

WORKERS THEATRE

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WORKERS THEATRE

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TO ASSIST US
IN OUR STRIKE STRUGGLES

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JUNE ISSUE of
"WORKERS THEATRE"



“WORKERS THEATRE”

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE LEAGUE OF WORKERS THEATRES
SECTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL
WORKERS DRAMATIC UNION OF U. S. A.

No. 2

108 EAST 14th STREET
NEW YORK CITY, N. Y.

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This number of WORKERS THEATRE is of great significance of the workers' revolutionary theatre movement.

It is at once a conclusion and a beginning.

This first printed number marks the climax of forces that have been busy laying the groundwork throughout the United States for a proletarian theatre. The fruit of more than a year's preparatory work was witnessed at the National Workers' Theatre Spartakiade held April 16 at Manhattan Lyceum in New York City, and at the conference held on the following day.

Delegates from cities throughout the country reported on what had been accomplished, and laid plans for the future. The League of Workers Theatres of the United States was then organized, a constitution was adopted, and we are now ready to go full speed ahead.

In this number you will find the reports of the delegates, the text of our constitution, the resolutions we adopted, and many other items that will guide our future work. A careful reading will lay before your eyes the solid groundwork for a great movement in the history of the proletariat. We do not have to apologize for the detail with which we have reported the conference. It was a great historic event, and this number of WORKERS THEATRE is a historic number.

We regret that we could not find space to give the reports of the groups in as full detail as we would like. Also we regret that we were forced to omit many of such reports entirely in this issue. However future issues of WORKERS THEATRE will contain more of these reports, as well as accounts of activities which we hope the members of the League of Workers Theatres of U. S. A. will lose no time in sending to us.

We will publish in our next issue the English translation of the “15-Minute Revue”, the production by the Proletbuehne that won first prize at the Spartakiade.

We want other plays as soon as you can send them. You may be sure they will receive immediate consideration. We also here register our promise that you will get a speedy answer on what we intend to do with any play you send us.

Also we welcome every contribution from every group in the United States and in other countries. WORKERS THEATRE is the national organ of the League of Workers Theatres of the United States. It must be the national organ in fact as well as in name. Cooperate with us. Give us a chance to cooperate with you. Make WORKERS THEATRE a national platform for your ideas and your criticism. Do your share to make WORKERS THEATRE a mass magazine, and you will be helping to build up the solid united red front of a mass revolutionary workers' theatre.

WORKERS THEATRE

GREETINGS TO CONFERENCE AND SPARTAKIADI

MOSCOW — INTERNATIONAL BUREAU THEATRICAL CLUB, MOSCOW, GREET'S CONFERENCE STOP WE ARE CONVINCED YOUR WORK WILL BECOME HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR CULTURAL MOVEMENT AMERICAN PROLETARIAT OUT WAVERING STOP SHNEERSON.

MOSCOW — MOSCOW BLUE BLOUSE THEATRE WELCOMES CONFERENCE STOP WAGE COMMON STRUGGLE WITH-STOP SHNEERSON.

MOSCOW — LONG LIVE THE UNITED FRONT OF ALL THE WORKERS AND REVOLUTIONARY THEATRES IN THE WORLD! WE HOPE THAT THE DAY IS NOT FAR OFF WHEN THE WORKERS THEATRICAL REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT OF THE U. S. A. WILL BE IN THE FIRST RANKS OF THE CHAMPIONS FOR PROLETARIAN CULTURE AND A PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION. FIGHT, JOINTLY WITH ALL THE REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATIONS, FOR THE RED UNITED FRONT OF THE WORKERS AND TOILERS OF THE U. S. A. — CONSOLIDATE YOUR UNION WITH THE WORKERS AND THE REVOLUTIONARY THEATRES OF OTHER COUNTRIES! — OUR ARDENT GREETINGS TO THE ADVANCE GUARD OF THE PROLETARIAN THEATRE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND ITS FIRST CONFERENCE! — SECRETARIAT OF THE I. W. D. U., DIAMENT, GEN. SEC'Y.

SEATTLE — THE WORKERS CULTURE COUNCIL OF THE W. I. R. GREET'S THE FIRST NATIONAL WORKERS THEATRE SPARTAKIADI.

WE ARE VERY SORRY THAT WE COULD NOT SEND A DELEGATE TO THE SPARTAKIADI FROM DISTRICT NO. 12. WE WILL ABIDE BY THE DECISIONS OF THE CONFERENCE AND CARRY ON THE TASK OF BUILDING A REAL WORKERS THEATRE IN THIS DISTRICT.

WE PLEDGE OURSELVES TO SUPPORT THE PROLETARIAN CULTURAL MOVEMENT.

WE INSTRUCT THE DELEGATE FROM THE REBEL PLAYERS OF LOS ANGELES, CAL., TO ACT AS OUR REPRESENTATIVE AT THE CONFERENCE.

FORWARD TO REAL MASS WORKERS THEATRE.

COMRADELY YOURS,

MICHAEL SAKSAGANSKY, ORGANIZER

LOS ANGELES, CALIF. — LOS ANGELES REBEL PLAYERS SEND REVOLUTIONARY GREETINGS TO THE FIRST NATIONAL WORKERS THEATRE SPARTAKIADI AND CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION IN THE CLASS STRUGGLE FROM LOS ANGELES TO NEW YORK WILL MAKE OUR ORGANIZATIONS A TRULY MASS THEATRE. LET OUR SLOGAN BE, MAKE THE THEATRE A MIGHTY WEAPON IN THE FIGHT OF THE WORKING CLASS. VICTOR CUTLER, SEC'Y.

NEW YORK — THE WRITERS GROUP OF THE JOHN REED CLUB SENDS ITS GREETINGS TO THE WORKERS DRAMATIC GROUPS CONFERENCE. THE JOHN REED CLUB WISHES TO REASSERT ITS WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE WITH THE WORKERS' DRAMATIC GROUPS AND THROUGH THEM TO BUILD THE FOUNDATION OF A POWERFUL PROLETARIAN LITERATURE. SUCCESS TO THE CONFERENCE. THE WRITERS GROUP, JOHN REED CLUB.

THE WORKERS INTERNATIONAL RELIEF, WHICH IS ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN DEVELOPING ALL FORMS OF MASS CULTURAL ACTIVITY AS A WEAPON OF THE WORKINGCLASS IN ITS FIGHT FOR BREAD AND FREEDOM, GREET'S THE FIRST NATIONAL WORKERS THEATRE SPARTAKIADI AND CONFERENCE ON APRIL 16 AND 17 AS A TREMENDOUS STEP FORWARD FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY CULTURAL MOVEMENT. THREE CULTURAL GROUPS OF THE W. I. R. ARE ON THE PROGRAM OF SATURDAY'S SPARTAKIADI, — THE WORKERS LABORATORY THEATRE OF THE W. I. R., THE RED DANCERS OF THE W. I. R., AND THE YOUNG REVOLUTIONARY DANCERS OF THE W. I. R. FROM BOSTON THE SOLIDARITY PLAYERS OF THE W. I. R. ARE SENDING DELEGATES.

THE NATIONAL OFFICE OF THE WORKERS INTERNATIONAL RELIEF EXPECTS THAT THIS SPARTAKIADI AND CONFERENCE WILL STIMULATE GREATLY THE RAPID DEVELOPMENT OF W. I. R. MASS CULTURAL WORK, AS WELL AS OF THE ENTIRE PROLETARIAN CULTURAL MOVEMENT!

FORWARD TO A MASS PROLETARIAN CULTURAL MOVEMENT! ALFRED WAGENKNECHT, NATIONAL SECRETARY

THE JUNE ISSUE OF "WORKERS THEATRE" WILL BE THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN ISSUE. PLAYS AND ARTICLES DEALING WITH AGIT-PROP WORK IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN SHOULD BE SENT AT ONCE TO "WORKERS THEATRE" 108 EAST 14TH STREET, NEW YORK CITY.

First National Workers Theatre Conference on the Development, Prospects, and Tasks of the Workers Theatre in the United States

The political, economic and cultural background.

1. The First National Workers Theatre Conference takes place in a period of the most severe economic crisis that American capitalism has ever undergone. Thirteen million American workers are unemployed. Millions of small farmers are ruined. Production in every industry, except the war industry, is being sharply curtailed, in the face of the tremendous needs and growing misery of the workers and farmers. At the same time, American imperialism works imperialist powers to prepare an immediate war against the only country where the workers and farmers rule, the only country that steadily raises the economic and cultural level of its toilers — the Soviet Union!
2. In the present period, the bourgeois theatre (like all bourgeois culture) is also experiencing the sharpest crisis it has ever known. More than half of its actors, artists, and musicians are admitted to be unemployed. Wages of those still employed are being slashed. The bourgeois cinema has great mass influence, but the bourgeois theatre in the United States has never reached the great masses, except to a limited extent in a few big cities. And now all but a few theatres are unoccupied. Soup kitchens and the proceeds of charity concerts are all our American bourgeois society has to offer those theatre workers and artists who serve it. At the same time, the leaders of the Actors' Equity Association, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, have not raised a finger to resist the worsening of the conditions of its members, but have gone ahead and increased the initiation fee and annual dues. The "Little Theatre Movement", which under the false banner of "Art for Art's Sake" set out to reform and rescue the bourgeois theatre, has collapsed under the strain of the economic and ideological crisis of capitalism.
3. At the same time, the reformist Socialist Party leadership suddenly sets up a so-called "Workers Theatre" demagogically repeating the revolutionary slogan of "Art is a Weapon" and even speaking of "Class War". But its true nature came out in its very first production, which ends up with old unemployed workers finding their only way out by turning on the gas and committing suicide. As a further demagogic trick with the approach of the First National Workers Theatre Spartakiade and Conference, the "socialist" fakers announce, on one day's notice in the bourgeois press, a "First Workers Theatre Conference" to discuss forming a national organization. That this so-called conference was a demagogic stage trick is shown by the fact that it had a total attendance of nine people, of whom four were paid functionaries of the Socialist Party's Rand School. This activity of the cultural fakers is a frantic attempt to counteract the rising influence of the revolutionary workers theatre.
4. The growth of the revolutionary workers theatre in America is an accompaniment of the intensifying crisis of capitalism, which results on the one hand in a rising wave of revolutionary struggle on all fronts by the workers and farmers, and on the other hand in the increasing radicalization of petty-bourgeois theatre workers, artists, and students.
5. The rise of the revolutionary workers theatre, whose high spot in this country is marked by the present National Spartakiade and Conference, is an international phenomenon. Its increasing effectiveness as a weapon of the working class is shown by the attempts of the bourgeoisie and their "socialist" henchmen to suppress the agitprop theatre troupes in Germany, Japan, Czechoslovakia, and other lands, attempts which will also be made soon in the United States. In fact, the police in Los Angeles, California, already seek to smash up all performances by the "Rebel Players", a revolutionary workers theatre of that city.
6. The tremendous growth of the revolutionary workers theatre in the United States dates back a year and a half ago to the letter of the International Workers Dramatic Union to the Cultural Department of the Workers International Relief, to the establishment of the Workers Theatre Magazine by the Workers Laboratory Theatre of the Workers International Relief in April, 1931, and its rapid growth of influence under the joined editorship of the Workers Laboratory Theatre of the W. I. R. and the Prolet-Buehne, German Agitprop Troupe of New York.
7. With the development of the workers theatre movement, there is taking place a sharp turn towards agitprop work. Workers theatres in all languages in the United States are coming to realize more and more that this form of theatre, with its forcefulness, mobility, and political timeliness, is the basic form of workers theatre in the present stage of the class struggle. But we must be careful to see that our agitprop plays have good entertainment value.
8. At the same time, there is a growing understanding of the proper role of the stationary workers theatre, which should be as highly political in content as the agitprop type, but which has possibilities for more thorough and more impressive treatment of the most important subjects.

Agitprop Theatre and Stationary Theatre.

WORKERS THEATRE

Basic Tasks.

9. The basic tasks of the workers theatre now are to spread the idea of the class struggle, to participate actively in the class struggle by raising funds for campaigns and for the revolutionary press and by recruiting workers into the revolutionary unions and mass organizations, and especially to arouse the workers for the defense of the Soviet Union, against the coming imperialist attack.

Short-Comings.

10. The main shortcomings of the workers theatre in America today are

- that there are not enough contacts between groups.
- that there are not enough plays being written to meet the growing need.
- that the more developed groups outside New York City do not assist the weaker groups in their locality.
- that the groups underestimate the necessity for cooperation.
- that there is no systematic attempt to build theatre groups in the revolutionary unions and in most of the mass organizations.
- that international contacts are very weak.

Tasks

— General.

11. To overcome its weakness and to accomplish its important tasks, the workers theatre must undertake the systematic political and artistic training of its members. It must increase and improve its agitprop work. It must go out to the masses — into the streets, to the factory gates, to the farms. It must reach the rank and file of the American Federation of Labor and the Socialist Party.

It must build and make use of the stationary workers theatre wherever there are possibilities for its effective utilization.

It must experiment with forms in order to find the most effective methods of presenting its subject-matter. It must use music and the dance and all other cultural forms, in order to make its material more attractive. It must take over from the bourgeois theatre whatever can be used for revolutionary aims.

It must expose and fight anti-workingclass propaganda of the bourgeois theatre and its "Socialist" stepchild. It must expose the deception of the slogan, "Art for Art's Sake".

It must draw in large numbers of workers and farmers. It must draw in sympathetic artists and intellectuals.

Tasks

— Repertory.

12. It must more quickly catch up with and dramatize the day-to-day struggles of the American working class.

It must present the most important developments of the class struggle in other countries.

It must popularize the tremendous achievement of the workers and farmers of the Soviet Union.

It must make clear that the great vitality of the Soviet

Theatre to-day was only made possible by the proletarian revolution in that country.

It must win workers and farmers, including those in the armed forces, for the tactic of turning the coming imperialist war against the Soviet Union into a civil war against the imperialists.

Tasks

— Organizational.

13. To correct serious shortcomings in its organizational work

- it must establish the closest contact with and help build agitprop troupes in the revolutionary unions and mass organizations.

— It must stimulate the growth of the workers theatre in the important industrial sectors and in the rural districts.

— it must establish closer contact with the organizations of revolutionary writers, particularly to help solve the problem of adequate repertory.

— it must establish a National Workers Theatre Organization as the United States' section of the International Workers Dramatic Union.

The National organization must include federations of all workers theatres in the various languages, building federations where they do not exist. The National Workers Theatre Organization will be a tremendous stimulus to the further growth of the revolutionary workers theatre.

The Workers Theatre Magazine.

14. All workers theatre groups should support and build the official organ of the National Workers Theatre Organization. The Workers Theatre Magazine is one of the most important instruments for the building of the revolutionary workers theatre movement.

Revolutionary Competition.

15. The experience of the workers theatres in other countries shows that one of the most effective methods of stimulating and improving the activity of the workers theatre groups is the method of revolutionary competition. The workers theatre in the United States must adopt this method and must organize such competitions between the various groups and districts, including as an annual event the revolutionary competition of the National Workers Theatre Spartakiade.

Theatre and its Relation to the general Revolutionary Movement. The Workers

16. Every workers theatre group must realize that its existence is closely tied up with that of the entire revolutionary movement — that its aims are the same — that its slogans are the same — that only under the closest guidance of and cooperation with the revolutionary organizations can

the workers theatre in the United States, as in the other lands, march forward as an important factor in the overthrow of the capitalist system, in the emancipation of the working class, to the glorious building of the classless society.

DRAM BURO REPORT

BY JOHN E. BONN, CHAIRMAN

COMRADES:

Two weeks ago the Agitprop Department of the Communist Party called upon the workers theatres in New York for active participation in the coming election campaign. A week ago the Unemployed Council of the Harlem Section New York asked for an Agitprop group to give regularly street performances at open air meetings. Yesterday's Spartakiade in which 14 workers theatres of New York, Newark, Philadelphia, and Chicago participated proved that the political and artistic quality of our groups stands well in comparison with the best workers theatres of other countries.

The simultaneity of all these events shows that it is not just an accident that this conference takes place at this time. This conference was necessary at this moment, in order to conclude a certain period in our development and to begin a new phase in the history of the workers theatres of this country. This is the moment when the "splendid isolation" of the workers theatres of this country, from each other, from the masses, and from the political events, has been definitely canceled, when the American workers theatres finally abandoned that "minority complex" willingness to be a second hand means of amateur entertainment by and for workers, when we are conscious of our political task and responsibility towards the working class. And this is the moment, when the workers and the working class organizations, instead of ignoring us or smiling at our attempts as they used to do, recognize us as an important factor in the revolutionary movement of the working class.

We have passed the period of clarification and are ready to enter our new phase: the period of action. Between these two phases of development this conference **had to take place** in order to resume the experiences and achievements of the first period and to prepare for the next period by organizing and consolidating the forces for action.

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND

This turn in the history of the workers theatre movement of the U. S. A. coincides with a most important event in world history: the crisis of the capitalist system and the rise of Soviet System, the transition of the political and crisis of the capitalist system and the rise of the

economic dictatorship from the capitalists to the workers. While in one sixth of the world the rule of the proletariat has been established, in the other part of the world the capitalists are still strong enough to defend their lost position — at the expense of the toiling masses. And we, the workers of this country of prosperity, feel this burden no less than our brothers in the other capitalist countries.

Twelve million workers are unemployed in the richest country in the world. Those of us who are still working are exploited by a reckless system of speed up and wage cuts. — At the same time, the capitalists, encouraged by the treacherous role of the so-called Socialists, have started an unheard of system of terror against all militant attempts by the workers to struggle for their rights. The Hunger March of Washington, the battles in the Kentucky Strike, the clashes in Detroit and Chicago, the Scottsboro case, are only a few example of the growing militancy of the workers and the desperate terror of the bosses who use jail, murder, lynching, electric chair, and deportation against protesting, demonstrating, and striking workers. In a time like this all means must be used to defend ourselves against and to attack and defeat our enemy. In a time like this we cannot afford to renounce the aid of a strong and militant front of the workers theatre.

THE BOURGEOIS THEATRE

All the culture is determined by and is the expression of the economic situation. The capitalist decay must find its reaction in the capitalist, i. e. bourgeois theatre.

The bourgeois theatre takes an active part in the class struggle on the side of the capitalists. It broadcasts the bourgeois-capitalist ideology. It covers the facts of capitalist decay. Just think of all the plays and movies demonstrating, explicitly or implicitly, that money does not make happy homes, that every worker in this country has a chance to become a millionaire when he starts as an obedient wage slave and rises to exploit others, that millionaires are often unhappy and always charitable, that we have to defend and to die for "our country" etc., etc. The erroneous conception of many of us that the bourgeois theatre is a matter of "art for art's sake" while the workers theatre is a weapon in the class struggle, must be revised. The slogan, "art for art's sake", is nothing but a cover for the political

WORKERS THEATRE

reactionary character of the bourgeois theatre. The bourgeois theatre is also a weapon in the class struggle — on the side of the bosses.

On the other hand, the bourgeois theatre reacts passively, as a victim of the capitalist crisis. More and more theatres are forced to close. The remaining theatres reduce the wages of the employed actors, directors, and workers to a minimum. The number of the unemployed theatre artists and workers is growing from day to day. The artistically highest form of the bourgeois theatre, the "Little Theatre", has practically disappeared. And even the cinema and the most popular American form, the "vaudeville", are in the same critical situation.

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE BOURGEOIS THEATRE

Our attitude toward the bourgeois theatre was up to now incorrect. I in particular had taken a wrong leftist standpoint in my report at the Workers Cultural Conference on June 14, 1931, when I stated that there is no relation between bourgeois theatre and workers theatre, as the bourgeois theatre approaches the rich while the workers theatre approaches the workers. This attitude led to a dangerous neglect of the bourgeois theatre. But after a closer study and wider experience I now agree fully with my critics who urged a more active attitude toward the bourgeois theatre. The bourgeois theatre, as an instrument of our class enemy, must be fought by exposing its class character to the workers, by replacing it by a qualified workers theatre art. As a victim of capitalist decay the bourgeois theatre must be attacked by approaching those who are affected by the crisis, in order to win them over into the ranks of the class conscious militant workers.

THE AIMS OF THE WORKERS THEATRE

In contrast to the bourgeois theatre, the workers theatre shows openly its political character: it is the theatre of the revolution, it is a weapon for the workers in the class struggle. We expose the whole capitalist system with all its tools. We expose the class character of the bourgeois press, of the police, of the army, of the courts, of the church, of the schools, and of all capitalist institutions. We must propagandize the campaigns for Unemployment Insurance, for liberation of political prisoners, for strike relief. We must report and analyze the day-to-day events. We must prove that the revolution is the only way out. And we have to broadcast the truth about the Soviet Union, and the necessity for all workers to defend their only fatherland.

But it is not enough to propagandize and to dramatize the class struggle. The workers theatre must take an active part in the class struggle. We must support and build up the revolutionary mass organizations by raising money and by winning over the workers. We must help the revolutionary press by collecting money, by winning new readers and subscribers. The workers theatre must stand in the front of the class struggle, reflecting it and carrying it out.

While almost everybody working in and for the workers theatre is clear on our general political aims and the specific tasks, we are still engaged in the search for the right method of work and the most appropriate form of expression to carry out our tasks. When we look over the articles in our magazine, **Workers Theatre**, and the correspondence among the various groups or between the Dram Buro and the groups, we find that these organizational and artistic problems have been taken up very seriously and dealt with thoroughly by the workers theatres of this country. The limited time for this report allows me but to touch the main problems, which it seems to me are these:

1. which method of work should we apply?
2. which is the most efficient artistic form for workers theatre production?

METHOD OF WORK

As agitation and propaganda groups, we have to convince the masses of workers of the necessity of the class struggle and to arouse them to action. But how can we propagandize the class struggle if we are not clear about it ourselves? How can we inspire our fellow-workers to action if the spirit of action is not in ourselves? That means: the basic prerequisite for a successful work is

POLITICAL TRAINING

of each member and political orientation of our entire work. Not before each group considers itself as a shock brigade and each group member feels as a soldier in the class struggle can we expect to fulfill the other prerequisite of our work:

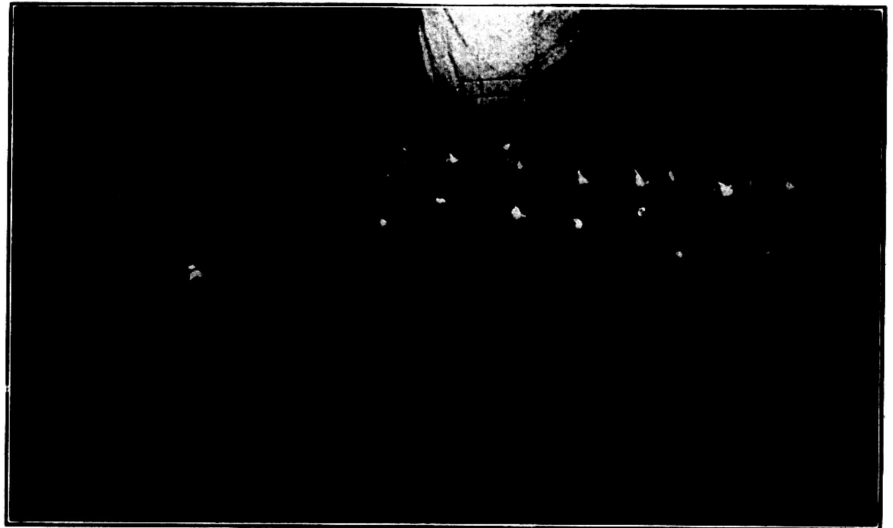
PROLETARIAN DISCIPLINE

I do not have to explain here why workers theatres have to expect more discipline and more responsibility from each individual member than other organizations. Everyone of us is convinced of this necessity. However, for many of us the question is still open, how to accomplish the necessary group discipline. One thing we know by experience: we cannot and will not enforce this discipline. It must be a voluntary discipline,

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which can only be the result of political education. A group member who does not understand the political importance of his group cannot keep a strict proletarian discipline. A group member who is convinced of the political necessity of our work cannot act undisciplined and irresponsible.

Not before we understand the importance of thorough and continuous political education of the group will we be able to find the correct method of work. The problem is to find the right balance between leadership and collectivism. Here we failed in either direction. On account of a wrong understanding of collectivism on one hand, and an absolute lack of leadership on the other hand, we find some groups in the state of anarchism which is sometimes camouflaged by a bureaucratic organizational formalism. Nothing is more able to kill the revolutionary spirit of a group than a too complicated apparatus of committees, sub-committees, functionaries, and functionary-bodies. At least there is no more task for which the group as a whole could be responsible and no problems which could not be given over to the "proper" committee of functionary. On the other hand we find often a dangerous overconcentration of all activity and responsibility on one comrade while the rest of the membership has nothing to do except to carry out the plans and the orders of this single "leader". Imagine what would happen if this single comrade has to leave the group, and you recognize immediately the dangerous shortcomings of this method.

The organizational basis of our work must be such that the special talent of an individual member can be used as far as possible. The group as a whole, however, has alone the power to decide on all political, organizational, and artistic ques-

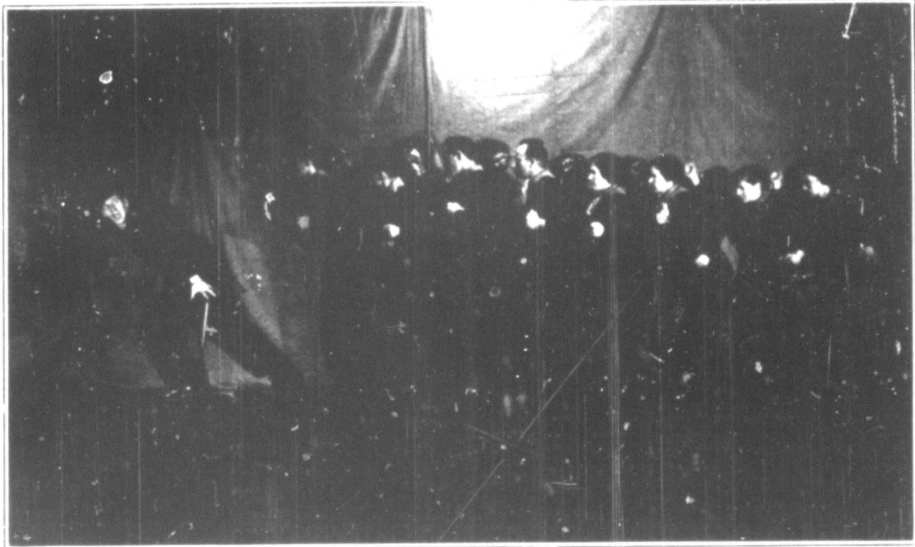
tions. The leader has the function to lay out the plans and to direct the activities, in order to carry out the decisions of the whole group. In this case each member of the group feels much more responsible, as he has to carry out not the order of a single comrade but a collective decision in which he took part. We know from experience that this

COLLECTIVE METHOD

based on political education and on voluntary discipline guarantees the best results.

THE PROBLEM OF FORM

What should the Workers Theatre look like? Which is the proper form for our plays, for our staging, for our acting? When we compare **Workers Theatre** with the Workers Theatre magazines of other countries we find that we in this country are more concerned with these problems than our comrades elsewhere. Again and again we meet articles, speeches, discussions, letters dealing with the following problems: Shall we learn from the bourgeois theatre or not? Do we need a stationary theatre or an Agitprop Theatre? Shall we write and perform naturalistic or symbolistic plays? Shall we use scenery, costumes, and make-up or not? The way these questions are put shows that most of us have a purely formalistic therefore wrong approach toward the problem of form. We understand that aims, working conditions, players, directors, writers, audience of the workers theatre are different from those of the bourgeois theatre, and at the same time, we try to find the appropriate form for our theatre among the forms existing in the bourgeois theatre! This is an obvious contradiction.



WORKERS THEATRE

We cannot wait or look for a ready made style for our new theatre; we have to develop the style of the workers theatre by bringing it in conformity with its tasks and its means of expression.

MOBILITY

Our task is to bring the message of the class struggle to as many workers as possible. When we want to reach the masses it is not enough to wait until they come to us or call for us. We have to go there where the masses are: in meetings, in workers affairs, on the streets, at factory gates, in parades, at picnics, in workingclass neighborhoods. That means we must be mobile.

Our organizational structure, our plays, the form of our production must be such that we are able to travel with our production from one place to another, that we are able to give the same effective performance on a stage, on a bare platform, on the streets.

PROPAGANDA AND ENTERTAINMENT

It is not enough to bring our message to the masses. It is necessary that the masses accept our message. Our production must be such that the workers like them. We have to consider the expectations of the audience. And a theatre audience expects in the first place entertainment. A production with the best political content is worthless if this content is not presented in a form

which is interesting for a workers audience. But we do not achieve this entertainment value by adding certain entertaining elements—like a dance, a song, a special stage effect—to the political content. The form in which we express our propaganda must contain the entertainment value. Both elements—propaganda and entertainment must be interwoven in a workers theatre performance.

SIMPLICITY AND ART

The organizers, players, writers, and directors of workers theatres are workers, the audiences are workers. Both are not prepared by a long literary and cultural education, which is only available to the members of the bourgeois class who have the leisure and the money for it. Worker players are not able to express, and worker audiences are not able to understand, complicated structures of ideas and refined intellectual language. The workers theatre plays must be simple, so that workers can produce them and workers can understand them. Simplicity, however, does not mean crudity, does not mean absence of art. On the contrary: the more artistic our productions are, the more effective they are, and the more efficient is the political education and propaganda we carry. The art of workers theatre will be an art using the simplest elements, according to creative elements at our disposal, according to our economic situation and according to our audience.

(To be continued)

THE JUDGES AWARD

(Report by Comrade NATHANIEL BUCHWALD, to the National Conference of Workers' Theatres held in New York on April 17, 1932)

Speaking in the name of the Committee of Judges, I shall announce the results of the Spartakiade in the hope that all groups that participated in this historic contest will realize the difficulties under which the judges labored.

Our first difficulty was in establishing a "yardstick" to measure the specific merits and shortcomings of the various groups. We finally agreed to divide the credits about equally between the play and the performance, and on each of these points there were several items to consider. The credit items include, on the side of performance, new ideas in direction, use of technical means, smoothness of performance, acting, and entertainment value. The latter items also applies to the text of the play, and here we had to take into consideration the political importance of the content, the timeliness of the theme and the clarity of the message. Unfortunately, no provision was made for the literary and dramaturgical quality of the script, so that a well-written

play was at a disadvantage compared to a slipshod script.

The judges were considerably handicapped by the rules of the contest which did not really permit the various groups to be seen at their best, the rule being that each group must present a new play, never given before, and confine itself to the time-limit of 15 minutes. If the groups had been permitted to show the best plays in their repertory, the Spartakiade would undoubtedly have achieved a higher level and the award of the judges would, perhaps, be quite different.

However, the results both from the political and artistic standpoint are quite gratifying. If we view the Spartakiade as a composite picture of our agit-prop groups we find in it both clear and effective political content and at least the beginnings of a distinct and effective style. All of the plays put together gave the impression of something vehemently revolutionary, and in the very variety of forms there was the promise of a new style that is a live and dynamic, a style that even in its imperfect first attempts achieved that oneness of stage and audience, of player and spectator, which the bour-

"I
NEED YOU
AND
YOU NEED ME"
AGIT.
PROP.
SCENE
PRODUCED BY
THE
PROLET BUEHNE



geois theatres failed to achieve for all their formalistic innovations and thematic lures.

In connection with their award, and by way of justifying it, the judges find it necessary to point out a few essentials of the agit-prop theatre. First, an agit-prop play must be specific and have a direct bearing upon a timely issue, upon a campaign that has for its aim the mobilization of masses of workers for a given purpose. In its effect upon the audience an agit-prop play must be a mobilizer and organizer of workers for mass action in connection with the issue involved.

To this end it is necessary that an agit-prop play be clear and concrete in its message. I shall attempt to explain this by stating the opposite. There is a tendency in some of our agit-prop plays to rely too much on poetic phraseology and intellectual rhetoric. Instead of bearing in mind the content of the lines and their ability to reach and influence the audience, some of our agit-prop playwrights seem to be preoccupied with literary and poetic "self-expression".

The second essential is, as Comrade Bonn pointed out in his report, a high degree of mobility of an agit-prop group. An agit-prop group must not be encumbered by heavy or bulky scenery or complicated stage effects. A good agit-prop production should be portable.

Another essential is good acting, good not in the sense of professional polish or clever technique, but in the sense of clearness of diction, simplicity of movement and sincerity of utterance. The matter of good acting in this simple sense cannot be stressed too much. It is for the director to obtain from the untrained or insufficiently trained workers these qualities of clarity, simplicity and sincerity. We must remember that the actor is the living medium that communicates the meaning of the play to the audience.

It goes without saying that competent direction is important. In the agit-prop theatre which operates with untrained actors the job of the director is, of course,

more difficult and trying than in the professional theatre. But then again the devotion of the actors to their task, their oneness with the content and purpose of the play, their oneness with the audience are qualities that go a long way in making an agit-prop play live and convincing. The problem of the director is one of organization, inventiveness in the matter of operating with a minimum of stage-paraphernalia, resourcefulness in the employment of simple props and—above all—of "getting along" with the actors, stimulating their native gifts, encouraging their best efforts.

In point of specific theme and timely content the play given by the Negro group of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights (Scottsboro Limited), the Eviction play of the Coney Island Dram-Section of the Workers' Club and the Charity skit of the Jack London group of Newark are good examples. The Hungarian Dramatic Group, on the other hand, furnished an example of plays that are unsuited for agit-prop purposes. The play was cluttered up with outworn domestic melodrama that really obscured the political message. This type of play should be discouraged in the agit-prop theatre.

In point of cumbersome scenery the Artef was a characteristic offender. Due to the rules of the Spartakiade the Artef was declared out of competition, its play being too long and not new. The judges appreciate the high merit of the work shown by the Artef group and recognize the value of this type of stable revolutionary theatre; but the play in question (War against War) while belonging to the agit-prop field by its content, was burdened with complicated settings calling for several shiftings and called for intricate light effects, all of which reduced its mobility and hence—its availability for agitational and propaganda purposes. The script of the Artef play also manifested those faults of intellectual rhetoric and abstract poetic diction of which I have spoken a moment ago.

The Negro group was ruled out of competition be-

(Continued on page 13.)

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SOCIALIST



PROLETARIAN THEATRICAL ASSOCIATION OF JAPAN

(Reported by Comrade Ishigaki)

Comrades!

On the occasion of the first National Workers' Theatre conference and spartakiade, the PROT (Proletarian Theatrical Association of Japan) sends its heartiest revolutionary greetings to our comrades of America.

Japanese imperialism, which has gone into Manchuria with swaggering insolence, has now taken possession of Harbin, and also of Shanghai, close to the Chinese Soviets. This means that the provocative military action against the Soviet Union and the imminent threat of a war against the Chinese Soviets by Japanese imperialism and the other imperialistic powers have become of a clearer character.

FASCIST CHARACTER OF BOURGEOIS THEATRE

The Japanese bourgeoisie, which has tried to escape from the world crisis by these imperialistic adventures, is now rushing Japan headlong into a real fascist dictatorship. Therefore the Japanese bourgeois theatre, as well as all other bourgeois culture, the press, the cinema, phonograph records, radio, etc., has never so openly exposed its character as a bourgeois class weapon as today.

The staging of reactionary, chauvinistic war propaganda plays by prominent theatres all over the country, the compulsory collection of money and presents from the theatre workers for the "consolation" of the soldiers at the front, the contribution of theatre profits also for the "soldiers at the front," (with the consequent added exploitation of the theatre workers'), the quick change of the popular amusements and entertainments into channels of reactionary and chauvinistic propaganda, the sending of delegations of these entertainers to the front in Manchuria, etc.—all these show what is happening to the Japanese bourgeois theatre.

Comrades!

In the midst of these stormy waves of reaction, the revolutionary working class of Japan is marching on under the banner of the Communist Party of Japan. It is marching on more persistently and more resolutely than ever in the fight against imperialist war, for the defence of the Soviet Union and the Chinese Soviets, for the establishment of a Soviet Japan, and for the World Revolution. Not only in the essential industries, in the military factories, in the building of barracks, etc. but even in the various parts of the front, the anti-war movement is daringly carried on in face of imprisonment, torture and the firing line; and the power and influence of the Communist Party of Japan and the Zenkyo (Japanese section of the Profintern) is rapidly increasing.

FOURTH NATIONAL CONGRESS

Comrades!

The PROT (Proletarian Theatrical Association of Japan) is holding high the red banner of the Communist Party of Japan in the theatre field. The PROT had its fourth National Congress last October, in accordance with the decision of the KOPFJ (Federation of Proletarian Cultural Organizations of Japan), which had been organized a short time before, in these difficult times.

FACTORY "THEATRE CIRCLES"

Thus our organization, which had consisted only of "revolutionary theatres" before the Congress, gathered under its jurisdiction the workers' and peasants' groups

throughout Japan. The membership of the association, which had amounted to only 300, is increasing daily, and it now has under its jurisdiction the factory "theatre circles" of the main industries throughout the country, including the metal, chemical, press, transport, postal and other industries. In November, 1931, there were already 181 such theatre circles.

"THEATRE PAPER"

Our paper, the "Theatre Paper", which has been established since September, 1931, as a theatrical paper for the masses and appears twice a month, had a circulation of eight thousand within three months, and a local edition of this paper has been established in Osaka, an important industrial center in the western part of Japan. Besides, as recently as January, 1932, the association established its theoretical monthly organ, "Prot." As its first step in the field of theatrical activity in the Japanese colonies, the association has organized theatrical groups for the Korean workers in Korea.

PERFORMANCES IN LARGE THEATRES

In the big cities such as Tokio and Osaka, big performances by the "revolutionary theatres" have been held in large theatres every month, despite the district censorship, the police terror, and the fascist gangsters. The agit-prop groups also carry on their propaganda and agitation among the workers and peasants throughout the country either illegally or semi-illegally.

We inform you with pride that we are holding our revolutionary post, just as you are in your countries. We realize that our chief task at present lies in winning the majority of the workers on our side, carrying on energetically all our agitation and propaganda activities against war with with the Soviet Union and the Chinese Soviets.

Comrades!

In view of the International Worker' Theatre Day as preliminary to the coming first World Congress of the International Dramatic Workers Union and the First Theatre Olympiad in Moscow in August, 1932, we pledge ourselves that we shall always strengthen these fights and stand with you, shoulder to shoulder, for the final victory of the working class.

Fight against imperialist war.

Defend the Soviet Union.

Long live the Chinese Revolution.

Long live the international unity of the workers theatres and the revolutionary theatres of the world.

(Signed) The Central Executive Committee of
Proletarian Theatrical Association of Japan.

JEWISH WORKERS' DRAMATIC SECTION OF DETROIT OF THE JOHN REED CLUB

(Reported by Comrade Lewis)

This group began by being a bourgeois literary group and gradually found its way out. It is now an organization of 24 active members. *It was really WORKERS THEATRE that helped us last year.*

It is necessary now to find a way to approach all the other groups that do not know about the work going on, otherwise half of our work will remain undone.

**WORKERS' CULTURAL FEDERATION
OF NEW YORK**

(Reported by Comrade Pullman)

The National Spartakiade, coming at a time of the decadence of bourgeois culture, was a great and effective demonstration of the vitality of the rising workers' culture. The Spartakiade showed the importance of agit-prop plays in bringing the knowledge of the class struggle to the workers and in building up a proletarian culture.

VAUDEVILLE WORK

However, there are other weapons of the theatre that must not be ignored if we wish to reach the great masses of workers who are not yet class-conscious. *One of the most effective of these weapons is the vaudeville stage.* Recently the Workers' Cultural Federation took a definite step in that direction. *A Vaudeville Workers' Club has been organized, with the aim of bringing the unemployed vaudeville workers into the ranks of the workers' theatre. A workers vaudeville show is being*

prepared for about the middle of June. In this show will be a magician's act, marionette shows, and dance recitals. Every one of these acts will be used to put the message of the workers' struggles over to the audience.

SERVICE AT STRIKES

The Workers' Cultural Federation has been busy in other ways. In the recent New York dressmakers' strike, the Federation mobilized workers' theatre forces to *perform at the strikers' meetings* and thus help to keep the strikers' ranks solid. About 25 afternoons to two hours each were devoted to this work. The medium employed was in general American vaudeville.

DANCE COUNCIL

The Federation has also organized a dance council. A May Day mass dance is being prepared in which about 22 dancers will participate. Music recitals are also being prepared.

The aim of the Workers' Cultural Federation is to assemble all the workers' cultural forces for the use of the working class.

15**MINUTE RED REVUE****PRODUCED BY THE GERMAN PROLET BUEHNE****WILL APPEAR IN THE JUNE ISSUE OF W. T.****JUDGES AWARD***(Continued from page 11)*

cause the play they gave had been given before and also because the group had been recently organized and could not be matched against the older groups. But the very fact of the appearance of a Negro group at the Spartakiade is considered by the judges, and I am sure by all of you, the most welcome and hopeful feature of the contest. There was something wonderfully inspiring in the solidarity of white and Negro workers as exemplified by the participation of this group in the Spartakiade and by the enthusiastic response of the audience.

The dance groups were not in the competition, but the judges think it necessary to commend the Young Revolutionary Dancers for their use of a timely theme (Scottsboro) and for the employment of pantomime as part of the dance. On the other hand the use of the hanging figure and particularly the resort to mystic symbolism (the dead man raising his arm) should be criticized. The Red Dancers gave an effective performance of the "Rot Front" group dance and a commendable dance suggesting the idea of solidarity between white and Negro workers. But their "Widows' Dance" manifested a tendency in the direction of nebulous, mystic movement and expression that meant nothing in particular to the uninitiated. Proletarian dances should not need an explanatory speech.

The International Workers' Order group should be commended for their effective staging and verve of acting. The Scandinavian group deserves favorable mention for the splendid ensemble quality of their mass recitation; as well as for the ringing clarity of individual utterance. Their piece, a glorification of the Communist Party, sinned to some extent on the side of intellectual and poetic diction. The Ukrainian group are given mention for the progress they made in the direction of the agit-prop form. It is only their second play of this type, and they had to break with a long-established tradition of the "art" theatre to bring about this change.

Special mention should be given to the Workers' Laboratory Theatre which has been a pioneer in the field of the agit-prop theatre. Its work should be encouraged and commended in spite of the fact that the judges could not find for it a place among the winners.

The winners of the Spartakiade are:

First place—The German Proletbuehne for their "15 Minute Red Revue";

Second place—Jack London group of Newark for their play called "Charity";

Third place—John Reed group of Philadelphia for a play called "We Demand".

The second and third winning plays were written by members of the Workers Laboratory Theatre.

(A critical evaluation of the winning plays and groups will be printed in a subsequent issue of Workers' Theatre.)

CONSTITUTION OF THE LEAGUE OF WORKERS THEATRES OF U. S. A.

I. NAME AND TASKS

1. The name of the organization is: "League of Workers Theatres of U. S. A.". The organization is a section of the International Workers Dramatic Union.
2. The aim of the organization is to make the workers theatre movement an efficient cultural weapon for the toiling masses in the class struggle.
3. In order to reach this aim the organization has to perform the following tasks:
 - a) To support and to improve the work of the existing workers theatre groups by giving organizational, artistic, and political assistance and guidance such as repertory service
exchange of ideas, forces and material
political information
training of the forces
theoretical clarification
 - b) To coordinate the work of the existing groups on all occasions where joint activities are necessary
 - c) To spread the idea of the workers theatre
by making the workers conscious of the importance and the possibilities of the workers theatres
by exposing the class character of the bourgeois theatre
 - d) To develop new groups where and when it is necessary
 - e) To establish contacts with all sympathetic elements in the bourgeois theatre and to make it possible for them to participate in the workers theatre movement
4. The official organ of the organization is "Workers Theatre".

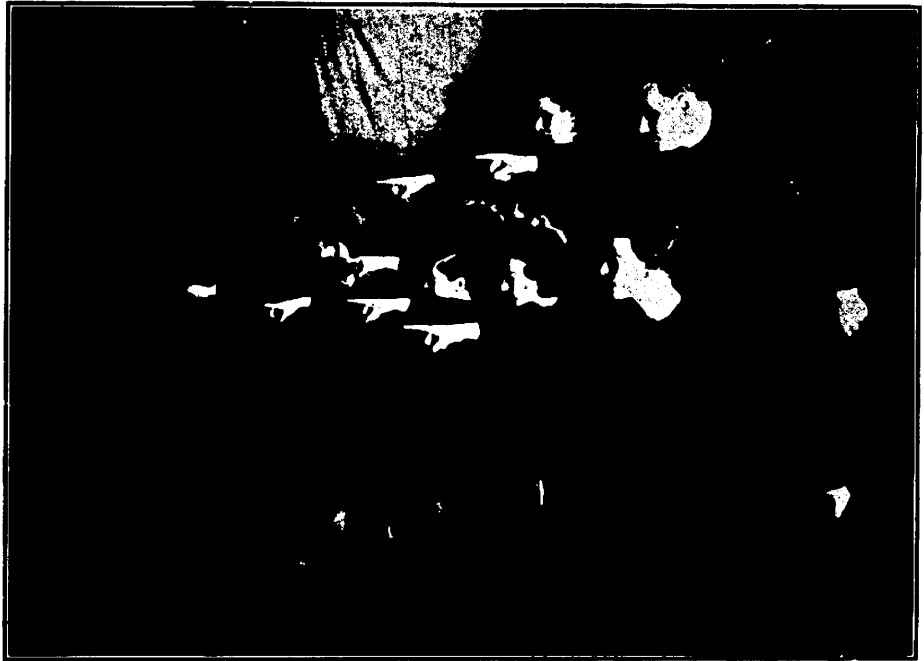
II. MEMBERSHIP

5. Every workers theatre that accepts the constitution of the organization can become a member.
6. Individual members are accepted in localities where no group is in existence. In this case it is the duty of the individual member to organize a workers theatre group as soon as possible.
7. A workers theatre group consists of at least three members.
8. Applications for membership are to be filed with the secretariat and must be approved by the National Executive Committee of the League.
9. The National Conference sets the rates of the membership fees for the period until the next National Conference.
10. The National Council shall have the power to take disciplinary action against members.

III. STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION

11. The Organization is subdivided locally into Districts, Sections and Local Branches; in the matter of language, into Language Federations.
12. The executive bodies of the organization on a national scale are:
 - National Conference
 - National Workers Theatre Council
 - National Executive Committee
 - Secretariat
13. The NATIONAL CONFERENCE consists of delegates of each member-organization. The task of the National Conference is to review the past activities of the organization and to decide upon a plan of action until the next National Conference. All functionaries and functionary bodies are bound by the decisions of the National Conference. The National Council decides on the time and place of the next National Conference. It decides also on the principle of representation.
14. The NATIONAL WORKERS THEATRE COUNCIL consists of the members of the Secretariat, of members of the National Executive Committee, and of one representative of each language federation. It meets every 3 months. The National Council plans the work for the time until its next meeting. The National Executive Committee can call special National Council meetings with at least a week's notice.
15. The NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE consists of the Secretariat, the Editor of the Magazine, and the Chairman of the Repertory Committee. It meets twice a month. The General Secretary, as Chairman, can call special meetings on at least three days notice. The National Executive Committee decides on and organizes all activities, necessary to carry out the working plan of the National Council. It decides on the employment of paid forces and on all larger expenses.
16. The SECRETARIAT consists of the General Secretary, the Organizational Secretary, and the Financial Secretary. It meets at least once before each National Executive Committee meeting. The General Secretary calls the meetings of the Secretariat when it is necessary, or if the other two members ask for a meeting.
17. The task of the REPERTORY COMMITTEE is to provide suitable plays.
18. The EDITORIAL COMMITTEE OF "WORKERS THEATRE" consists of the Editor and two associate editors. The editorial board of nine (which includes the three editors) decides on the policy and the contents of the Magazine.

**"SCOTTSBORO"
AGIT-
PROP-
SCENE
PRODUCED
BY THE
PROLET-BUEHNE**



**RESOLUTION
ON
SCOTTSBORO**

In the name of the workers theatre movement, we, the delegates to the First National Workers Theatre Conference, protest the legal lynch frame-up of the nine Negro-boys in Scottsboro, Alabama. We pledge that thru the medium of the workers theatre we will fight for the unconditional release of the nine Negro-boys and will work for the unity of all toilers, Negro and White, native and foreign born, in the common fight against their oppressors.

Copies of this resolution shall be sent to the Scottsboro boys, to the Governor of Alabama, to the Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, to the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, and to the revolutionary press as well as to the bourgeois press.

**THE GROUP REPORTS WILL CONTINUE
IN THE JUNE ISSUE**

Resolution on Mooney and the other class war prisoners

The First National Workers Theatre Conference demands the immediate and unconditional release of Mooney, Billings, and other class war prisoners. We pledge ourselves to use the workers theatre to carry on the fight for their release.

Copies of this resolution shall be sent to the Governor of California, to the workers press and the bourgeois press.

GREETINGS

TO

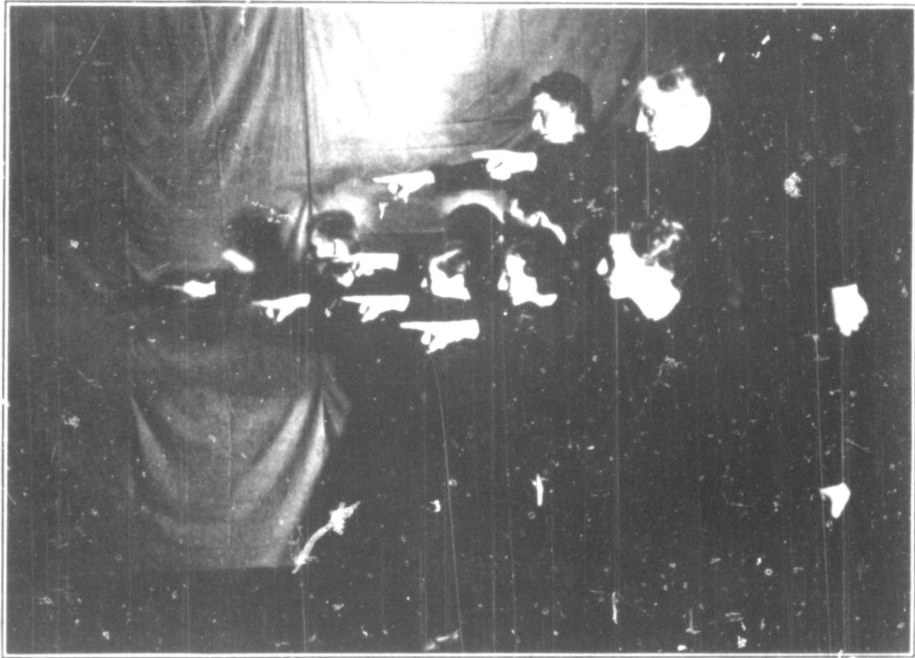
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19. All functionaries are elected by the National Conference. Between the sessions of the National Conference the National Executive Committee can replace functionaries if they prove to be incapable or irresponsible. The replaced functionary has a right to appeal to the next meeting of the National Workers Theatre Council.
20. The workers theatres of one city shall constitute a LOCAL BRANCH OF THE L. of W. T. The local Dramatic Council consists of representatives of each group in the city. A committee of three elected by the Workers Dramatic Council of this city acts as executive body and establishes the contact with the National Executive Committee.
21. The districts in the vicinity of a larger city organize a SECTION of the L. O. W. T. with a Section Executive Committee of three to be elected in a meeting of the Local secretaries of the branches.
22. Sections in the same geographical districts form a L. of W. T. DISTRICT with a district executive committee of three to be elected by the section secretaries of the districts.



THE

"ARTEF" JEWISH WORKERS
 REVOLUTIONARY THEATRE GREETES
 THE **"WORKERS THEATRE"**
 WHILE CONCENTRATING MORE AND
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 AND THE NECESSITY TO CULTIVATE
 A VARIETY OF FORMS IN THE
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 COMPLISHMENT OF THE COMMON
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