clearly.

"I want to introduce myself. I am a striker from Storeback's. We are on strike for a living wage. Mr. Storeback—Charity begins at home.

A pandemonium of voices blots out the girl's voice and continues for a moment. The pickets outside shout "She did it. She did it. Becky did it. Charity begins at home. The darling." The cabbie and doorman are mystified. One says "Shut up! Get the rest of this." And the radio announcer goes on in an excited manner:

"This is your announcer speaking. The banquet at the great Astoria Hotel has been interrupted. During Mr. Storeback's speech a very attractive girl rose in the balcony and started to talk. Apparently she's a striker. The house detectives are trying to throw her out. The whole hall is in confusion. As though they'd been galvanized by an electric shock. Everyone's talking at once. They can't put the girl out! She's chained herself to the balcony rail. She's going on talking. Oh! That must have hurt. They tried to pull the chain off her wrist and she gave a cry of pain. Now she's going on talking. A man's put his hand over her mouth! Another girl is up! She's talking! The banquet hall is a bedlam! Mr. Storeback is the only one sitting down. He has his head down on the table and his hands covering his face! Ladies and gentlemen the banquet is breaking up . . ."

The strains of an orchestra come over the radio and the drama returns to the stage itself as men and women in evening wraps pour out from the hotel doors. The pickets tell them why they are striking—for recognition of their union, for a living wage. And the people file out commenting "Why Storeback's nothing but a hypocrite—yes, charity begins at home, etc." Storeback comes out finally but the cabbie refuses to take him for a fare. As he runs off yelling for a cab, a picket expresses worry about "the poor girls" inside, under arrest, and the cab-driver says admiringly:

"Poor, hell! They got something. They got what it takes. Would I have the guts to walk in there in evening clothes with a bunch of swells and chain myself to a rail? I would not. Am I yellow? Not by a damn sight! So what does that make them? It makes 'em heroes—see? By God, I take off my hat to 'em" (he throws his cap to the ground) "And to all of you. And now get into my cab. You're going home in style."

Like Clifford Odets, this new playwright brings a sure knowledge of the theatre to his writing. He makes full use of the stage and relies on crisp dialogue, dramatic situation and plot rather than on sharp characterization in *The Great Philanthropist*, so much so, in fact, that he weakens an otherwise admirable play by failing to make all of his important characters convincing and real. Nevertheless, this play is richly deserving of the \$25 prize for the best fifteen minute play.

ALTHOUGH approximately one hundred and fifty plays were submitted in the forty minute class, only a few are ready for production without considerable revision and rewriting. The best of these is *Road Closed*, a play dealing with the Iowa farm strike, by Philip Stevenson, author of *Gods In His Heaven*, winner of the 1934 Theatre Union prize play contest. Stevenson has a sure knowledge of the realistic



Clifford Odets

one-scene one-act play. Unlike most of the contestants, he realizes its limitations and does not try to cram three acts into one. *Road Closed* is a mature, craftsmanlike work, written by a man who is capable, undoubtedly, of turning out much finer plays. The dialogue is good. The plot and characters develop . . . but, somehow, it doesn't quite come off. Possibly this is because much of the action takes place off stage and we never quite feel the conflict either between the farmers and the trust that is trying to crush them or the inner drama of the mother's development from her opening position against the strikers to sympathy with their cause.

Other plays in this class that are worthy of longer treatment here are *Towards Soviet America*, an eviction play by Lagos Egri, *The Straw Men*, dealing with the anti-war activities of college students by Maurice Clark, *Lynch* by Herbert Hart, *Milk Strike* by Vincent Sherman, *Bowdown* by Albert N. Williams, and *Student Red* by Martin Shore. The Repertory Department of the New Theatre League will work with the authors on revision of these plays, and hopes to have all of them available for use in a few months.

Among the best of the fifteen minute plays are *Hunger Strike*, by Walt Anderson, which deals with the miners' revolt at Pecs, Hungary, *We Shall Conquer*, dramatizing an incident in a Nazi concentration camp by Ben Blake, *The Mine Speaks* by Lagos Egri, *Study War No More* by William Shulman, a play that deals with the revolt of American negro soldiers in France, *The Wedge* by Lou Lantz and Oscar Saul, and *Nigger Lover* by Yoch Schwab.

The plays submitted in the ten minute class were so weak that not one is worthy of the prize award. Most of them were ineffectual "agit-props" or trite political jingles. New Theatre and New Masses will extend this section of the contest an additional thirty days, hoping that a play

worthy of the \$25 prize will be submitted within this time. Plays of this length are particularly suitable for performances by traveling troupes like the Theatre Of Action shock-troupe that play on street corners and at factory gates. A special article will be devoted to the problems of writing such plays in an early issue of NEW THEATRE.

The prize winning plays and those given special mention above are important additions to the repertoire of the revolutionary theatres, but the contest was disappointing in several respects. Most of the plays were written in haste and without understanding or consideration for the demands of the theatre. They revealed the confusion in the minds of the playwrights. Some plays appeared to come out of real contact with their subjects, but most of the playwrights still think that they have to go outside their own experience to find the material of social conflict. (Although many of the playwrights were of middle-class origin, only a few plays dealt with the problems facing this class). As a result, the majority of the plays show an obvious lack of first hand knowledge of the situations and people they deal with. Not only this, but often they are so confused politically that one can only recommend a stiff course at the nearest workers' school. As far as craftsmanship is concerned, the same criticism that I made of the bulk of workers' theatre repertoire in the December issue of NEW THEATRE (see *Writing For Workers Theatres*) applies to these plays.

Most disappointing of all was the failure of the playwrights to produce a single successful comedy. *Agi the Agitator* by Richard Humphries, *Pity the Poor Police* by Philip Stevenson and *Merry Xmas Revolution* by Ronald R. Cooley are the best of the few humorous plays submitted.

It is regrettable also that none of the established revolutionary dramatists were interested enough to take time off from writing full length plays to write for this contest. Unlike the professional revolutionary dramatists of Europe and the Orient, American playwrights with a few exceptions have been "too busy" to write for the mass amateur theatres. Their failure to do so should be a subject for serious discussion at the American Writers Congress.

Perhaps the most significant fact about the plays submitted to this contest is the trend toward realism. Most of the playwrights have dropped the primitive "agit-prop" style that, as most every one in the workers theatres knows, has limited their development for several years. For no matter how grateful we may feel to this form for its many contributions from the early Prolet-buehne's *Tempo-Tempo* to the Workers Laboratory Theatre's *Newsboy*, these beginnings of the short realistic play promise such fine social drama that we may well regard them as having as much importance as the full length plays that have excluded the oneacters far too long for the good of the theatre.



Clifford Odets

A Revolutionary Gentleman

To *New Theatre*:

Emanuel Eisenberg's piece, *Ladies of the Revolutionary Dance*, printed in your February issue, may be useful to the revolutionary dance movement only as an example of the kind of extreme "leftism" that has long been discredited and discarded by most active workers and critics in all fields of revolutionary art. Stripped of its high-sounding vocabulary, this article amounts, in substance, to a complete denial of the very existence of the revolutionary dance. For one thing, Eisenberg maintains that "the revolutionary dancer has made no pictorial—theatrical or political—cultural progress whatever" (!), since "on the stage she looks exactly like her avowedly bourgeois sister, with the simple and negligible difference that she appears to have gone off on a labor-slumming holiday and is showing her liberal-sympathetic audiences what those interesting working people think about and go through." For another, he speaks of "their failure to create genuinely receptive and responsive audiences" as of something taken for granted. Every type of style and technique presented by the various revolutionary dancers and their groups, the more-revolutionary-than-thou critic condemns as "of the devil," of bourgeois origin, as "befuddling and exacerbating hangovers of symbolic bourgeois idealism." What, then, is left of the revolutionary dance movement? Nothing, indeed, but a misnomer—if we are to accept Eisenberg's appraisal.

Fortunately for that movement, Emanuel Eisenberg is talking through his hat. The revolutionary dance has scored a sensational success precisely in the matter of creating "genuinely receptive and responsive audiences"; and if there is any one thing that distinguishes a revolutionary from a bourgeois dance program, it is precisely the compelling sincerity of the performers, their revolutionary and militant verve, *their oneness with the mood and political ideology of the proletarian and revolutionary audiences*. Instead of the revolutionary dancers' pondering their "failure" to create responsive audiences, would it not be advisable for Eisenberg to ponder his own failure to take cognizance of facts? And instead of denouncing these dancers as insincere and out of contact with their audiences, perhaps he should make a canvass of both the dancers and their audiences? To build a "theory" on such an obvious denial of facts is to build on something less substantial than nothing.

But what of the "theory" that all revolutionary technique, as now current, is of the devil, of the "haute bourgeoisie"? Well, I think our ultra-"revolutionary" critic fell in love with his own cussword—calling the revolutionary dancers "ladies"—and simply cannot part with it. So much so that he ingenuously invents a whole "theory" to match his "clever" epithet. As

a matter of common sense (not to speak of the Marxist view on the cultural heritage of the past, which may not be binding for Emanuel Eisenberg), revolutionary art must and should borrow from the accumulated experience of the past, even if stored up by the bourgeoisie. No responsible revolutionary artist or critic will maintain today that we must start with a clean slate, wiping off all that the bourgeoisie has created in the course of centuries. Perhaps *flaneurs* in the field of revolutionary art and gentlemen of "revolutionary" criticism to whom the whole thing is a mere diversion or escapade, can afford such an attitude; the makers and followers of proletarian culture cannot. I remember when similar strident leftisms were heard in our young revolutionary theatre movement—one of its exponents stated with high disdain that "we have nothing to learn from the bourgeois theatre." In the international circles of the revolutionary theatre this phrase is still used as a perfect example of "pure" leftism, characteristic of certain elements among bourgeois intellectuals who went left emotionally, as a violent reaction against the evils of capitalism. Some of these new converts would turn their backs to the old world and start everything anew. To such people we must say: "We admire your ardor, but not your misinterpretation of revolutionary culture." We must make it clear to them that in developing a given field of revolutionary art we start not from technique, not from a revolt against bourgeois forms, but from content, from a revolt against bourgeois ideology. True, certain formalizations of bourgeois art are inextricably bound up with their class-content. But we may use bourgeois forms, nevertheless, making them our own by virtue of the new content we infuse into them. It goes without saying that we select and modify and develop to a higher level the borrowed bourgeois forms. Essentially our preoccupation is not with form and technique as a criterion but as a means.

Nor would I grant Eisenberg's premise that all dance forms now used are bourgeois in their origin. Without being a student of the dance, I take it for granted that work-processes as formalized in what we call folk dancing have also contributed their share to the development of dance technique. It strikes me that "we, the people" also have a large stake in the dance technique and that much of what we borrow from the bourgeoisie is rightfully our own.

Perhaps Emanuel Eisenberg's slate-wiping criticism would have some validity, if he proposed something else and something definite instead. Then we could, at worst, regard his "theory" as special pleading. But what does he propose instead of the "lady" technique? Nothing more concrete than to "rediscover the essential universal

instincts and impulses of the body which are not related to class labels and class ideas." O-la-la!—the revolutionary dance must avoid a technique which is related to "class labels" (working class included, of course) and "class ideas" (proletarian ideas included, I supposed?).

'You see, that's what you get for being a *flaneur* and gentleman of revolutionary criticism.

Sincerely yours,
NATHANIEL BUCHWALD

A Reply by E. Eisenberg

THE charge of extreme leftism is always a sure arrow of devastation, even if it errs a little on the side of glibness, facility and gleeful pedantry. To Nathaniel Buchwald's certain disgust and eventual fatigue, I suppose I am incurring it all over again by a stubborn repetition of my insistence that the bourgeois dance has absolutely nothing to give to the revolutionary form of this art.

To assume that this is a brief for the same truth in all the arts is where Buchwald's own ardor sadly misleads him. It is my conviction that the vitality and validity of revolutionary fiction, drama, music and architecture would have been and will be hopeless without an intense and elaborate employment of bourgeois forms. For these have already engrossed and affected very large masses usefully and soundly. But the dance must start absolutely fresh—or it must return to folk-patterns and the periods preceding the decades of what we understand as bourgeois culture. The last fifty years have seen this art degenerate into such nauseating onanism, self-indulgent idiot babblings and pure playing-with-form that it has had meaning almost only to the inner circle. I generalize, of course, but I think it will be easily admitted that the first four mentioned arts have made infinitely greater revolutionary progress than the dance.

Buchwald's relish of large audiences is so naive that I hesitate to break the news to him that revolutionary dance recitals are attended in the greatest part by other dancers and intellectuals and that these are the only ones who pretend to understand them. My article was written after a growing realization of the dancers' own acute discontent with their work and the confession of complete befuddlement and incomprehension by the few worker-laymen who happened in. As for concentrating on form instead of content, may one not write a piece wholly on form? For a piece on content, I recommend Buchwald to an article I contributed to the July-August, 1934, issue of *NEW THEATRE*.
EMANUEL EISENBERG

RUTH ALLERHAND School of the MODERN DANCE

● Announcement

All classes have been re-organized into Co-Operative Groups.

Gymnastic Group — 2-3 hours weekly
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Against Fascism

A THOUSAND New Theatre groups throwing defiant spotlights on every corner of graft and corruption, misery and oppression from coast to coast. A thousand dramatic companies voicing the bright visions and fierce determinations of the American people. A thousand theatres charged with the dynamite of social change, rousing millions to action through the power of dramatic persuasion.

Each of these theatres will stand as a firm bulwark against fascist cultural barbarism. The Goerings who assert that whenever they "hear the word 'culture'" they "reach for their guns," will find a tremendous mass movement built around our theatres which will repel their advances at every step. The "culture" symbolized by the burning of the books is exposed on every stage of the New Theatre League.

The New Theatre movement, supported by tens of thousands of workers, middle-class people, intellectuals, and professionals increases every day its physical strength and artistic quality. Our new social theatre is a people's theatre, vividly conscious of its role in society, seeking to take over the best of the cultural heritage of the past and weld this heritage into new forms, expressing the flow of life and art today. Just as at the end of the Dark Ages, theatre art began to flourish despite the then-established powers, so today in spite of suppression workers and intellectuals, amateurs and professionals, are creating their own theatre. A united theatre front in America *can* save the cultural traditions of the past and the vital new art of the present; *can* proclaim in the face of fascism the unity and strength of a mass theatre for social justice.

These are our aims. We want you to share them with us. And we have more than aims. We have the energy that brings young people home from long days in a factory or an office to rehearse six nights a week and perform on the seventh. We have the enthusiasm that sends organizers hitch-hiking across the country to build theatre groups and swap a lecture on "Social Trends in the Theatre" for a dish of beans. We have the abilities of trained actors, directors, playwrights, scene designers and technicians from the Broadways, colleges and little theatres of America. We have the courage of Negro and white workers in the South who dare lynching to speak the truth; of workers in the West who fight for freedom in the face of police terror; of workers and intellectuals throughout the country who are building a social theatre in spite of censorship and suppression.

Already three hundred of these New Theatres exist, some number their audiences in hundreds of thousands, others in a few hundreds. Everywhere the new theatres struggle against poverty, lack of equipment,

inability to pay full-time workers enough to live on. We need teachers, editors, field organizers, playwrights and stenographers. At present three full-time workers, earning ten dollars a week each (when they get paid) manage the New Theatre League national office, while four others publish the magazine. In order to exist on their unpaid wages, the staff members live together in a "collective" apartment, crowded three to a room, bare of furniture. If these full-time workers had a few assistants to help conduct the manifold business of the League and magazine, to send field organizers over the countryside, these three hundred theatres would quickly blossom into a thousand theatres, stretched from coast to coast.

The theatres scattered through the country are desperately in need of trained directors. We have the directors, but cannot finance their trips. Our Repertory Department has scripts of plays ready to be published, but cannot do so for lack of funds. Readers of NEW THEATRE, and subscribers are asked to help us in this emergency situation, to build a \$5,000 fund that will establish these theatres on a national self-supporting basis. We know from our experiences this past year that the New Theatre League can be placed upon a self-supporting basis. As a theatre organization, with an audience that is growing by leaps and bounds, we should not find it necessary to ask our friends for donations year after year.

The one present obstacle to the realization of these aims is lack of an adequate building fund with which to finance our work. With this fund guaranteed, the New Theatre League could carry on income-producing activities, and eliminate the need for calling on our friends for donations to meet each emergency as it arises.

The uses to which we will put this money are as follows:

1. To finance the acquisition, by purchase, prize contests, etc., of plays for the Repertory Department. To publish and distribute such plays to all groups.
2. To finance NEW THEATRE magazine and other publications of the New Theatre League. During the fifteen months of the magazine's existence it has been steadily approaching financial self-sufficiency on the basis of circulation and advertising. A vigorous push now will achieve that goal very quickly.
3. To finance a National Productions Department for the New Theatre League. This activity has a three-fold function: First, it brings together on the same stage for frequent performances all the producing groups of a locality, enabling them to learn from each other. Second, it enables our dramatic companies to reach wider and wider audiences, drawing them into united struggle against fascism, war and censorship. Third, it builds in each part of the

country definite sources of income for the theatre groups, through paid admissions, and stimulates them to artistic excellence by developing a critical audience. The National Productions Department will send organizers to various parts of the country, to build income-producing activities, and to finance the theatre groups in each locality.

This campaign for five thousand dollars will culminate in *National Theatre Week* (April 15-22) at which time competitions for the best anti-war and anti-fascist productions will be held in every locality throughout the country. Readers of New Theatre, friends and members of the League, will you send us your contribution at once to NEW THEATRE, 114 W. 14 St.

For member groups of the New Theatre League, we have a special plan of participation in this drive, of which we will send information by mail. But surely among the twelve thousand theatre-lovers who read this magazine each month, there are those who can help us financially, those who join in our purpose,—who want to help us reach our goal. It is to you we make this appeal. Help us to build a united theatre front across America,—to set up footlights against fascism and war in every town and countryside.

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BACKSTAGE

THE BLACK PIT, by Albert Maltz, will be presented on March 20 as the fourth production of the Theatre Union. It is set in a mine camp in West Virginia and deals with miners' problems—bad working conditions, low pay, speed-up, company unionism, unemployment, inadequate relief. The play is a departure in revolutionary playwriting in that its dramatic conflict is not identical with the conflict of picket line or barricade. The conflict occurs in the mind of Joe Kovarsky, a blacklisted miner, when he is faced with the corruptive influences of capitalism. The worker's responsibility to his class is the motive power of the play. He is confronted with alternatives which every worker and intellectual sympathizer to labor's struggles must face—the impossibility of remaining neutral in the class struggle, the danger of losing his job unless he capitulates to the boss, the tragedy of capitulation and betrayal of his fellow workers. These are matters of class "morality." Thus a classic formula of playwriting, an ethical struggle in a man's soul, is turned to the uses of proletarian drama.

In the perennial "propaganda and art" dispute, critics of the propaganda theatre have argued that it could not continue to interest audiences since each play necessarily must be a monotonous repetition of previous plays. The Theatre Union's program so far refutes this argument brilliantly. No permanent theatre could offer a greater variety than the themes, characters, moods, and dramatic treatment of its first four plays. The only element that has remained constant and must consistently remain, is that each play was written from the point of view of the working class.

IN a recent issue of *Partisan Review*, Jerre Mangione criticized the editors of *Leftward*, the publication of the Boston John Reed Club, for trying to make it "The New Masses of New England," and suggested that they find a specific function for the magazine which is not being performed by any other.

Mangione's criticism of *Leftward* applies even more justifiably to *Film Front*, the new publication of the Film and Photo League. With the exception of the technical questions-and-answer columns the articles by Dziga Vertov and a few short pieces, the contents of the first three issues of *Film Front* are a duplication of material published in *NEW THEATRE*—a weak re-writing of information that reached a much wider audience through our columns. The one original contribution made by *Film Front* to the literature of the film—the articles by Vertov on his theories of montage—would have been immeasurably improved by skillful editing. A long explanatory note giving the essence of Vertov's theories in simpler terms, and pointing out the practical application of these theories in his best known film, *Three Songs About*

Lenin, would have made the articles more comprehensible to American readers.

We understand that the editors of *Film Front* recognize that their publication, as it now appears, fills no particular need in the revolutionary press, and are planning to make it a popular film magazine appealing primarily to the movie-goer—a mass publication that will cover current movie news, review new films and analyze movie trends from a revolutionary point of view.

There is room for such a magazine, and the Film and Photo League would be making a distinct and important contribution to the revolutionary cause by issuing it. If it is to achieve a real mass circulation, however, it cannot continue to be mimeographed or multigraphed. It will have to be well printed and profusely illustrated. Until the League is in a position to finance such a publication, *Film Front* cannot realize its goal of becoming the popular revolutionary film magazine that is needed to counteract the influence of Fascist films.

IMPORTANT because it is one of the first plays to combine an understanding of economic forces in America with a realistic treatment and temper that can reach non-revolutionary audiences, *Gods in His Heaven* by Philip Stevenson, presented by the Theatre Collective on the February 3 and February 24 "New Theatre Nights," reveals itself in production as a play worth doing, and at the same time difficult to do. We criticize as wholly destructive the review of this production in

the *New Masses*. It was sharply discouraging to a new and promising group of actors, destructive in its treatment of a new and sensitive writer who has, in this play, added a new and much needed feeling for character to the repertory of our theatres. And finally, the review gave no help or suggestions to other theatres who will produce the play. We do not favor coddling any effort because it expresses our social point of view, but *NEW THEATRE* believes very strongly that theatre workers should be able to look to revolutionary publications for professionally competent and always constructive comment.

As a matter of fact, the Theatre Collective needs no patronizing for this effort. The play is a definite problem, and they made a good attack on it. An unemployed man and his family have moved in with his brother who still has a job. The scene is any evening after supper, with the friction from their crowding and their unadmitted worry breaking out in flashes that are quickly suppressed. The lack of dramatic action in this first half of the play puts the burden upon the actors, who have to create full and interesting characters and the sense of a household charged with below-the-surface conflict. Badly handicapped by the bareness of the Civic Repertory stage, this production proved that in this kind of play careful account must be taken of the physical possibilities of the stage. A more careful selection and arrangement of properties, some suggestion of a cramped living-dining-room, would have helped the whole effect enormously.

TAMIRIS and GROUP

IN

NEW DANCES

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New Theatre, 114 W. 14 St.

Workers Int. Relief, 5 E. 19 St.

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CIVIC

REPERTORY

THEATRE

103 W. 14 ST.

NEW THEATRE LECTURES

FRIDAY MARCH 1

"If This Be Treason"

—play by PHIL BARBER

FRIDAY MARCH 15

Let Freedom Ring

—play by ALBERT BEIN

FRIDAY MARCH 8

Theatre Publications

—MOLLY DAY THACHER

FRIDAY MARCH 22

Playwriting

—J. HOWARD LAWSON

at **NEW THEATRE, 114 West 14th Street—CHelsea 3-0236**

Admission: 35c ea.—Series, \$1.00 or \$1.50 with 1 year subscription

SHIFTING SCENES

WITH the intention of further stimulating interest in the revolutionary theatre, only with the intent of discussing the problems of revolutionary theatre, NEW THEATRE has arranged a series of lectures and readings.

The first of the series will begin Friday March 1 at 8 P.M. Harry Lesson, a member of the Theatre of Action, Shock Troupe, (formerly Workers Laboratory Theatre) will read Phil Barber's play, *If This Be Treason*. Phil Barber was assistant to the late George Pierce Baker and is now head of the Repertory department of the New Theatre League. The play deals with the corruption of the Chicago educational system and the demands of the teachers for their back pay. The second of these series will be a lecture on "Theatre Publications" by Molly Day Thacher, one of the editors of New Theatre. This will take place Friday March 8th. Friday March 15th Albert Bein author of *L'il Ol' Boy* will read his new play—*Let Freedom Ring*—a brilliant dramatization of *To Make My Bread*, the novel by Croce Lumphsin that won the Maxim Gorki prize award. Culminating this series will be a discussion of the problems of playwriting led by John Howard Lawson.

These lectures will take place at NEW THEATRE, 114 W. 14 St. Admission to any one of the series is 35c, to all four, \$1.00, with a subscription to NEW THEATRE magazine, \$1.50

THANKS to Roosevelt, the NRA and the rising cost of living, particularly for struggling groups, the Repertory Department of the New Theatre League announces a reduction in prices of plays. Short sketches are now available at 5c a copy, fifteen-minute plays at 20 cents, longer one-act plays, can be secured for forty cents, and there are some special bargains on certain manuscripts. These will be announced in a new repertory bulletin, which will be published soon. On all plays selling for more than five cents, there is a 50% reduction for members of the New Theatre League, which cuts these already-low prices in two. The popular Handbook of Recitations, which has been in great demand throughout the country, is now reduced to fifty cents per copy, twenty-five cents for members of the New Theatre League.

* * *

From the Red Dancers

New Theatre Editor:

There have been several reviews written on the Town Hall dance recital of December 23. The latest one appeared in the February issue of New Theatre. Since this article was written several weeks after the recital by a Workers Dance League representative, we must assume that it represents a matured point of view.

Now let us examine it. Edna Ocko commends the Red Dancers and Nature Friends Dance Group on their simple and obvious dances, because, she says, their very crudity and lack of subtlety make them appealing to workers who cannot understand more complicated choreography and movement. Therefore it seems that the Red Dancers and Nature Friends receive more requests for bookings from workers' organizations than do any of the other groups. Edna Ocko comes to the conclusion that there is a place for groups like these in the Workers Dance League. But she does not make a single suggestion that we try to improve the quality of our work. The impression one gets from reading this article is that mediocre dances are good enough for workers' audiences.

Now let us consider the comments of the reviewer on the dance *Black and White*. She infers that the principal reason for its evoking such lusty applause is that it places a negro and white performer on the stage, shows them struggling under similar conditions and ends with a heroic handclasp and fist salute. We cannot help but feel that this is a rather superficial analysis of this dance which has been

NEW THEATRE ANTI-FASCIST DANCE

**FRIDAY
MARCH
29**

**75¢
IN ADVANCE
\$1.00 AT DOOR**



**ENTERTAINMENT * DANCING TILL 2
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performed more often than any other dance in the repertoire of the various groups. It has always been enthusiastically received. Angelo Herndon made a statement, which appeared in NEW THEATRE, regarding the significance of this dance in the struggle for the unity of negro and white workers.

As for the New Dance Group and the Theatre Union Group, the recommendation of the reviewer is that they raise their artistic level. Very little stress is laid on the importance of their attaining a higher political level, so that their dances would become clear enough to be understood by workers' audiences. We do not deny that the concert has an important place in our development. But the reviewer makes the grave mistake of placing first importance upon improving for the gratification of bourgeois-intellectual audiences.

After studying this review very carefully, we are convinced that it completely misses the point.

We do not think it presents the official viewpoint of the Workers Dance League. The reviewer will argue that she has based her criticism on this particular concert. We feel that any review in NEW THEATRE should be more than a narrow review of a concert, but should point to the correct direction for the groups to take.

With the economic crises becoming more serious every day we must realize the absolute necessity of building toward greater political clarity in our dances and increasing effectiveness in presenting them. Although Edna Ocko does not see the urgency of groups like the Red Dancers raising their artistic level, our aim has always been to do just that. We are not satisfied to remain crude. Our dances must become more powerful all the time. In order to accomplish this, sounder ideology and every improving quality must be our aim.

RED DANCERS
GRACE SOSIN, Sec'y

NEW THEATRE ANTI-FASCIST DANCE

FRIDAY
MARCH
29

75¢
IN ADVANCE
\$1.00 AT DOOR



ENTERTAINMENT ★ DANCING TILL 2
WEBSTER HALL
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OUR HALL

(Continued from Page 7)

make drama out of their lives. In one city members of a Little Theatre who attended the performance came back stage to find out where they could obtain such an interesting repertory. Out of this contact the Little Theatre—which had been producing Barrie and Pinero—began production of the anti-war play, *Peace on Earth*.

Life in and about the New Theatre is not all heroic, not all on a pitch of single-minded effort. Petty intrigues hamper the work. An occasional love affair disrupts rehearsals. There are those who appear to work awhile and then, dismayed by the steady discipline, drift away. These last are more than compensated for by those who remain to develop their talents and the theatre. It is these hard workers who have built and made secure the future of the new theatre.

Back at the hall the work goes on steadily. Finally eleven-thirty comes and those who do not have to go home early so that they can get up in time for work the next morning adjourn to a neighborhood restaurant and talk into the small hours over a cup of coffee.

AS the last ones leave our Hall and it is left black against the cold winter night it seems isolated from the rest of life in Stone Island. No telephone wires run into it. The street before it is unpared.

The attendance is still comparatively small. But from our Hall an invisible current runs out nearly every worker's home in Stone Island. Our Hall seems isolated—but only to the blind, for it is linked with similar halls all over the earth. Our Hall in Stone Island is bound with a thread in history that begins with the revolt of the miners in Laurentium in ancient Greece. The same thread binds our obscure Hall out on the prairies with the great Babeuf who was borne half-way across France in an iron cage like a bird to warn the masses that the basic laws of property must not be touched. Pick up the thread if you wish, it runs over the face of the earth to link Stone Island with tens of thousands of towns. Half of them already have halls such as ours and all the halls are bound one to the other!

Downtown in the shadow of the Court-House the movies disgorge their patrons. Men and women come out of the darkened houses rubbing their eyes and stretching their cramped legs and their minds which have been held as in a vise by the fast-rolling frames of Hollywood's latest confection. As they step out of the lobbies they find themselves flung back into the world of reality—of cold winter winds and shoddy clothing, of high-priced groceries and low wages. Perhaps some, as they recall the picture they had just seen with its lovely actress suffering the pangs of love amidst the luxurious furniture of an expensive penthouse, will say softly under their breaths, "It's a lie, a rotten lie with which

they beat down our strength." Perhaps they will recall that one of their neighbors has told them of a theatre down near the John Stagg Plow Company's plant where plays were to be seen that dealt with their own lives, their own problems, and not with the sex-life of the Hollywood playboys and playgirls. Perhaps one will recall that his shopmate said his kid was spending all his time down at a hall working in plays that exposed the National Run Around, that gave the lie right in the teeth of those who say that people on relief must be grateful for being treated like dogs, that showed how youths were unable to marry and live decently because they couldn't get jobs. . . . What was the name of that place, New Theatre?

Paul Muni Denies All

(Continued from Page 5)

but only by those who make a business of misapplying and exploiting things."

Bromberg's comments reveal the true defects in an attempted Defense of Pure Acting. Some may protest that Muni's reactionary ideas scarcely prevent him from turning in a good performance every now and then, but I think Bromberg has shown, more importantly than anything else, that Muni in his public statements is effecting either an evasion or a confusion or a helpless misrepresentation of his obscurer creative processes, so that, fundamentally, he thinks nothing of the kind.

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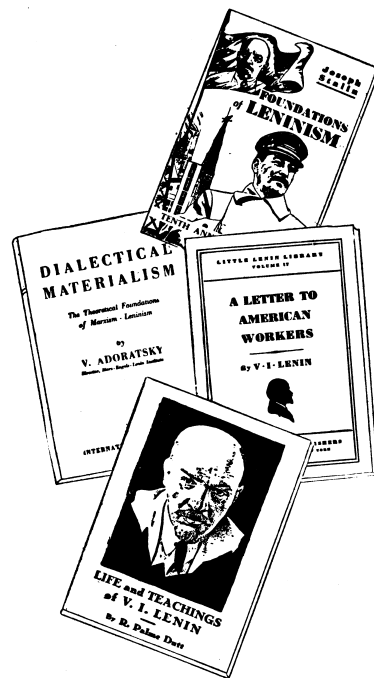
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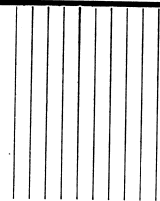
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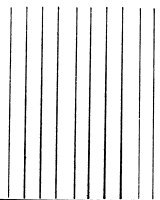


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ACTOR'S FORUM

A GROUP of the younger Broadway actors have recently organized the *Actor's Forum* "to provide an opportunity for Equity members to discuss and formulate plans for the strengthening of their organization, the Actor's Equity Association." Members of this Actors Forum point out that Actor's Equity Association holds its general meetings only four times a year and these meetings are given over to elections, nominating committees, reports, etc., so that there is little opportunity for the free and informal discussion of proposals dealing with the welfare of the actor. The *Actor's Forum* advocates complete abolition of the \$25 Junior minimum salary and the establishment of one minimum of \$40; payment of \$25 per week to actors for each week of rehearsal after the probationary period; unemployment insurance and old age pensions for the actor; co-operation of Actor's Equity with other stage unions; consideration of ways and means of giving further relief to unemployed actors, in addition to the Drama division of Public Works.

IN the interests of the child victims of German Fascism, Hanns Eisler, brilliant, young revolutionary composer of mass songs such as *Comintern*, *Rot Front*, *Ballad of the Cotton Pickers*, *Mass-Nahme*, and *Song of the Tortured*, has undertaken a concert tour of America. His first New York appearance will be March 2nd at the Mecca Temple.

REVIEWS

(Continued from Page 21)

the handling of the movement by Anna Sokolow. The dances planned by her are remarkable for their theatric appropriateness, their oneness with the tone of the play, their unstrained ease in expressing moods and sensations.

It is a tantalizing evening. So much is fresh, so much artistry has been put into it, and yet it does not make a whole impression nor involve one as even a fantasy can. I think the difficulty is two-fold: first and simplest, the lack of decisiveness and second, that the concentration on experiment leaves an audience just that: fragments of skilled experiment to watch, never a story or idea or feeling that becomes close and important. M. D. T.

WAR!

REMEMBER 1917? . . . See Back Cover.

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