

# NEW THEATRE



Harold Clurmon, Stella Adler and Clifford Odets working on "Paradise Lost"

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DECEMBER 1935 15c

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# NEW THEATRE

DECEMBER, 1935

When *Let Freedom Ring* opened at the Broadhurst Theatre the other evening it served to prove that as far as certain drama critics of the metropolitan daily press are concerned, Billy Minsky was right. Over one of the humble entrances leading from the lobby of the theatre auditorium in the late Mr. Minsky's temple of burlesque on 42nd Street, an inscription reads: "Forget Your Troubles!" Something about Albert Bein's beautifully written, yet realistic drama of southern textile workers, must have broken this inviolable standard of what theatre should make one do, for as one of the critics who did not like the play complained, "It makes one think, for one thing." And because a first-rate play on Broadway could make one think, it was open to the suspicion of Mr. Robert Garland of the World-Telegram, Mr. John Mason Brown of the Post, and Mr. Gilbert Gabriel of the American, not to mention the half-hearted applause of Mr. Percy Hammond of the Herald-Tribune.

Mr. Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times, said of the play that "what distinguishes *Let Freedom Ring*, from the run-of-mine labor play is the thoroughness of its characterization," but the liberal Post's Mr. Brown could only offer that the play was "as tiresome as a parade of ten floats in which all the floats happen to be identical."

Fortunately, Mr. Brown drew his answer from Archer Winston, a columnist on the same newspaper. Mr. Brown has never read Grace Lumpkin's novel, *To Make My Bread*, which is the inspiration for the play, and admitted as much; but Mr. Winston last summer visited the mill-town of Gastonia, N. C., scene of both book and play, and he found *Let Freedom Ring*, exciting because, "the truth of this play in speech, action and characterization was overwhelming and utterly accurate."

The lesson from all this is that the critics who by their yea-saying and nay-saying rule the length of life for the Broadway play, must not be permitted to have the same influence over plays of social importance to many thousands of Americans. What Mr. Winston deftly called the "hollow piping" of the critics has kept many from seeing *Let Freedom Ring*.

By this time, the Theatre Union production *Mother* has opened. Shortly, New York will see the Group Theatre's production of Clifford Odets' *Paradise Lost*, and an important new group, the National Negro Theatre, will present *Turpentine*, a play of Negro life by Augustus Smith and Peter Morell, at the Venice Theatre. These four plays, and others to come, are laden with the message of social protest against those forces of war, capital, and power that reduce life to a racket with the American people always the victims.

Two things, then, must be done regardless of the critics' allegiance to Minsky's golden rule. First, each reader of NEW THEATRE is urged to make it his personal mission to support *Let Freedom Ring*, *Mother*, *Paradise Lost*, *Turpentine* and the other social plays of the season. Second, the new audience for the new play must be organized to a degree where no worthwhile social play can fail. Trade Unions, cultural clubs and organizations, workers' clubs, and individuals must join in a movement now under way, which will insure the life of dramas that dare make Americans remember their troubles and do something about them!

Sometimes one of the most important editorials a magazine can publish is one about itself. Our next issue marks the second anniversary of NEW THEATRE's appearance as a monthly printed magazine of the theatre, film and dance. This is no time to go into the past, to tell of the sacrifices and hard, unremunerative work that have gone into the building of our magazine. We aim to celebrate.

The first celebration will take place December 28 or thereabouts with the appearance of a special 48 page anniversary issue of NEW THEATRE; and we promise that it will be our finest ever.

The second celebration will take place on New Year's eve at the Central Opera House in New York City when the writers, artists, editors, actors and readers who have made the success of NEW THEATRE possible will gather to enjoy the gayest, merriest New Year's eve and Anniversary Celebration on record. You're invited!

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This space was originally laid out for an editorial on the current situation in Equity, describing how Frank Gilmore was fighting the Actor's Forum as a disruptive influence instead of fighting with them for improved conditions for stage workers. As we go to press, the following wire has just come in: "Replace editorial on Equity with statement Gilmore overrode wishes of membership by insisting on confidence vote in his administration. Wholly undemocratic procedure antagonized many actors previously outside Forum. Chair refused to entertain motion for regular democratic discussion meetings under Equity sponsorship. Five hundred actors met later proposing action for unity and free speech. Actors claim that Equity has not seen such excitement since the 1919 strike. Gilmore and Dulzell puts it either Forum goes or they go. They sidetrack WPA issue leaving it still undetermined. Announce article on this for January."

When Michael Gold attacked the current adaptation of Katayev's *Squaring the Circle* as "anti-Soviet," he had good reason to object to some details of the production, and even more reason to be suspicious since the names of two notorious anti-Soviet writers, Eugene Lyons and Charles Malamuth, were associated with it. But there were other left wing critics who felt that despite certain objectionable interpolations and details of staging, the director and adapter Dmitri Ostrov had done a sympathetic job in the main, one that would send audiences away, confused perhaps, but with a warm feeling towards the U.S.S.R.—as Katayev meant his comedy of self-criticism.

The producers and directors met with these critics who saw that certain changes would make the production a clearly sympathetic one, and some of these changes were made. Pending the changes, the NEW THEATRE held the small section of John W. Gassner's review, planning to give the altered production more lengthy treatment in the next issue. Writing in the New York Post, Eugene Lyons charged that some mysterious "headquarters" had taken "Herbert Kline's" sympathetic review out of our November issue. That Mr. Lyons is mistaken is evidenced by the following facts: one, far from having his opinions suppressed, Kline's article really was written not for NEW THEATRE but for Michael Gold's column in the Daily Worker (where it was published the day before Lyons' letter appeared in the column "As the Crow Flies" in the Post); two, Gassner's review is in this issue; three, far from suppressing differing opinions, New Masses and NEW THEATRE sponsored a symposium in which Michael Gold, Stanley Burnshaw and Herbert Kline stated their respective criticisms, and Dmitri Ostrov the director explained his efforts to give a sympathetic production.

Thus there was constructive criticism instead of carrying out orders from "headquarters," Mr. Lyons to the contrary.

At the recent symposium held by the New Film Alliance on the subject "In which direction is the *March of Time* going?" United States Congressman Vito Marcantonio pointed out by well-documented facts the clear path the *March of Time* was taking toward reaction and fascism. Any doubts entertained on that score, however, were completely dissipated when last week's motion picture publications carried the news that *March of Time* had turned over nine reels of film to Croix de Feu. Croix de Feu, the French Fascist organization that only the other day achieved distinction by firing into an unarmed group of workers and intellectuals, wounding twenty, will use the film for propaganda and recruiting purposes. In the light of this new development there must be an end to equivocation. Boycott of the *March of Time* series is decidedly in order. As Congressman Marcantonio pointed out, the supposedly "impartial *March of Time* is reactionary and must be fought against with mass pressure such as the boycott affords."

## New Plays' by Odets and Peters

Three thousand people jammed the Manhattan Opera House on Oct. 19th to hear George Sklar, Lee Simonson, and Kyle Crichton speak on "The American Theatre, Left or Right." Most of the audience obviously sympathized with the left speakers. Mr. Simonson put up a spirited defense of the commercial theatre, which was greeted with jeers by some factions in the audience. This childish display of intolerance is altogether regrettable. It could not, however, spoil our enjoyment of two new short plays on the program: *Remember* by Clifford Odets, presented by the Negro People's Theatre under Odets' direction, and *Bivouac Alabama* by Paul Peters, produced by the Theatre Collective under the capable direction of Brett Waner.

Clifford Odets has already proved himself a poet whose lyrical dramatic qualities outweigh his analytical constructive strength. In this play of the horrors of "relief" he convinces us more by emotion and individual characterization than by a thorough exposure of a problem. But he has, and this becomes especially obvious in his short plays, an ingenious faculty for selecting material that dovetails with his maximum abilities. This is so rare a quality that it deserves high praise. The concentration on a small but significant section of the problem balances to a large extent his lack of thoroughness. His ability is for utter understanding of people, and his dialogue is their very language, exact and significant. He embellishes the crudeness of reality with the beauty that human beings can create even in the most hopeless of circumstances; he makes us love his characters and brings their problems so close to us that we discover suddenly that they are our own.

In *Remember* Odets shows how danger-

Unavoidable circumstances have delayed the review of Ben Blake's pamphlet, *The Awakening of the American Theatre* until the next issue. Meantime, NEW THEATRE welcomes this important addition to the documents of the new theatres and wishes to point out to its readers that in no other single publication can the record of this new movement be found. Every reader of NEW THEATRE should obtain and read this stirring history. To aid the development of the new theatre movement copies should be placed in every public library, and your bookseller should be urged to order copies for sale in your community.

A large distribution of this pamphlet, particularly among present theatre forces in your community will hasten the day when social drama and peoples' theatres will quadruple their present numbers and develop concomitantly in quality of work. *The Awakening of the American Theatre* takes its place as the spokesman and organizer for the new theatre movement: take advantage of it and use it for all it is worth!

ous it can be to escape into the realm of emotion—if it leads from the realities of our problems. He shows the fallacy of resignation, and cries out that we must remember every injustice that we suffer so as to strengthen our powers and our minds to fight against those who are responsible for our misery. What an excellent dramatic evolution: out of lyrical, poetic romance arise an uncompromising, steely, "J'accuse!": Remember, remember, remember!

Paul Peters is cut from a different pattern. The author of the unforgettable *Stevedore* is a fighter who faces reality more sternly and pugnaciously. If Odets speaks for the working middle classes, Peters addresses himself to the workers. His *Bivouac Alabama* unfolds before us a picture of the sharecroppers' struggle for a decent human existence in the south. He shows the "impartial" sheriff who tries to maintain the law, which in a merciless class struggle is used against the workers but modified and twisted where it affects the landowners. Peters uses a mass chorus effectively. He leads the story skillfully and competently to a point where all the dramatic threads are taut and tangled. Then, unfortunately, he cuts them arbitrarily and presents us with an unconvincing happy ending. Let us suppose he lost a few pages at the end of his play: and let us hope that he will find them. What exists of the play more than justifies such a hope.

If outstanding playwrights like Odets and Peters continue to devote part of their time to the writing of short plays, new theatres groups throughout the country will be able not only to hold but actually to extend the audiences they won with *Waiting For Lefty*. HERBERT RAPPAPORT

# Duke Ellington on Gershwin's "Porgy"

By EDWARD MORROW

When the Theatre Guild launched the George Gershwin musical version of Du Bose and Dorothy Heyward's play *Porgy and Bess*, the cult of critical Negrophiles went into journalistic rhapsodies, hailed it as a "native American opera", avowed it "typical" of a "child-like, quaint" Negro people and declared it "caught the spirit" of a "primitive" group. The huzzas filled the columns, were quoted by second-hand *intelligentsia*, and echoed in the banalities of the subscribers. No one, however, thought to ask Negro musicians, composers and singers their opinions of the Gershwin masterpiece.

Accordingly, I sought out Edward Kennedy ("Duke") Ellington, Negro orchestra leader and composer. He has neither axes to grind nor pretensions to support, but busies himself reproducing and creating the most genuine Negro jazz music in the world. Objective critics have likened his work to Sibelius; his band is distinctive. Unfettered by hot-cha exploitation, his energies might be released to the serious efforts his genius warrants.

"Well, Duke," I began, "now that you have seen *Porgy and Bess*, what do you think of it?"

"Grand music and a swell play, I guess, but the two don't go together—I mean that the music did not hitch with the mood and spirit of the story." Then he added: "Maybe I'm wrong, or perhaps there is something wrong with me, but I have noted this in other things lately too. So I am not singling out *Porgy and Bess*."

"But sticking to *Porgy and Bess*, Duke, just what ails it?"

"The first thing that gives it away is that it does not use the Negro musical idiom," replied Ellington. "It was not the music of Catfish Row or any other kind of Negroes."

"Then I don't suppose it could be very true to the spirit, scene or setting of impoverished Charleston Negroes if the musical expression failed to consider the underlying emotions and social forces of the Gullah Negroes," I suggested.

"That might be it at that," agreed Ellington, "but I can say it better in my own way. For instance, how could you possibly express in decent English the same thing I express when I tell my band, 'Now you cats swing the verse, then go to town on the gutbucket chorus!'"

"You would intend for the boys to play the verse in rhythm, and finish the final chorus with improvisations, accented beats and a *crescendo*," I laughed.

"Sure, but for all your fifteen-dollar words you didn't give the same impression, did you?" he argued. "If you hadn't been around the band and if you did not know the backgrounds of the musicians you

couldn't interpret them or use their idioms, could you?"

"I think I get your viewpoint," I answered, "but why did you say the music was 'grand'?"

"Why shouldn't it be?" he smiled amiably, "It was taken from some of the best and a few of the worst. Gershwin surely didn't discriminate: he borrowed from everyone from Liszt to Dickie Wells' kazoo band."

Ellington turned to the piano, and playing said: "Hear this? These are passages from *Rhapsody in Blue*. Well, here is where they came from—the Negro song *Where Has My Easy Rider Gone?* Now listen to this—this is what I call a 'gutbucket waltz.' See, it's a waltz, but it still has the Negro idiom. I have taken the

method but I have not stolen or borrowed." He played on, evidently pleased with his innovation.

"Will you ever write an opera or a symphony?" I asked.

"No," Ellington declared positively. "I have to make a living and so I have to have an audience. I do not believe people honestly like, much less understand, things like *Porgy and Bess*. The critics and some of the people who are supposed to know have told them they should like the stuff. So they say it's wonderful. I prefer to go right on putting down my ideas, moods and themes and letting the critics call them what they will. Furthermore, an opera would not express the kind of things I have in mind."

"Where would you consider *Porgy and*



Scene from *Porgy and Bess*, dir. by R. Mamoulian

Vandamm

Bess offered opportunities that you should have used that Gershwin missed?" I asked.

"Several places," Ellington said, "he missed beautiful chances to really do something. There was one place, though, where he made the most of his music: the hurricane passages, when no one was on the stage. But when he tried to build up the characterizations he failed. What happened when the girl selling strawberries came on the stage? Did he get the rhythm, the speech, and the 'swing' of the street-vender? No, sir, he did not; he went dramatic! Gershwin had the girl stop cold, take her stance, and sing an *aria* in the Italian, would-be Negro manner."

Ellington warmed up to his subject. "Bubbles, who is a great dancer, built up the character of Sportin' Life with his dance. The music did not do that. And other actors had to make their own characterizations too. There was a crap game such as no one has ever seen or heard. It might have been opera, but it wasn't a crap game. The music went one way and the action another. If a singer had lost his place, he never would have found it in that score. Still, the audience gasped: 'Don't the people get right into their parts?' and 'Aren't they emotional!'"

"Would you say that an honest Negro musical play would have to contain social criticism?" I asked.

"Absolutely," declared Ellington. "That is, if it is expected to hold up. In one of my forthcoming movie 'shorts' I have an episode which concerns the death of a baby. That is the high spot and should have come last, but that would not have been 'commercial,' as the managers say. However, I put into the dirge all the misery, sorrow and undertones of the conditions that went with the baby's death. It was true to and of the life of the people it depicted. The same thing can not be said for *Porgy and Bess*."

It was very evident that here was one colored composer who realized the cramping forces of exploitation which handicap not only him and his colleagues, but the Negro masses as well. That is why their expression is filled with protest. He is also fully conscious that there are imitators and chiselers, always ready to capitalize on specious products purporting to "represent" the Negro. They are totally lacking in social vision, and their art is phony.

No Negro could possibly be fooled by *Porgy and Bess*. Mamoulian's direction has added nothing to his old superficial tricks of animating inanimate objects, such as rocking chairs, with rhythmical motion to fit a song. (This business was used in *Porgy* which he directed in 1927.) His Negroes still wave their arms in shadowed frenzy during the wake. The production is cooked up, flavored and seasoned to be palmed off as "authentic" of the Charleston Gullah Negroes—who are, one supposes, "odd beasts."

But the times are here to debunk such tripe as Gershwin's lamp-black Negroisms,

and the melodramatic trash of the script of *Porgy*. The Negro artists are becoming socially-conscious and class-conscious, and more courageous. Broadway will find it harder to keep them on the chain-gang of the hot-cha merchants. The Ellingtons and the Hughes' will take their themes from their blood. There will be fewer generalized gin-guzzling, homicidal maniacs, and more understanding of rotten socio-economic conditions which give rise to neurotic escapists, compensating for overwrought nerves. There will be fewer wicked, hip-

swinging "yellow-gal hustler" stereotypes, but more economically isolated girls, forced into prostitution. These themes are universal. They will be particularized and vivified in ringing language, and charged with the truth of realities. The music will express terror and defiance in colorful Negro musical idioms which have remained melodious despite a life of injustices. They will compose and write these things because they feel the consequences of an existence which is a weird combination of brutality and beauty.

## "Formation Left"—Los Angeles

The presentation of *Formation Left* by the Contemporary Theatre in Los Angeles, is an event in the history of the American theatre; it is, we believe, the first time on the Pacific Coast, and one of the few times in American stage annals, that a locally written and produced full-length play, giving an intelligent analysis of contemporary conditions, has been staged outside of New York.

*Formation Left* presents a cross-section of the dole system. The first act takes place in a relief office. A young Negro boy, whose mother is dying while medical aid fails to come; an Irish mechanic who has failed to make good at ditch-digging on a relief project; a contractor, whose young son refuses to wear "relief pants," because all the kids in school know where they come from; a boy and girl who can't get married because their relief budget would dwindle if they did; an old couple who can't pay their rent—each of these comes to the relief office to tell his story. The narration comes to life on a second stage, behind the main setting, and devised to look like a motion picture screen. The transitions from relief-office to flashback, and then back again, are mechanical and monotonous, but the material presented is so striking that one does not mind the naïveté of the technique.

The second act, with another series of flashbacks, tells the way in which all these various relief-victims, who have been brought together by common sufferings, develop an Unemployed Workers League, and how their united protest and their solidarity with the case-workers succeed in putting across their demands.

*Formation Left* is a first play by Jeff Kibre and Mildred Ashe, and it suffers from insufficient mastery of stage technique. The influence of *Waiting for Lefty* and Emjo Basshe's *Doomsday Circus* is constantly obvious. The direction, too, by Max Pollock, attempts to bring motion picture methods on to the stage, and finds this to be impossible.

The main defects of *Formation Left* seem to have resulted from the lack of a strong board of directors of the theatre. There was no one to whip the production

into shape on time, or hold off opening until the play was definitely ready; or to impose upon the playwrights and director, collective, constructive advice, which could have added polish to the production as a whole. In place of this, the audience has been treated to the spectacle of a play shaping itself, night after night, until, at the end of a week, it is a stirring performance.

As entertainment, *Formation Left* has an excellent balance of tragedy and comic effect. It is mainly narrative, without dramatic construction, but it has the weight of a document that even the enemies of the workingclass could scarcely avoid recognizing as evidence of the rotting decay of the system. It gives it to you between the eyes. More than this it is a highly acceptable full-length show of an agitational character which makes it the most powerful weapon now at the disposal of Public Works and Unemployed Unions throughout the country. Relief workers who see it, like it; and that means that it succeeds in being the agitational weapon it was meant to be.

The cast of some thirty-odd members is uniformly excellent. Michael Egan and Herb Smith, who carry the two most difficult roles of the play, are standouts. In secondary parts, Edward Walsh, Al Eben, Joseph Reynolds, Rita Steppling, and particularly Lillian Calvari, lend sterling quality to the performance.

With the experience of the Los Angeles production behind them, New Theatre and unemployed groups all over the country, should find *Formation Left* a perfect choice for early production.

With its organizational faults understood, Contemporary Theatre takes its place as one of America's outstanding theatre groups. While there have been many plays that have had progressive, revolutionary or socially significant implications, the Pacific Coast, with the exception, of course, of *Waiting for Lefty*, has never before seen a theatrical document so vital to the development of present day American life as *Formation Left*.

JOHN R. CHAPLIN

# The Theatre in Mexico

By EMANUEL EISENBERG

The first glance at the contemporary theatre in Mexico is a confusing and distressing one—for, in a country that calls itself revolutionary, that smears up its public walls with the hammer and the sickle as lightly, say, as William Randolph Hearst babbles in his senile beard about Jeffersonian democracy, one looks in utter vain for the dimmest sign of a revolutionary or a workers' or even a merely "social" theatre. But as soon as the extent of imperialist domination is realized, as soon as it is understood how thoroughly colonial and provincial a life is enforced here, each aspect of theatre expression becomes intensely significant and revealing.

(Mexico is technically, of course, semi-colonial, since it possesses its own government which is acknowledged by other powers. Throughout this article colonialism is referred to as a psychological condition of the people.)

The Spaniards, with their overwhelming religious machinery, started the conquest on a good large scale with a tremendous appropriation of lands, all in the name of the church. They proceeded to the usurpation of practically all the minor productions, such as bread, hats, shoes, furniture, alcohol, and the control of agricultural distribution. The French were glad to aid in industrial expansion by monopoly of the textile industry and ownership of all the larger clothing stores. The Germans arrived with all manner of machinery and dyes and inks and remained to see that the profits came in steadily. The Swedes had just about managed to install a telephone system when finally, and most magnificently, the Americans broke in. With unflinching piratical gusto they not only established a rival telephone system which became far more widespread than the Swedish but promptly set about the complete taking over of railways, highways, airways, mines, petroleum fields, water power, and exclusive control over the shipment of bananas and the sale of automobiles.

The effect of this fantastically absolute imperialist set-up, which naturally had the complete approval and collaboration of the corrupt government powers, is inevitably felt in all of the arts. The practitioners respond in two ways: either they yield completely to the intense foreign influence and turn out carbons of European chic, or they turn with juvenile violence to indigenous themes and emerge with stridently self-conscious and nationalistic folk lore. A small group of authentic revolutionaries is struggling to find true forms and create a sure understanding audience, but they have a gigantic problem in the face of an official demagoguery which is without parallel and without precedent. The government, impaled on unignorable revolutionary traditions, hands out portraits of Lenin, talks of a not yet existent socialist education in

the schools, writes in its official organ about the gradual dictatorship of the proletariat—and firmly proceeds with the Six-Year Plan, a project of fascization of all labor and education and culture. The public confusion is incalculable. . . .

As if in perfect illustration, three kinds of modern theatre exist in Mexico: the *carpa*, or street tent-show for the lumpen-proletariat; the respectable commercial hideaway for the bourgeoisie, always an extremely small class in a colonial country; and the incredible foreign affectations and "preservations" of the government for xenophiles, esthetes, snobs, parvenus, tourists, classicists and archeologists.

The *carpa* is a curious institution for which America has no equivalent. Think of it as an uncertain composite of the old style minstrel show and vaudeville show and the contemporary burlesque show, with trimmings of political kidding in the form of easy couplets, and you have a fair idea of contents and intentions if not of style. But the style is, of course, what counts—and this is almost beyond communication, since it ranges (as with us) from utter mechanical boredom on a Monday night to rich electric contact on Saturdays, depending largely on the audience. Our actors, too, respond to good audiences, but here it is actually a matter of the public making its desires and preferences known. Often enough this takes the form of aimless hoodlumism, as when the boys howl for the girls to take another turn on the apron run-way so they can pinch their legs, or when some cry to see the *bamba* danced and others long for the *jaiba*. But it can also achieve such a perfect fusion of actor and audience as the Conde Boby, an uproarious act of ventriloquism which consists mostly of spontaneous attack by all spectators so disposed and fresh and juicy *riposte* by the extraordinarily agile dummy.

It is a rich and a heartening thing to see these audiences, for the greater part illiter-

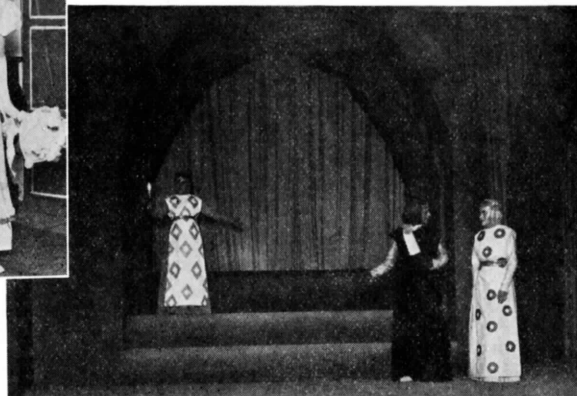
ate, consisting of such diverse elements as Indian women with their babies, market-vendors, mechanical and street workers in their overalls, young apprentices loose from their dreary shops, young shop-girls and office workers free from the stiffness of their daily grind, destroying the preposterous barrier of the stage line and making the *carpa* their own.

To the extent that these theatres are simple and inexpensive constructions which are dismantled about once a month and shifted from market place to workers' district all over Mexico; that the admission is very low (30 centavos Mexican, 9c American) and laborers can enter in any costume whatever; that audience participation can actually condition the speed, gaiety and content of the show: to this extent the *carpa* belongs to the people and represents an instinct for proletarian theatre. To the extent, however, that most of the songs and skits and performers and flat painted curtains are discards, wash-downs or memories of the imported bourgeois *zarzuela* (revue) of the Spanish and French music hall of the late 19th century, the *carpa's* essential attraction is for the harassed and beaten lumpen-proletariat (and, of course, to enchanted slummers from Uptown). As a known medium and with an habitual theatre-going public, this form has tremendous possibilities for development into a class-conscious proletarian theatre. Of this more later.

Bernard Shaw's classic indictment of the middle-class theatre as an institution whose ideas were consistently twenty years behind the times is so vividly apt in Mexico that here, again, we would seem to have too good a set-up just to prove an advance conviction. There is not even the pallid liberal pretense (symptomatic almost everywhere else) of an occasional serious "problem" play questioning the values and standards of their own lives, the problem usually being, Should we be more broad-minded about marital infidelity or is adultery an eternal human instinct? Here the bourgeois theatre is strictly one of escape in the most elementary and mechanical



Gogol's *Wedding* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* at the Teatro de Orientacion, Mexico City, dir. by C. Gorostiza





Actors wearing masks, by G. Cueto, based on traditional Mexican tribal masks

sense of this act. The four playhouses are closed boxes far from the hideous circle of home. There, in happy darkness, they can be stunned into a needed coma by a series of wandering vaudeville turns under incredible greens and ambers (Madrid-New York); or a "political" revue with aimless anarchistic pot-shots at any public figure who happens to have made a nitwit of himself that week (Paris); or "modern" problem comedies from Spain reminiscent only of the early Rachel Crothers at her sententious worst; or mystery plays adapted from the British, French and American, where the illusion of being frightened out of your own depressing skin must serve as a complete compensation for the actual failure to stir you at all.

This is the fare, sickly with the odors of importation. And if ever, even as a liberal, you long for the relatively stimulating productions such as have been offered in the American bourgeois theatre by Arthur Hopkins, the Actors' Theatre, the Theatre Guild, Guthrie McClintic and the Group Theatre, you must simply decide that you will not attend the theatre at all: which is exactly the liberal decision here.

Concentration of capital into fewer and fewer hands has reached such fantastic proportions in Mexico that there is just enough of a middle class to fill up four fair-sized playhouses for one week and then start all over again on the following Monday. The result, naturally, is that the average run of any entertainment is a week. Two weeks means a special run of luck and four weeks is a nightmare of success. Over the weekend the musical theatres often have one set of skits at 7:30 and another at 10, for, if they ran the one show three times in a day (which is the Saturday and Sunday schedule here), there simply wouldn't be enough people to occupy all the seats. They've got to draw them back again and again, week after week after week.

The government or aristocratic theatre takes all the most offensive features of the London Stage Society, the Vieux Colombier under Jacques Copeau, the first steps of our own Little Theatre movement, and

dance recitals of ten years ago, and blends them into one wonderful mess of recherché affectation, unsocial sterility and blatant colonial servility. All theatre events are offered as a sign of the government's earnest "socialistic" intentions in the sponsorship of paralyzed arts and in the deliberate static preservation of indigenous forms: never as theatre itself, as a dynamic and belligerent projection of the contents of a living and changing world.

Examine this list of productions of the last five years. Kaiser's *Gas*, O'Neill's *Diff'rent* and *Lazarus Laughed*, *Macbeth*, Romains' *Amadeo and the Gentleman in a Row*, Gogol's *Marriage*, Toller's *Machine Wreckers*, Cocteau's *Antigone*, Molière's *Georges Dandin* and Copeau's version of *Karamazov*. Not an unimpressive list by any standards. But when it is known that each was put on for one or two nights, just long enough for the best people to get acquainted with them; that they were juiceless, precious and chic experiments in style and in arty settings and costumes; that the whole program is a profound part of the essential campaign to keep the colonized spectator ashamed and suspicious of any possible native product, then the valuelessness of the list may be understood.

Naturally, even the most consistent pressure to discourage the flourishing of the native product will never wholly succeed. So playwrights like Mauricio Magdaleno, German List Arzubide, Armando Arzubide, Fernández Bustamante, Juan Bustillos Oro and Concha Michel have intermittently come forth with dramas of social satire, high anger and revolutionary protest. But the only way to get any kind of production backing in Mexico (always excepting the workers' theatre we are striving toward) is through the government; and the government, enchanted as it is with the opportunity to demonstrate its alleged willingness to sponsor the native and the "revolutionary" product, nevertheless takes great care not to give more than one or two performances of each play. Thus deprived of audiences and of any true sense of cultural function, it has been the undeviating experience of each such playwright that he has slipped hopelessly into a government job and begun to turn out conscious material for demagoguery or, after two or three years, ceased writing plays altogether.

And a few times a year a concert of native dance-dramas is put on at the Hidalgo Theatre, again by the government boys. These are preposterous museum re-creations, highly offensive when it is realized that the real thing still functions brilliantly in countless villages in spite of persistent discouragement by the still powerful clergy (although this same clergy will sometimes deliberately avail itself of a pagan festival and incorporate it into the ritual of a saint's day). The dance-drama in Mexico is a profound and important manifestation of popular theatre, but it is in no sense analogous to the new theatre, and it is a form that can scarcely be taken over and expanded before the establishment of a régime which is fundamentally dedicated to the true preservation of folk culture. Consideration thereof is accordingly pretty much out of the scope of this article.

Then what are the possibilities of a revolutionary or workers' or social theatre in Mexico? The answer, to this observer, is that the possibilities are just as great as

(Continued on Page 36)



The whole village participates in ceremonial Aztec Festival



# The Hope for Poetry in the Theatre

By ARCHIBALD MAC LEISH

The phrase "Poetry in the Theatre" means two very different things. It is impossible to discuss it unless it is clear which of the two is intended. To some people—to most perhaps—it means a stage on which people speak in poetic language. Poetic language in this connection means elevated language, lofty language, flowery language, beautiful language. In this meaning of the phrase I have no interest. If people want elevated and flowery language on the stage they can very easily get it. Nothing is easier than the composition of such language. It is much easier to dress language up than to strip it down. There are probably several hundred thousand Americans to say nothing of the countless Englishmen and God's own quantity of Irishmen who can write such language as against a very few men who can lay it bare. No one who wants to hear poetic language on the stage need wait very long. In fact he need not wait at all. He can hear it on Broadway in any season. There is only one thing he must not do. He must not confuse what he hears with poetry.

The other meaning of the phrase is at once much simpler and much more complicated to understand for it means exactly what it says. It refers to the possibility of a theatre in which *poetry* shall be presented. The difference between poetry and poetic language is too obvious to discuss. Roughly it is the difference between bridge building and interior decorating. A poem is not a poem because it has a surface of poetic talk but because it is a poem in its conception, in its construction, in its whole and in its parts. It is an entire experience. Its whole quality consists in its power to present entirely, immediately and essentially what prose can only describe or explain from the outside. Nothing could possibly be farther from poetic language than a poem.

The difficult question then is the question of finding or creating a theatre for poetry in this strict sense. It seems to me that such a theatre is becoming possible. It also seems to me that the reason why such a theatre is becoming possible now is closely related to the reason why such a theatre has not existed in the immediate past. A true poetic theatre requires for its success a community of emotional understanding between audience and stage. Precisely because its function is *not* to explain or describe but to present, poetry must make many assumptions. It enters any emotional situation at the crisis—at the third act. If it is obliged to spell out the early scenes—the background and derivation of that emotional crisis—it is lost. It is clumsy and self-conscious and lost. But if it is permitted to seize at once and directly upon the emotional crisis it is infinitely more lucid, because it is infinitely more immedi-

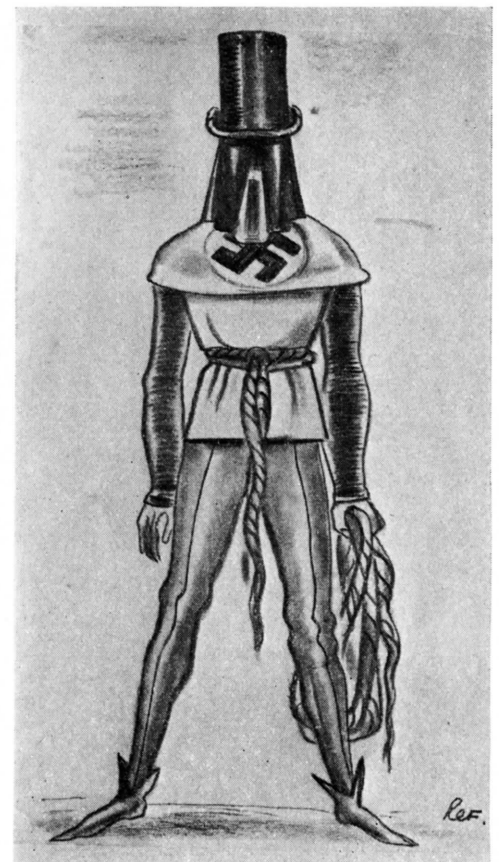
ate and more inward, than prose. It is for this reason that all the great poetic dramas have been dramas dealing with situations as familiar to the audience as to the poet. The situations of the great Greek plays were threadbare with familiarity. So were the plots of most Elizabethan plays—where they were not familiar, the verse, carrying too great a load of explanation, has long periods of an incredibly prosaic dullness and awkwardness. It is the essential condition of poetry for the stage that no scaffolding, no extraneous preparation, should be necessary: that the audience should be ready for the essential discovery of the verse: that the audience should be willing to believe in the emotion upon which the poetry moves.

It is this community of assumption and understanding between audience and poet which has been lacking in our society. The great common experiences carrying the great common emotions have ravelled out, leaving sexuality as almost the only universal. But the emotions of sex, although they are universal, are not *common* experiences. They are on the contrary exceptionally personal experiences: although all men have felt the same thing they have not all felt it together. A sexual play is a communication not between the playwright and an audience but between a playwright and a roomful of individuals—a thousand whispered secrets. A theatre based upon sexuality as its one universal is a theatre in which poetry is impossible—a theatre which must itself very shortly decay—a theatre which can only take refuge in sexual perversions. For unlike the great common experiences out of which the creative emotions of love and hate and triumph and revenge may be produced, the experience of sex produces only the emotions of sex. And the emotions of sex are essentially banal and must be spiced with variety to be frequently palatable. It is this disease which has attacked the commercial theatre and which indicates its senility and the senility of the society which it reflects. Not only some of the worst but some of the best of recent Broadway plays have been plays in which sexual perversions have been desperately used to restore the vitality of a theatre which has no other life.

The basis for hope for a new dramatic poetry lies in the fact that gradually over a period of years a new community of experience has been established, a new common ground of fact supporting a new commonly felt emotion. Social injustice is no novelty in this world. Indeed it is quite probable that there is less social injustice in this century than in the last: the most academic description of an English mill of the early eighteen hundreds will make the most exciting story in the New Masses sound mild. What is new is the *recognition*

of social injustice; the recognition specifically that it is injustice and that it is hateful. People a hundred years ago and fifty years ago, refused to know what they knew; and people who knew it very well in their blood and in their anguish were taught that what they knew was natural and to be expected and the will of God. But with time a part of that has changed. A larger and larger number of those who suffer have come to believe that they should not suffer, and a larger and larger number of those who observe have come to see, whether they wish to see it or not, that what they see is intolerable. There is again in the world a body of experience—of facts, of names, of cities, of human suffering, of human hope—which is held in common. There is an emotion distilled from that experience which is also common. These are the elements of poetic drama.

Until that common experience is more widely shared the audience for such poetry of the theatre must be limited, as it is limited now, to groups connected in one way or another with the political Left. But as long as that common experience is so limited those who do not share it must continue to take their theatre in a rotting house and to miss altogether the delight and the excitement of the building of a new.



Costume for an Anti-Fascist Satire.  
By Anton Refregier

are inherent in every letter of the word *Hollywood*.

Cagney's most remarkable quality is his sterling emotional consistency. No matter how bad the story which he is given to animate, no matter how worthy are his fellow-players or surroundings, he is incapable of a false performance, or of one foot of film which is not the candid record of his controlled impulse. Many actors have some intelligence and excellent intentions. They study a characterization, building it up consciously into some kind of artificial clothing. And as a result, the screen sags under "brilliant performances" of such artistically dishonest practitioners as Wallace Beery or George Arliss. But there's not a phoney thing about Cagney. His simulations are far more "intelligent" in their accurate directed spontaneity than any amount of the half-baked "created" roles by Basil Rathbone or Charles Laughton. And it is not merely that Cagney is "always himself"—that is, the tough little Brooklyn mick with a heart of gold right behind his left-hook. It is true that Cagney is "always himself." But he has any number of selves. His body is a transparent instrument for the demonstration of every facet of the lives of millions of men into whose class he was born. Their tragic, diverse and active lives are fused in him to burn from behind his own two eyes set in his mobile mask. But Cagney's mercurial mouth and fluid face are capable of assimilating such varying surfaces of shadows that he is not only a rough-neck from a down-town filling-station, nor a worn-out racing-driver, nor a cocky truckman, nor a damn-good prize-fighter, nor a petty-gangster, nor a traveling salesman, nor a picture-snatcher, but all of these varied characters, each perfectly realized in itself, with the inimitable addition of his own brand (since he was born with it) of recklessness, bitterness, anguished comedy and sober hysterical gaiety. Cagney is the perfect portrait of the American urban man and boy, whose life is so insecure and dangerous that the only buckler they can forge for themselves up to the present has been in the anarchic, ruthless, funny and tender violence which is apparent (as their reflection) in his every gesture;—his walk, his nervous fists, his abrupt silences and his steady mounting rage. Who, having seen it once, can ever forget his insolent creeping gait, his reckless waiting, running ahead, and his hiding, always confident, resolute and diabolically ingenious, as the news photographer in *Picture Snatcher*?

He was fortunate to start with. He was not handsome; that is, his face lacked the weak and pretty regularity of most film "juveniles" and he was well trained by contact with the work-a-day vaudeville stage. No one who doesn't dance could possibly move with the economy and easy balance with which Cagney manages his physique. Most Hollywood star-acting is accomplished by smart cameramen with angle-shots and the incidental support of widened-eyes, quivering lips or shuddering shoulders. There is no single part of Cagney's pres-

ence which does not respond to a proportional activity of the rest of his body when he starts to move. As he rushes up the front-stoop of a tenement house, bent on revenge, his face is blackened out by the sun behind him. But his prancing feet are only too obviously angry and his flailing arms are furious. In Soviet films alone do we feel that the director has simply gone out into the street and picked up his actors, so true are they to fact. With Cagney, in his best uses, it is the same. He is what he pretends to be.

He came to Hollywood four years ago without a reputation, after a very moderate amount of stage experience. He appeared modestly in one of the early gangster pictures, *The Doorway to Hell*; he had a "bit" in a scene with George Arliss in *The Millionaire*. But it was *The Public Enemy* that established his position. This remarkable picture is a perfect example of accidental excellence in the film industry. Its plot was nothing more than a rags-to-riches romance, but in reverse. It was the success story of a little gangster packed full of the documentation from Chicago's goriest feudal murders. But neither borrowings from the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre, nor the true incident of the bumping-off of a saddle horse that had broken its gangster-master's neck, nor any other of the anecdotes transposed from the daily papers to the screen, was responsible for the greatness of *The Public Enemy* as document. It was Cagney's complete comprehension of the kind of boy that produced the man that made the murderer who would inevitably end up with his mummified, bullet-ridden body tottering into his horrified mother's arms. From the first moments when Putty-Nose, the ward-sneak, gives the boy a gun, and Cagney, sitting on an old bed in the back of a saloon, sights down its barrel with delight, the temperature of all the action is ripe for murder. Cagney, as a truck-driver piping liquor from a bonded ware-house; Cagney as an unrepentant but quiet bad-boy, come to look at his friend's corpse set among the palms and keening of his suspicious neighbors,—Cagney as the sweet, hurried, cruel lover twisting the grape-fruit into his girl's face, personified that recent era. But *The Public Enemy* was an accident, however brilliant. It was the acting of Cagney we remember, not the name of the gangster he portrayed. There is one character, achieved by one of the best artists in America which would make a miraculous study for Cagney. James Farrell's Studs Lonigan is as real a symbol of Irish-American youth in process of harassing disintegration as Joyce's Stephen Dedalus was the type of a young Dubliner split by his Catholic background and his skeptical instinct. Lonigan is a whole, three-dimensionalized personification. His early suicidal death is a terrible testimony of class-murder. A film based on Lonigan would escape (from the studio standpoint) any stigma of propaganda. But it is impregnated with the most telling of revolutionary significance.

It was logical, after his first success, according to the Hollywood formula, that he would be "cast for type," doomed to repeat that first happy rightness in his role of Public Enemy indefinitely, until he would be as diluted and weakened as, for example, William Boyd or Franchot Tone. Aside from Cagney's superior talents, he managed admirably by force of his own character to resist this wrecking kind of exploitation. He saved himself momentarily, by comedy parts, and after *Smart Money* and *Blonde Crazy* (not expressly gangster-pictures), he managed to have stories found for himself set in other, if parallel, backgrounds. *Taxi* could have been a superb picture. As it was, its plot which started out in a series of fast events surrounding a taxi-rate war with union-trouble, was wanly pushed over into boy-and-girl romance. Cagney was furious that the dramatic significance of the whole idea was deliberately sabotaged by influence from the Hay's office, whose policy fears any mention of industrial controversy. But even in retrospect—Cagney the taxi-driver was an ominous and solid character. Strangely enough, the spirit he evoked was independently present on the New York stage all last year. *Waiting for Lefty* would have made the real picture that all of Cagney's well-wishers have been expecting since *The Public Enemy*. *Michael* } *Logic*  
*The Crowd Roars* was the (implicit) } *Boys*  
catastrophe of a racing-driver. It repeated, }  
in a way, the "development" motif of the }  
best of his films; that is, a complete pan- }  
orama of the origins of his interest in the }  
given subject (gangs, automobiles, card- }  
sharpening) up to a climax. The racing }  
scenes in *The Crowd Roars* modelled on }  
the Indianapolis track, had the terrific lit- }  
eral excitement of a good sports'-reel. }  
When, on account of his own selfish reck- }  
lessness, the young driver finds himself re- }  
sponsible for the terrible death of his own }  
mentor in the racing game, Cagney was at }  
his height. He stood, streaked with grease }  
and sweat, at the side of the smoking track. }  
The crazy cars kept tearing relentlessly }  
past. And with the vision of Cagney into }  
his own mad misfortune and senseless }  
speed, one almost smelled singed air and }  
burning flesh. He lost his nerve; started }  
to drink. Few actors can afford to de- }  
stroy their own charm, their best front-face }  
the way Cagney has never hesitated to do. }  
With a three-day's beard, in a lousy little }  
room, he drank himself into a stupor. He }  
bummed, and hated to do it; yet was forced }  
to take a cup of coffee at the dog-wagon }  
by the race-track side. Here the pathos }  
was no easy tear-jerk, but sickening and }  
humanly embarrassing. Yet instead of the }  
logical dénouement, the inevitable decline }  
and suicide which was indicated at every }  
turn, a girl, the girl appears again and }  
saves him from himself. What Cagney }  
wanted was to show the effect of racing on }  
a sensitive mechanic, the accumulative and }  
necessary use of drugs to keep his nerve }  
up, the insane competition of speed and }  
men, the irrelevance of the roaring, arti- }  
cally significance.

(Continued on page 34)

# The Play's the Thing

By JOHN W. GASSNER

Every so often, just to be sure that the point is not overlooked, the theatre lets its devotees know that the play is *not* the thing. The theatre as a collective art takes precedence over the play itself as often as the playwright and his time permit. This generally occurs when the play has nothing vital to say or fails to say it clearly. In the main thus far the theatrical season has offered better productions than plays. In addition to worthless pieces that have been dressed up natively by the collective efforts of director, scenic designer and actor, there have been other dramas which are largely inadequate but which have been so well plumed by the production as to resemble masterpieces. Directors of distinction are forced to waste themselves on melodramas, parlor comedies or helter-skelter farces where they cannot do full justice to themselves (witness Herman Shumlin in *Sweet Mystery of Life* and Harry Wagstaffe Gribble in *There's Wisdom in Women*) or else they lie fallow.

Lest the fault descend solely upon playwrights, let it be said at once that there is little encouragement for the more serious and courageous members of the fraternity who must peddle their wares for a year or more in the incredibly limited market of the theatre. Nor are the producers wholly to blame when it has long been painfully evident that every play of serious intent,

unless it provides some extraneous attraction such as "sex," for instance, in *Tobacco Road* and *The Children's Hour*, must struggle for breath alongside of theatre abortions that have no right to breathe at all. Meanwhile it is disheartening to count the mounting number of worthless plays that the theatre has already spewed out since the end of September. Many of these, such as *Eden End* and *Play Genius Play* were retired quickly enough, but the good money expended upon their production might have gone into the presentation of plays of infinitely greater value.

Fortunately, the theatre has profited substantially from three of its latest additions. Sidney Kingsley's *Dead End* has probably done as much as the stage can toward encompassing the question of crime and its relation to social injustice. It achieves the significance that *Blind Alley* misses when it becomes fog-bound in psychology. *Let Freedom Ring* is a solid addition to the literature of social oppression and an effective industrial complement to *Tobacco Road*. The Theatre Union production of Brecht's *Mother* recreates the social struggle glowingly, if rather unevenly. All three dramas belong pre-eminently to the theatre of today, reflecting a world in ferment and holding in solution a vision of justice which animates an increasing number of people whose outlook

would else be one of abysmal despair. There is in these plays, in varying degree, that catharsis and sublimation of evil which has premeated high tragedy ever since Prometheus Bound challenged an unjust Heaven in the year 470 B.C.

These reflections, by one who believes that the play *should be* the thing, do not comprise a puritanic rejection of mere "entertainment." There are many strings to the theatre's bow. There is place for a good "belly-laugh." There is also room for spectacle, pageant and musical fare, for the assembled glamor of theatre production which impinges simultaneously on many senses. On one level there is such superior entertainment as *The Taming of the Shrew*, God bless her. Or *Porgy and Bess*, which is to be considered less as a drama (its dramatic potentialities having been largely tapped in the non-musical production several years ago) than as a folk-opera. On another level one has the multifarious vaudeville amusement of musical revues, whose pearly gates have not yet been opened to this reviewer. However, the more generous circus management welcomed even NEW THEATRE "to come and see the big show."

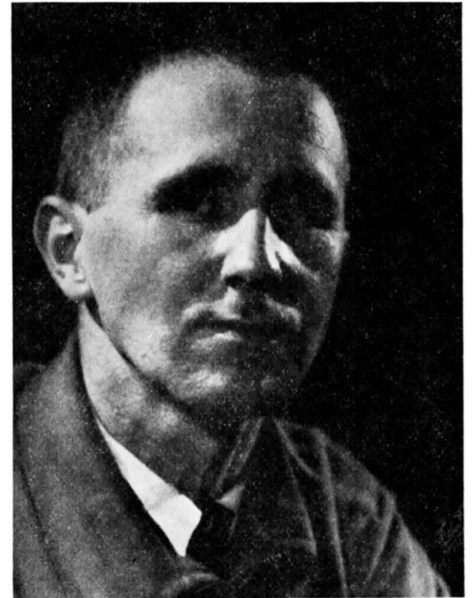
## Jumbo

As an epitome of this type of variety show multiplied tenfold with the resources of the circus, one could not find anything more suitable than the present production of *Jumbo*. It combines every conceivable adjunct of theatric art without ever approaching drama in the strict sense. One cannot take the thin thread of plot spun by Messrs. Hecht and MacArthur seriously. Their tale of a feud between two rival circus companies, along with the Romeo and Juliet passion of two youngsters from the warring camps, is merely a convenient peg on which to hang an equestrian ballet, a parade of animals and saxophone players, headed by the still beaming Mr. Paul Whiteman (this time on a white palfrey which bears up most wondrously), a docile pachyderm, a ten-reel circus, and a flood of wise-cracking expletives from the comically raucous Jimmy Durante. We pay homage to the latter's profundities ("They say an elephant never forgets. But what has he got to remember?" or his brilliant reference to paper money as "government literature") and to a resonant roustabout chant, "We don't know where we're going, but we're on our way," which sounds perilously like a crack at the New Deal. But *Jumbo* is innocent of meaning. It remains honestly and, except in the inept bridal finale, successfully an orgy of the senses. One is grateful for the pageantry, one is giddy with trapeze gazing, one admires the performance of a super-juggler and the precocity of a waltzing horse, and



Sidney Kingsley's *Dead End*. Setting by Norman Bel Geddes

Vandamm



Scenes from *Mother*, dir. by V. Wolfson. Right—B. Brecht.

Photos by Talbot

one leaves pleased and vacuous. Reflecting upon the experience one wonders whether much of our present content-free theatre wouldn't do well to pool its energies for the presentation of gargantuan shows of this kind instead of continuing to dish out picayune portions of entertainment like the pale fare of *There's Wisdom in Women* and *Most of the Game*. We would also be happy to dispense with all further dissertations on the artistic temperament like *Play Genius Play* that made such catastrophic recent appearances on Broadway. We would be equally pleased to see Pirandello mercifully interred and could leave the mysteries of play-writing decently confined to playwrights' cubicles instead of seeing them served up in plays like *On Stage*. We prefer to eat our chicken without watching the processes of decapitation, plucking and disemboweling. . . .

## Squaring the Circle

*Jumbo* brings us to the tragic subject of comedy. Thus far the season has not contributed a single native comedy of real value. If one comedy, the Soviet *Squaring the Circle*, rises above its fellows on the stage, it is because its roots are in the soil of a substantial world. The domestic imbroglios of the play would be beneath contempt if they appeared in the social vacuum of our regulation triangle comedies. The geometry of the bedroom is becoming an increasingly profitless study. Psychoanalysis provided for a time a new, non-Euclidean dimension, but that too has been pretty much exhausted. *Squaring the Circle* does not glitter in a social void in which etiquette and small talk provide a pretense

of environment and reality. As a result, *Squaring the Circle* is not only interestingly descriptive but is charged with meaning. The grotesque exaggerations of its characters are surface manifestations of buoyant idealism the very naïveté of which is lovable and heady. The play forbids us to forget that the youthful vitality of the characters is one of the natural resources of a new world which these people are helping to create, at the same time that the humor throws a mellow light upon this world of the Soviets which has been one-sidedly praised or damned for its adamant materialism. Humor brings this world closer to us, while the peccadilloes of the characters make it less formidably austere and incidentally more believable. At the same time its unabashed clowning should be a sufficient guarantee against regarding this as a factually realistic picture of the Soviet world.

Unfortunately, *Squaring the Circle* has laid itself open to misunderstandings. The very choice of the play for importation was not altogether fortunate. Katayev's comedy, which has superficially all the earmarks of a private joke, was in danger of being distorted in certain eyes as an anti-Soviet satire, a viewpoint which is incorrect both factually and artistically. An astute liberal critic has congratulated Katayev upon fooling the Soviet government! On the other hand, many of the reviewers regarded the play and the production as fundamentally sympathetic. The possibility of some misunderstandings must have been present in the producer's mind. And the fact that the translation was in part the work of a well-known anti-Soviet writer was also sufficient to put a conscientious

director on his guard. The producers and the highly capable director, Dmitri Ostrov, appear to have made some effort to guard against misinterpretations in their American adaptation. Their efforts were only partially successful because not free from opportunism and confusion. The interpolation of a "hunger march," in which an undernourished young communist proposes to take over the entire world where crops are wilfully destroyed, does credit to Dmitri Ostrov's sincere intentions and ability. It guards against too much smugness on the part of a foreign audience that might forget that in its country too there is want—want without the extenuating circumstances of a shortage of products as in the Russia of 1927. The interpolation also denotes that behind his clowning, and despite his grotesquely unsuccessful marriage (and who shall deny human beings the inalienable right to a little private folly!), the young communist is far from being a nitwit. The communist organizer who knows that there are things in the world that "will not hurt the revolution" is a delightfully tolerant and dignified figure, excellently played by Aristides di Leoni. His presence removes the possibility of attributing the follies of a pair of love-sick and mismated pigeons to their leader-

ship. On the other hand, the presence of a number of gags calculated to satisfy the carriage trade, as well as the stress of the production upon certain unfortunate quips, is misleading. The ending, in which the whole company consults a pre-kindergarten urchin regarding the future is a particularly unfortunate interpolation. Not only does it fail to jibe with the farcical humors of the preceding events, but it is as difficult to conceive of the youngster as an oracle as it is unnecessary to look for one in view of the substantial achievements of the characters in the present generation. There is, besides, no reason within the body of the play to scan the future with anxiety. The lack of any time identification in this production, which is actually supposed to represent the first years of Soviet reconstruction, adds to the confusion, which was aggravated at the opening performances by production difficulties. The answer regarding the future was to be given by off-stage noises of riveting and Soviet construction, which were unhappily barely audible. (These and sundry other matters were subsequently corrected in response to criticism.) Nevertheless the play remains the season's one substantial farce-comedy.

## Parnell and Mulatto

Serious drama has been less neglected recently. *Parnell*, though well written, need not detain us long. Its outstanding merit is that of production rather than playwriting. Despite dynamic performances by an exceptionally good cast, especially on the distaff side, and vigorous direction by Guthrie McClintic, the play falls short of strong and significant drama. Only the lavender romance of Parnell and Kitty O'Shea materializes in dramatic form, while the important elements in the Parnell saga are held at best in dim suspension. The drama of the home-rule struggle in Ireland is obscured by crinoline romanticism and the betrayal of Parnell by a combination of the Catholic church and the British state is never realized; a significant drama on this theme is still to be written.

*Mulatto*, Langston Hughes' maiden effort in the theatre written in 1929, is almost equally disappointing, but for altogether different reasons. This excellent poet and short story writer cannot be accused of turning his face from present-day realities. His play is in fact a bitter commentary on the plight of the mulatto in the South, the frustrations that are doubly harassing when he has been given a liberal education, the bitterness that is made more galling by the fact that the mulatto's father belongs to the master class. Trenchantly, too, the play points a mocking finger at the hypocrisy of the Southerner who avows his contempt for the Negro people without being in the least disinclined to have sexual relations with its women. At the same time the play realizes the tragedy of the lone Southern gentleman whose love for his Negro housekeeper results only in suffering and embitterment for himself, his morganatic wife and their mulatto children. The earnestness and fair-mindedness which

characterize this analysis of a problem is all to the credit of the play and more than justifies the support it has been receiving. Unfortunately, its dramaturgy is laborious and uncertain as if the playwright were fumbling in medium alien to him and could not follow the clear direction demanded by the conditions of dramatic literature. There is a confusing division of sympathy and identification with the protagonists of the drama, until it is not always clear whether the white father of the mulatto is not the tragic hero and whether he is not really the victim of his soft-heartedness. The production of the play is at least equally uncertain. Rose McClendon, however, achieves one of the stellar performances of the season.

## Dead End

Sidney Kingsley's *Dead End* presents only one phase of social wrong, but the picture it paints is uncommonly effective, and the larger implications of the scene are clearly present. Once again Kingsley has selected a relatively routine central action, but to a much greater extent than in *Men in White* he has not only handled the situation with notable expertness but has permeated the play with vital inferences. On the surface, *Dead End* is the story of a gangster who returns to his boyhood neighborhood to see his mother and his first girl before disappearing somewhere. He finds bitter disillusionment and death on the waterfront which had started him on his blood-bestrewn career. This situation is superficially melodramatic, and is made more so by the fact of his betrayal by a childhood friend who covets the reward money in a vain attempt to win a rich man's mistress. However, the parallel story of the young boy who is being driven into a similar career of crime and murder by the cumulative effect of poverty, bad example and the callousness of the law, not only makes the older gangster's career understandable, but places the blame where it rightfully belongs. Supplementary details like the jostling of the poor and the rich on the same waterfront and the plight of the architect on relief, for whom society has even less use and more contempt than for the criminal, also widen the scope of the play, which becomes a pointed indictment, as well as a poignant tragedy. Here and there the dramatist's writing hand trembled quite a little. Thus the picture of the rich is less fully dimensional than the treatment of the poor, the romance between the unemployed architect and the rich man's mistress is incompletely realized, and the apparently happy ending is hardly conclusive. But in every other respect Kingsley's drama is a credit to the stage.

Its authentication is greatly abetted by Kingsley's own forceful direction, Norman Bel Geddes' ominous setting, the acting of the adult principals and the vivid performance of the child actors who comprise the most dynamic group of youngsters the stage has harbored within our memory. Here and there the realism seems to be a

trifle gratuitous and self-conscious. Thus the dock which projects into the orchestra may be a valid solution of one of the production problems (the appearance and disappearance of the boys who are constantly in and out of the water), but inspection of this part of the set, which is open to the audience, reveals its make-believe character. A stage gully is not a river. The ultra-realism of the setting thus becomes rather fraudulent and unsatisfying. However, one would be guilty of inexcusable obtuseness if one seriously identified *Dead End* with routine Belasco productions. The difference leads to the whole question of realism in the theatre. Realistic art must understand of course that it too is only a form of illusion on the stage, and that its problem is to convince and not to describe. But the objection to Belasco realism does not, as generally supposed, relate to the *means* but to the *end*. If all the realistic drudgery—genuine escalators, elevators, bric-à-brac, etc.—produces nothing more than a picayune bedroom tragedy or a torrid romance there is good reason for damning the realism as pretentious. The trouble with the Belasco productions was that the plays did not warrant the treatment. If, on the other hand, the realism authenticates a scene which is trebly effective because it has been authenticated, as in *Dead End*, the effort is neither superfluous nor pretentious, even if the same immediacy might have been achieved by expressive simplification. *Dead End*, it will be seen, illuminates dramatic, as well as social, problems.

## Let Freedom Ring

The most immediate of the aforementioned three plays is unquestionably Albert Bein's *Let Freedom Ring*, a dramatization of Grace Lumpkin's pioneering proletarian novel, *To Make My Bread*, which unlike most dramatizations is really an original piece of work. The reception of the play was a distressing experience for those who believed that the progressive theatre could count upon some measure of understanding and support from the liberal press. It is evident that, to a great extent, any negative attitude toward the play must be based on definite misconception. Bein's tragedy is not merely just another routine strike in the Southern textile mills, just as it is something more than an elementary cry for social justice, though this alone should be welcome on a generally innocuous stage.

If the core of Bein's play is a strike situation this is the inevitable climax of a folk-history, of an odyssey of an American mountaineer clan. The strike situation gives significance and direction to the folk-story, just as conversely the latter adds poignancy to the strike. The implications of the play cannot be neglected without reducing its significance by more than half, for among its several truths this play states, with a conviction never before experienced on our stage, that the American labor movement is no foreign product jammed down one hundred percent throats by the despised "furriner". The camouflage of

racial and national prejudice receives short shrift, for here is as homespun an episode as any that could be culled from the covered-wagon period. The proletarianization of the native American population, an undeniable fact, is the tragic theme of as grim a picture as the theatre has seen in many a moon. Watching these mountaineers lose their homes and descend to the level of chattels in a mill-town, seeing their free spirit and tall bodies broken by peonage and pellagra, the strong flesh of their women corroding, their simple creativeness disappearing, is an unforgettable experience. Equally memorable is the final revolt when these bound men recover their manliness in the thick of a new struggle—a manliness that is the most precious of America's natural resources. They have not yet found victory in their war against economic slavery, but they have found *themselves*, which is already a form of triumph. How anyone can fail to be stirred passes comprehension.

*Let Freedom Ring* breaks the regulations of dramaturgy with the same disregard with which genius often cuts through established restrictions, even if it must pay a penalty for its violations. The penalty takes the form of a certain degree of epic diffuseness. This was perhaps unavoidable because the dramatist was forced to manipulate a great number of people over a long span of years. In other respects the weaknesses were avoidable. One can cite the necessity of telescoping the last two scenes and of hastening the pace of the play in its middle portion. Minnie Hawkins, the town prostitute, requires more development. Basil is rather arbitrarily drawn in the little time and space devoted to him. The flow of the play should have left more scope for the pathos of Kirk's return to his family, of his reunion with it, and his death shortly thereafter. Certainly the reunion with the mother could have been more intimate, despite the natural reticence of mountaineer folk, and less slow-paced and hortatory.

The production, laboring under great material difficulties, did not strike this reviewer as always equal to its task. It might have gained from a Kirk who could have been cast more definitely in the mountaineer mold, though Robert Williams' acting was dynamic and vibrant. Emma Martin could have appeared more raw-boned and less beatific, and her death might have been managed with less theatricality. However a production that boasts the genuine performances of Will Geer as Grandpap, Norma Chambers as Ora McClure, Shepperd Strudwick as John McClure and Robert Porterfield as Jesse McDonald, not to mention minor contributions by others in the cast, is far from an inadequate projection of the play. It is merely uneven. Mordecai Gorelik's settings call for more than grateful mention. They mark another step in his increasingly substantial career as one of the theatre's most incisive scenic designers. His is no stuffy, strictly picture-frame realism. Here is the realistic mode heightened by an imagina-



Albert Bein

tive truncation of interiors whose significance is enhanced by the continual dominance of the factory background. The sets recapture the larger sense of the play, in addition to providing a suitable acting space for it. They declare, almost as much as the action, that here is a significant local struggle that transcends its locale. With due allowances, then, for the difficulties of the script and the production, *Let Freedom Ring* is distinctly a definite contribution to the season. Contrary to the opinion of Mr. Robert Garland, ordinarily a staunch and courageous defender of the progressive theatre, freedom has not rung the wrong bell this time.

## Mother

The Theatre Union's audiences are privileged to see a landmark in the winding course of a legend. Living through its throes one experiences first of all the poignant drama of an illiterate peasant mother who became an active revolutionist first out of devotion to her son, then as a convinced volunteer. Beginning with a pathetic faith in the rightness of the prevailing order and a naive trust in the kind-heartedness of the government, she advances step by step toward revolutionary action. But human beings when placed in historically significant situations become something more than themselves, and the "mother" moves on the Theatre Union's stage as a symbolic figure to which her private self is decidedly secondary. She is the womb of a dream and of a conviction, around which is woven a simple but telling lesson in history and economics.

These considerations must be clearly understood if the Brecht play is to justify itself in the theatre and make sense. It is not a pedestrian exercise in realism; this is evident in the quickly changing scenes, augmented with moving picture slides, mass recitation, music and soliloquy. On the other hand, the play is not an exercise in sophisticated expressionism. Its deliber-

ate simplifications and telescoping of events comprise an unique experimental attempt to create a legend in terms of theatre.

Like all experiments, regrettably, both the play and the production leave something to be desired. The ending is distinctly inconclusive, and the play sometimes lags. There is a certain epic diffuseness in the text which the slides and the chanting fail to overcome and sometimes even accentuate. The play, in fact, exists on two unequal planes—as a lesson in montage form and as a drama, in which the latter alone is really effective even as a lesson. Unfortunately the dramatic portion—that is, the mother's story—is insufficiently developed and is not only episodic but shadowy. There are even more serious objections to the play that cannot be discounted. A certain self-conscious, almost condescending, simplification largely in the use of explanatory stereopticon slides and elementary preachments, endangers the entire effect of the play. If its intent is pedagogical, then this treatment threatens to insult the intelligence of the informed part of the audience, while repelling the part that is not preconvinced. Indeed, it is questionable whether the Theatre Union might not have found a more suitable play for its audiences, a play whose lesson would be less obvious to its regular following and more subtly realized for its middle-class guests. And certainly it would have been advisable for the author to have submitted his play to a thorough adaptation for American audiences. This might have recaptured the tremendous impact the play is reputed to have possessed before it was suppressed in Germany on the eve of the Fascist reaction. The production, which labors under obvious difficulties, is often enough astonishingly vivid. Helen Henry's performance of the mother is a memorable realization of a wonderful old woman, naive at first but shrewd and courageous in defense of her son, weary but resourceful and understanding, defeated but unbowed, and grimly determined at the end. John Boruff's Pavel, the son, is appealing; the scenes between mother and son are infallibly moving. Among several other portraits, James Macdonald's police inspector, Lee J. Cobb's formidable butcher and Stanley G. Wood's schoolteacher are clear-cut and sensitive. The mass chanting, especially in Hans Eisler's Song of the Answer, In Praise of Learning, and The Death of the Comrade, is generally effective. It would have been even more so if the Theatre Union's resources had permitted a larger group of speakers. But the coordination of the various elements of this production is not always in evidence, a difficulty caused by the play and aggravated by the numerical insufficiency of the cast, as well as by the fact that the music originally written for orchestra had to be transcribed for two pianos. *Mother* will unfortunately meet with a mixed response. However, few experiments are so justifiable and are likely to be as stimulating an influence in the theatre. Without *Mother* the season would be definitely the poorer.

# JAMES CAGNEY

By FORREST CLARK

It is probably true that even in the commercial "legitimate" theatre there is a greater percentage of plays worth one look than there are films from Hollywood or Elstree. During the last ten years, what with the aid of intellectual analysis and the connivance of the studio publicity-departments, the films have become universally recognized as an art-form worthy of considerable attention, quite in addition to the personality chatter of gossip-columns. Yet there are very few of the huge number of American films that have any intrinsic value as either works of art or of entertainment in comparison with the masterpieces of Europe. This truism is rendered no less true, but a little more complex by the fact that a number of movie connoisseurs in the daily papers continue to discover "historic" innovations in one picture after another, according a quantity of obscure and ingenious excellences to otherwise empty products. But after all the discussions, what has the American film really created since the naive dawn of Griffith that competes with the achieved epics of other countries?

Every so often, and always by accident, a fairly good picture can emerge from Hollywood. A recent example was *The Informer*, sensitively dehydrated from an original concept which was far more intense than the finished picture. Financially a failure, such a picture affords infinite satisfaction to the commercial distributors. In fact, every so often, as has frequently been shown, Hollywood will spend a considerable amount of money proving that "Art" doesn't pay. To be sure, there are the pictures and personality of Charlie Chaplin, but the vigor and exuberance of his earlier output has been increasingly attenuated in recent years. Even the quality of *Modern Times*, his unreleased feature, seems to be ambiguous, due to his own insecurity and personal confusion. Yet Chaplin has survived not only the transfer from silent to sound-pictures, amazingly well, but he has also managed to maintain his independent integrity, perhaps at the cost of his previously lavish creative output. When strong characterizations by dynamic personalities converge (usually accidentally) with a moderately unencumbered director (as Victor McLaglen in John Ford's *Informer*) the result is so hopeful that one can only regret it's not twice as good, and happening twice as often.

Given a few accidental excellences, a handful of outstanding personalities, what have the American films to propose for themselves, sav, for a cinematic Museum of the Future? Aside from Cecil B. de Mille's criticisms of history and the Hearst-inspired provocations toward friendly



fascism, there will be valued some evidence of sex-appeal at its most electric: the more inflammable Harlow-Gable competitions or other extreme examples of the lip and clinch school—parodies of themselves which are not only their own friendliest frameup, but also their severest criticism. It is sad to think that all the mechanical ingenuity, all the intellectual energy, all the artistic taste—to say nothing of cold cash added and subtracted, has produced little to tally up against either our verse, our architecture or our popular music of the same epoch. Mechanical ingenuity has been poured into flattering a vacuum, intellectual energy has sharpened itself by developing a dialectic of evasion and inanity; artistic taste, when it avoids vulgarity, achieves only the anonymity of a credit-line on a program. The whole setup of the industry effectually precludes the possibility of much more than one fairly good picture per studio per year. The canonization of certain physiognomies and anatomies in a stepped up super-human sexual potential devitalizes most of the personalities who have, even to start with, one spark of individual vigor. If a personality can survive, usually under the guise of a comic style, it emerges in a non-sexual or un-animal appeal: for example, as in the screen personalities of Joe E. Brown, Fred Astaire or James Cagney.

Joe E. Brown is, like the best of the four Marx Brothers, an inspired low-comic, and we are not ungrateful, when we complain his range is rather limited. Fred Astaire is not only a remarkable technician in the field of spectacular tap-dancing, where most tap, however complex, is to be *heard* and not to be *seen*, but he has also an extremely touching personal manner. He is always the brilliant amateur dandy surprised into a demonstration of such a bravura technique that few, if any professionals can match. But his mask of top-hat, kid-gloves and white tie, or his other identical minor, delightful disguises do not diminish one's pleasure at his performance, though they keep him from the scope of irony or even tragedy with their subsequent intense rewards. James Cagney, on the other hand, is perhaps not only the best young male actor in America both in slap-stick and the tragic genre as well, but in his bewildering personality meet all the conflicting strands which make the films a delight and a perpetual torment. Cagney's limits are not easily to be dismissed as personal. Rather, they are conditioned by all the phenomena of the most corrupt of our industries, the movies. The limits which constrict Cagney, preventing his gifts and energies from their frankest development, are not organic in him, but imposed upon him from outside, and they

great an opportunity for a helpful public service for him to refuse. We have agreed to look upon the situation from the broadest viewpoint and seek the highest public good."

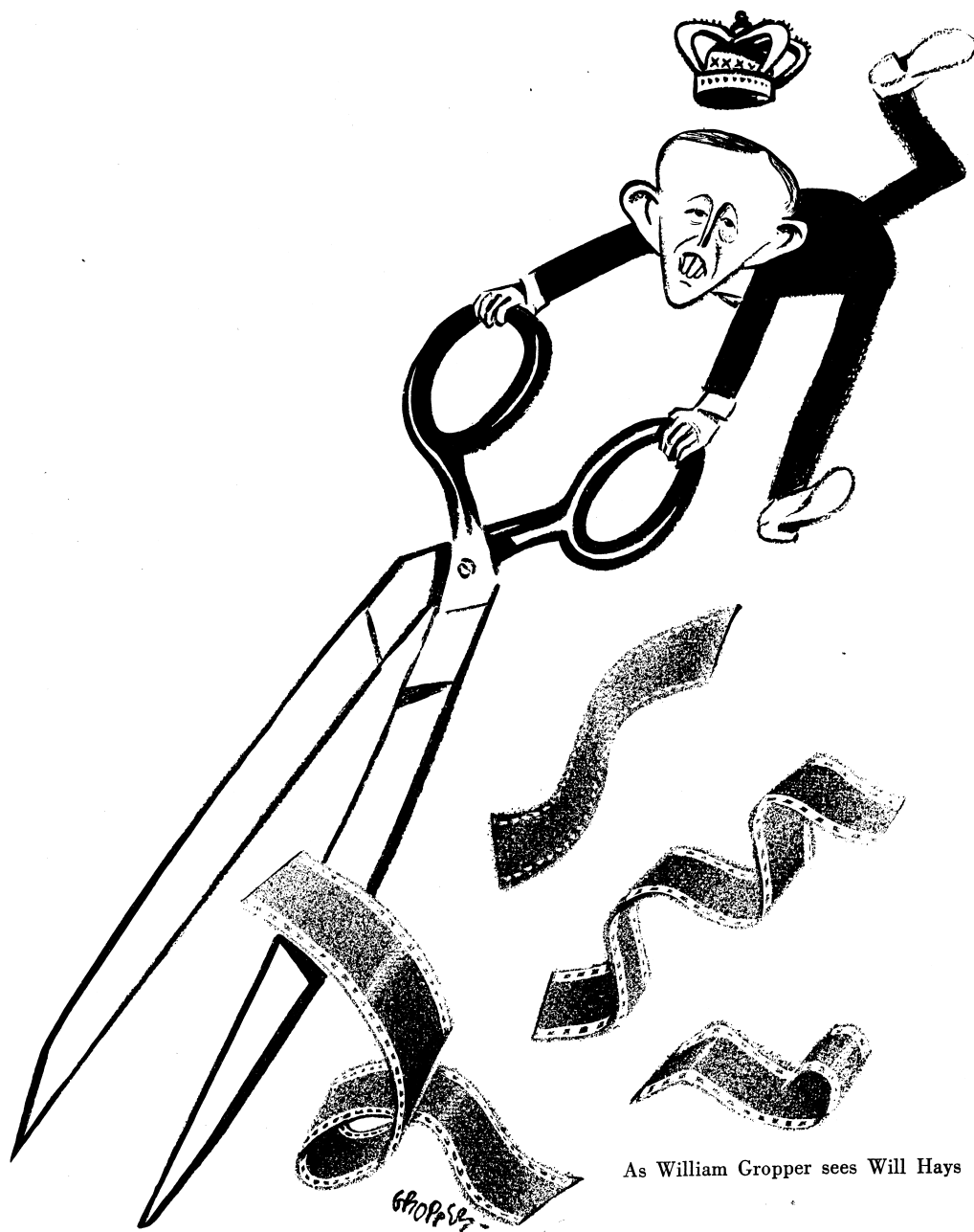
"A man's job is just what he makes it," Hays said, like a male Aimee Semple McPherson answering the call. "This is no personal thing with me. I am just a pawn and I have no ideas of getting out and revolutionizing things at all. The potentialities of the motion picture are limitless. Through the movies we can reach every one—even those who can't read. England sold the war to its colonies through pictures—the possibilities are inestimable."

Hays' first contract was for three years. He proved himself such a capable fixer—in the eyes of the mental giants who run the industry—that he was given a new one in 1926 for 10 years. Before that expired, and at a time when some of the movie moguls were thinking a deserving Democrat should be named to Hays' job, the cunning Hoosier outflanked his enemies and took advantage of the Legion of Decency drive to get a new five-year contract last May. Some of Hays' critics are unkind enough to say that he actually fostered the decency drive among churchmen so that he could frighten those among the producers who wanted to slit his throat. Be that as it may, Hays did hire John Boettiger, ex-newspaperman who was about to marry Anna Roosevelt Dall, as his assistant. That gives him an "in" with Roosevelt—an influence he desperately needs now that strong measures for Federal censorship and the laws against block-booking are being considered by Congress. Hays, upon giving a job to Roosevelt's son-in-law, was characterized thus by Representative Culkin of New York: "Moses leading the movies out of the cesspools was in fact a lobbyist whose sole function was to keep the public off the producers."

Just before the decency campaign P. S. Harrison, editor of Harrison's Reports, a very important film reviewing service for independent theatre owners, wrote in one of his bulletins:

"In the last two months pictures that have been produced by the Will H. Hays association surpass in filth, demoralization and cruelty anything that has been produced before. . . . Mr. Hays is responsible for this condition more than any other person in the business, for he has protected the producers of such pictures until now they are so cynical they laugh at his edicts."

One month later, in April, 1934, Roman Catholic bishops met in Washington. Archbishop McNicholas asked others to sign pledges "to remain away from all motion pictures except those which do not offend decency and Christian morality." Jews and Protestants joined. The movement finally controlled 65,000,000 persons in a threat of boycott. Hays must have chuckled. Until then he had been on a political hot seat. Now he was tops again. The movie magnates, scared, scurried like rabbits to the Haysian cover, leaping with an agility they



As William Gropper sees Will Hays

had never displayed before, from smut to piety. "There is no need and no excuse whatsoever," said pompous Ben Kahane, head of RKO, "for productions which scoff at chastity and the sanctity of marriage, that present criminals and wrong-doers as heroes or heroines, or in which smut and a salaciousness are deliberately injected for the appeal they may have to coarse and unrefined minds."

Mr. Kahane's company just before the decency drive, had produced *Finishing School*, with Frances Dee and Bruce Cabot, a picture in which the charming little heroine enrolls in a school and progresses from innocence to pregnancy in two semesters; *Hips, Hips, Hooray*, a Wheeler and Woolsey contribution to culture; *Flying Down to Rio*, a very dull musical with Dolores Del Rio, which concentrated on slightly clad dancers in stupid routines, and *Goodbye Love*, a picture which the Christian Century described as an "inexpressibly cheap concoction about easy divorce and the alimony racket. Much suggestive dialogue and cheap actions by mostly cheap people."

So you see Mr. Kahane *was* something of an authority on smut.

The churchmen, notorious gulls for the frauds like Hays, signed their pledge and subsided. They missed the point and didn't go to the root of the evil they were complaining about. The reason why theatre owners can't refuse to show these "cheap concoctions" is because they have been forced by the producers, who control distribution, through the block-booking system, to take a certain number of what the industry calls "stinkers" to get a few good pictures. The clergy, somehow, were held in line by the Hays mob, and didn't protest the block-booking system under which the producers make money in advance of production and by which they are able to maintain their cheap standards. As a consequence the producers retreated no great distance. Hays merely set up a few more rules, easy to break, and put Joseph Ignatius Breen, Catholic ex-newspaper reporter and ex-strikebreaker for the coal baron, Stuyvesant Peabody, in charge at \$20,000 a year to censor films. Breen can't soar very far into the stratosphere of purity. His



wings are clipped by the fact that his salary is paid by the Hays mob. His job is not to act as a pious censor, but to give the boys tips on just how a questionable scene can be filmed without offending too many people and advise on just how much they can get by with.

The producers, under the Hays rule, will be fined \$25,000 if they put out a picture without Breen's purity seal. Sure. And Louis B. Mayer is willing to be a Communist and the great powers are going to stop wars. How would you like to be getting \$20,000 a year from a noble gang like the producers who have more yes men at their command than Hays has alibis and fine one of them \$25,000? How long would your job last? And aren't jobs tough to get for men like Joe Breen, who haven't too much above the ears anyway?

Breen was incompetent enough as a newspaper man to be fired from every paper in Philadelphia. His last job in that city was on the Philadelphia Record, for which he covered the downtown beat. One night a fire broke out there, but the city editor of the Record couldn't locate Breen. That great journalist, instead of being at work, was attending a musical comedy opening. After that he worked for Peabody. "In this capacity," a recent article on him in the Esquire magazine said, "he had a lot to do with labor organizations and labor leaders. He had to know first hand how to break up strikes, protect mining property, outtalk and outswat delegations of belligerent miners." Hays, according to the story, offered him a job "after he had witnessed Breen competently handle a strikers' protest meeting."

The moral values of a strikebreaker, if any, are questionable. So don't believe the publicity stories you read about poor Joe Breen, ruining his eyes in a projection room, cutting filth out of films. The only qualification he had for that job was an ability to call several priests and bishops by their first names—a political value appreciated by the deceitful Hays. Don't think for one minute that Hays hasn't tried, aside from giving a prominent Catholic a good job. Just recently he banned crime stories which portray "the activities of American gangsters armed, in violent conflict with the law, or law enforcement officers." Of course he exempted 20 films with crime angles the boys were planning to produce. And only last September he issued his latest set of taboo words: alley cat, bloody, dump, sex appeal, skirt, house-broken, guts, fairy, nance, mistress, chippie, coccotte, courtesan, eunuch, floozy, goose, nuts, nerts, louse, broad and the phrase, in your hat. The biggest thing he's ever done was to ban the giving of the Bronx cheer. Mr. Hays means business.

Joe Breen will probably come in handy later as a motion picture strikebreaker when the purity racket peters out. The labor record of the Hays mob is not a pretty one. In 1933 when the sound men struck, Harry P. Brigaerts, head of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, worked openly with Pat Casey,

"labor contact executive" for the producers, to break up the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees. The IATSE had called the strike. The men had responded. After conferences with Casey, Brigaerts raised the cry that his union had jurisdiction over the strikers. That dispute has never been settled within the American Federation of Labor, but it did serve in 1933 to break the strike. Technical workers in Hollywood since that sell-out have been afraid to join unions and are poorly organized. Hollywood actors, however, have joined in a militant union and from their ranks the real leadership will come.

At one annual Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences award dinner Hays tossed this bouquet at his bosses:

"Again and again these dramas that reflect new standards of art and good taste are disappointing to their producers. And yet that inner urge which marks every one of our producers as a true artist causes him again to make the trial."

These gents termed artists by Hays were described otherwise by Robert Montgomery, Ralph Morgan, Claude King, Kenneth Thomson and Richard Tucker, members of the Screen Actors Guild during that body's NRA negotiations. This is what they had to say:

"With few exceptions they have never contributed anything to the actual making of pictures or to the advance of the art. Yet these same men arrogate to themselves a despotic feudalism over the working conditions of those who actually make pictures. . . . Only the baronial insolence of men whose record speaks for itself has led to the obstructionist attitude with which each proposal for reform has been met."

Perhaps the actors saw the producers a bit more realistically than Mr. Hays did. Perhaps they held the same view as that expressed by Senator Smith W. Brookhart of Iowa, when he introduced a resolution asking for an investigation of the film industry, denouncing the way producers issued their securities "in a wild orgy of expansion." These securities, he said, "were issued to and absorbed by the public in bales, and the amount of water represented by them would have floated the United States Navy."

Hays first launched an offensive against the actors in 1927 when the producers tried to get "talent" to take a 10 per cent cut. The annual box office income of the industry is one and one-quarter billion dollars. Actors, for all the propaganda about high salaries, receive only 1 3/5 cents on each dollar. Salary cutting was blocked when Equity threatened to organize film actors. In 1929 there was the Equity strike in Hollywood, lost through the poor leadership of Frank Gillmore, Equity president, and the selling out of his fellow workers by that distinguished Christian Scientist, Conrad Nagel. The producers then set up their Academy, under its fancy title, as a company union. Prominent actors signed an agreement not to strike for five years, a pact which expired just last March. In return free lance actors were given a new

uniform contract, guaranteeing a 12-hour rest period between calls and continuous employment. The guarantees were not kept until the producers were forced into the bargain by the Screen Actors Guild. Hays' big push came in March, 1933, during the banking holiday. Producers, under the threat of closing all the studios, forced contract players to take a 50 per cent cut and free lance players to take 20 per cent for eight weeks. He attempted to start a General Booking Office, to be controlled by the producers, from which studios were to hire all creative talent. That plan failed when actors and agents refused to cooperate. Then came the NRA and the actors broke away from the company union and formed the Guild. Among those able to see through Hays' shabby schemes were Adolph Menjou, Frederic March, Groucho Marx, James Cagney, Ralph Bellamy, Jeanette MacDonald, Ann Harding, Paul Muni, George Raft, Boris Karloff, Eddie Cantor, Spencer Tracy, Miriam Hopkins, Warren William and Gary Cooper. For months they tried to negotiate with the producers, but got nowhere. Finally they sent this appeal to President Roosevelt:

"The actors have exhausted every effort to agree with the producers on working conditions. They have been exceedingly patient. They have been tricked, hamstrung and lied to. Every dishonest practice known to an industry, the code of ethics which is the lowest of all industries, has been resorted to by the producers against the actors. In the face of such treatment, the actors, with confidence, are coming to the government which promised them better working conditions under the NRA, to see if such better working conditions can be thus obtained."

Alas for their naive confidence. The NRA was a flop and they, in common with other labor unions, have been handed the hollow promises of the Wagner Bill. The Actors Guild, allied with the Screen Writers Guild, is expected to call for a collective bargaining election within the coming months; but they will not be recognized by the producers. Hays will deal only through the Academy, a thoroughly discredited body which has about as many friends as Willie Hearst. Even today he will bleat that the Academy is not a company union, but he cannot explain why it is represented by Loeb, Walker and Loeb, who are also attorneys for the producers.

In the role of economic prophet Hays is as dense as Louis B. Mayer and Herbert Hoover, and his ardor to plug his racket leads him to utter such stupidities as this statement he issued in March, 1934:

"No medium has contributed more greatly than the films to the maintenance of the national morale during a period featured by revolution, riot and political turmoil in other countries. It has been the mission of the screen, without ignoring the serious social problems of the day, to reflect aspiration, achievement, optimism and kindly humor in its entertainment.

"Historians of the future will not ignore the interesting and significant fact that the

movies literally laughed the big, bad wolf of depression out of the public."

Millions are on relief today; millions are homeless; millions are being prepared for a gigantic slaughter—yet one can find no evidence that films under the rule of the Hays mob will treat of serious social themes. That is not to say the producers are ignorant of social problems. Hays is never more keen than when he is suppressing ideas for the screen which will help humanity. He is never more aware of his job than when he is fostering the production of Fascist propaganda. His influence kept Al Rosen, Hollywood producer, from making *The Mad Dog of Europe*, a picture about Adolf Hitler. Rosen accused Hays of that in a damage suit he filed against the film czar in October, 1933. The producer was informed, according to his suit, that he must cease all negotiations for the making of the film and that if he failed to do so, Hays would "see that the production was never made and would do all in his power to obstruct it." Rosen at that time had spent \$7,200 preparing production and had rented space at the Tiffany studio. The suit also charged that Hays had threatened to boycott Tiffany unless their arrangements with Rosen for use of the lot facilities were cancelled.

Walter Wanger's film, *The President Vanishes*, was purged by Hays of the scene in which a Communist speaker is killed by a mob of Fascists when he urges the workers to join the Communist party. Every effort was made to obstruct that picture because Wanger did not deal kindly with Fascists. Hearst raised a cry of radicalism in his yellow journals and Hays eliminated the picture's most vital, most dramatic parts. There is the case of Eisenstein's *American Tragedy* which he was to do for Paramount. One scene was to have the central character as a bell hop in a luxurious hotel receiving a 50-cent tip. He stares at the coin in his hand, which grows larger

and larger until the camera shows only the words, "In God We Trust." Turning down the hallway the boy sees, at the far end, a huge sign with the same words and the scene changes with the youth walking down the aisle of a great cathedral over the altar of which, etched in letters of fire, is "In God We Trust." Hays and his mob stopped Eisenstein and the picture was made by Josef von Sternberg, a synthetic genius who took all social meaning from Theodore Dreiser's great document. The film was a flop at the box office.

G. W. Pabst, one of the greatest directors in the world, also felt the Hays censorship, when he attempted to do *War Is Declared* for Paramount. B. P. Shulberg, one of the more intelligent producers in Hollywood, knew that Pabst would direct a great film. The action of the picture was to take place aboard a liner bound for Europe, when news flashes over its radio that war has been declared. The news is not clear which countries are involved, but the ship immediately becomes a little world, torn by the petty hatreds and chauvinistic patriotism of the various nationals aboard. The picture showed all too clearly the stupidities of war hysteria. So the Hays mob stepped in with an edict from Washington that it could not be made.

"Well," one of the Paramount executives said to Pabst, "why should we make pacifistic pictures when the whole world is thinking in terms of militarism?"

"But gentlemen," Pabst replied, "from the very start you knew that the next war was to be the subject of this picture."

"That's true," the executive agreed, "but

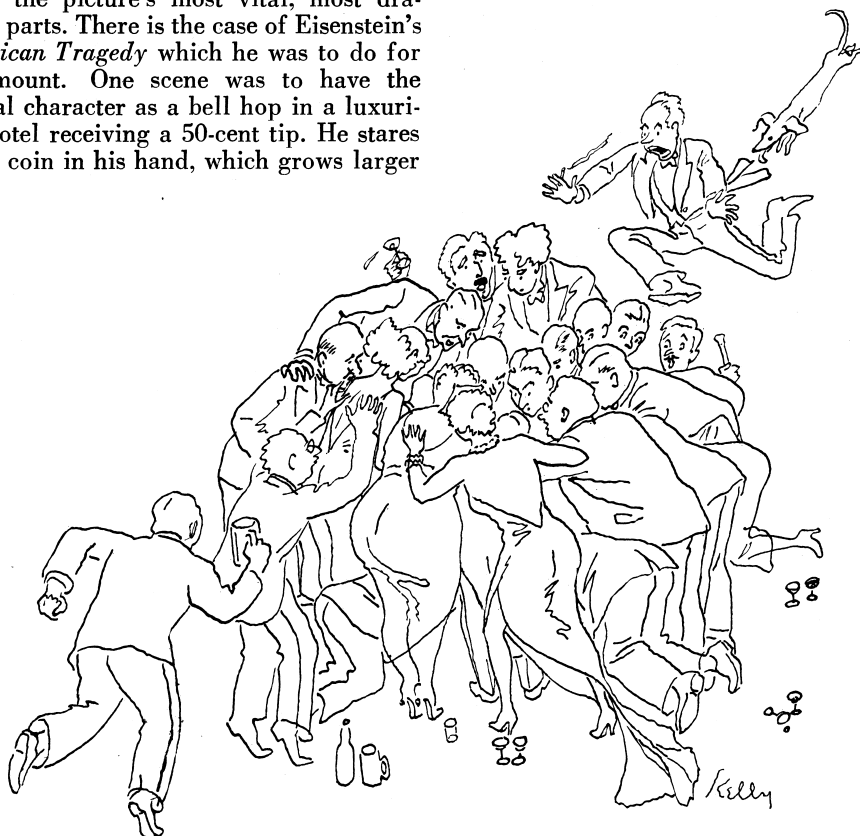
we had hoped it wouldn't be so noticeable."

So much for Hays' rigid censorship. Let's go back to his white role of Man of God—another favorite color assumed by this chameleon as he scuttles about his strange pursuits. This brings us to Rev. Charles S. McFarland, former senior general secretary of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. The good doctor's cupidity was seen quickly by Hays and McFarland, unknown to the vast membership of the Federal Council, was given a cut of the Hays mob's "take." From January, 1928, through August, 1929, McFarland was on the payroll at \$150 a month for "giving advice concerning religious motion pictures and questions arising in the industry which related to religion." Those questions concerned censorship and Rev. McFarland was a good front for Hays. Mrs. Jeanette W. Emerich, field worker and assistant secretary, also received \$15 payments from the mob for addresses made and conferences attended in connection with her council duties in which she found occasion to discuss motion pictures. She found 215 such occasions and netted \$3,225.

When that scandal broke the Federal Council lost a good man on its administrative committee in the person of Carl E. Milliken, secretary of the MPPDA, who resigned in a huff. Milliken admitted the payments and did not call them bribes, giving them the polite name of "honoraria." Churchmen launched an investigation and discovered that the Hays mob paid very liberal expense accounts to 52 civic, club and church leaders to pack meetings at which speakers criticised pictures. The Federal Council report also said in part: "The Hays office in an effort to establish the point that motion pictures do not contribute to crime contributed \$100 to the expenses of a certain prominent European social scientist who was planning to make one address in New York city in which he would state his favorable conclusions regarding pictures." There was also Rev. Charles Stelzle, publicity man for the Federal Council, who sent out some letters to churchmen praising Hays and Milliken. "Who is paying him?" the *Episcopal Churchman* asked—then answered, "The ox knoweth his master's crib."

If Capitalism were not rotten with such corruption it would be a mystery why so-called church and civic leaders go on believing Hays when he makes a new set of promises to be good. For the man is not a dignified, intellectually honest person. He is a cheap ward heeler in a top spot. He is a former member of the Harding cabinet—a political gangster of the lowest stripe.

Yet he is allowed by the producers and by a public upon which tribute is levied to pay his salary, to act as moral guardian for motion pictures, the infant industry. It is as if a young mother should deliver her new born child, for safe keeping, into the hands of a William Edward Hickman or a Jack the Ripper.



HOLLYWOOD EXTRA! MAN SUPPOSED TO KNOW THE REAL IDENTITY OF JOEL FAITH MOBBED AT PARTY

—James Kelly

# "THE NEW GULLIVER"

By LOUIS BUNIN

**T**he *New Gulliver* is in its fourth week at the Cameo as this article goes to press. The film has already been reviewed by every metropolitan paper and magazine that carries cultural and feature news, and the reviewers have elbowed each other in the rush to attain heights of praise. Some of them have even warned Clark Gable and Mickey Mouse to look to their laurels. One said that Gordon Craig was right: "The puppet is an ueber mensch, and the world's greatest actor." True, most of them objected to the "underlying propaganda" in *New Gulliver's* brilliant technical achievement, but they hinted that Hollywood could correct this defect in future American puppet films. None of the reviewers even suspected that this film carried a profoundly disturbing message to the surprisingly large number of American workers in the puppet field. This article will explain the nature of the disturbance.

For many hundreds of years, puppets and marionettes have enjoyed a large mass following in all parts of the world. During all those years, puppets have been operated in one of two ways. Hand puppets are placed over the operator's hands and the movement of the fingers within the puppet gives it life. Marionettes are operated from above by means of strings and controllers. But the *New Gulliver* has done something tremendously important to Puppet Punch. It injected him with a new and unheard of power and made him fantastically eloquent, flexible and alive. In this film, the puppets are not operated by strings like the string marionettes. Nor are they placed over the hand like the hand puppet. They have no inner mechanisms, no springs or levers.

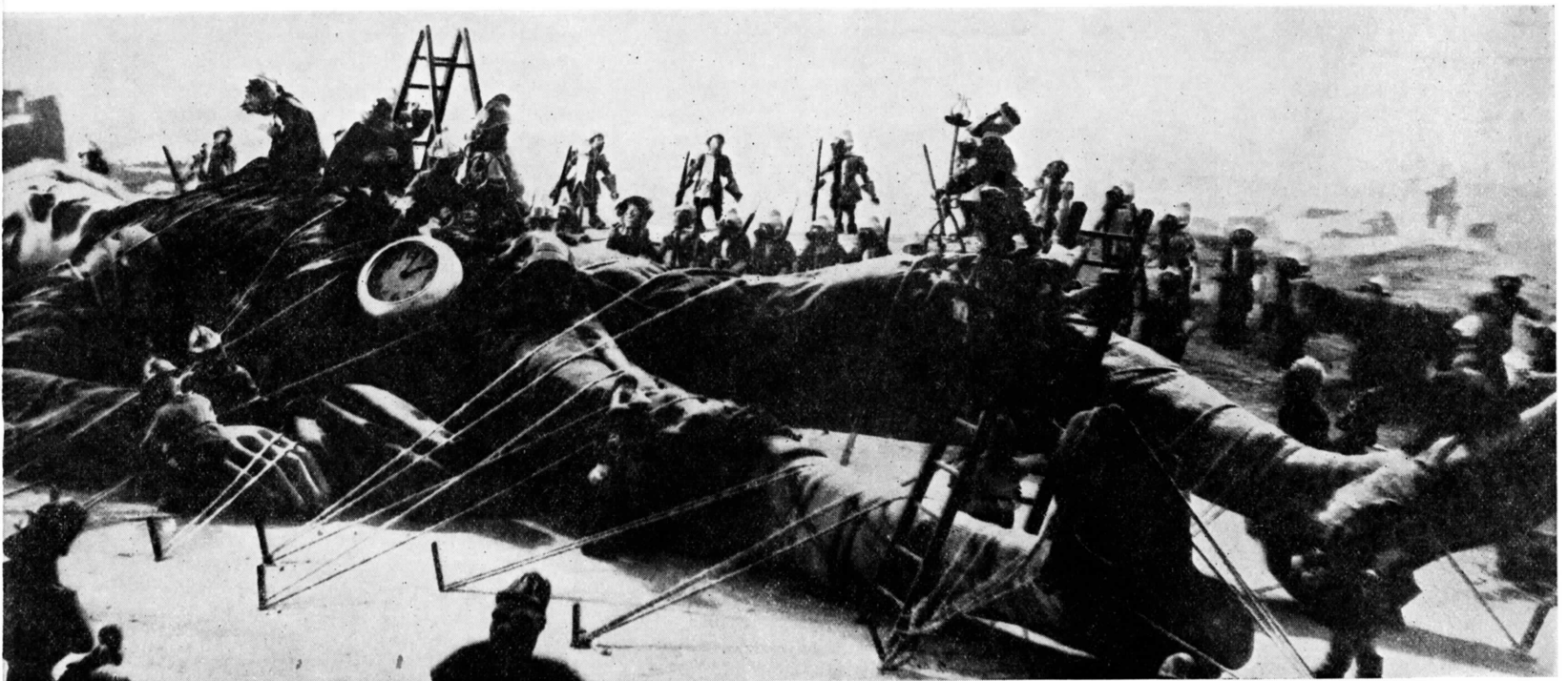
They are about seven inches tall and are, by themselves, immobile. In America, we call such figures "stand-pats"—but see them on the screen! They sing and laugh; express joy, sorrow,—anger, and every emotion desired of a skillful actor. After the hundreds of years of conventional life, puppets have been touched by the magic of the cinema and you would never recognize them.

In America, some puppet and marionette operators had their puppet shows filmed for the screen. After several attempts at using the conventional technique, however, the puppeteers became convinced that an entirely new technique would have to be developed if the puppet were to become a movie star. But puppeteers have never been conspicuous for their wealth. The time and money required for experimentation necessary and materials were obstacles that could have been removed by the movie financiers. However, as all creative artists in America know too well, financiers demand a finished product before they will gamble, and as a consequence puppeteers in America have been left to their own poor resources, hoping that, maybe, some day—.

Contrast this with the experience of the collective artists, musicians, writers, puppeteers and craftsmen who created *The New Gulliver* in the Soviet Union. Obviously, this collective was patted on its back by the government of a great nation and told that time, money and materials were of little moment, if an important and beautiful movie medium could be created. It is precisely this contrast that the American puppeteers, mentioned in the first para-



Above: Puppets by Ptushko  
Below: Scene from *The New Gulliver*



graph, felt so keenly, and were disturbed thereby.

Now let us describe what this collective did to warrant the confidence of the government. The film *The New Gulliver* was made with thousands of puppets and one human being. The story is based on Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. But by having the young pioneer, Petya, dream that he was Gulliver, the director Ptushko was able to take liberties with Swift's story and make a perfectly conceived marionette movie. In Petya's dream, Gulliver sees the land of the Lilliputs through the eyes of a pioneer, and the childish confusion of ancient costume and people with modern machinery is very logical and charming.

The film was twenty-one months in the actual making plus a background of eight years of experimental work. It was made entirely by means of the same technique employed in the animated cartoon and object multiplication. The latter technique involves a tremendous amount of work, but the film proves how worth-while it was. Briefly, with this technique, to make a head change its expression from close-lipped anger to open-mouthed hilarious laughter, one must make from thirty to forty separate little masks; each mask with a slight change of expression, from one extreme to the other. The masks are then photographed on the figure some thirty or forty separate times. When these shots are combined and run off on the screen in the usual rapid sequence, the face seems to change its expression as though it were alive. We can imagine the joy of Sarah Mokil on first seeing the tests, when the hundreds of small separate parts she designed were combined on the screen in these astonishingly alive little people.

To puppeteers in America, the Soviet collective that created the film will be an object of envy and inspiration. Through

this collective the screen has finally touched Puppet Punch and miraculously freed him from century-old limitations. This is the only important evolutionary change in the

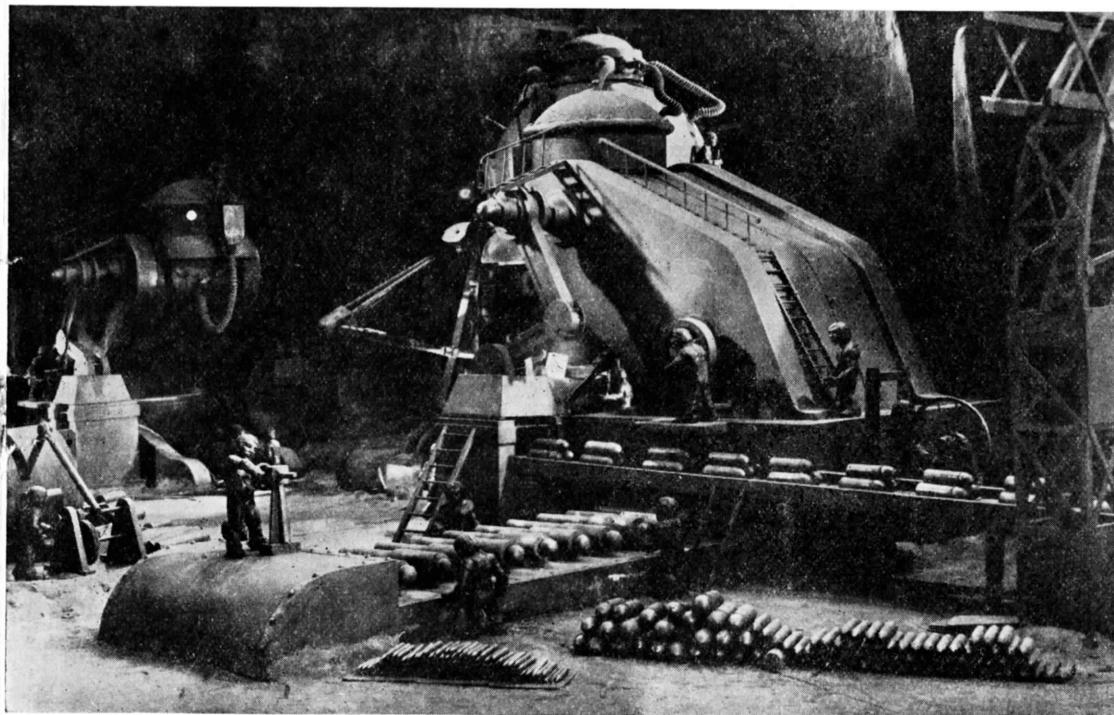
entire course of the life of the world's oldest actor.

Hollywood, too, will see *The New Gulliver*. The enthusiastic press reviews will hold forth possible profits to producers. Puppeteers will undoubtedly be called in for consultations and propositions. Perhaps, technical improvements will feature the puppets' appearance on the American screen, but it is safe to say that the vigor and life in *The New Gulliver* resulted from the fact that this film took sides in a social struggle, will be lacking in the Hollywood marionette film.

As for you craftsmen and puppeteers I know so well, you who worked in such films as *The Lost World* and *King Kong*, and proved beyond a doubt that technical efficiency and ingenuity are obtainable in America; you who were disturbed by the obvious advantages of the Soviet collective must bear the following important fact in mind. There are workers' film groups in America. Among them are the New Film Alliance, Nykino, and the Film and Photo League. You can bring them your ideas and skill. They will recognize, thanks to *The New Gulliver*, that an acting company of grotesque, comical, and fascinating little people can win a permanent place in the affections of the great mass of American movie-goers.



The Puppet Master Ptushko—A Soviet Caricature



The Workers of Lilliput Laboring in a Munition Factory

# In Praise of Hollywood

By ROBERT STEBBINS

November witnessed the unexpected emergence of a new movie theme; to-wit: the love of offspring. How the producers ever overlooked it remains one of the many mysteries of the industry. But they've more than made up for their negligence with no less than six pictures, each of which is devoted to the tribulations and joys of parenthood. *I Found Stella Parrish* (mother love), *The Melody Lingers On* (ditto love), *Last Days of Pompeii* (father love), *Transatlantic Tunnel* (mother, father, and tunnel love), *Three Kids and a Queen* (dog and baby love), and *A Feather In Her Hat* (just baby love) all go to indicate in their novel way that the Hollywood film has at last advanced to the stage where swaddling clothes are appropriate.

To account for this unforeseen increase in maturity we must refer to the condition of the industry. The producers can hardly have failed to notice the alarming apathy of moving picture audiences in recent months. As a consequence they were forced to reach out desperately to new and untraversed domains of thought. It was one of those rare occasions when the considerations of pure self-seeking accrued to the aesthetic advantage of the public!

As for the films themselves, they are pervaded with the sweet spirit of parental love. True, there are tears, but then again, there is happiness. Whoever it was, who first said that tears and joy are inextricably one, we do not know. But how right he was! And with what subtle persuasiveness is this thought embodied in *I Found Stella Parrish* and *The Melody Lingers On*!

The former relates a beautiful tale of sacrifice. Stella Parrish, played to the hilt by that fascinating tragedienne, Kay Francis, makes an unfortunate marriage. Her husband, an indescribable rotter, is insufferably, well-nigh insanely, jealous of her. There is a quarrel and an innocent third party is fatally shot. Stella is convicted of the crime and her baby is born in prison. The heroic efforts of this little mother to save her child from the dreadful knowledge that she first saw the light of day behind prison bars forms the basis for as noble and inspiring an epic of the human heart as these eyes have ever beheld. We have but one fault to find, a fault that lest we appear unduly captious should be considered in the light of suggestion rather than criticism. Why in *Stella Parrish* did the child serve as an instrument for keeping husband and wife apart? Certainly there is something about children, something in the very nature of children that brings husband and wife together. This result could be effected in any number of felicitous ways. The following solution might be attempted.

As our film opens Mr. and Mrs., let us say Davenport, though any name could do, are celebrating the fourth birthday of their

daughter Sopha. Parents' eyes are seemingly filled to the overflowing with love for one another and simple pride in their Sopha's beauty and gentle charm. At this moment there enters a youngish, though obviously coarse, servant girl. Mr. Davenport looks up at her. Mr. Davenport then looks at his wife. Mrs. Davenport notices his glance and drops her eyes. The music, a symphonic arrangement of *Jingle Bells*, *Jingle Bells* turns to the minor. Mother Davenport decides to win back Father Davenport by arousing his jealousy. She goes out slumming with the butler. Both Mother and Father foolishly believe themselves in love with butler and servant girl respectively. On the fatal night they are about to part from one another, perhaps forever, the little Sopha, who all along has suspected the strain between her parents, somehow manages to climb out of her trundle bed and by her simple eloquence makes Father and Mother realize the error of their ways. The music, a symphonic arrangement of *Jingle Bells*, *Jingle Bells*, returns to the major.

Such a story, or variant thereof, although probably too daring a departure from the norm of motion picture plots, would serve a double purpose. Not only would audiences be refreshed by unhackneyed material but the cause of child-acting in our country would be invaluablely advanced. NEW THEATRE has always contended that the banning of child actors from the Hollywood screen was an unwarrantable excess against the youth of the land. Other arts have had their prodigies: music its Mozart and Mendelssohn, sculpture its Michelangelo, then why not the

American Movie? Surely somewhere in our vast nation there must be a curly-topped, bright-eyed child who by her winning innocence and skill can benefit both producer and audience alike.

Furthermore, the lack of child actors often creates a serious, if not insuperable problem. For instance, there was the matter of *Anna Karenina*. Although Mr. Schnozzle Durante performed with remarkable verve as the son of Miss Garbo, it was obvious to anyone with the slightest degree of critical acumen that the celebrated juvenile was too old for the part by several years. And another thing. Why, for example, has no producer shown sufficient enterprise to investigate the rumor that last year in the wilds of Canada a certain Mrs. Dionne presented quintuplets to an unconcerned world. These children, if their existence can be proved, might readily fit into the recently announced G-Kiddie cycle. With regard to the last mentioned, may we humbly submit that the grey-beards thus far proposed for the leading roles are beyond the age where their performances will be accepted with any credulity.

But to return for an unjustifiably brief mention of the remaining films, *The Melody Lingers On*, etc. Each is excellent and deserves a prominent place in the vanguard of Hollywood's slow march up from morosity to mental paroxysms. Nevertheless let us not be too enthusiastic. In view of Hollywood's diffidence towards new and provocative ideas, let us be unceasing in our demands. Perhaps we can get six more *Stella Parrishes* next month if we put up a good fight.

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## Film Checklist

**MARY BURNS—FUGITIVE:** Paramount surprises with this one. Directed with marked intelligence by William K. Howard. Sylvia Sydney performs creditably in the title role but Alan Baxter, late of *Black Pit*, completely steals the show. The picture actually goes out of its way to prove that the vaunted G-Men efficiency is largely mythical and that law-enforcement agents coerce prisoners into the lowest forms of stool-pigeoning.

**MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY:** or men against two million dollars in petty cash. Charles Laughton in another of his superb hoaxes. Anyone who has had the pleasure of seeing Laughton's first movie appearance as the mock-maniac Sultan in Ivor Montagu's *Day Dreams* must realize that Laughton receives many a fat salary check these days for performing with apparent seriousness what in that early work he understood for the huge joke it is. The British Navy of today gets a grand build-up, Clark Gable slobbers over his well-beloved Tahitian in the approved Hollywood manner while Franchot Tone, scholar-wise, conforms with the latest ethnographic authorities by merely rubbing noses with his native wife. For all the reputed research that went into the film the music of the natives is often pseudo-Afric oom-pah oom-pah and the dancing at least in one instance, Minsky-Egyptian.

**CRIME AND PUNISHMENT (French):** To be reviewed at greater length next issue. This film must be seen. Save for Sonia, whose lineaments are somewhat on the pallid side, the characterizations are magnificently full and consistent. But even more important, in *Crime and Punishment* the camera is used *psychologically* and not merely as a recording device. The film possesses many of the virtues of the silent movie and few of the vices, if any, of the talkie era.

**THE LAST MILLIONAIRE (French):** Rene Clair's brilliant but confused attempt to laugh dictatorships into the limbo of forgotten gags. Clair's use of the Chaplin,

Mack Sennett technique is not only unerring but, unfortunately, unremitting. After a while one begins to hope that the next character to cross the threshold will not trip or break a vase. Nevertheless the film should be seen. Clair's travelogue to end all travelogues alone provides more meat than one gets in years of the usual movie fare.

**LA MATERNELLE (French):** Has probably occasioned more evasive and wishful thinking on the part of audiences and critics alike than any film in recent years. Most of us have chosen to disregard in entirety the core of the film, namely, the romance of the eternally submissive Madeleine Renaud and the nursery doctor. We have been totally disarmed by director Benoit-Levy's partial success with children in various stages of candid undress. Actually these children are purely incidental to an obvious and threadworn situation. When the children actually participate in the plot proper they are unmercifully mugged, for example, the little boy who had never learned to smile. The treatment accorded the suicide-attempt of the mal-adjusted Marie is vastly inferior in conception and convincingness to that of the same problem in *Poil de Carotte* or *Maedchen in Uniform*. All in all, *La Maternelle* falls woefully short of the masterpiece it is supposed to be.

**PETER IBBETSON:** Freudians undoubtedly have a hard name for the strange relationship that existed between Peter and

the Duchess after the former's confinement. To this lecherous eye it looked a great deal like mutual . . . but at any rate the censors passed it.

**RENDEZVOUS:** Spy comedy-drama, and an expert sugar-coating job. William Powell plays the part of an American code expert in the last World War. He aches to escape from his irksome duties in the intelligence department so as he can see real action at the front. "Do you want me to have to tell my grandson that I fought the World War behind a desk?" he inquires. As Mr. Powell is a gentleman of very positive qualities the likelihood of never returning doesn't occur to him. But why introduce a macabre note into this sparkling tale of merry diablerie and jolly conceits? Why be morbid? "And there never will be another war, will there, Daddy?"

**THANKS A MILLION:** Musico-political satire. As Hollywood pictures go, this is as speedy and mechanically proficient as any of them, but then you have Dick Powell and Rubinoff! It's a toss-up as to which of the two is the more offensive. Perhaps Powell has the edge. He has always impressed us as a callow drug-store cowboy gone Sunday school, and *Thanks a Million* adds no nuance to the characterization. The Yacht Club Boys' satire on the NRA and its horde of alphabetic offspring is the highlight of the picture and well-worth hearing.

ROBERT STEBBINS.

# An American Peoples Theatre

By MARK MARVIN

Anyone who participated in the two regional conferences held by the New Theatre League in Chicago and New York City during the month of October will understand why the theatres represented unanimously determined to carry on their work in the future under the slogan of creating an "American people's theatre" movement. Here were theatre workers representing broad masses of American people: native and foreign-born, Negro and white, Church-goers and non-believers, anti-war militants and pacifists, employed and unemployed, white collar and industrial workers and followers of most of the organized political parties—not even the American Legion conventions could justly claim a wider variety of representatives of the people! In the same broad way the conferences included in their representation every active branch of the contemporary theatre. The delegates felt extremely conscious of their responsibility to theatres not represented. In this consciousness lies part of the uniqueness of their organization, the New Theatre League, and its organ, NEW THEATRE, the efforts of both of which are directed towards uniting every creative and progressive element in the American theatre into a people's theatre movement that will extend its influence throughout the land.

The conferences this year really represented the nucleus of such a people's theatre. At the Mid-West Conference the literary editor of Esquire, Meyer Levin, long identified with the professional theatre, read a paper on "The American Theatre Today." He was followed by Paul Romaine of Milwaukee whose analysis of creative problems in the theatre showed deep knowledge of and respect for the best traditions of the theatre. Another speaker, formerly a leader of the Paterson, N. J., Silk and Dye Workers Union is now organizing dramatic groups in American League Against War and Fascism branches in the middle-west. Still another was an un-official representative of the I.L.G.W.U. who recounted her experiences in bringing theatre work to her trade union. After the discussion on the theatre in relation to the trade unions which indicated the desire of organized workers to support a theatre dealing with the drama of their lives, came another long and earnest discussion concerning the creation of a Negro theatre that will be the authentic expression of the rich culture and militant traditions of the exploited Negro people. A Negro theatre director who had come from a distance to contact the New Theatre League for the first time spoke. His theatre had repaid white discrimination and Jim-Crowism with a refusal to admit white actors into its company. Now, he stated, he realized a Negro theatre could not deal adequately with its material unless it used

white characters to depict the dramatic struggles of the two races side by side. At the Eastern Conference, Negro theatre work proposals were ably summed up by Thomas Richardson, Negro actor and playwright from Boston. The resolutions included the pledge of the New Theatre League to help unite the forces now at work in the Negro theatre world, to work closely with these forces, and to fight against Jim-Crowism before and behind the footlights. The Negro theatre issue of NEW THEATRE last July and the current contest for plays of Negro life were hailed as achievements in this important work.

The commission on craft problems was led by Charles DeSheim of the Chicago Repertory Theatre at the Mid-West Conference; in New York City the same commission was guided by Alfred Saxe of the Theatre of Action, Moie Solataroff of the Artef, and John Bonn of the National Executive Board.

In addition to the long agenda many of the delegates had the responsibility of participating in productions. In Chicago two splendid theatre nights were presented in which the outstanding performances were those of the Chicago Repertory Theatre, the Vanguard Players of Chicago in a scene from *John Henry*, the New Dance Group of Detroit, the Theatre Collective of Chicago, the Ukrainian Blue Blouses of Chicago, the Y.M.C.A. Negro group from Columbus, Ohio, and a group from the Jewish Peoples Institute of Chicago in a scene from *Black Pit*. The Mid-West Conference, both in quality and number of productions far surpassed the Eastern Conference theatre night which was notable for the production given Clifford Odet's new short play *Remember* by the Negro Peoples Theatre, a series of recitations by Amalia Babad of the Artef which received tremendous ovations, and the Brooklyn Labor Theatre's production of *Take My Stand*. The vaudeville skit presented by the Theatre of Action was fine, but delegates were disappointed at not seeing some new dramatic work by this outstanding company. The Theatre Collective of New York City and other leading Eastern theatres were conspicuous by their absence.

Reports made by League members indicated that the past year has marked the greatest period of growth in the new theatres, particularly in the work of the New Theatre of Philadelphia, the New Theatre Players of Boston, the Cleveland Peoples Theatre, the Newark Collective Theatre, the Chicago Repertory Theatre, and new groups in Minneapolis, Duluth and Des Moines as well as the Artef and the Theatre of Action of New York City. Simultaneously with the publication of *Waiting for Lefty* in NEW THEATRE last February came the first announcement of

the broad policy of the League calling upon all progressive theatres in America to join ranks in a united theatre front against war, fascism, and censorship. Though insufficiently explicit in its formal statement the program as applied by the boldest and most progressive League theatres with the guidance of the National Office met with instantaneous response. Hundreds of theatres varying from pacifist groups to civic and little theatres began to produce the new social drama and to work with the New Theatre League. As the year progressed and especially by the time of the two conferences, member theatres, individual League members, and the National Office became aware of the necessity of intensified efforts to develop the original abstract program into a rich and living one based on the day-to-day experiences of our theatres and the growing willingness of audiences to support such theatres. It became clear that a theatre which fights against war, fascism, and censorship must necessarily be a people's theatre speaking the idioms and voicing the life and heroic revolutionary traditions of the American people. In the present fierce struggle for democratic rights, for a living wage, for the right to organize into trade unions such a theatre would play an important role. It would include among its supporters not only the militants of the left but also pacifist, church, settlement house, Y.M.C.A. student, and trade-union groups. An energetic drive would seek to enroll League members from amongst most of the 3200 amateur theatres in America. It was realized that only the New Theatre League at present could supply these manifold theatres with plays and organizational advice and leadership based on years of work in the field. The conferences clinched this idea; they gave the National Office the mandate to supply the leadership which these theatres need. The delegates pledged their theatres to support the National Office in its current re-organizational plans; and instructed it to go ahead with projects for the publication of craft and organizational pamphlets in the near future.

Furthermore the conferences pledged themselves to root out the vestiges of sectarianism from our ranks. Too often have our theatres been cut off from the main currents of popular life in their communities. Both conferences discussed new methods of obtaining mass support for our theatres, making them community and neighborhood centers, cooperating with existing theatres by entering into municipal, state and regional dramatic competitions, and by ending forever that separation from the life of the community which frequently marred the early work of our theatres.

The Conferences, not content to let matters rest with the outlining of programs, worked carefully over the detailed prob-

lems of broad audience organization. Outstanding on this subject were the reports given by Joe O'Neill of the Cleveland Peoples Theatre, Lem Ward of the strikingly competent Philadelphia New Theatre, and Margaret Larkin of the Theatre Union of New York City. It is no easy task to maintain the growing financial requirements of theatres striving each month to give better productions. All such development can be made only in terms of steadily mounting numbers of *organized* supporters. Such support must be won by aggressive and sincere efforts to penetrate all the popular organizations and clubs in every community. In addition this work requires a knowledge and determined application of the elementary principles of theatre organization and management, well-planned publicity, the use of lecturers, and finally the bringing of the mobile companies and actors of the theatre to every possible type of organization with short skirts to popularize the theatre and attract audiences to the stationary performances.

Years of painful experience both in the little theatre and the new theatre movement have convinced even the most ardent groups of the necessity for changing their methods. And this in turn means the renewal of efforts to win over trained craftsmen and theatre businessmen who would be glad to give us the fruits of their years of experience. That these forces can be won over was attested to by the number of non-League theatres and theatre workers who attended these conferences for the first time. Though complete reports will not be made accessible for several weeks it is reported that over one hundred theatres from twenty-five states and three North American countries were represented. The seeds of the work of these conferences will be scattered far and wide.

Above all, the people's theatres will have a great need for good plays. In the past the new theatre movement, particularly the amateur section of this movement, has been compelled to rely upon sketches written for the most part by ardent but untrained supporters. The nation-wide success of *Waiting for Lefty* and *America* however has proved to be an incentive to experienced professionals and we now have *Private Hicks* by Albert Maltz and *The President of 315*, a new play by Michael Blankfort, plus the knowledge that important new plays are being written for us by other professionals. In order to encourage this development the new theatres have pledged themselves to pay royalties for each production in the future. The forthcoming plays will be a welcome addition to the few short plays and the long list of full-length plays which the League now recommends.

Audiences demand rich, mature, and indigenous plays of American life. Many such attempts to root the American play in the soil of American life have been made in the past. More recently these attempts have taken the form of "regionalism." The New York Times of October 1st records the failure to establish a mid-western regional theatre with the University of Iowa dra-

matic department as a center. The reason for the lack of success of this venture was partially due to the fact that it restricted itself to a purely geographic regionalism much as did the Southern regional school. Such attempts must be greatly sterile. Only a regionalism based on a dialectical approach to the events and forces and folklore of a given area can succeed. There is much work for the regional social theatres to do. The history of the Middle West, the deep South, New England, etc., and the records of the various cities and industries therein cry out for dramatization. We must take native forms and do individual research into the struggles of the pioneers, the Negro slaves and the white bondsmen, the armed revolutionaries of '76, the populist and other third party struggles of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the free speech and anti-war and labor struggles of the various regions; when we do this we shall be creating an authentic regionalism that will not die of sterility on a university campus. The peoples theatres, in their fight against war, fascism, and censorship will be striking roots deep

into the life of their communities and they will come forward with the stuff of a revolutionary drama, an American peoples drama.

It has been impossible to report the conferences in detail in this brief article. If I have been able to convey their spirit and their broader decisions I shall have accomplished my assignment. Further articles in *NEW THEATRE* and elsewhere will take up the specific issues. In closing I wish to announce that the delegates ratified the plans of the National Executive Board for an American Theatre Congress next April in New York City which will attempt in conference and in various productions to bring forward dramatically the mighty strength of an American peoples theatre movement. Full details of these plans will be published in the next issue of *NEW THEATRE*. Those who arranged the two regional conferences will be aided by many new forces in preparing the national congress next spring. The preparatory conferences cleared the way; we must now go forward with our plans.

## The Prize Play Contests

**Y**ou can't dodge it; consider one act plays for the new social theatre and inevitably you find yourself thinking in terms of *Waiting for Lefty*. This discovery, made by the judges of the Anti-War—Anti-Fascist and Negro Play Contests, was reinforced by the delegates to the Mid-West and Eastern New Theatre League Conferences. They have found that the little theatres, the church, settlement and college dramatic circles who have been aroused by *Lefty* to an awareness of our theatre's vitality, cannot be expected to produce the old type of workers' theatre plays. These groups as well as our own demand not only honesty and purposefulness but a high degree of dramatic artistry. The few good plays that emerged from the two contests can provide only a temporary stop-gap for the growing demand for social drama. Although the two hundred scripts entered this year show a marked development over last year's crop, they still have many of the old weaknesses and crudities: the insistence on sloganizing characters, the sermonized endings, the use of stock labor situations. Of course we need good strike plays. But that this should be taken as the only possible theme by large numbers of writers who obviously have had very little experience in strikes, is an unfortunate situation. Still more disappointing were the anti-war plays of which not even one was considered worthy of immediate production. These plays, although they often had effectively brutal war scenes were seriously weakened by a lack of knowledge either of the underlying causes of war or of existing movements for combating war.

First prize in the contest went by unanimous vote to *Private Hicks*, an anti-fascist play by Albert Maltz. It is significant that at this time when the militia is being used against American labor in practically every major strike struggle, we should have a strong and convincing play dealing with the fight against reaction and terror in this country. Productions of this play, now being planned from Connecticut to California, will strike a decisive blow at fascist tendencies in America. Its broad approach to the subject matter and convincing treatment of the characters place *Private Hicks* high above its nearest competitor.

Second prize of fifty dollars goes to Philip Corbin for *Red Sky*. This is an exciting, fast moving play of a strike on a munitions ship. It suffers from an arbitrary ending, tacked onto a play which deserves much better. Third prize of twenty-five

dollars was won by *My Country Tis of Thee*, by Maxine Finsterwald and Lewis Fall, a farm strike play culminating in the deportation of a foreign-born leader. This suppression of the rights of foreign-born workers is an important theme, but, again, the conclusion of the play is not integrated with what goes before it. The judges feel that both these plays should have some revision before being offered to theatres for production, but they feel in both cases that the plays are promising and the subjects treated are of the utmost importance.

Another sad aspect of the Anti-War—Anti-Fascist Play Contest was the marked absence of satire, farce, or much humour of any kind. The only attempts worthy of consideration in this field were a revised version of Philip Stevenson's *Pity the Poor Police* which might have excellent production possibilities, if music were added, and *Ostriches* by Rudolf Wittenberg, in which there is an amusing but somewhat unhappy combination of realism and fantasy.

Of the other plays submitted, *The Way the Wind Blows*, by Philip Stevenson, which is based on the mine strike and terror in Gallup, New Mexico, also suffers from ending trouble. Still others, which are structurally good are made unconvincing by their stereotyped characterizations: their villainous capitalists and noble workers. *Vigilante*, by Vernon Wilkinson of the West Coast, dealing with the attacks by reactionaries on labor organizers would have been far stronger had it not been for the crudely symbolic "Mr. Banker," who like the worker protagonist in the play, has no particular characterization, no distinguishing human trait. In the same category are *Soldiers*, a play of American military intervention in the Soviet Union, and *Execution*, translated from the German of Stefan Heyn, a young exile from Germany.

Judging the plays as a group the principal weakness is that the subject matter was not sufficiently incorporated into the development of the plays. Often it is not so much a question of poor technique as of a superficial knowledge of the chosen subject. The most general and at the same time most encouraging tendency is one that was noted in a lesser degree last year, the trend toward a sharply pointed realism. If this trend continues we may look forward to a tremendous increase in the vitality of our social theatre plays. In the meantime we have a scant but valuable addition to the repertory of the New Theatre League.

BEN IRWIN.



# The Dance Season Begins

## REVIEWS OF THE MONTH

An unusually full dance season is under way, indicating a growth in the dance audience as well as the return of old artists and the venturing forth of young, new dancers. Many events are now behind us, but exciting ones are still to come, including the New Dance League solo recital on December 21st, and the program at Carnegie Hall on December 15th, at which Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Tamiris, and the Dance Unit will perform for the benefit of the International Labor Defense.

On Sunday evening, October 27th, at the Guild Theatre, an unusual event in the dance world took place when Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and their respective groups presented a recital of two new dances—dances which achieve epic dimensions. The first, titled simply *New Dance*, is a vivid tribute to Miss Humphrey's choreographic skill. The work was first presented last summer at the Bennington School of the Dance; the last movement, the most striking and unifying of all, has been added since then.

### Humphrey-Weidman

*New Dance* contains, besides a brilliant performance by Miss Humphrey where, as protagonist, she initiates dynamic polyphonic activity in the group, a subsidiary section by Charles Weidman and three of his men, whose motif, built on rhythmic counterpoint, is an exciting episode. The work almost justifies itself in the beauty of its form, the high quality of its technique, and the satisfying use of group. The dance ends with a coda that achieves ecstatic heights; it is in this conclusion that the work of Beatrice Seckler was outstanding.

*New Dance* is artful in form and contains finely executed, important dance elements, but the work exists on the sheer excitement of its movement. We regret to see such tremendous possibilities used for form and technique alone—with little attempt made to integrate content and idea into the form. What powerful achievements we would have were genuine artists like Miss Humphrey and Mr. Weidman to express fully realized ideas through such technical perfections as *New Dance*! We await such a time with impatience.

The second dance, by Charles Weidman, José Limon, and the men's group, is built on the legend of that indigenous figure, Paul Bunyan, the mighty lumberjack. *American Saga* is a ballet in modern dance form that is cleverly conceived and dominated by José Limon's brilliant dancing and Charles Weidman's satirical skill. They dance Paul Bunyan and the clerk, Johnny Inkslinger, respectively. The flavor and characterization of *American Saga* are admirable, despite inadequate support by the

group. The dance obviously needs revision both technically, and in its conception. It remains, however, not only a dance completely suited to Weidman's talents, but also strikes out a new field in integrating American legends with the dance.

NORMA ROLAND.

### Tamiris

Still another recital to be commented upon is that of Tamiris and her group, who danced under the auspices of the New Dance League and NEW THEATRE, on Saturday evening, November 2nd, at the Venice Theatre.

The program consisted of a series of dances indicating Tamiris' position towards the serious problems of the modern world. The very titles of such compositions as *Middle Ground*, *Dance of War*, *Individual and the Mass*, and *Manoeuvres*, speak for themselves. We appreciate Tamiris' attempt to develop a form consonant with her understanding of the social problems of the day. In view of the controversial article by Paul Douglas that appeared in last month's issue of NEW THEATRE, a critical analysis of Tamiris' actual contribution is warranted.

What do we expect from a dancer? First, it seems fair enough to demand that the idea of the dance composition and the technique be integrated into a unified form, a form that has in itself development and climax, thus making the dance a significant and clear statement. Tamiris very often fails to achieve this desired unity. *Dance of War*, *Flight*, and *Escape*, neglecting this structural development, leaves the onlooker dissatisfied. The first motif comprises the complete dance idea; the rest is mere reiteration.

Second, the dancer must never rely solely on symbols, whether literal or formal (as in group design), to carry her dance statement. Tamiris depends too heavily on these aids in *Middle Ground* and *Sycophants*, for instance. In the former dance, the use of a multi-colored cloak to indicate the liberal's shifting position, in *Sycophants* the over-simplified conception of king and subjects, make further development ineffectual.

Third, one expects from a self-admitted revolutionary dancer a clear analysis of her material. In *Manoeuvres* and *Individual and the Mass*, this is not apparent. *Manoeuvres*, a travesty on militarism, treated obvious features of its subject, such as drilling, attacking and recruiting, in satirical enough fashion to gain audience response. At a time when warfare is an actuality, however, this dance seemed too fanciful. What construction are we to place upon Tamiris' attitude toward the ever significant problem of the *Individual and the Mass* when Tamiris, the individual, at the end of the dance is left alone on the stage? Does she wish to indicate the loneliness of the individual, or her weakness as opposed to the strength of the mass? Whatever it is, one does not feel that profound analysis has gone into the creation of the dance.

Perhaps the most pertinent touchstone of a dancer's work is the effect of her compositions on an audience. Were all other elements present in the dances, unless the performer actually achieves audience reaction, her endeavours are of no avail. Does *Middle Ground* make the liberal sitting in the audience aware of his weaknesses? Would *Escape* influence the escapist to ac-



Doris Humphrey and Group in *New Dance*

knowledge reality? Would not Tamiris' *Dance of War* with its abstract conception of warfare be stronger propaganda if an indication of an anti-war message were present? These are questions which remain to be answered, not only by Tamiris, but by all dancers.

Tamiris has definite talent in the field of satire, as seen in *Manoeuvres* and *Middle Ground*. By developing this aptitude into a more keenly sharpened weapon she undoubtedly can utilize it for deepening and extending the many-sided approaches to war and fascism. **NORMA ROLAND**

## Martha Graham

It is a compliment to Miss Graham that though she has achieved the place of leading modern dancer in America, her programs always indicate a trend in a new direction. The two recitals at the Guild Theatre on November 10th and 17th were proof of this.

*Frontier* was produced for the first time last spring. It remains one of the most satisfying solos in Miss Graham's repertoire. Its content is vital and the movement images are clear and filled with the spirit of the subject. The dance is a characterization of a pioneer woman. It is an inspired dance in which, as in *Lamentation*, Miss Graham's masterly technique is used not as an end in itself but as a means by which to express a powerful idea. The *Dance in Four Parts* subtitled *Quest, Derision, Dream and Sportive Tragedy* is at the other extreme: mystical, abstract. What the artist's intention is, one cannot tell. The four parts are bound structurally to each other, but other than this there seems to be no real reason for their grouping. Even as four separate dances they would at best remain sequences of clever movements without tangible relation to their titles.

Two new numbers were shown: *Formal Dance* and *Imperial Gesture*. The first is merely another example of Miss Graham's grasp of formal choreographic structure. The second is another venture for her into the use of meaningful content as material for dances. The work remains not quite convincing. Apparently the concept of *Imperial Gesture* has not been clearly mapped out in the artist's mind. Is it to be an openly satiric sketch of imperialism? The audience seemed divided in its opinion but was so pleased with the freshness of approach that it received this new composition with enthusiasm nevertheless—an enthusiasm wholly lacking in its response to *Formal Dance*.

One can only hope that Miss Graham will pursue as her main line of development not formal dances but dances of vital content like *Frontier* and the group composition *American Provincials*. It would be a pity for the creativeness of Martha Graham to be confined to the pursuit of good form for its own sake, when it lies so much in her power to invest that good form with significant human values.

CHEM.

## Korchien-Goodelle

It was with embarrassment that we witnessed the performance of Polly Korchien and Dean Goodelle, American dancers, at the Guild Theatre, Sunday evening, October 20th.

Out of the program of nine compositions presented, not one dance possessed qualities that modern dancers should demand of themselves. Pantomime and romantic interpretation of music, elements that weakened their compositions, predominated. There was great dependence on these tricks, rather than on the movement. The dances were sadly deficient in content; the entire evening was spent on the light, the pretty side of life. The costumes, which seemed to be the main preoccupation of the dances, were reminiscent of Radio City's Music Hall and Southampton Beach. Movement in their dances was constantly unimaginative; an annoying parallelism devitalized their duet compositions.

It is disappointing to us that these dancers, who showed promise at their debut two years ago, have failed to mature in any significant manner; they still have far to go.

NORMA ROLAND

## Esther Junger

On November 10th Esther Junger returned to the concert stage of the Guild Theatre after an absence of several seasons. It seems that in the interim Miss Junger has remained "untouched by time and times" and has not kept pace with the rapid strides made in the modern dance.

Miss Junger's subject matter is wide in range including such unrelated themes as *Variations on a Tango*, *Berceuse* and *Negro Theme*. Her interpretations however are in so many cases so personalized as to make them studies in self-expression rather than communicative works of dance form. A *Berceuse* in itself seems rather out-dated; and a *Negro Theme* that is merely a Covarrubias come to life is too inconsequential in this year of '35.

In formal structure, each dance is constructed on a monotonous use of parallelism: a movement or sequence of movements to the right with a repetition to the left. Also, the dances never build to a definite climax. The movements in themselves are unimaginative and the use of facial intensity hardly enhances this inadequacy.

Miss Junger has a fine command of body movement. It would however be to her advantage to allow herself the stimulation that can come from close contact with leading dance groups and dance choreographers.

CHEM

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# "Revolutionary" Dance Forms

By IRVING IGNATIN

In printing Paul Douglas' article, *Modern Dance Forms* in the November issue, the editors of NEW THEATRE have recognized and initiated a corrective for the uncertainty and confusion that exists among modern dancers and critics. Violent feelings render the scene colorful and hectic, some of this passion, however, arises from tainted motives.

Many of the errors being made are traceable to the strange phenomena attendant upon concentrated revolutionary periods. Art forms change much more slowly and less noticeably than ideas and emotions. The same is true in other social forms. (The emergence of a new form corresponding completely to a previously existing new idea is one proof of the triumph of that idea.) Old forms tend to linger on despite the addition of a new content whose essence is opposed even in a revolutionary manner to the normal content of the old form. Robert Cantwell's *The Land of Plenty*, for example, is a proletarian novel with highly revolutionary connotations, yet its form is quite strictly that of the novel as it was practised by novelists from Fielding to Faulkner. It is interesting to note that the most marked formal departures have been made by writers whose subject matter is far from revolutionary: Stein, Joyce. This is because they were not primarily concerned with content. Theirs was, largely, "the revolution of the word". . . Formal changes when they occur as a result of the impact of new ideas will often be scarcely visible externally, but will first be evidenced microscopically in internal rhythm and style, reflecting the artist's response to his chosen material. Deliberate choice of new forms will almost invariably end unhappily simply because form is the outgrowth of national historical and cultural periods and its value and solidity will hinge upon its partial adherence to what has survived among the best practitioners.

The trouble with most of our revolutionary dancers is that they become "revolutionary" too suddenly. They experience certain evils in contemporary life which coincide with *some* of the contentions upon which is based a whole system of revolutionary theory and practise and they don the regalia of the entire system. Naturally the fit is bad. Their eclectic response fails to satisfy the rigorous requirements of creative and progressive art. They do not suspect the vast complexity and limitless depth of the great human seas whose rebellious heaving they are trying to map. In their restlessness and confusion, they are prone either to accept without interrogation existing forms or to proceed unmolested by the problem of form, fortunately swathed by the "freedom" owing such great "revolutionaries." The quality

of careful analytic study is a boon denied them by their violent (but often superficial) conversion.

The forms adopted by great artists should never be dismissed altogether as Douglas does in the case of Mary Wigman. The human understanding that is inseparable from the established technic of such artists certainly has points which are transferrable to any expression, no matter how opposed, which is still concerned with humanity. That the Wigman technic "is solely adaptable for the formulation of mystic ideas" is a statement whose sweep is gratuitous and narrow in its conception of the problem of artistic creation. Nowhere in the world will you find the boundary lines so drawn. Our enemies can teach us things. The circumstance that Jane Dudley and Miriam Blecher are in some of their recent compositions getting away from the main features of the Wigman school does not establish the complete inutility of that technic; it is only that their cited thematic material did not include statements which Wigman has made with mastery and economy of choreography—statements basic to human situations which will recur for some time to come under any social system. Our object should be not to limit our scope but to make it as inclusive as our understanding of the world will permit. It will then be truer and more revolutionary.

Coming to Duncan, Douglas calls her "the highest development of the bourgeois dance." We agree. (That he later calls Martha Graham "the most developed bourgeois dancer since Isadora Duncan" can only mean that Graham has developed *past* the *highest* development of the bourgeois dance—an incomparable feat. This confusion arises from Douglas' erroneous estimation of Graham's position in the modern dance—which is in essence opposed to the bourgeoisie.) Duncan's flights through space, her untrammelled motion, signify her revolt against the stifling ballet, symbol of Feudalism, and her faith in the destiny of democratic bourgeois society ostensibly based upon the "free" individual. She remains the quintessential expression in the dance of bourgeois society at the point of its highest self-assertion.

Douglas' analysis of the Duncan technic leads him to the italicized conclusion that "her technic is more closely related to our modern dance than the dance forms of any other modern dancer" which is followed by a second judgment that "her limitations lay in the fact that her . . . technic was based ideologically on an acceptance of the indestructibility of society as it was then known to her." Now we are here told (remembering always Douglas' insistence upon the inseparability of form and content) that Duncan firmly believed in the

permanence of bourgeois society; that this belief constituted her limitations (a pithy remark totalling up to this: that her limitations were based on her limitations); and that this belief is closer to the belief of our modern dancers than any other. One statement is false and the other is nonsensical. Duncan's fundamental characteristics (especially formal) have very little relation to those which are emerging in the modern dance and already beginning to bear the gold of proletarian content. The modern dance, in truth, is miles away from Duncan in spirit and substance, just as the present condition in capitalist society does not resemble the Victorian age. Our modern dancers will be justifiably hostile to Mr. Douglas' opinion, simply because their problems are not even tangential to those which Duncan expressed when she shocked the philistines of three continents by openly revealing the interior logic of their ostensible beliefs. It was Duncan's great genius that unshackled the dance and made it free to develop but the development which has taken place is today a negation of her whole formal achievement.

Today, one of the outstanding dancers in the world is Martha Graham. I quote the following illuminating description of her technic written by Edna Ocko in the July issue of NEW THEATRE:

"Hers is the closest approach to a system of dance technic which is basic, transferable and capable of infinite variation. She has developed a science of modern dance movement which seems remarkably suited to make the body a fit instrument for expression. And this rigorous training presents itself to me, at least, as an admirable technic for the revolutionary dance. It has, above all, strength and endurance; it permits of amazing gradations in dynamics; it embodies dramatic elements of militance and courage. Its most delicate moments are fraught with latent power. When the body stands, it seems immovable. The body in motion is belligerent and defiant. It seems almost impossible to do meaningless dances with this equipment. In training, the pupil is told to be strong, 'strong enough to destroy barriers,' that her body must surmount all physical difficulties, must be 'energy on the move' creating and recreating strength and change within itself . . . her technic has elements which make it ideal for depiction of militant evaluations of society, her dances more and more approach realistic social documentation, and her verbal sympathies are avowedly one with the revolutionary dance."

The *elements* of her art belie the designation of "bourgeois" dancer which Mr. Douglas applies to her. The philosophy of her technic is opposed to the philosophy

of decaying bourgeois society. Her very existence is a negation of its tenets.

To compare her contribution to that of Proust in literature is to reveal an amazing lack of critical acumen. The dying capitalist class leans to mysticism and pessimism and obscurantism, and for obvious reasons fears the portrayal of energy and militance.

Far from being the "dance exponent of the last stages of capitalism," Martha Graham's genius is related to and instinctively strains towards the revolutionary forces in modern society. That her art has not yet shown a clear understanding of that necessity which today means freedom is probably explainable on various grounds, none of which minimize her fundamental and unique contribution to the revolutionary dance. Let those who expect sudden and facile conversions prepare for disappointment. Graham will remain true to the stern demands of an art whose trail she has blazed in a lifetime of hard pioneering effort. It will only make her final approach more valuable.

We have not yet exhausted Mr. Douglas' false judgments. From his failure to understand the nature and roots of formal changes springs the following: "the *fundamental* features of the Graham dance forms will have to be departed from radically if we are to find the beginnings of that fusion of content and form which will make the modern dance a real weapon for the eman-

ipation of culture." But what are the fundamental features which have to be departed from? They are not mentioned in the article. The editor's blue pencil? Somehow I doubt it. The closest mention is: "She possesses a great deal of technical skill and perfection in her execution." But why depart from this?—This is very poor stuff. Especially when an untenable conclusion, contradictory to all the facts, is being maintained. Above I did mention, and partially quoted another's description of these fundamental features. But you can't make a straw man bleed.

Mr. Douglas has found the emancipator of culture—Tamiris. "She has not sought the assistance of others simply to borrow from them an easy way to synthesize a new technique. Her refusal to adopt bourgeois dance forms is a dialectic negation. Always conscious of the social forces which were determining her relationship to society, her forms have never remained static but are in a constant process of change . . . Through this *natural development* (my emphasis, I. I.) she became a modern dancer. She understands fully that the form of a composition is always determined by its subject matter." Douglas is like the bear, as Stalin once said of a defender of Bucharin, who in embracing someone chokes him to death. According to this, (although we doubt that it is Tamiris' practise) the revolutionary artist must start like Adam without a history or

culture, creating everything anew, both implements and substance. This is absurd. The proletariat is not nihilistic, but cherishes and uses the best achievements of the human mind. The revolutionary dancer must not "refuse to adopt bourgeois dance forms" if certain of these forms can be valuable in developing more adequate forms and in expressing her ideas. We will leave the burning of the books to Hitler and Mussolini. There is a concrete development in accepting the worthwhile from our predecessors and building with the aid of their accomplishment. All other building will crumble.

Douglas' marriage of form and content is a shot-gun affair. The formula is: new subject matter equals new form. Where is the mention of a philosophy of form underlying specific adaptations? In the practise of all great artists such a system is evident.

The dance with proletarian content will in time create its distinctive formal structure. At the present time we can see the main seeds of the future growth in the technic of Martha Graham and her school. This technic will undergo modification with the increase of revolutionary subject matter—it will have to become more joyful, conscious of power—but the great part of her contribution will be included in any new forms which will arise in the main stream of the revolutionary dance for some time to come.

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# THEATRE WORKSHOP : Art of Make-Up—II

By TAMARA DAYKARHANOVA

In preparing a make-up, we have to solve the problem of beauty and ugliness. Although there is no yardstick, no golden rule to govern our conception of beauty, a conception which is always personal and relative, we can say, nevertheless, that beauty lies in certain facial proportions, in the harmony of features, in the controlling influence of form, in the subordination of the parts to the whole. Ugliness, therefore, must lie in the disproportion, in the exaggeration of features. Thus, when one is going to prepare a beautiful face, one must give it the impression of harmony and proportion. In my own experience I have found certain criteria for beauty which I attempt to give the face upon which I am working. The distance between the eyes should be the space of one eye. The proportional face should be divided into three parts; the first part consisting of the space from the hair line to the bridge of the nose; the second from the bridge to the end of the nose; the third from the end of the nose to the end of the chin. The shape of the beautiful face should be an oval. Specimens of classic Greek sculpture supply us with excellent examples of a proportional, harmonious face.

It is of maximum importance that the actor playing a straight role should know his own face. Every face is symmetric, a fact which often becomes too apparent on the stage. Every face is individual; each has its own merits and faults from the theatrical point of view. And the problem of straight make-up consists chiefly in emphasizing the merits of the face and concealing the defects. The results of improper make-up, are immediately apparent on the stage, because the actor, not knowing the art of make-up frequently emphasizes his defects. He may succeed in making a large mouth larger by the faulty application of rouge or he may apply too little and the spectator will see no mouth at all.

The general principles of make-up are the same as those of painting, which deals in lights and shadows. Each lighted portion is projected, made prominent. Every darkened or shadowed portion is deepened, sunken, almost made to disappear. All parts of the face, therefore, that an actor wants to make prominent must be lightened; those that he wishes to conceal, darkened. As in painting, he must know the answers to three questions: What paints should be used? Where should he apply them? How shall he blend them?

Modern industry offers us four types of paints: grease paints, dry paints, liquid paints and greaseless paints. There are, furthermore, approximately ninety hues in the various kinds of paints, giving the actor a large range of choice. Among these various types, I completely eliminate the use of dry paints with the single exception of dry rouge. I find that dry paints usually produce an opaque effect and that they dry the skin. The grease paints I use are manufactured by Max Factor or Stein. I find that they are harmless to the skin and offer a satisfactory choice of shades and colors. Lechner's paints also are excellent and I use many of them. It might be well, at this point, to emphasize the fact that a clearly defined application, well-blended, devised to give the natural effect of wrinkles, should be applied with "Artistic Brushes" according to the methods originated by the experts in the Moscow Art Theatre.

Let us now enumerate the succession of operations in make-up. Then we shall be able to discuss and analyze each operation in turn. The order should always be as follows:

- (1) Application of cold cream.
- (2) Application of foundation or ground-coat on the entire face to the neck.
- (3) Moulding of cheeks and chin: In case of old or character make-up, the application of wrinkles.
- (4) Eyes.
- (5) Nose.
- (6) Forehead.
- (7) Powdering the face.
- (8) Lips.
- (9) Eyebrows and eyelines.
- (10) Additional retouching of cheeks.
- (11) Neck.

Cold cream cleanses the face. One must be lavish, therefore, in its application. After it is carefully and richly rubbed into the skin, it should be completely removed with a towel and tissue napkins, leaving a greaseless surface to the touch. Foundation is applied in order to give the face a base. The choice of color in this operation depends upon the type of role to be played as well as upon the age of the character. Each individual must make his own choice for each part. For straight make-up I find that grease paint a shade darker than one's own complexion is generally satisfactory. This is especially good for the American stage, usually lighted with straw or amber lights, which tend to blanch the grease paint slightly. One should never use too thick a foundation. The paint should be spread over the face to the neck until a smooth surface is achieved. It is important to remember that the modern stage is higher than the orchestra and that the chin does not conceal the neck, which must have proper treatment and attention. The foundation is blended with the fingers, always carefully working into the hair line. Otherwise a white line of demarcation will appear at the point where hair and forehead meet. If the foundation is poorly blended, high lights and shadows make an unexpected appearance upon the face of the actor.

Moulding, the third operation in the application of make-up is designed to give the face the shape that is required for a particular characterization. As I mentioned elsewhere, it is almost always accomplished by the play of high lights and shadows. Occasionally, and for special purposes, the use of putty is employed to build up a nose, chin, temples or forehead. This use of putty, however, requires highly specialized training, which it is impossible to discuss fully at the present time. The moulding of the face for straight make-up for actresses is accomplished by the use of rouge which is darker than the foundation and, therefore, sinks protruding parts of the face. A heavy chin, for instance, or too prominent cheek bones may be made less conspicuous by the use of rouge. A narrow or undersized chin, on the other hand, may be made to appear larger by highlighting the maxilla bone. For moulding the face for the young actor in straight make-up, I advise the use of grease paint of a slightly darker shade than the foundation. Should the face require a cleanly shaven appearance, the chin and cheek bones should be moulded with green-blue lining color. Let us emphasize at this point that the entire secret of moulding depends upon the actor's ability to blend the rouge or dark paint into the foundation so that the paints gradually disappear into the foundation. The blending of larger surfaces such as the cheeks is done with the tips of the fingers, while the blending of eye-shadows must invariably be done with "Artistic Brushes." Perhaps one of the most essential operations of a proper make-up is the blending of the cheeks. Often one will find an actor placing the rouge only in the center of the cheeks without the proper blending, resulting in an unnatural doll-like quality.

At this point the ears should be covered with rouge.

In the case of a character, or an old make-up, the wrinkles are applied immediately after moulding. In order to make the wrinkles appear natural I recommend the use of a red-brown mixture. Only this shade, the same as is used for moulding faces depicting old age, corresponds to the pigments of our skin. Except in certain isolated instances, I do not suggest the use of black or blue lining colors for wrinkles. Wrinkles will look natural if the face is screwed up and the natural lines thus formed are deepened with the "Artistic Brush" or with a stick or pencil, if one feels a lack of facility in handling the brush. Once the wrinkles are drawn they should be blended carefully with the tips of the fingers.

The make-up of the eyes is done in two operations: the first, prior to the application of powder, the second, after. The latter operation will be explained in its place in the application of make-up. The proper make-up of the eyes is done in the following manner. The eyes are strengthened for a straight make-up by shadowing them on the upper and, more particularly, on the lower lids. With a fine brush, lines are drawn close to the lashes. These lines must be blended until they gradually fade into the colors on the nose, on the cheeks, on the temples. Should an actress desire to make her eyes appear larger than they naturally are, she should prolong the lower line from the outer corner of the eye slightly beyond the eyelash and carry this end in an upward direction. By this method, deeply set, dull eyes may be made to flash and twinkle. If the upper lid is puffy, a dark color should be applied from the eye-lash up and gradually blended with the tips of the fingers up to the eye-socket. If the upper lid is hollowed it should be highlighted instead of shadowed. When the eyes are placed too closely together, the upper and lower shadows should be applied where the eye begins and extended a little beyond the eye in the direction of the temple. If the eyes are too far apart, shadows should be applied on the inner corner of the eye sockets. These operations are the same for men and women, with a single exception. In the case of the actor, the lower lid should be shadowed very slightly. In all cases one must always remember to rouge the eyelid as this gives life to the eye.

Even the slightest trace of grease must be thoroughly removed, with a lotion or with alcohol.

The next portion of the face to be treated is the forehead. Here, one will generally meet one of two problems. Either the forehead is too high or broad or else it may be too narrow to meet the proportions of real beauty. The actress with a high forehead may cut part of it off with rouge while the actor may use the darker foundation. If on the other hand, the forehead is too narrow, part of the hair may be blocked out. This may be accomplished effectively in the following manner: Cover the necessary portions of the hair completely with "Pinaud's Pomade Hongroise", broadening or lengthening as much as is required. Allow the Pomade to dry thoroughly. Then richly apply the grease paint foundation.

After all these operations have been completed, the face should be powdered. Cover the whole surface of grease paint and apply the powder generously. Then with a soft baby brush, smooth or brush the face carefully and thoroughly. The superfluous powder will be removed in this way. In choosing the powder for a young make-up, the actor or actress should match the color of the powder to his individual grease paint foundation.

In coloring the lips, we must bear in mind that their size should be in proportion to the face. Proportion is particularly desirable for an actress' straight make-up. If the lower lips are much heavier than the upper ones and if the space between the nose and lips permits, build up the upper lip. Should the distance between one's nose and lips be too short, however, the lower lip may then be narrowed with the use of the foundation of grease paint.

Again we return to the eyes. I call this "retouching." The contours should be emphasized by a very thin line drawn with black lining along the upper and lower eyelids, close to eyelashes. If it is desirable to enlarge the eyes the upper line may be prolonged a little in the direction of the temple and drawn with a downward stroke resembling a comma. This will give the effect of lengthened eyelashes. False eyelashes may of course be glued on; blonde ones darkened



Tamara Daykarhanova in real life and as an old faith peasant woman in Ostrovsky's *The Storm*

by painting. I will leave the application of mascara and cosmetics to the actor's discretion, reminding him only that both mascara and cosmetics produce an effect only on about the first ten rows of the orchestra. The shape of the eyebrows may, of course, be altered. An eyebrow may be heightened by blocking out part of it. The method used to do this is the same as has been discussed in the treatment of the forehead.

Occasionally at this point, an actress will observe that her cheeks are too full. She may re-touch them with dry rouge after, and only after, the face has been powdered. This will help her make-up without having the dry rouge harm her skin.

The make-up now being completed, it may be necessary in some cases to cover the arms, neck, and hands with a special body liquid in a color corresponding to the foundation. This liquid is applied with a sponge and should be permitted to dry thoroughly.

In the treatment of the hair, it has been found that white powder, or white mascara, especially when applied on the temples, will make the hair appear grey or greying. The Broadway theatre seems to have an enormous prejudice against wigs. I feel this attitude due, largely, to a misunderstanding. Wigs, for contemporary characters, prepared by expert wig makers should be as effective as one's own hair. I have known many actors who have covered thinning hair or completely bald heads with transformations, with such dexterity that the question of the naturalness of the hair has never arisen. The European practise is a vastly different one. There is scarcely a role in the repertory of the Moscow Art Theatre which is played without a wig.

The technique of applying artificial hair (crepe hair) must be mastered thoroughly, if it is to be employed satisfactorily. The actor must remember that beards and mustaches are glued to the lips and chin after the whole painting of the face is completed. It is obvious of course, that those portions of the face on which the hair will be

glued must be clean of all grease. The hair itself is applied with a strong spirit gum. The crepe hair will be procured in braids which must be loosened and combed gently apart. As soon as enough hair is combed, the mustaches and beard are glued on in small sections. They should never be glued on in a compact mass. Press the crepe hair firmly to the face with a towel. When the hair is fixed in place trim into the desired shape or form with a straight scissors.

In evolving a character make-up an actor must be guided not only by the general principles and technique of straight make-up but by the conception of the character to be played. The inner design of the character must be clearly understood before his outer appearance is planned. Inasmuch as limited space prevents us from going into all the devious paths of character make-up, I have selected a few special examples and will explain how the technique of make-up is applicable to these cases.

The illustrations of Mr. Basil Sidney, one of the foremost American actors, as he appeared in two roles in his late success on Broadway, *The Dark Tower*. On the right of this photograph, Mr. Sidney is seen in the straight make-up as Damon Wells. On the left is the same actor in the same play, in the role of Max Sarnoff, an evening murderer. Here was a difficult task. The plot of the play depended entirely on the fact that no one in the audience should possibly know or guess until it was disclosed at the climax of the play that Wells and Sarnoff were one and the same person. In the program a fictitious name was employed for the actor interpreting Max Sarnoff. In addition to this very taxing problem, there was still another to be faced. The time permitted for the change in make-up from one character to another was distinctly limited, thereby necessitating that both make-ups be as simple as possible.

Let us now examine Mr. Sidney's solution of this problem. His straight make-up was applied without the use of foundation. He covered his

face only with powder and his eyebrows with lead pencil. He outlined his lips with dark red rouge. Thus he simplified his straight make-up. In devising his character make-up to suit the German Mr. Sarnoff, he had to find some means of providing himself with a ruddy complexion without using a grease paint foundation. For this he substituted rubbing alcohol. This may be applied in a few seconds and holds the reddish hue on one's face for about twenty minutes—long enough for a single scene. At the end of that scene, when Mr. Sidney had to appear almost at once as Damon Wells, he had only to apply the powder to his face. To return once more to the operations for the character make-up, we find that he has ordered a wig made on a hair net. In order to change the shape of his nose rubber rings were inserted in his nostrils. This device extends the nostrils without interfering with breathing or speech. This is frequently employed in make-up for the motion pictures. To change his diction and tone of voice enough to fool the audience and in order, furthermore, to make his upper lip more prominent, Mr. Sidney had a dentist create a set of false teeth made on a hook to fit over his own. The moulding of his face was done with dark lines under his chin. The photograph will clearly show that he has obtained thereby the effects of a heavy double chin. He applied false eyebrows, slightly high-lighted his eyelids, and used a brown powder around the eye in a circle into which the monocle fitted. This make-up was impressive and so adroit that no one in the audience discovered that Mr. Sidney played both Wells and Sarnoff until the end of the play, when as Sarnoff, and in order to prove his point, he removed his wig and rubber nostril rings on the stage, in front of the audience. Mr. Sidney was able to contrive this make-up through his complete understanding of the part as well as through his adeptness in the technique of make-up.

[The Art of Make-Up: Part I appeared in the October NEW THEATRE. Both sections will appear in the volume *Our Theatre Today*, just published by French & Co.]

**STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS MARCH 3, 1933.**

Of NEW THEATRE, published monthly at General Post Office for October 1, 1935.

State of New York } SS.  
County of New York }

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared David Crystal, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of New Theatre and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publishers: New Theatre League and New Dance League, 55 West 45th Street. Editor: Herbert Kline, 156 West 44th Street. Managing Editor: George Redfield, 156 West 44th Street. Business Manager: David Crystal, 156 West 44th Street.

2. That the owner is: New Theatre League, 55 West 45th Street. New Dance League, 55 West 45th Street.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholders or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

DAVID CRYSTAL.  
Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1935.

Jacob L. Stillman, Notary Public.  
My commission expires March 30, 1937.

## Dance Front

At last the modern dance has been accorded a belated recognition by the Works Progress Administration. Mr. Elmer Rice, in charge of the Regional Drama Project, is including a dance unit in his plans. It is very likely that Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman will be in charge, and that all dancers working on Recreational Projects, as well as those already teaching dancing in Settlement Houses, will be invited to participate in the formation of this unit. How much of this project is the result of the persistent efforts of the Dancers' Union cannot be gauged, but we are convinced that were it not for the activities of these militant young dancers, who fought the category of boon-dogglers, who repeatedly urged on Miss Gosselin the necessity of a Dance Project, who even now are fighting to have the State School of the Dance continue as a free project, the dance would still be considered—by the authorities, at least—on a par with whittling and jig-saw puzzles.

NEW THEATRE and the New Dance League are both ready to support this worthy venture, to give to Miss Humphrey and Mr. Weidman whatever assistance and co-operation they need.

### Chorus Equity

In 1919, inspired by the Actors' Strike, a Chorus Equity was organized. It now has a membership of 5000 dancers, show girls, cabaret girls and singers. Dancers in the films are organized by the Screen Actors Guild of Los Angeles. Chorus Equity does not provide either old age or unemployment insurance for its members. "It would be impractical in an organization of this kind to consider old age insurance," said Mrs. Bryant. "Chorus people do not remain in the chorus until they are old; you must remember that thirty years is an advanced age for these dancers."

Mrs. Bryant commented on the WPA dance projects. Instead of relieving the unemployment

problem, they seem to have aggravated it. By competing with private dance schools: forcing them to close down and disemploying highly skilled teachers, the Works Progress Administration has created a graver problem in attempting to relieve a serious one.

We do not feel that this issue is as serious as one other. The big motion picture theatres where stage shows are presented, such as Radio City, are as yet unorganized. Many independent producers have no contracts with Equity. The concert dancer, while she is drawing closer to the theatre in her activities and is very often a paid performer, still has no economic organization for her protection, and Chorus Equity has no jurisdiction over her work. Although the dancers in the Hollywood films are organized, the dancers who work on sets in Long Island or on location any place in the East are completely unorganized, save where they themselves set up temporary committees to guard their interests. Until headway is made among these categories, the minimum wage of \$30-\$40 will prove difficult to protect and maintain.

### A Successful Strike

On the corner of Fifth Avenue and 116th Street in New York, in the heart of the Latin-American section of New York, stands the only Spanish theatre of the city. The management of the theatre employs six chorus girls. Until a few weeks ago, these young dancers were one of the most ill-paid and the most exploited groups in the whole theatrical profession. Their regular routine of work called for three stage shows during week days, and four on Sundays. Between shows they rehearsed the new dances and songs for the following week's performance. Their salary amounted to the huge sum of ten dollars a week. Under the leadership of Iris De Riera, the girls demanded a raise of two dollars. The management accepted this demand but the raise was never forthcoming. A strike was then called. The Unemployment Council of Lower Harlem, and the

Spanish newspaper, *Unidad Obrera*, rallied to the support of these youthful workers. Twenty hours later, the management of the Campoamor capitulated, accepted all the demands formulated by the chorus girls, and fixed their salary at fifteen dollars per week.

### Boycott the Fascists

The major campaign of the New Dance League with regards to its program against war, fascism, and censorship, will be centered around the boycott of the International Dance Festival which Nazi Germany, abetted by Rudolph von Laban and Mary Wigman, plans to hold in conjunction with the Olympics next July. That Germany will ask American dancers to participate cannot be doubted, and it is the function of the New Dance League to do whatever it can to expose the anti-cultural attitude of fascist Germany today, and persuade all dancers to act in protest of this Festival. The Committee to Boycott the German Dance Festival is headed by Jane Dudley, Lilly Mehlman, and Winifred Widener. All dancers willing to work with this committee are urged to write immediately to anyone of these three, in care of the New Dance League, 55 West 45th Street, N.Y.C., and volunteer their services.

### New Dance League Recital

The New Dance League will give its first major event of the year on December 22nd, when it will present several of the younger dancers in the League as soloists. To date, the Review Board has not determined the dances, but they will be chosen from the repertoire of Jane Dudley, Anna Sokolow, Sophie Maslow, Miriam Blecher, Lilly Mehlman, Lil Liandre, Merle Hirsch, Polly Korchien, José Limon, and others. Remembering the thrilling work of these people in the past, the dance audience can look forward to an evening of rich and varied talents, and an approach to the problems of dance material that is both vital and significant.

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## Shifting Scenes

The National Office of the New Theatre League is at work on plans for reorganization as suggested by the two recent conferences. The plans include enlargement of the Repertory Department, the publication of several important pamphlets, correspondence courses from the National Training School and a regular bulletin of guidance in theatre crafts. Copies of these plans will be mailed to member theatres shortly, and any theatre failing to receive them in two weeks should get in touch with the National Office . . . More than three hundred people are now at work in the Training School, and courses for the next term will be announced in an early issue of the NEW THEATRE . . . The National Office has been doing a rushing international business with requests for advice, guidance, and scripts coming from South America, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa . . . Ben Golden, New Jersey Secretary of the N.T.L. last winter, is now Acting New York Secretary of the League. . . .

The American League Third Congress Against War and Fascism in Cleveland, Jan. 4, 5 and 6, has received the official endorsement of the N.T.L. All League theatres are strongly urged to send delegates if it is at all possible, and to endeavor to get little theatres, and student and church dramatic groups to join them.

### From Coast to Coast

The Group Theatre of New Orleans (united front) is doing *Squaring the Circle* and *Lefty*. . . . The People's Theatre of Cleveland is still at work on *Ostriches*. Their director, Howard da Silva, and K. Elmo Lowe of the Cleveland Playhouse have leading roles in the Playhouse's production of *Between Two Worlds* by Elmer Rice. . . . The Ibsen Players of Minneapolis recently did Ibsen's *John Gabriel Bjorkman*. . . . The New Theatre Union of Detroit is putting into effect a real people's theatre program—they have interested leading progressives and trade union and Labor Party forces in their forthcoming production of *My Country 'Tis of Thee* and *Private Hicks*. The opening performances, December 6th and 7th, will be under the auspices of the Conference for the Protection of Civil Rights. On January 10th they expect to do *Peace on Earth*, under the direction of Joe Grammercy. The same theatre is arranging a symposium for December 15th at the Statler Hotel, with leading theatre people and dramatic critics as speakers. . . . The Rebel Players have been covering Los Angeles with short performances at meetings and parties. . . . Dick Pack, Toledo correspondent of NEW THEATRE has contacted a small farmers' dramatic group "who were once industrial workers and have now gone back to the land. They have a glorious tradition of militant struggle for relief, against evictions, etc. Out of these experiences we intend to write a collective play." The Toledo Repertory Company is at work on *Peace on Earth*. . . . The Chicago Repertory Group of the N.T.L. is responsible for an excellent symposium on the Negro theatre which should set an example to all theatres anxious to bring their work to the attention of the people of their communities. . . . No further word has been received regarding the New Theatre of Philadelphia's production of *Black Pit*, but all Philadelphians are urged to watch for the opening.

The Theatre of Action which appeared to have dropped from the theatrical horizon after the closing of *The Young Go First* is hard at work. In addition to carrying on mobile work, the Theatre has conducted an intensive search for scripts, which has resulted in at least two very promising plays. The first, tentatively titled *The President of 315*, by Michael Blankfort, is already in rehearsal under the direction of Alfred Saxe, for a premiere early in January. *Private Hicks* is also in rehearsal under the direction of Peter H'yun, Chinese member of the company. A new one-act play by Paul Peters is under consideration as well. The Blankfort play requires a large cast, so that the personnel of the company

has already been increased by six actors, and the theatre still has a number of unfilled positions, particularly in the business department. The theatre has organized an advisory board of theatre directors to assist from time to time in directing productions, advising on production problems, and sitting in on rehearsals and previews. The directors include Lee Strasberg, Irving Gordon, Joe Losey, Bobbie Lewis and Elia Kazan.

Ernst Toller's *Man and the Masses* was revived for three performances by the Arts Guild at the old Neighborhood Playhouse. . . . Actresses not in the Group Theatre acting company who have roles of importance in forthcoming productions are: Evelyn Varden in *Weep for the Virgins* and Frieda Altman, Joan Madison and Blanche Gladstone in *Paradise Lost*.

Notable among the groups which have tackled the script problem is the Chicago Repertory Group. After "troubling deaf heaven with its bootless cries" for script, it took the realistic approach: "If there are no scripts available, we'll have to write some ourselves." And they did. *Waiting for Odets*, a satiric treatment of *Lefty* in the manner of Noel Coward, Eugene O'Neill, the grand opera, and the constructivists; *Hearsterial Revue*, a hilarious lampoon of the "103 per cent Americans" and super-patriots of the Hearst calibre in music, dance and vaudeville sketches; *Anti-War Cycle*, a series of swift-moving sketches carrying the message of horrors of war through a dramatic reading of Mark Twain's *War Prayer*, a clever tap dance depicting a young man going through the stages from gullible youth in front of the "Army Builds Men" recruiting sign to bullet-ridden corpse on the battle-field; singing of the war-propaganda songs of the 1917 vintage; were some of the results. Curiously enough, necessity proved to be more than a mother of invention, it served this group with the materials it was hungering for, and in the *doing* aided them in the realization of a new form, the musical political satire which is truly "national in form and socialist in content."

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# James Cagney

(Continued from page 15)

ficially primed, hysterical crowd. Greater than the tragedies he has enacted is the very tragic situation whose protagonist he himself is;—to be such an artist and to have almost every achievement crippled at its climax by the conditions of the industrial background which pays him well but which he cannot control. Everything good he has done has been in an accidental frame; all the memorable moments are fragmentary, in spite of the main direction, and increasingly unrelated to a central pattern. There is nothing so disastrous to the morale of an artist of Cagney's calibre as to have every excellence of his work at the grudging mercy of a chance director or a haphazard choice in the editorial department, or the shears of the cutting-room.

Lately, it has been sadder and sadder to see the uses to which Warner Brothers have put him. They rely on his engaging, candid personality (which is the result of great technical perfection on his part) to put over whatever bad films crop up on their crammed calendar. In the *St. Louis Kid* he was a good-humored strike-breaker. In *Here Comes the Navy* he served as an amiable recruiting poster. He is incapable of giving a bad performance, even in such sleazy fare as *The Irish In Us*. His love scenes, for example, are always simple and tender, often stylized and perhaps highly mannered, but nevertheless convincing; a fine contrast to his anger or his laughter. Pat O'Brien is a fair enough running mate, but Cagney needs no running-mate. All those pointless laugh-getters of healthy life in the Marine Corps, in the Navy, mild and cheap pro-war propaganda at best, waste the sap of his genius. Indeed such a versatile artist, according to Hollywood, is a real embarrassment. Much better to stick him in one hole, one type, one role, and let him haul in the cash, which the customers who are made familiar with this one type by Warner Brothers build-ups, are willing enough to pay. The mental and emotional damage done to a man as able and intelligent as Cagney, must be incalculable. He staged one impressive protest. To rob him of his fulfillment when he deserves it and is so strikingly able (by himself) to achieve it, is just another kind of hack-saw moral murder in which Hollywood specializes.

What is Cagney's status now? He is currently to be seen in Max Reinhardt's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The most one can say of this rapid, glittering bore is that admirers of Cagney should see it for his performance as "Bottom." And his Bottom is by no means a perfect performance. It is surprising that anyone could give even a fair performance under Reinhardt, who for twenty years has been the most false and expensive producer on two continents. Joe Brown crashes through in a miraculous rightness by just being Joe Brown. But Cagney is always too imaginative to play just Cagney. There never is, as is so easy to believe, a basic Cagney

who simply puts on different clothes for different parts. Perhaps he was embarrassed by the responsibility of speaking Shakespeare for the first time. The words he speaks clearly and beautifully but with that lack of conviction that Reinhardt used sedulously to cultivate, in the preposterous affectations of Alexander Moissi. Cagney's failure as a Shakespearean comic is more interesting than Joe Brown's success. In the scene where he feels to his growing horror, that he has no longer a head of human flesh but one of animal fur, and his questioning fingers taper out into the dreadful ass-ears, he is brilliant;—this kind of brilliance only comes from a worked-out substructure of careful thought. He should not be discouraged from his experience in the *Dream*. Reinhardt has the failures of far more experienced collaborators as his responsibility. And as far as Shakespeare goes (who will increasingly be used in films), Cagney could make a magnificent Mercutio, or Hotspur or Petrucchio. No one would have the nerve to put him into a movie Hamlet since the "under-acting" of Leslie Howard is now found preferable to the equivalently artificial "over-acting" of John Barrymore. Cagney would make Hamlet a violent young man, calm and confused, angry and noble. *Hamlet* (in essence) is a fast brutal drama and Cagney would not be ridiculous in it but right, and closer to Shakespeare than one might at first think.

If one can believe the movie magazines, Warner Brothers have bought *Slim* by William Wister Haines, for him. This fine story of an electric-linesman is pure Cagney material. But the subject is again questionable, as far as Hollywood goes. It is the epic treatment of a class of technicians trained in dangerous labor, which with the depression suddenly collapses as an industry. The linesmen have nothing more to do, but form into anarchic bands and waylay food or chance jobs as they can. Albert Bein's beautiful play, *The Heavenly Express*, has a hobo part which would be pure gold for Cagney. And he would be even better as the organizer in *Let Freedom Ring*, but neither Warner, Hearst nor Hays could admit this was a "suitable vehicle." Warner Brothers appropriated Cagney's *Mayor of Hell* in a vicious dilution from Bein's *Little Ol' Boy*. His latest picture, *The Frisco Kid* is on the verge of release, and though it is set in the nineteenth century days of the California gold rush, its plot involves the demonstration of pure-Americanism as displayed in the terrorism of the Vigilantes. This might be a little more bearable if the Vigilantes were as dead as the gold-rush, but unfortunately they are not. Cagney wants to do *Robin-Hood*, and its myth might provide a possible frame for freer action. At present he is busy on *Ceiling-Zero*, last season's well-made and inadequate melodrama of commercial aviation.

Not until the motion-picture actors succeed in organizing themselves so solidly in the Screen Actors' Guild that they can force their own choice of parts, of inter-

pretation and direction, will an actor like Cagney have anything more than a nominal freedom. The technicians on the lot, cameramen, electricians, carpenters, soundmen and the rest will be excellent allies; and it may be surprising to discover how many fans will support the stars.

Meanwhile James Cagney, one of the preëminent American artists in any field, finds himself in a situation which one can only imagine must be quite intolerable. A living definition of the American working-class,—the most vital, creative personification of the energy, courage, cleverness and fatalism of vast numbers of American workers, he finds himself not only hamstrung by the contracts of his producers as far as "art" goes, but what is worse, he finds himself forced into testimonials against the best possibilities of that class from which he springs and whose heroic representative he could be.

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## Theatre in Mexico

(Continued from page 8)

the need—and the recent formation of a New Theatre group is an opening proof. The *carpa* is surely a brilliant base for such humor and musical cutting-up as the Theatre of Action achieved during its final period as the Workers Laboratory Theatre. The process of transformation could be an infinitely insidious one, since a tradition of sharp political irreverence is very much alive here and intensely popular. Brief depictions of the struggles of the workers' own lives could be substituted for the dismal morality dramas with which the *carpas* flood the market-places around the middle of winter. And securing of audiences would be nothing of the problem it was with us in the beginning, since the theatre-going habit among workers is a fixed one here because of both the accessibility of the playhouse and the extreme cheapness of admission. And trade-union organization is so advanced in Mexico that they could supply basic support with due cultivation.

The great remaining problem is the combating of government demagoguery—and here the important thing, of course, is recognizing and understanding it. The government not only supports a large staff of writers, artists and actors to put on little dramas about how arbitrary official compulsion settles all the differences between oppressed employes and bad bosses but also publicizes these productions on an ample scale and consistently offers them to the workers absolutely free. The large population that is sincerely hoodwinked is unfortunately balanced by an unnatural proportion of revolutionaries who have slid into fatigue and defeat over this situation. The more rapidly they determine to mature their slowly developing technique for clarifying and opposing the shrewd machinery of demagoguery, the sooner we can hope in Mexico for the growth of a true workers' theatre run by and for the workers and not by and for a willingly subservient government that presumes to call itself socialist.

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## With The Stage Unions

Two members of Musicians' Local 802 report that the members of the union has appointed a strike committee to take action December 5th against the WPA Music Project, unless conditions are remedied before that time. Our correspondents are bitterly critical of Federal Music Administrator Nikolai Sokoloff, and attribute new hardships of project workers to his policies. The musician's problems are linked with those which confront the Actors Equity membership, and the two unions should be united in their policy toward the projects. The strike committee has drawn up the following demands:

Cancellation of the increased services recently demanded of musicians on the project. (These preclude the right to include home practice hours as a part of the musician's work, putting him on the same time basis as clerks, manual workers, etc.) The setting up of a union wage scale.

Withdrawal of federal permission for WPA orchestras to broadcast over commercial stations. (This practice would reduce jobs for employed musicians.)

The abandonment of the proposal to charge admission at WPA concerts. (The concerts until now have been held benefit of the unemployed.)

Prohibition of the use of musicians for production try-outs in dark theatres at present WPA wages on the projects. (This would cut opportunities for employment by taking try-outs out of the commercial into the subsidized, project, field.)

Fulfillment of the federal promise to employ on WPA all employable musicians now on relief.

The principle of time for home rehearsal was endorsed by Harry Hopkins at the time when he advent of Mr. Sokoloff musicians were required to play a maximum of 15 hours a week of perwas New York TERA administrator, and until the formances. Now a policy of unlimited rehearsals deprives the musician on the project of a chance for home practice, and prevents him from hunt-

ing for regular employment. Furthermore, by increasing work hours without increase of pay, the wage scale of the entire profession is threatened. The admission charge for project concerts is for the purpose of building a fund to form a municipal orchestra, to replace, eventually, the WPA units so that the public may be led to believe that a magnanimous government is still providing jobs and recreation long after it has ceased to do so on an adequate scale.

The following resolution, passed by the membership of the United Scenic Artists (designers, technicians, etc.) on November 18th, speaks for itself. Members of other unions should study it carefully, for it applies the conditions it attacks exist in every field of theatre work.

WHEREAS the Federal Theatre Project was initiated to reemploy theatre people who are in need of employment, and to establish theatrical membership of a high standard;

AND WHEREAS up to November 1, 1935, the Federal Theatre Project has given employment to only a fraction of the number of people it was scheduled to employ;

AND WHEREAS the reason an adequate number of our members have not been employed on a project is that most of our unemployed members are not considered technically eligible for project work unless they are on the relief rolls;

AND WHEREAS it is to the best interest of the Federal Theatre Project, as well as of our unemployed members, that such technical restrictions shall be removed;

BE IT RESOLVED that United Scenic Artists of America Local 829, New York City, shall go on record against the present qualification for project work and that the Local shall send petitions to this effect to Elmer Rice, New York.

The note on the Alliance of Theatre and Costume Technicians in last month's issue

has been misunderstood by some readers: the members of the Alliance are not trying to overlap the jurisdiction of any existing union, and they would very much prefer to have one of the existing theatrical unions extend its scope to include the fields in which they work. It is because at present they are not protected by any organization that they are meeting to try to find a solution for their common difficulties.

On November 20th, the Office Workers' Union established a Theatre Trades Section, for the organization of office workers in theatre and film producers' offices and radio broadcasting stations. The Union Players, many of whom worked as the evening group of the Theatre of Action last winter, recently attached to the O.W.U., will work closely with the Theatre Trades Section. All office workers in the trade who are interested should get in touch with Bess Serman, Office Workers' Union, 504 6th Avenue, N.Y.C.

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## Backstage

NEW THEATRE thanks the 600 guests who attended the dinner given for the magazine last October 23 for their interest and support, and the sponsors and speakers who took part on our behalf. We present in this issue the speech given by Archibald MacLeish and the speech given by Hiram Motherwell, who extended his talk on sources in the American theatre into a complete article.

Though the dinner was a distinct success socially and indicated the wide interest in the magazine, it was marred by several faults deserving of comment. First, though its work was implicit in the speeches, the error in not having one speaker from the magazine to describe directly the working relationship between NEW THEATRE and the theatre, film and dance groups we represent, and to express our position on such questions as war, fascism, censorship, trade-union and other matters that are regularly our editorial concern. Regrettable also that neither Paul Robeson nor Langston Hughes were free to appear to speak on the Negro in the Theatre, for the word got around somehow that Negroes had not been invited. As a matter of fact, NEW THEATRE specified "no discrimination" in signing the lease for the night, Negroes were invited and did attend the dinner.

German writers are not the only ones who cannot let their identity be known to Fascist forces these days. Correspondents from Czechoslovakia have to be anonymous too. . . . And our writers from the inside of The Industry in Hollywood, though the facts they publish are not contradicted, protect their jobs behind the names of Joel Faith and Forrest Clark. Herbert A. Klein, journalist, now working in Hollywood-Los Angeles, wants it known that he is not Herbert Kline, editor of the N.T.M., and never has been. The connection is an accident of name only. Increased Hollywood interest in NEW THEATRE and all that pertains to it, make necessary this correction of some current misunderstandings. The puppet field is still free of Wall St. control, however, and Lou Bunin who reviews *Gulliver* is well identified as a leading puppeteer.

Emanuel Eisenberg has just returned from an extended study of Mexican theatres.

*Theory of Flight*, a book of poems by Muriel Rukeyser of the NEW THEATRE staff has just been released by the Yale University Press as the 1936 volume in the Yale Series of Younger Poets.

As we go to press the German Neue Theatre Gruppe is appearing on Sunday nights in Wangenheim's famous play *The Mousetrap*. A review will appear in our next issue. For address of performances call the New Theatre League.

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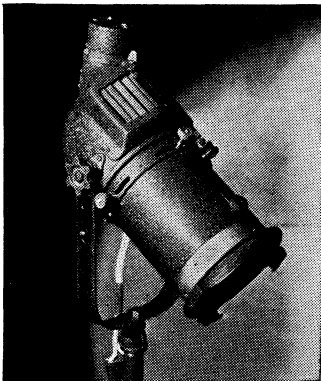
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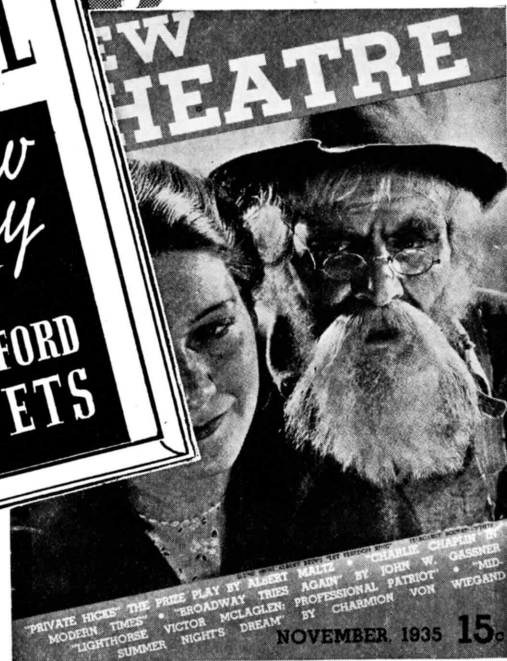
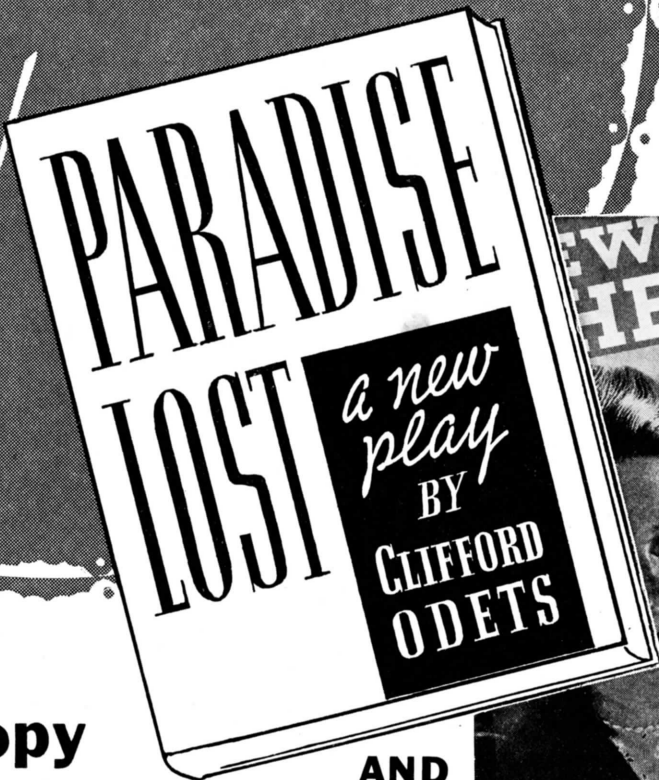
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