

new Theatre

EDDIE
CANTOR



"Eddie Cantor
Likes Peace"
by EMANUEL EISENBERG

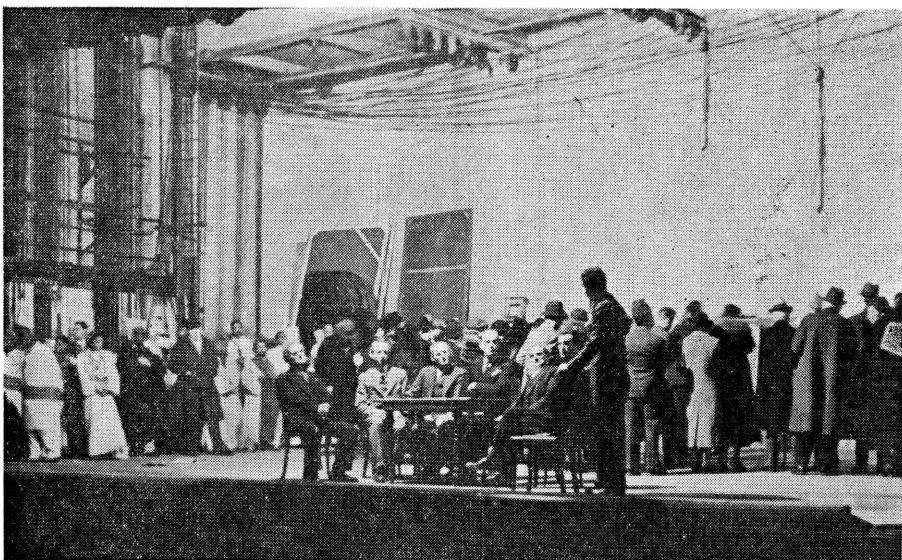
"I Can't Sleep"
by CLIFFORD ODETS

"Rene Clair"
by LEWIS JACOBS

Abraham

February
1936

15¢



THE DIPLOMATS IN CONFERENCE AT GENEVA. FROM THE UNCENSORED REHEARSAL PERFORMANCE OF "ETHIOPIA" AT THE BILTMORE THEATRE. PERFORMANCE PHOTO BY MARTIN HARRIS



ELMER RICE

A Statement by Elmer Rice

Given to the Press at the January 24th Showing of "Ethiopia"

The implied charge that a carefully documented factual presentation of public events could conceivably affect our international relations is absurd on its face and doubly ludicrous to anyone who has read the script or seen a rehearsal of the production. Mr. Baker is merely trying to raise a smoke-screen to conceal the real issue. That issue clearly is free speech. When I took this job last fall, I did so upon Mr. Harry Hopkins' emphatic and explicit assurance that Washington would not attempt in any way to censor the productions of the Federal Theatre Project. At my first interview in October, I informed the reporters that any attempt at censorship would be followed by immediate resignation. Washington has broken its word; I have kept mine.

The final decision to censor the Living Newspaper and thereby force my resignation did not come until after I had outlined by Mr. Baker some of the other productions which were being planned. These include a play called *Class of '29* which deals realistically with unemployment and the handling of relief; and a second issue of the Living Newspaper on the situation in the Southern states, touching on such vital subjects as lynching, discrimination against Negroes and the plight of the share-croppers (in other words, hitting the Democratic Party where it lives). Mr. Baker has already called off one Federal Theatre Project play in Chicago, because in the opinion of Mayor Kelly it was uncomplimentary to the Ad-

ministration and to the Democratic Party.

In short, we are confronted here not only with an evidence of the growth of facism which always uses censorship as one of its most effective weapons, but with the resolute determination of the Democratic Party to be re-elected at all costs. In the face of that stern necessity, the fostering of the arts, the rehabilitation of unemployed professional men and women and the constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression go by the boards.

I am sorry to be obliged to resign at a time when so many of the carefully-laid plans of the Federal Theatre Project are nearing fruition. And it is difficult for me to sever my friendly association with Hallie Flanagan, Philip Barber and the hundreds of fine earnest theatre workers who have given me their cooperation and support. But I am a member of the board of directors of the American Civil Liberties Union, the vice-chairman of the National Council on Freedom from Censorship and the Chairman of the Authors' League Censorship Committee. For fifteen years and more I have been actively engaged in fighting censorship in every form. The issue of free speech and the preservation of the bill of rights seem to me of greater moment today than they have ever been in the history of America. I cannot conscientiously remain the servant of a government which plays the shabby game of partisan politics at the expense of freedom and the principles of democracy.



DAVID BETHEA AS HAILE SELASSIE AND FRANK MARINO AS MUSSOLINI IN "ETHIOPIA," A NEWS DRAMATIZATION OF THE LIVING NEWSPAPER UNIT, W.P.A.

NEW THEATRE

FEBRUARY, 1936

The W.P.A. Theatres and Censorship

By JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

On January 23rd, Elmer Rice resigned as Regional Director of the Federal Theatre Project for the New York district. It would be more correct to say that Mr. Rice was unceremoniously forced out. Jacob Baker, Assistant Administrator of the W.P.A., ordered drastic changes in *Ethiopia*, first production of the Living Newspaper Unit. When Mr. Rice explained that the ordered changes were not only absurd and impossible, but that he considered them an act of censorship, Mr. Baker drew from his pocket a letter which had been prepared in advance, stating that, "When difficulties have arisen in the past . . . you have proposed either to resign or to take the difficulties to the press. Now that a problem has arisen in connection with a dramatization that may affect our international relations, you renew your proposal of resignation in a telegram to Mr. Hopkins. This time I accept it, effective upon receipt of this letter."

In spite of the smug excuse of "international relations," the meaning of this arbitrary action on the part of a government official is clear. In a statement issued at the uncensored press showing of *Ethiopia* on January 24th, Elmer Rice goes to the heart of the matter: "The final decision to censor the Living Newspaper and thereby force my resignation did not come until after I had outlined to Mr. Baker some of the other productions which were being planned." In response to requests from project workers that he resume his position, Mr. Rice said: "This resignation was forced upon me because they are afraid that we might do something on this project that would rock the Democratic boat. My return to the project is impossible because I would return only on my conditions, which will not be met."

Mr. Rice also told the newspaper men that he hoped they would be in-

terested in this "as men interested in your craft and in protecting its integrity."

The integrity of the newspaper craft, the integrity of writers in every field, the basic rights of free speech, free theatre and free press, are threatened by the government's action. The fact that *Ethiopia* deals with the international situation is used by the government as a smoke-screen for the suppression of honest artistic effort, and for the dismissal of the man who dared assert the Bill of Rights on a Federal Theatre Project.

The irresponsible censors in Washington were alarmed because the contemplated productions of the Living Newspaper included two domestic issues: one dealing realistically with unemployment, and a second dramatizing accounts of the Southern states, the discrimination against Negroes, lynching and the conditions of the sharecroppers.

This is not a diplomatic issue. It is not in any narrow sense a purely political issue. It marks the most decisive step toward Federal censorship of the arts that has ever been made in the United States. And let there be no mistake about it: Federal censorship means fascist censorship; it means using public funds for the suppression of public opinion; it means an attempt to harness culture in the service of reactionary politicians.

In preventing the performance of *Ethiopia*, the Roosevelt administration enters a field in which the Mayors and police of a dozen cities have already distinguished themselves. The series of attacks on *Waiting for Lefty*, the more recent censorship of *Tobacco Road* and *The Children's Hour*, are part of the same drive for a tighter control over thought and culture.

Washington knows that the honest presentation of facts is likely to "rock the Democratic boat," as Rice charges.

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Washington found Mr. Rice "difficult" because he is an honest and courageous artist, one of many who believed that a Federal theatre project could really serve the interests of American culture. The administration has consistently used the W.P.A. as a political football. The theatre project has been, and will continue to be, consistently sabotaged by the Washington authorities—first, because honest art is dangerous; second, because a considerable section of big business (manufacturers and film producers) is opposed to the fostering of the arts. The motion picture people fear that the competition will cut into their profits. The manufacturers object, because fifty percent of the money allotted for other works projects is spent on materials purchased at prevailing prices, while only ten percent of the money for arts projects is used for materials. The difference between fifty percent and ten percent of \$27,000,000 is approximately \$11,000,000.

This is the economic basis for the drive toward censorship—which is part and parcel of the drive toward fascism. The storm of protest which has greeted the suppression of *Ethiopia*, the quick rallying of liberal forces to Rice's defense, is heartening. It is to be hoped that this is only the beginning of a wider and stronger protest. Everyone who is interested in free speech and civil rights should join the fight to force a public showing of *Ethiopia*—and the return of Rice as Regional Director *on his own terms*.

"Ethiopia"

Ethiopia will not open, but an uncensored and in many ways impressive rehearsal of the W.P.A. production was shown privately to the press on January 24th. Here was a kind of experiment which no commercial producer would, and no amateur theatre could afford to undertake. Even this first, not wholly finished production, proved the possibilities that lie in a serious subsidized theatre equipped for experimentation and research and led by first class talents. And the killing of the experiment shows the artistic crippling which results from censorship just as inescapably as the more blatant violation of civil rights.

The production used, more or less, the *March of Time* technique which was first tried on the radio and later in films—with the important difference that the Living Newspaper actually gave an impartial representation. Months of research by newspaper men attached to the project resulted in the selection and authentication of crucial episodes in the

Italo-Ethiopian conflict and its international repercussions. Only occurrences admitted to by all parties were dramatized; claims and counterclaims of importance were given as such in the mouths of the officials who had presented them. No claim was delivered without the answer of the opposing party.

The public statements of the diplomats presented thus in bald succession—without any hint of motives or under-the-table bargaining or the real effect of their actions upon the people they "represent"—lead the spectator to only one considered conclusion. The League of Nations be-

haves with criminal irresponsibility; Ethiopia has been outraged.

For if "propaganda" means agitation in the interests of the people, then the plain truth is propaganda.

Except for the fine local color mass scenes laid in Ethiopia, the excerpt which we quote below is one of the few which involves lay characters. Even this scene is carefully representative of the currents of British thought and opinion which forced Hoare's resignation. It is preceded by the outlining of the Hoare-Laval plan, and followed by Hoare's own defense to Parliament.

A Scene from the Censored Play

TELETYPE: "BETRAYED!" CRIES BRITISH PUBLIC.

TELETYPE: SHEFFIELD SHEFFIELD SHEFFIELD SHEFFIELD SHEFFIELD

(*Light up on street scene. Man, soap box, etc.*)

SPEAKER: . . . and what do you think everybody else is going to say about this—all the little countries like Rumania, Greece, Turkey, Jugoslavia, Poland, and the rest of them. What are they going to think of British diplomacy and the League of Nations now? . . . I'll tell you what they're going to think! Suppose it was our country that was being invaded—Rumania, Greece, or Turkey? Why, we'd be getting the same kind of raw deal that Ethiopia is getting now—that's what they'll say. And they'll wash their hands of the whole dirty business, and then you can throw the **WHOLE LEAGUE OF NATIONS INTO THE SCRAP HEAP, AND CIVILIZATION WILL BE PUT BACK ANOTHER TWENTY YEARS . . . WE'VE BEEN BETRAYED!** (*Blackout*)

TELETYPE: LIVERPOOL LIVERPOOL LIVERPOOL LIVERPOOL LIVERPOOL

(*Light up on another street scene, another soap box, another agitator, a well-dressed, middle-aged woman.*)

WOMAN: (*Calmly, dispassionately—enumerating these successive steps on her fingers*) Look: the League decides that Italy is guilty of aggression of unprovoked assault on Ethiopia. They apply economic sanctions as a further emphasis of this guilt. So far so good. But what does Sir Samuel Hoare do? He decides to reward Italy for this aggression, for this unprovoked assault, by giving her practically everything she asks and more than she expected . . . while Ethiopia, a nation that's hurting no one and just minding its own business, a nation that

has been fairly judged to be the injured party, is stripped of almost everything it has that is worth taking! *AND THAT, MY FRIENDS, IS EXACTLY WHAT THE HOARE-LAVAL PEACE PLAN IS!* (*Blackout*)

TELETYPE: MANCHESTER MANCHESTER MANCHESTER MANCHESTER

(*Light up on another street scene.*)

GIRL: . . . So Mister Baldwin says this is the only way a world war can be averted, does he? Well, what I say is this: What good is the League for anyhow? . . . Didn't I read about some agreement in the Covenant which says that all the nations should support each other in outlawing an aggressor? And if this outlawing leads to a war of everybody concerned against this aggressor—well then, I say, didn't they think it meant that when they established the League, didn't they? . . . **WE'VE BEEN BETRAYED!** (*Blackout*)

TELETYPE: LONDON LONDON LONDON LONDON LONDON LONDON LONDON

(*Light up on a Trafalgar Square scene.*)

SPEAKER: (*Cockney*) . . . they comes before us and says, "Vote for Baldwin and the Conservative Party because the Conservative Party stands behind the League of Nations and the League will see that every nation gets a square deal," that's what they says. . . . And what do we do? We does what we're told like good little boys and girls and we votes them in with a majority of twelve million. *Twelve million!* . . . And then what happens? They proceed to forget every rotten plank in their platform and they get up a peace plan which is nice and sweet and fair and square for everybody . . . except Ethiopia . . . which has to give up half its territory so Italy won't make war on it any more. . . . We've been betrayed. **BETRAYED!** (*Blackout*) (From *Ethiopia* by Arthur Arent).

They're At It Again!

The censors are at it again! The places: Hollywood and Chicago. The cause: "lasciviousness" in Hellman's *The Children's Hour* and "vulgarity" in Chaplin's *Modern Times*. Surprising? Not at all. Censors and censorship crop up almost anywhere. No matter who or where or why, the machinery is kept in order, oiled and ready for use, an invaluable aid to any reactionary oligarch.

In Boston and Chicago, the play that won the admiration of every first line critic in New York City was discovered to be unwholesome. In Chicago, the play was banned. A telegram of protest was immediately sent to Mayor Kelly, signed by such distinguished Americans as Clarence Darrow, Llewellyn Jones, Robert Morss Lovett, Maurice Gnesin, and many others, and supported by the National Committee Against Censorship of the Theatre Arts, the Civil Liberties Committee of Freedom from Censorship, and the New Theatre League. Protests, however, should pour in by the thousands. Readers of *NEW THEATRE* are asked to write pure-minded Mayor Kelly, demanding that the ban be lifted.

But the really choice news comes from movieland! In Hollywood, which has sponsored Cecil B. DeMille's bawdy spectacles, the Hays office has ordered scenes deleted from Chaplin's latest film. Mr. Breen and Staff found too much "vulgarity" in Charlie's most serious comment on our times. Considering the abominations usually condoned by Hays' mob, isn't it more likely that the reason is closer to the Japanese "dangerous ideas" theory, than to the excuse offered by the one-time Presbyterian elder? We cannot urge our readers too strongly to take immediate action in the forms of protest wires, petitions, and letters against this latest act of the censors in Hollywood.

Nazi "Culture" Olympiad

Recently various American dancers have been approached and invited to attend and take part in the dance festival to be held in conjunction with the Nazi Olympiad. The types of the dance to be held in Nazidom were announced as national, historical and "concert." What "concert" dances are is more or less unclear, but it may be guessed that the arrangement will not encourage the presentation of the vigorous, modern, social-minded dance forms.

But American dancers may be expected to turn thumbs down on the sanguine plans of Mr. Hitler. A mass meeting is

to be held in the near future to crystallize the dancers' opposition to Hitler barbarism. A cultural committee has been formed with a possibility that it affiliate itself to the Committee on Fair Play in Sports, to initiate and carry on the movement against participation in the Berlin dance festival. Inquiries about this work should be addressed to the Committee on Fair Play in Sports, 20 Vesey Street, New York City.

Andre Sennwald

Andre Sennwald raised the standard of motion picture reviewing on the *New York Times* from a meaningless occupation, the aim of which was to originate smart phrases which could later be used to advertise meaningless pictures, to the dignity of genuine criticism. He brought to his job personal and brilliant gifts as a writer. He understood those things which make motion picture an art apart, and those things which make it an art in common with all art. When he believed a picture promoted war or race hatred, he was not afraid to say so. *NEW THEATRE* did not agree with everything Mr. Sennwald wrote, but it sincerely regards his death as a tragedy in which the Newspaper Guild, where he was a member, criticism, and the motion picture, are all losers.

Labor Stage, Inc.

The first performance to take place in Labor Stage's new theatre, the Princess, was one offered by the dramatic group of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union on January 11th. The I. L. G. W. U. has a studio at work, and contemplates doing a needle trades revue this spring. Labor Stage hopes to house other trade union performances at its headquarters, the Princess Theatre, on which it has taken an eight-year lease, and which it is re-equipping preparatory to its own productions next year. These will be full-length professional presentations of plays important to trade union audiences.

For the rest of this season, Labor Stage will confine itself to preparatory work, and lectures and symposia to arouse interest in its program. A series of discussions on music, the theatre and dance will be begun in February. The first of these meetings will be devoted to the organization itself, which was started as a result of the resolution of the A. F. of L. Convention last fall to initiate theatre activity. The position of Labor Stage will be put forward by Julius

Hochman and Francis Gorman. It is hoped that a representative of the Theatre Union, and one from the Broadway theatre will also speak. Active on committees in the organization are Mrs. Elmer Rice, Mrs. William Lescaze, Joe Losey, Rose Schneiderman and other theatre and union leaders. Louis Schaffer of the I. L. G. W. U. is the manager.

Here is an opportunity for a genuine labor theatre—it has access to an enormous audience, it has money, it has a militant trade union point of view. Now it faces the task of maintaining these and making itself heard in terms of the most appropriate theatre; that is, the most honest and human and creative theatre possible.

The Dance Project

The Dance Project achieved through the organized pressure of dance associations, and the active interest of Mrs. Hallie Flanagan, is the first recognition of the contemporary dance by the government. Says Mrs. Flanagan, in her reasons for facilitating the plans for the Project, "It is impossible to think of the modern theatre without thinking of the dance. . . . It is necessary for the theatre director to learn the hard lessons of the dancer: how to emphasize and distort line, how to assault by color, how to design in space."

Don Oscar Becque, supervisor of the Project, looks forward to an organized audience. "We plan to present works with a significant point of view, and it is for that reason we hope to be supported by a broad, sympathetic audience; the audience attending Theatre Union productions, or New Dance League recitals." Tentative plans for production includes the dance scenarios *Danger-Men at Work* by Mrs. Flanagan, dealing with the C.W.A. and P.W.A. and all government projects, *Boy and Girl Tramps of America*, based on a sociological study by Thomas Minehan, both to be directed by Mr. Becque; a contemporary version of *Tyl Eulenspiegel*, *Le Fils Prodigue* and *Tempo*, to be directed by Gluck-Sandor, and experimental concert productions under the supervision of Tamiris. Guest choreographers will include Charles Weidman and Doris Humphrey. There will also be a loan department to supply theatre productions with expert choreographers.

All dancers already on relief, but engaged in other work, are urged to transfer to this project and to support the outlined plans, which at this point promise to be a healthy step in the right direction. The dance has truly come of age.

Trudi on the Road

BY MURIEL RUKEYSER

She runs as Fridolin to the front of the bare stage, nips a bit of air between two fingers, and hurries back to give it as a flower; or giggles with a tremor of the shoulders that Bergner might very well envy; or with a swipe of the hand, a knee pulled up to her stomach in contrition, a stiff poke of the elbow, demolishes the grandeur of any stuffed shirt the middle class cares to put up as her opponent. The pompous families eating indigestible wedding food—ministers who preach hell-fire with intimate knowledge—young wives so boring that fly-swatting is entertainment to their husbands—show-girls and brides and newspaper readers—Trudi Schoop takes them all on as fair game, and leaves them, a set of dead dragons on the stage, and the audience, pretty largely middle class itself, sparkling and recognizing and giggling, in its seats.

Trudi Schoop would a lot rather have a predominantly working class or predominantly intellectual audience to watch her group dance than a middle class audience. Her material is slight, it is true; she does very little more than to be nimble among smugger, more awkward people, and so puncture them from a lot of changing vantage points. An intellectual audience will see this critically and understand it; she feels that workers' audiences will respond better, more directly—laugh more, and at different points from the others. She and her group, making their headquarters in Zurich, have been applauded all over Europe. Here the price range was an exclusive one which drew a class line; but she has danced for workers' audiences in Holland and Germany. She plans to go to dance in the Soviet Union after an extended tour of the United States; and her days in Germany were ended after her last tour, in 1933, when she was permitted to dance anywhere, but where in at least two cities, the press was forbidden to comment.

It is not that she particularly thinks of her dances as social, although they are always critical, poking fun, showing up staleness and swagger. "I want to get the fundamental gestures of people," she says. "I want to be able to catch their walk, their laughter, their attitude, and express that rhythmically." Flexibility and lightness get all the emphasis; there is no possibility of masks in a form that depends so much on pantomime, on facial expressiveness. "Ballet training,"

she continues, "and pantomime, but hardly any acting, for my group,"—all the reviews had been talking about the thin line between dancing and acting in Trudi Schoop's 'comic ballets.' "But then, there is really no permanent school, and no fixed courses—I teach when I happen to be in Zurich, and that has been at very irregular intervals during the last few years. But when the school is active, ballet and improvisation are important parts of the training."



They are prime factors in the group's equipment. The best members of the group were contrasting physical types: one small, rounded, and compact, appearing as showgirl and acrobat, and one tall and angular, with sharp, expressive elbows and knees, gawky to a fault when it is necessary, or fluent as ribbon. They both share with Trudi Schoop a delightful understanding of gesture and contortion and fun. The group uses faces as actors must, and as dancers seldom do. Trudi Schoop, whose face in repose is contemplative, with serious, wide-placed, pale eyes, noticeable Teutonic cheekbones, and strongly set teeth whose line

determines the contour of the mouth, becomes, as Fridolin, a naive, charming boy, who worms himself, grinning, out of any escapade, who can be smothered by embarrassment or shaken with laughter within any two seconds.

Each of the two dances is episodic, and may sacrifice development of theme to make the sequence more rapid. *Fridolin*, in twelve scenes, takes the young adventurer along the road. *Want Ads*, in six broken episodes, tells the individual tragedies that answer any set of newspaper ads, read to the audience after each 'act.' In witty and pathetic scenes, Meta Krahn and Trudi Schoop, among others, rapidly make their characters clear.

Speaking of her character of Fridolin and the social symbols which her group becomes, as family, or bowling club, Trudi Schoop says: "I want my group to represent types, physical and social types." In a form as dramatic as the comic ballet is, she believes that stylized characters are more effective and more easily recognizable. In her group problems of character development or improvisation, it is always the type that is remembered, and by that standard the action is developed. She means to go on with the same sort of comic and dramatic material.

She has been criticized for the slenderness of her material. It is true, for example, that the Silly Symphonies are more pointed, and certainly more universal, than such a work as *Fridolin on the Road*. It is true that this is middle class comedy, and almost exclusively the middle class laughing at itself; and that it is likely to be thin stuff, evaporating in laughter at the end, if it is not sharpened to a further point. What Trudi Schoop has now is delightful; it is so charming that it provokes all the questions of what she might do with, say, a Disney scenario. The modern fable might do as much for the dance as the dance could do for it. The figure of the mimic, of a boy like Fridolin, or of a boy like Hugo Gellert's Comrade Gulliver, lightened a bit, might be as good a social symbol for the dance theatre as any yet hit upon; and more effective for satire and lightness than many others. Trudi Schoop has all the equipment and gaiety and irreverence that could be desired; what can be hoped for is that she and others will develop the material there, so that her expert combination of playfulness and accuracy may be sharpened and intensified.



Katakombe

Cabaret—

Berlin



Actors continue to take their part in the fight against German fascism. And audiences support them, as discontent with Hitler's policies grows from week to week. The following article was published by the *Neuer Vorwärts*, a Social Democratic weekly organ of exiled Germans in Czechoslovakia. The author is an actor who recently escaped from Germany.

Before leaving Berlin, I had already heard of the arrest of Werner Fink, master of ceremonies of the well-known Katakombe Cabaret, and his transfer to a concentration-camp. So far as can be learned, he is still there, along with several of his colleagues. You who are in exile, and the rest of the world, have probably not yet heard the circumstances of these sudden arrests. As chance would have it, I saw a performance at the cabaret just two days previous. I deeply admired the desperate courage of my colleagues, but there, in the packed and tense house, the whole thing seemed highly dangerous.

Werner Fink stepped up to the stage with this greeting, "Heil Hitler—and a

Good Evening to the other ninety-eight percent of you!" There was wild cheering, loud applause, coming even from some obvious Aryans whose sense of humor and satire had not yet been lost. Then Fink told a little story: "As you all know," he said, "in the past there have been some truly great men: Napoleon, Frederick the Great, Goethe and Bismarck. They really were great subjects for writers. There was much to be said about them and they like to hear men express themselves. But now—you know—" Fink slowly and sadly started leaving the stage. Then suddenly, he turned and shouted to the audience, "Now! Oh, yes, now that would be so nice!" Not only the public, but the very theatre itself applauded. Not a soul had missed his meaning.

There came a hissing cat-call from somewhere in the audience. "You shameless Jew-clown!" And Fink answered calmly, "What can I do about it? I just don't happen to be Jewish. Is it my fault if I look so intelligent?"

There followed two short sketches. The first was an incident at the dentist's. The man with the pincers looks on helplessly as the patient refuses to open his mouth despite all the dentist's pleadings and his threats. Finally the patient moans: "How can you expect me to open my mouth? I don't know you at all!"

The closing scene was even more illuminating. Kaiser Barbarossa, with his crown on, is seen as legend has pictured him for a thousand years, gloomily brooding at a table over which his immense beard extends endlessly. It appears that the depressed king must be made to laugh. Several performers that evening have already tried. Song and dance have been used in an attempt to cheer him up—but to no avail. The art-

ists are about to pack up and leave in despair, when Werner Fink very seriously exclaims, "Do you know, your Highness, they have just completed a splendidly artistic film here in Germany?" Whereupon the Kaiser virtually explodes with laughter. His beard falls off, his crown rolls to the ground, and he appears to have found laughing-matter for the next thousand years.

When time came for the intermission, Werner Fink announced, "And now, my friends, there will be a fifteen-minute recess. If I am not back at the end of that time, you will know—well, at least you will be able to guess where I am!" For one long moment the heavy silence indicated that the whole audience had suddenly been recalled to the reality of present-day Germany.

It was only two days later that we found out how accurately Fink had predicted his own fate and that of his companions.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY

JOHN R. CHAPLIN



JOHN GROTH



"I Can't Sleep"

A MONOLOGUE BY CLIFFORD ODETS

Standing on a street corner, a beggar with the face of a dead man. Hungry, miserable, unkempt, an American spectre. He now holds out his hand in an asking gesture as a man walks by. The man stops, looks at the beggar, says:

MAN: (*Angrily*) I don't believe in it, charity! Maybe you think I'm a Rockefeller! (*He walks away briskly; the beggar lowers his hand and shivers. The man now returns and silently offers him some coins. The beggar refuses by putting his hands in pockets.*)

Take it . . . don't be ashamed. I had a fight in the shop: I was feeling sore. Take the money . . . You're afraid? No, I'm giving it to you. (*Waits.*) I mean it. Take it. (*Suddenly shouts.*) Say, maybe you think I'll lay down on the ground and die before you'll take it! Look, he's looking at me! All right, I made a mistake. I yelled on you, noo! Don't act like a fool . . . if a person gives you money, take it. I know, I made a mistake in the beginning. Now I'm sorry I yelled on you.

Listen, don't be so smart. When a man offers you money, take it! For two cents I'll call a cop in a minute. You'll get arrested for panhandling on the streets. You know this expression, "panhandling?" You can't talk? Who says you have to insult me? I got a good mind to walk away. Listen, what do you want

from me? Maybe I look to you like a rich man. Poverty is whistling from every corner in the country. So an honest man gets insulted because he offers a plain bum money. Live and learn!

Look, he's looking at me. Maybe you think I'm not honest. Listen, in my shop the only worker the boss gives a little respect is Sam Blitzstein. Who's Blitzstein? Me! Don't think I'm impressed because he's a boss. I just said it to give proof. Everything, "he's tickled to death," a favorite expression by Mr. Kaplan. . . . Like all bosses: the end of the summer he gives away dead flies! Yes. Yes. . . .

Take the money . . . you'll buy yourself a hot meal. I'll take out a nickel from the BMT. I keep for myself five dollars a week and the rest goes in the house. In the old days I used to play a little cards, but in the last few years with such bad conditions I quit playing altogether. You can't talk? (*Laughs bitterly and shakes his head.*) Even my wife don't talk to me. For seven years she didn't speak to me one word. "Come eat," she says. Did you ever hear such an insult? After supper I go in my room and lock the door. Sometime ago I bought for myself a little radio for seven-fifty. I'm playing it in my little room. She tells the girls not to speak to me . . . my three daughters. All my life I was a broken-hearted person, so this had to happen. I shouldn't

get a little respect from my own children! Can you beat it?!

I'll tell you the truth: I don't sleep. The doctor says to me it's imagination. Three dollars I paid him he should tell me it's imagination! I don't sleep at night and he tells me it's imagination! Can't you die? I eat healthful food. For a while I was eating vegetarian in the Golden Rule Cafeteria. It didn't agree with me. Vegetarian, shmegetarian, they'll have a good time anyway, the worms. Headaches, backaches — these things I don't mention—it ain't important. I like to talk to people, but I don't like political arguments. They think I'm crazy in the shop. I tell them right to their face, "Leave me alone! Talk politics, but let me live!" I don't hide my opinions from nobody. They should know what I know. Believe me, I'm smarter than I look! What I forget about Marx they don't know. (*Changes the subject.*) Friday night regular as clockwork I go on the corner and take a shave for twenty cents. After supper I walk in Prospect Park for two hours. I like trees and then I go home. By this time the youngest girls is sleeping but my oldest girl stays up late to do homework. A very smart girl in school. Every month A-A-A. She leaves the report card on the sideboard and I sign it. This will give you an idea she likes me. Correct! Last week I tried to talk to her, a sensible girl, fourteen years old. She ran in the kitchen to my wife. Believe me, my friend, in a worker's house the children live a broken-hearted life. My wife tells her lies about me.

Look, he's looking. What did I do to my wife? I suddenly got an idea the youngest girl wasn't my girl. Never mind, it happened before in history. A certain man lived in our neighborhood a few months. He boarded downstairs with the Berger's, next to the candy store, a man like a sawed-off shotgun. I seen in my young girl a certain resemblance. Suddenly he moved away. On the same day I caught her crying, my wife. Two and two is four! I remember like yesterday I took a pineapple soda in the store. For three weeks I walked up and down. Could I work? Could I eat? In the middle of the night I asked her. She insulted me! She insulted my whole family! Her brother came from Brighton Beach the next day—a cheap race horse specialist without a nickel. A fourteen carat bum!





JOHN GROTH

A person an animal wouldn't talk to him! He opened up his mouth to me . . . I threw him down the stairs!

But one thing—I never laid a finger on the girls in my whole life. My wife—it shows you what a brain she's got—she gives my oldest girl a name: Sydelle! S-Y-D-E-L-L-E! Sarah she can't call her or maybe Shirley. Sydelle! So you can imagine what's happening in our house!

Oh, I don't sleep. At night my heart cries blood. A fish swims all night in the black ocean—and this is how I am—all night with one eye open. A mixed up man like me crawls away to die alone. No woman should hold his head. In the whole city no one speaks to me. A very peculiar proposition. Maybe I would like to say to a man, "Brother." But what happens? They bring in a verdict—crazy! It's a civilized world today in America? Columbus should live so long. Yes, I love people, but nobody speaks to me. When I walk in the street I can't stand I should see on every block some beggars. My heart cries blood for the poor man who didn't eat for a few days. At night I can't sleep. This is an unusual combination of worries. I say to myself, "It's your fault, Blitzstein? Let them die in the street like flies." But I look in the mirror and it don't feel good inside. I spit on myself.

I spoke last week to a red in the shop. Why should I mix in with politics? With all my other troubles I need yet a broken head? I can't make up my mind—what should I do? I spoke to a Socialist on the street. A Communist talked in my ears for two hours. Join up, join up. But for what? For trouble?

Don't look at me. I'll say it straight

out—I forgot my mother. Also a dead brother for thirty years dead. Listen, you think I never read a book? "Critique of the Gotha Programme," Bukharin, Lenin—"Iskra"—this was in our day a Bolshevik paper. I read enough. I'm speaking three languages, Russian, German and English. Also Yiddish. Four. I had killed in the 1905 revolution a brother. You didn't know that. My mother worked like a horse. No, even a horse takes off a day. My mother loved him like a bird, my dead brother. She gave us to drink vinegar we should get sick and not fight

in the Czar's army. Maybe you think I didn't understand this.

Yes, my blood is crying out for revenge a whole lifetime! You hear me talking to you these words? Is it plain to you my significance? I don't sleep. Don't look at me. I forgot my working class mother. Like a dog I live. You hear the truth. Don't look at me! You hear me?!

Last week I watched the May Day. Don't look! I hid in the crowd. I watched how the comrades marched with red flags and music. You see where I bit my hand? I went down in the subway I shouldn't hear the music. Listen, I looked in your face before. I saw the truth. I talk to myself. The blood of the mother and brother is breaking open my head. I hear them cry, "You forgot, you forgot!" They don't let me sleep. All night I hear the music of the comrades. Hungry men I hear. All night the broken-hearted children. Look at me—no place to hide, no place to run away. Look in my face, comrade. Look at me, look, look, look!!!

[*I Can't Sleep* was first performed on a program for the benefit of the Marine Workers Industrial Union at Mecca Temple last year. Morris Carnovsky as Blitzstein and Art Smith as the beggar.

No professional performance of *I Can't Sleep* may be given except by special arrangement with the author's agent. Permission is not necessary for amateur performance. However, a fee of \$1.00 a performance *must* be forwarded to the author's agent, Mr. Harold Freedman, 101 Park Ave., New York City.]



Eddie Cantor Likes Peace

BY EMANUEL EISENBERG

On January 5th, if you were one among his millions of radio listeners, you heard Eddie Cantor announce a peace contest. For answering in 500 words or less the question, "How Can America Stay Out of War?", you were promised a \$5,000 trust fund for tuition and living expenses during four years at any college or university. The decision is in the hands of "four of America's most distinguished educators": Robert M. Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago; Frederick B. Robinson, President of the College of the City of New York; Ray Lyman Wilbur, President of Leland Stanford University; and Henry N. MacCracken, President of Vassar. Answers go to Eddie Cantor in care of the General Post Office in New York City and they must be in the mail by February 22nd or Washington's Birthday.

Your deputy was enchanted as anyone else by the news of this noble contest; but since he is far too antiquated to take advantage of the offered education and since the only answer he could think of—"Let America and all other nations completely and immediately disarm"—would probably be much too brief and naive to win a prize, it seemed fitting to follow up his tremulous interest with an investigation into sources.

Cantor was pleased to grant the interview.

Naturally it took a little time before the goggle-eyed favorite cleared up rehearsals and 'phone calls, but finally he was free to relax in pyjamas and bathrobe for a half hour's reflections on war and peace.

Peace? Of course he was for it. Wasn't everybody? But the chances of getting it or maintaining it were tragically slim. For greed and selfishness rule the hearts of men. And only terror and intimidation can really still the beasts in us. Eddie Cantor illustrated with a recollection.

"I'm an East Side boy, you know," he said. "Well, I remember there was a tough guy on our block. Everyone was scared of him and treated him with respect. Not only him: his little brother, too. Just knowing that this kid had a tough brother made us lay off him. And that's the way every country ought to be—tough. Fully armed. So that no other nation 'll try to walk in and get funny. That's the only thing that 'll keep 'em away: force, and a standing defense."

"Do you really believe that nations just want to walk in on each other out of spite and viciousness?"

"Oh, I know war's a racket. I know all about that munitions business, too. Always a handful of people that stand to clean up on it. But that's just why we should be armed. To prevent 'em."

This seemed a good opportunity to get in my answer to the essay contest and maybe get the prize then and there, so I said, with great diffidence, "How about everybody disarming? Then no one could attack anybody."

He twisted his agile mouth into a fatigued amusement and leaned over to pat me paternally on the knee. "Listen," he told me, "I've watched too many kinds of people in my young life. All right, so everybody says he's going to disarm. Don't you think there'll always be one wise guy who will hold out and go on arming anyway? You can bet on it! So where are you?"

The subject seemed to be getting out of hand under the stress of intimate experience, so I attempted to shift emphases a little. "How about participation in another war? How do you stand on that?"

He thought I was cracked. "The United States get into a war? Don't be silly. What for? You wouldn't get seven volunteers for anything like that. Not after the last one."

"But suppose we get involved?"

"How should we get involved? We have nothing to do with European affairs. Let them break their own necks over there. Me, all I'm interested in is my own country, America. We wouldn't start a war on our own. You know we're not an aggressive country."

"Aren't we?" I asked, a little amazed. "What about Mexico and the Philippines and Cuba?"

"Cuba! Why, we had to save the poor Cubans from Spain or they'd just have been wiped out like that."

"Well, don't you imagine there's a chance of getting involved in a defensive war now, just to protect some bankers' interests?"

"No, sir," said Cantor with great conviction. "Not with Roosevelt in the President's chair. Not a chance."

"But Roosevelt himself doesn't have everything to say, you know."

"I know all that! But he would never let it happen. Not a real idealist like him."

"They said that about Wilson."

He halted for a second. But he wasn't stumped. "So Wilson turned out to be different. But you can examine Roosevelt's record. You can see the man never gave a damn for money."

So there we were, with universal armament a necessity for the discouragement of designing aggressors, and the imminence of America's involvement in world war as an impossible fiction. Actual ideas toward the establishment of peace didn't seem very likely in this quarter. Specific conduct during war looked like the most positive point for the moment.

"Did you do any entertaining for the soldiers during the last war?"

"Certainly. I went around to camps and sang on all kinds of stages."

"Would you do it in another war?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I don't know whether you're aware to what extent American actors contributed to working up the martial spirit during the World War. They wrapped the American flag around themselves and got hysterical and sold Liberty Bonds all over the place."

"What do you mean, hysterical? I'll bet you all those people were very sincere when they wrapped the flag around themselves."

"They may have been sincere right in the heat of it all: but don't you think we ought to think about such things in advance and be prepared to resist hysteria when it comes?"

Cantor just couldn't believe my naïveté. "What good would that do? Can you tell me now how you're going to feel later? No, sir. No sense planning today about how you're going to feel tomorrow. Couldn't possibly be right."

The American League Against War and Fascism? Mr. Cantor had never heard of it. I described it and he sighed patiently. Utterly hopeless. A lot of people might band together and earnestly announce their opposition to war, but there would always be somebody (the aforementioned "wise guy") who . . . and here the actor made a gesture with his palm indicative of selling out. The League of Nations? He snorted. A complete farce. In a thousand years or so, when greed and selfishness had been rooted out of the human species, such a league might work. But today—

"Then you don't believe in any organization that could effectively stave off a war?" I asked, a little frantic.



EDDIE CANTOR AND PARKYAKARKUS IN "STRIKE ME PINK"

"I told you already. Organized defense."

"Only intimidation like that?"

"Absolutely. What do you believe in? Peace on earth and good will toward all men? Don't make me laugh. If you really had a way of bringing that about without anything like armaments—why, you'd be a second Jesus Christ."

"Don't you think organized defense is an awfully expensive business to go into just to scare other nations?" I wanted to know. "After all, think of all the money that goes into a battleship that cruises around on exhibit. Mightn't it be better to use the money to feed people with?"

"Say, listen," he said assuringly, "if you didn't have battleships, you wouldn't have *anything* to feed people with. Some other nation would just walk in and take everything you've got."

The air of pure political thinking had got too rarefied even for me. I tried switching the subject back to the theatre. Had he seen any of the anti-war plays?

I named them. No, not one. Too busy. An actor's life, you know. Barely the time to breathe. But what was his feeling about a militant theatre that tried to expose the hypocrisy behind war-mongering? This struck the comedian as a good moment for theorizing.

"The theatre should do two things," he said, "teach and entertain. Naturally, the best thing is to do both at the same time. The teaching shouldn't be boring."

I concurred heartily. What, then, about the usefulness of theatre in conditioning audiences against war? He thought a few seconds, then favored me again with the twisted mouth of fatigued amusement.

"All right, so they go and see a play like that. What happens after that? They go to a night club and Sally Rand does a fan dance and they get all their ideas knocked out of their heads. So what good is it?"

"You said," I reminded him, "that you didn't care about any country but Amer-

ica. Still, you hear about other countries attacking each other. And you get indignant, don't you?"

"Sure, sure. I get indignant. Plenty."

"Well, in the name of believing in peace you might want to express your indignation in some form."

"I might."

"Would you sign a petition of protest, for instance?"

"I don't know. I might."

"Would you join in a demonstration?"

"Oh, I might, I might."

"Take the Italian invasion into Ethiopia. Don't you consider that an outrageous act of aggression?"

"I can't say."

"You mean you don't know enough about it? But the facts are on record."

"I mean exactly what I told you: that I can't say. What do you expect me to say about a thing like that? After all, I'm an actor; I'm in the public eye. Cantor's got friends on both sides. Do you want Eddie Cantor to lose all his friends and be without anybody?"

The dramatic excursion into the third person knocked all remaining ideas out of my head and I prepared to leave, particularly since the star was revealing signs of impatience. "I can't see that you're really expecting any helpful answers from your peace contest," I remarked. "What made you even think of it?"

"Oh, Newton Baker gave me the idea," he said lightly.

"But what do you think 'll be the value of it?"

"To send some kid through college. I always wanted to do that. You see, I never had the advantage of an education myself."

Since there will be about three weeks between the appearance of *NEW THEATRE* for February and the closing of the contest, let this serve as an aside to all entrants. Write neatly and on only one side of the paper, but don't worry too much about the solution. Eddie Cantor just wants to give you the education he missed.

SCENARIO CONTEST

Theme: Anti-War or Anti-Fascism.

Winning scenario will be awarded prize of \$40, production by Nykino and publication of script in *NEW THEATRE*.

For full details see January issue of *NEW THEATRE*. Scripts should be sent to Scenario Contest Department, *NEW THEATRE*, 156 West 44th Street, New York City.

The Films of Rene Clair

BY LEWIS JACOBS

Since the movie is a medium dependent upon multiple technicians and artisans, few directors are capable enough to both create and control their films' manifold destinies. Rene Clair is one of the few who, until his most recent film *The Ghost Goes West*, had the distinction of realizing his conceptions intact, brooking no interference in the questions of content or style. He not only supervised his cutting, but also wrote the stories and constructed the scenarios for his films. None of his pictures which we have seen shows evidence of a producer's or corporation's tampering. Consequently with a director as earnest as Clair and as talented, questions of content and structure assert themselves, calling to be weighed, analyzed, criticized instead of merely being superficially dismissed.

Practically all of Rene Clair's films deal with the foibles of the middle class. He has a knack for swift characterization (the stock-in-trade of every caricaturist) on the intellectual level of a Leech or Gavarni. A deeper insight into the basic social and economic incongruities would inevitably lift his comedy to social satire. As it is, his humor, with rare exceptions, springs from the same cynical detachment as *The New Yorker's*, with results just as socially ineffectual.

Clair's first films: *The Crazy Ray* for which he still has a sentimental attachment, *Entr'acte*, made to be shown between the acts of the Picabia-Satie ballet, *Phantom of Moulin Rouge* and *The Imaginary Voyage* were all excursions into whimsy. Nevertheless they served as a discipline for his first feature and most penetrating film, *The Italian Straw Hat*. This was one of the first films of social satire—although in a discussion of the film with him, Clair said satire was not his purpose—a piercing cross section of the middle class. Coming from such a young director, *The Italian Straw Hat* was especially remarkable. His images were so telling that the bourgeoisie retaliated by forbidding its showing, a censorship Clair could not understand in view of the fact that he said his aim was only comedy. Notwithstanding, he was dismissed by his producers and the stigma of "intellectual" was attached to him and has remained ever since.

Although Clair has praised the films of Chaplin for their "movement," it was not until *The Italian Straw Hat* that he based his method on Chaplin's. (Upon asking Clair if he would like to make a film

with Chaplin, Clair replied, "I? How could I make a film with Chaplin? He has a genius! The rest of us have only facility.") However Clair's film revealed a feeling for social caricature as against Chaplin's poignant little-man-what-now frustrations. Where Chaplin was content with slapstick, Clair achieved ridicule. While Chaplin was concerned with an individual, Clair was concerned with a class. This feat preceded by several years Serge Eisenstein's formulation of the "class villain."

A year's idleness was the penalty Clair paid for *The Italian Straw Hat*. His promise to behave was rewarded with another picture. In *Two Timid Souls*, as it was called, Clair concerned himself solely with plastic problems. Since honesty in content was frowned upon, Clair grappled with the beezelbub of structure—no simple problem.

But cinema style and structural form has always been a concern of Clair. In 1923-4, with Picabia, the French painter and dadaist, Clair made the film *Entr'acte* which helped to foment the avant-garde movement in the cinema. Experimental films such as *Ballet Mechanique*, *What Are The Young Films Dreaming*, *En Rade*, *Emak Bakia*, *Montparnasse*, together with *Entr'acte*, introduced the plastic problem to film structure. The directors of these films insisted that the film's artistic integrity lay in the correct use of the camera's resources: angles, dissolves, fades, optical distortions, tempo and space distortions, image duration, transitions and their rhythms. This engagement with the grammar of the film had a far reaching effect. In Soviet Russia, under the tutelage of Kuleshov, the conclusions drawn from these avant-garde experiments were later put to a dynamic social use.

Entr'acte gave Clair a keen perception of the possibilities of the movie's instruments. But whereas in that film he used the means solely as an end in themselves, in *Two Timid Souls*, he attempted to utilize the medium's resources as an integral basis for expression. The separation of movie from stage or even literature, the individuality of the movie as a distinct mode of art, with methods of expression peculiar to it alone, was the problem which intrigued Clair. How well he succeeded can be illustrated by several instances from the film.

A young lawyer is describing the happy home life of his client. This is the law-

yer's first case and he is a bit nervous. Instead of showing his nervousness by a photograph of him in jitters—the typical Hollywood fashion—Clair lets us see a closeup of the lawyer pleading and as he talks there is superimposed across his forehead what he is describing: the husband with flowers enters in slow motion. The nervous lawyer forgets his speech and the superimposition of the husband, still in slow motion, backs out. The lawyer then recalls his speech and the husband comes forward again. Suddenly the entire image stops and appears like a still. After a moment the still explodes leaving the screen blank. From then on the entire speech of the lawyer is told without his presence on the screen. Here is an instance of the camera's means utilized filmically, psychologically, an integration of content and form.

Later in the same film, Clair shows two rivals, indicating what they will do when they confront each other. Instead of showing one image following the other, Clair divides the screen in two and the audience sees the action of the two rivals simultaneously with each performer oblivious of the other. Of course the result is twice as effective. It is by such intelligent use of film craft that Clair lifts his material from the conventional.

Two Timid Souls ends with perhaps one of the cleverest uses of the fadeout ever recorded. The screen is split into three panels. In the left is seen the defeated suitor. In the right is "the timid soul." The center panel contains the newlywed couple in bed. Slowly the left panel goes blank, then the right. Now there remains only the center panel holding the mischievous eyes of the audience upon the bride and groom. The groom stretches out his hand and presses the electric light button. The room darkens, the panel blackens and the picture ends. This is a superb instance of the "Clair touch," illustrating again his instinct for cinematic values, values which act as a corridor for his humor or fantasy. Yet upon what puerile subject matter does he lavish his resources! The reprimand resulting from *The Italian Straw Hat* had indeed reduced Clair to grappling with windmills.

The advent of sound brought a problem Clair disdained. "Sound is the death of film," he said. However he soon realized that the sound film was here to stay and *Under the Roofs of Paris*, his first sound film, ironically established the reputation

of Rene Clair internationally. Craftsman as he was, he worked out a mixture where sound and image could run parallel; in this way overcoming the immobility of dialogue by relying on the mobility of the camera. But whereas in his silent films his humor was heightened by its filmic aspects, Clair was hindered when confronted with a microphone and he actually became sound struck. His camera participated in his chase patterns by dollying continually and for no other reason than to infuse an artificial sense of life to offset the deadening influence of dialogue. Often he resorted to music to overcome the language barrier for the international market. The financial success of the film however did not offset its structural looseness.

In his second sound film, *Le Million*, Clair's fancy has become richer. The behavior of his characters are as grotesque and unreal as those in a musical comedy. This unnaturalness is deliberate. Treating his material as fantasy—a far cry from the social criticism of *The Italian Straw Hat*—*Le Million* could become as madcap and daring as Clair chose. Clair tries to solve the problem of sound and image by having his characters sing and dance at the slightest pretext. Only one man has been successful in this respect: Walt Disney. With Disney in mind, Clair made *Le Million*. By the nature of his films—animation—Disney has contracted and expanded sound related to image so as to create counterpoint. He juggles sound with the same dexterity as images and relates both to a rhythmic continuity which emerges as an integrated and complete sound-image unity, each dependent upon the other for life and meaning. The result of such an interdependence is form. Disney's films alone since the introduction of sound to film, can be said to have form.

The predominant motif of *Le Million* is the chase and in Clair's eagerness to out-Disney Disney, his microphone is given seven-league boots. Staccato dialogue, snatches of songs, sudden refrains, a deliberate attempt to animate sound is apparent throughout. But in the meantime, the camera-means, Clair's feeling for film structure, has been pushed aside. Instead of a blissful union between camera and microphone as in Disney, Clair exploits one at the expense of the other. Whereas in his silent films, the very subject matter was moulded and built by camera-means. In *Le Million* his camera has become a spectator. Consequently his material emerges lopsided: photographed musical comedy spotlighted with mobile sound effects.

A Nous La Liberte, his next film, was an advance upon *Le Million*. Clair's use of sound became more structural. The



A SCENE FROM "THE GHOST GOES WEST," RENE CLAIR'S LATEST FILM

film has many instances of counterpoint, image-sound effects. The similarity between the jail and the factory systems was heightened by the same martial sound overtone of both. Likewise his use of sound flashback to recall an image in the office of the industrialist confronted by his former pal, the ex-convict, is structural progress. Again in the courtyard of the factory, high-hatted officials are interrupted by falling treasury notes. Their speeches suggest one thing, their greedy glances at the money another. (Eisenstein in talking of sound film, said, ". . . thus does conflict between optical and acoustical impulses produce the true sound film.") In this instance Clair solved the problem of sound in a filmic way, an international way. One need not understand French to appreciate the meaning.

As a statement of social position, *A Nous La Liberte* lacks conviction. Poking fun at rationalization and factory methods is not enough; we must know whose rationalization and which society's factory methods. Unfortunately there was never any clue as to what Clair was joshing: democracy, the factory, the worker—everything? Somewhere in the film, Clair's sense of extravaganza got the upper hand. Allowing his fancy to rule and his camera and microphone to follow, he became a buffoon and as such was often dazzling. His technique had sharpened, his raillery distilled.

July the Fourteenth was a reversion to the sentimentalisms of *Under the Roofs of Paris*, both as to content and style. Though the film has the newspaper critic values "gaiety," "charm" and Clair "touches," his style has become a man-

ner, the fun repetitive. The film might almost have been made in Hollywood, cut from a Clair pattern.

Rene Clair has often been called a great stylist. Trained as a journalist, his filmic structure partakes of journalistic simplification. Especially is this apparent in his portrait of a dictator: *The Last Multi-Millionaire*. From the very opening, the remarkable mock travelogue of depression-dampened Casinario, to the end, the film is a *comedia humaine* in terms of a comic strip. And as such, one would expect a great success for it. The reverse was true. Clair attributes its failure—at the box-office—to its injudicious presentation. It opened in Paris at the beginning of the Stavisky affair and a few days after the assassination of King Alexander and Minister Berthoud. Paris was seething with excitement. As luck would have it, the assassinated minister resembled the minister in Clair's film. A sardonic coincidence: the film was made some six months before. Demonstrations against the picture broke out. During its first showing, fascist sympathizers were pleased at the early scenes of the multi-millionaire taking over the reins of government, only to become angered when later in the film, he becomes mad. Shouts of disapprobation, breaking of theatre seats and a general commotion followed. Subsequent showings were held in turmoil. The producers had to recall the film. "A tremendous failure," said Clair. But was it? Would it have had such a startling effect if it did not strike at dictators? "My films are not satire," says Clair, "they are comedy." I wonder.

(Continued on page 31)

The Person in the Play

BY JOHN W. GASSNER

Among the sundry difficulties confronting the drama of our day perhaps the most serious is the danger of either losing sight of the individual or being side-tracked by him. The problem is so apparent in serious playwriting that almost any collection of contemporary plays would serve to illustrate it. But it is not always that two practically simultaneous revivals, like the recent productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Ghosts*, provide a proper historical perspective.

From her tour through the country Miss Katharine Cornell brought back a *Romeo and Juliet* that was even more luminous than last year's production. Superlatives being in good taste where they pertain, it is permissible to say of Miss Cornell that she proves herself more than ever before America's leading lady in the domain of serious drama. A round of compliments goes also to Ralph Richardson for his enlivening Mercutio, to Maurice Evans for his Romeo, to Florence Reed for her rugged Nurse. Their labors prove once more that whenever a constellation of actors can bring sensitivity and intelligence into the theatre *Romeo and Juliet* breathes again. The play could be enacted on a barroom floor, and still it would live. For no matter how much dramatic complication there may be in the feud of the Capulets, the basic drama resides in the passion of a man and a maid; in its genesis and its effect upon them, and in the character of the lovers. The word is made flesh in *Romeo and Juliet*.

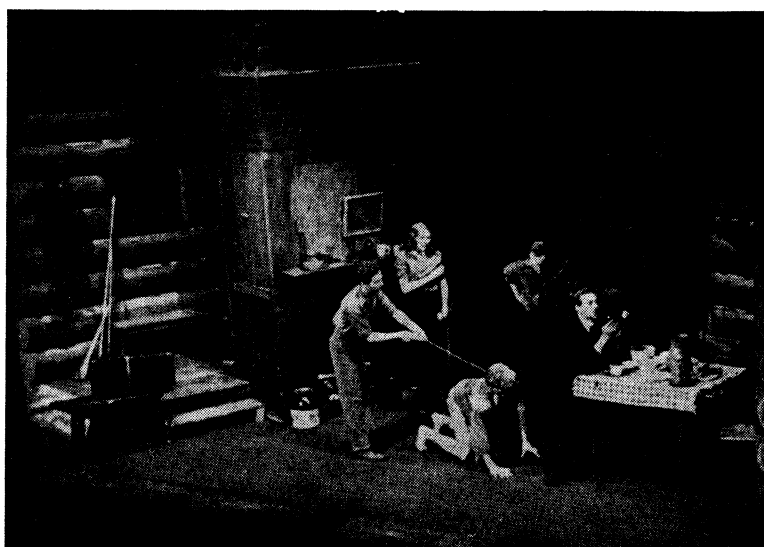
It is no secret that the theatre has undergone a transformation since the time

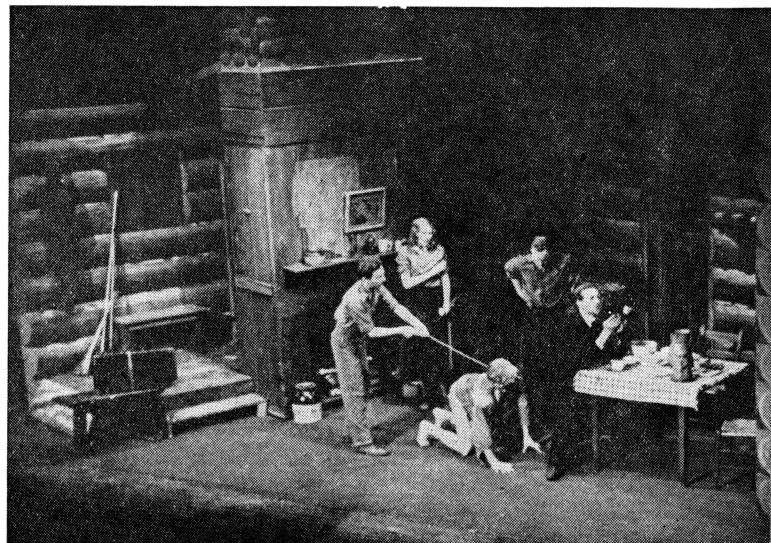
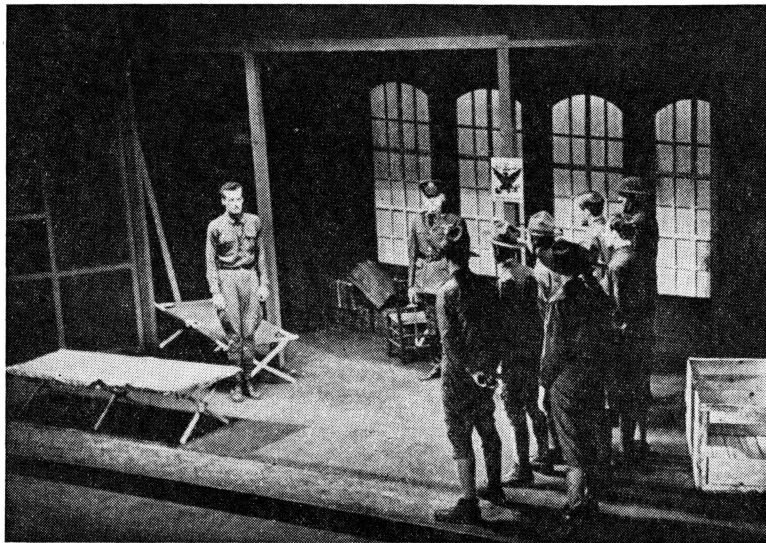
of Shakespeare. Character is no longer unfolded without relation to social criticism. The drama of the individual becomes in a sense the drama of society. The labor pains began in the eighteenth century, and they delivered a live and kicking infant social conscience into the theatre of Ibsen and his successors, until one finds it difficult today to mention serious playwriting without referring to "social drama." A contemporary *Romeo and Juliet* would concern itself, in one sense or another, with the social problems of adolescence. One cites at random *The Awakening of Spring*, *Hannele*, *Wednesday's Child*, *Little Ol' Boy*, and most recently Lynn Riggs' *Russet Mantle*.

It would be foolhardy to maintain that the individual, the person in the play, has gone scot-free in the modern theatre; or that the drama has not suffered, as well as benefited, by the transformation it has undergone. It has been necessary to achieve some balance between the personal and social elements in a play, and this has not been easy.

Ibsen's *Ghosts*, the most important play of the new dispensation, its landmark in fact, is an instructive example. Pressing an argument to the effect that the moral code of the nineteenth century was obnoxious, Ibsen invented a situation in which a woman who followed the straight and narrow path had reason to regret her subservience the rest of her life. The thesis here was uppermost, and the people in the play were largely kingpins in the dialectical game. So long as the controversy regarding marriage and divorce prevailed *Ghosts* continued to be

an exceptionally stirring drama. Wherever the old morality still obtains, the play will continue to be highly exciting. But, in the main, the smoke-clouds of debate that raged around Ibsen's drama lifted several decades ago, divorce is now generally recognized, and Ibsen is no longer the ogre whom our William Winter accused of everything from "mental astigmatism" to "purblind censoriousness, gross falsehood, and ignominious censure." Unfortunately, by the same token Ibsen is, for the most part, no longer exciting. No longer galvanized by a timely issue, *Ghosts* is a dull play; its situation is artificial and pat; its characters are largely firewood in a logician's poorly ventilated furnace. The present revival could have presented the play as a historical curiosity, in which Mrs. Alving is ghost-ridden with convention and the pastor is an unpleasant, die-hard representative of puritanism. The play would have been as outmoded as a hoop-skirt. Choosing more discreetly to present *Ghosts* as a drama rather than a dated argument, Nazimova must rely in the main on character. She rescues her own rôle. Her Mrs. Alving is permeated with rich and appealing humanity. Matured by suffering she is so much more self-assured than the pastor that he looks like a child beside her. And she is a match for the ghosts that rise against her, especially as she administers the poison to her son when he lapses into idiocy. But Mme. Nazimova cannot salvage the other kingpins of the *dramatis personae*. Except Regina, the buoyant vital girl, they are wooden.



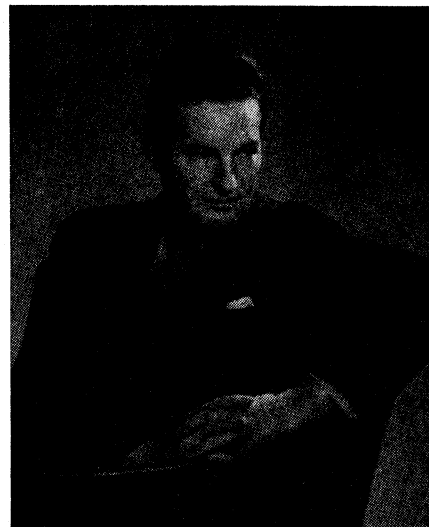


There is no reason for blinking at the fact that the social theatre (which is the major part of our serious theatre) by its very concern with collective rather than private issues is always in danger of legislating individuality out of existence. There is, of course, no necessary conflict between dramatization of the individual and social drama. People have not been known to live in a sealed vacuum, a man's occupation is a major factor in the formation and exhibition of his character, and the prevailing economic or political situation is a basic condition of his existence. Absolute individuality has as little meaning as a society without individuals. In principle, social drama can only help to interpret the individual adequately. In practice, however, special pleading often warps the characterization. Sometimes bad dramaturgy is at fault, sometimes the abridgement of character is intentional, as in the work of the German expressionists and their adherents. Other plays, like *Stevedore* and *Sailors of Cattaro*, have economized on individual character only to the extent to which it is technically necessary, and have found compensation in those mass effects in which the individual is directly and indeed very personally concerned. Still other dramas, like *Rain from Heaven* and *Dead End*, manage to identify characters and social issues almost completely.

To this observer the tendency seems at present to be very much in the direction of greater individualization. The Theatre Union's treatment of *Mother* stressed individual character more fully than its

author's principle of the "learning-play" would have allowed, producing in fact a conflict of styles but unintentionally demonstrating the power of personal appeal in dramatic art. *Black Pit*, earlier, linked the economic struggle of the miners with the personal drama of one of their number. *Let Freedom Ring* abounds in character types which give dimension to the tragedy of the mountain people of the South. *Paradise Lost* endeavors to convey its point-of-view almost solely through character, which is heightened for this purpose.

The recent Artef production, *Haunch, Paunch and Jowl*, based on the Ornitz-Davis version, even carries this tendency to a point at which the social analysis becomes truncated and more than a trifle submerged. Following the career of Meyer Hirsch from his humble beginnings to his judgeship and candidacy for the governor's seat, it is the saga of a metropolitan politician. He is not intrinsically corrupt, nor is he a one-dimensional careerist, but he has been educated by a world which has no use for tender-minded people and gives the weak no quarter. A rounded character animates the play. It is unfortunate only that there is no adequate dramatization of the crises in the politician's life, which is told in the unilateral chronicle form, and that the forces which determine his career are left mute and shadowy. Here the opposite danger of being deflected by individual characterization rears its head. Fortunately the Artef's understanding production, which succeeds in relating the life of the careerist with the teeming



Renato Toppo

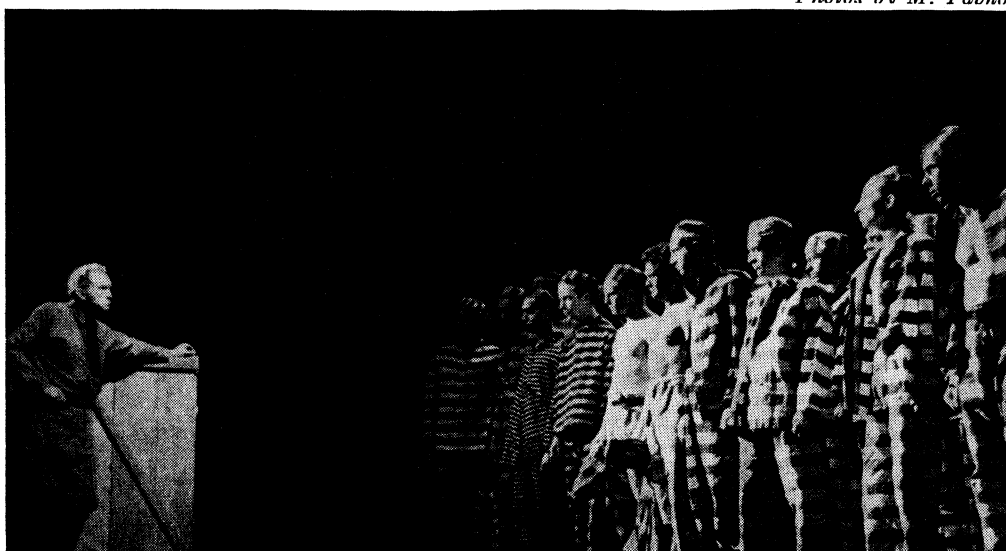
PAUL GREEN

humanity of his East Side neighborhood, integrates the play to a degree.

The New Theatre Night program of short plays given on Sunday nights at the Civic Repertory Theatre confirms this trend toward individualization. The stated purpose of these nights is to stage plays of social significance that might not otherwise gain a hearing. In addition, these evenings very often succeed in presenting plays that would stand up as moving drama in any category—this due largely to their increasingly vivid realization of the relationship of the persons in the play to the society about them without diminution of their distinct individuality.

Albert Maltz's *Private Hicks* deals with a strictly social issue—namely, the employment of the militia as a strike-breaking institution, it is a far cry from the declamatory "agit-prop" play which prevailed until recently. The latter is now properly confined to such a semi-dramatic form as the "mass chant," which does

Photos by M. Yarno



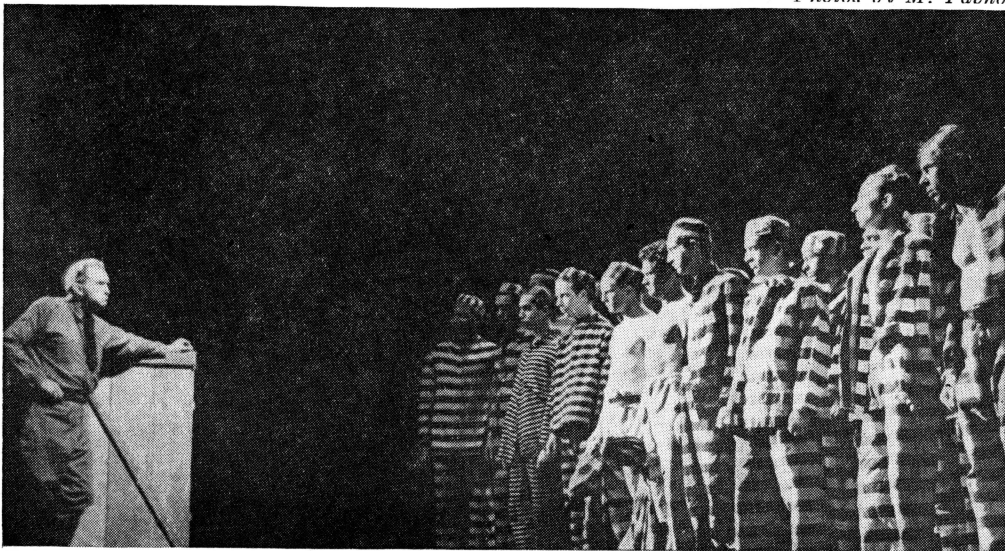
The "Let Freedom Ring" Actors' Troupe Presents Three New One Act Plays on the "New Theatre Night" Programs at the Civic Repertory Theatre. Left "Private Hicks" by Albert Maltz. Center "Unto Such Glory" by Paul Green. Right "Hymn to the Rising Sun" by Paul Green.



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Photos by M. Yazno



The "Let Freedom Ring" Actors' Troupe Presents Three New One Act Plays on the "New Theatre Night" Programs at the Civic Repertory Theatre. Left "Private Hicks" by Albert Maltz. Center "Unto Such Glory" by Paul Green. Right "Hymn to the Rising Sun" by Paul Green.



GEORGE WHITE ON "RELIEF"—A "SCANDAL OF 1936"

not pretend to be a play and lends itself naturally to direct exhortation. It can also be immensely exciting, as has been shown by Alfred Kreymborg's *America, America*. The new mass chant on the New Theatre program, *Angelo Herndon*, by Joseph North and E. England, though less rich in expression and variety, is a rousing appeal for justice which should serve its purpose. The *Private Hicks* playlet lags occasionally, and could use a more effective climax, but it lays claim to a solid achievement in characterization. Hicks is a clean and simple-minded American boy, for whom baseball is still the national sport and fair play the only sure ideal. He is as real as your neighbor's son, and Shepperd Strudwick does him only justice when he projects a vastly appealing personality. His dilemma when confronted with the choice of shooting unarmed strikers or being court-martialed for insubordination is therefore no jerry-built circumstance, but one that flows from his character.

Still more effective is the beautifully written *Hymn to the Rising Sun* by Paul Green, which shows how easily the drama can dispense with preachment when the exposition is adequate. The short play is an ideal medium for situations that speak for themselves, and we may look forward to the continued use of this form, which owes its present resuscitation so largely to the new theatre movement. A more compact dramatization of the brutality of the chain-gang and its violation of the spirit of American democracy could hardly be conceived. Bitter, sensitive dialogue and understatement that recalls the murderous satire of Swift make this playlet a miniature masterpiece. The play falls of course unmistakably into the category of social protest, and yet it suc-

ceeds in achieving as much fine characterization as its short form will allow. Seldom has a sadist received such rounded portrayal as the captain of the chain-gang, with his alternation of moods, his megalomania and his self-pity. It may be that his July Fourth address could be shortened to advantage, but it is unmatched for irony; it is on "Independence Day," immediately after the captain's speech, that one prisoner is flogged brutally and another found suffocated in the sweatbox. Aply directed by Joe Losey, and performed with feeling by Charles Dingle as the captain and the other principals, it makes memorable theatre.

Along with the delightfully farcical playlet, *Unto Such Glory*, it calls attention to the reassuring fact that Paul Green is still one of our outstanding playwrights. He has not always felt comfortable in the harness of the full-length form, and he has allowed himself a few highly dubious excursions into mystic drama in which mood dominates meaning, but the one-act play has no finer artist. *Unto Such Glory*, assisted by Leslie Urbach's rough-and-ready direction, Will Geer's superlative performance as an evangelist, and Dorothy Brackett as the deluded wife, is a boon to jaded playgoers. It is pure folk art, brisk, rugged and broad, and withal a Rabelaisian satire on the cruder forms of revivalism. In bringing Green's short plays to metropolitan audiences, NEW THEATRE has rendered a unique service to the theatre, and it is doubly significant that this has been managed at a fraction of the prohibitive cost which would have had to be carried by commercial managers. This has been largely due to the zeal of young theatre workers who can evidently be depended upon to make sacrifices for what-

ever seems worth-while. The *Let Freedom Ring* troupe, responsible for the above-mentioned program and other special performances, the Group Theatre actors who donated their services in last season's original production of *Waiting for Lefty*, and other young professional groups are lifting the theatre out of the muck of commercialism.

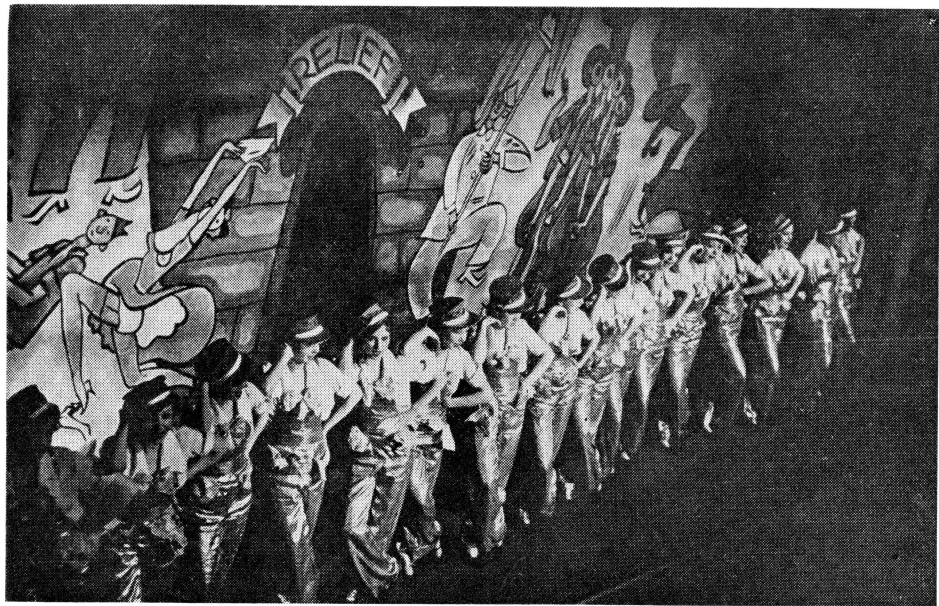
Transitional Drama

Having commented at length on the dangers of insufficient individualization in the serious theatre, and having noted with optimism the new tendency to recognize and correct this deficiency, this review must in fairness point out that the flies are not all in one ointment. There are many plays that err on the other side, allowing themselves to be side-tracked by the individual or evading social realities.

It is just as possible to miss dramatic effectiveness by neglecting or obscuring the social conditioning and significance of a character as by denying him dimension and individuality.

Sometimes the absence of a rounded view of society is only moderately felt as a detriment. Sometimes, not at all. Mystery drama can be left to its own devices. It is wisest to let it revel and curdle in a world of its own, providing atavistic thrills and mental gymnastics at its own sweet will. Especially when so well invested with the appurtenances of theatre as the Gilbert Miller production of *Libel*, an English importation which no doubt has its American parallels, though they have not been seen by this reporter. Nor can one cavil to any extent at simple character studies like the current *Victoria Regina*, culled from Laurence Housman's highly literate album of episodes about the good Queen. It hardly pretends to be more than an animated portrait, and thanks to Helen Hayes' *Victoria*, Mr. Miller's supple direction and Rex Whistler's sumptuous scenic work, it provides a most entertaining evening. Strictly speaking, it does this only two-thirds of the time. It would have to be a most vital and engrossing chronicle that would overcome the limitations of its episodic structure, and neither the play's subject nor viewpoint can do that much. For at this point it becomes painfully evident that *Victoria Regina* is without much significance. Making theatre without drama and portraying a historical figure without historical perspective cannot but have decided limitations. The production will linger longest in the mind as a highly literate occasion for the virtuoso performance of Miss Hayes, who makes every gesture as eloquent as

(Continued on page 36)



GEORGE WHITE ON "RELIEF"—A "SCANDAL OF 1936"

Vaudeville Fights the Death Sentence

BY PHILIP STERLING

American theatre audiences, long accustomed to taking what is handed to them have apparently paid scant attention to the rapid disappearance of vaudeville from the popular stage during the past six years. This may have been due to the fact that during this period there was a decided trend away from the box-office queues toward the headlines.

In any event, the causes of variety's fall to its current sad estate are close at hand. They may be traced from Longacre Square directly down Broadway and up Pine Street to the Chase National Bank and a few other institutions whose financial control of the movie industry have given the money-men powers of life and death over America's entertainment. With the advent of the talkies, radio and the depression, the money-men decreed death for vaudeville.

The simple retrenchment policies of all business enterprises during the depth of the depression is not enough to explain the forcible ejection of vaudeville from the theatre, because in the theatre business the retrenchment policy wasn't simple. It entailed a complete rebuilding of the financial foundations and the administrative and distributive superstructure of the movie world. And as the movie world went, so went vaudeville for the cross country net-work of theatres which makes it feasible and profitable for actors to work continuously by traveling short distances was largely in the hands of the financiers who by 1931 had taken complete control of the movie industry.

In the process of rationalizing movie production itself, there developed a now perfected plan of making full-length "program" pictures which had no particular merit but which helped fill out an entertainment bill from which vaudeville had been eliminated. This was so because the monopoly theatre chains, RKO, Loew's, etc., having fired the body of vaudeville actors virtually en masse found it necessary to provide an acceptable substitute attraction at once, particularly in years when it was hard to lure a single dime from the pockets of Americans for any non-essential. Following the old show-world dictum, the producers immediately decided to give the suckers more for their money without worrying too much about quality. This move stepped up production, too, at a time when the movie industry was on its wob-

blest legs in history. The question of whether independent theatre managers or the customers would like it, wasn't a consideration. The deadly block-booking system makes exhibitors, like their patrons, take what they get. Thus grew up the somewhat tedious institution known as the double feature bill which generally gives the theatre audiences two lousy movies for the price of one half-decent one.

The double feature, and radio, which offers everything in vaudeville except personal contact, are still two of vaudeville's chief bugaboos.

Now, after six years in the death-house, vaudeville is beginning to put up a fight. There is a chance that the fight may be a winning one because it is being conducted by an economic organization of the vaudeville artists themselves. There are about 43,000 members in the American Federation of Actors. Like the members of the American Newspaper Guild, they have begun to put behind them the false traditions of their profession's glamour which in former years isolated them from other wage-earners.

They are members of the American Federation of Labor, proud of it, and damn sorry they didn't think of it before. The reason for that, however, lies in the history of company unionism as embodied in the National Variety Artists. But that's part of another story.

The pertinent thing is that the American Federation of Actors has for more than a year been conducting an energetic "Save Vaudeville" campaign. Logically, this raises the questions: Is vaudeville worth saving and how can it be saved?

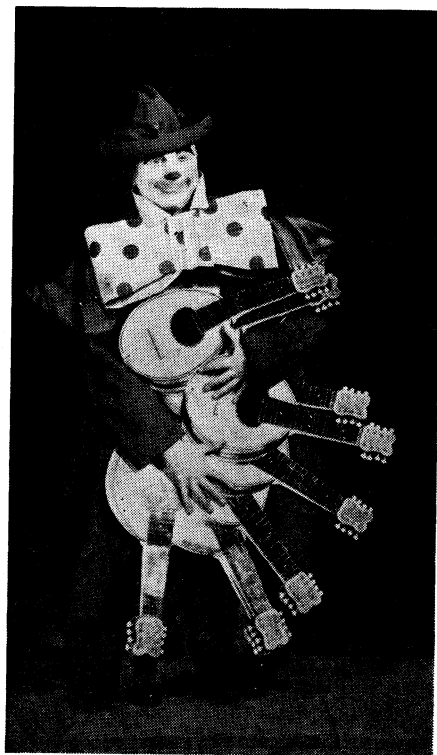
Many unthinking though well-meaning patrons of the dramatic arts may immediately reply:

"Vaudeville is a cheap, out-moded stage form that is dying not only because of external economic and social influences but because it has always been essentially banal, innocuous, and boring." In this reply there may be a half-grain of truth. Speaking strictly for himself, however, the writer believes that vaudeville is worth saving and that it has not always had those essential faults named above. Vaudeville is a valuable theatre form, valuable, as is the rest of the theatre, not simply as a highly effective social instrument but as an excellent means for revitalizing the folk-flavor of the stage.

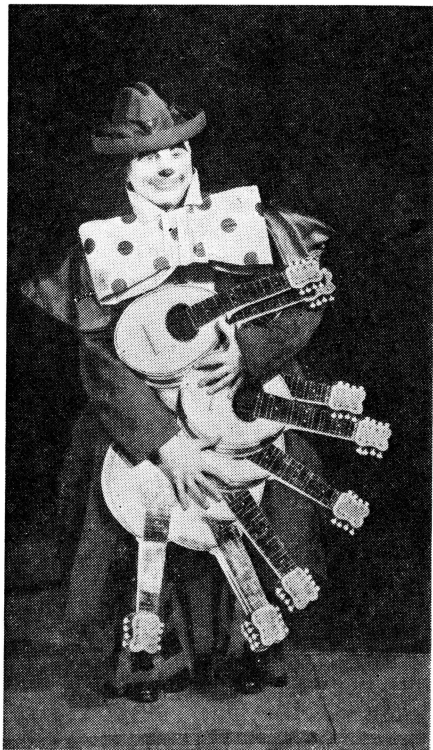
Its main faults are not inherent ones. They lie in the current content of vaudeville which has been gradually squeezed dry of all vitality by the deadly hand of monopoly control in the same manner that the cinema, the legitimate stage and radio have been devitalized by the same agencies.

The encyclopedias credit one Olivier Basselin, a fuller of Normandy as being the father of vaudeville. The word itself is supposedly a corruption of *les Vaux de Vire*, the valleys of Vire, where Basselin worked and wrote his barbed satirical drinking songs directed at the land-holding clergy, the French feudal court, the aristocrats and the landlords. But whether the encyclopedic information is accurate or not, vaudeville, since those fifteenth century days, has devoted its lilting songs, its light-footed, light-hearted dancing, its glib tongue and its nimble hands to comment, criticism and burlesque of the life of the common people.

Until the twentieth century, the formal drama, the legitimate stage, were even further beyond the reach of the people and removed from their interests than is the case today. Vaudeville, in one form or another with its pithy turns, its intimate contact between audience and performers, has, as a result, existed in every modern country.



A. ROBINS IN "JUMBO"



A. ROBINS IN "JUMBO"

The evolution of vaudeville in the United States, however, was different. Like the rest of American life, its various stages of development were rapidly and violently telescoped. When vaudeville began to make its first consistent appearances in this country some seventy-five years ago, it was quickly seized upon for exploitation by the Barnums and other "great" showmen of the period.

In other countries vaudeville had developed as a folk-expression which drew its material to an extent at least, from the problems and the every-day lives of the people, of its audiences. In this country it evolved from the raucous, obscene side-show exhibitions which were held out by the showmen as come-ons for the stuffed whales, the two-headed calves, and the wax work figures on the inside of the tent.

When Barnum and his ilk had cleaned up in the hinterland, they headed east again and opened up pretentious theatres. Their attractions were modified and refined until Jenny Lind replaced Jo-Jo, the dog-faced boy, because presentation of Jenny Lind could command higher prices. Here was the beginning of the entertainment and show business monopoly that came to full bloom with the perfection of the movies. And once the monopoly got under way, the chances for an American vaudeville stage with a genuine folk vitality went permanently aglimmering.

It should be pointed out, however, that even despite the petty censorships imposed on vaudeville from within and from without the most popular and successful acts have been those with some slight amount of social content. The examples of Clark and McCullough and Gallagher and Shean are typical but it would be difficult to multiply them in the history of the vaudeville stage. Another indication of vaudeville's inherent vitality—denied the right to make fun of social and political happenings, it has never ceased to make fun of itself. There is no type of act in vaudeville that has not been burlesqued by some other act.

Up to this point the record of American vaudeville is not particularly bright. Why, then, is it worth saving?

The answer is this: Bad vaudeville is not worth saving but there has been and can be such a thing as good vaudeville. Good vaudeville combines individual virtuosity in anything from juggling to doing bits of Shakespeare and the live folk-spirit and dash which makes for creative entertainment. The flexibility and mobility of vaudeville make it an

appealing form for social comment, and there is no contradiction between this and entertainment. The more vital the social content the more entertaining vaudeville will be.

The theory is that people seek entertainment to relax, to forget their troubles. But such relaxation and forgetfulness are emotionally and almost physically unsatisfactory unless they evoke a response or an emotion of which the individuals in the audience are aware after they leave the theatre.

Nobody remembers the infinite variations of "Who was that lady I saw you with last night?" But when you hear the story about the man who stormed into an office and demanded a job, you have subject matter for humor which lies close to the heart of virtually any audience. The man in this case was rebuked by the prospective employer. The rest of the story goes like this:

Employer: That's no way to ask for a job. You've got to be polite. Come back in an hour and try it again.

Applicant: (Returning an hour later with meek countenance and hat in hand) I beg your pardon, sir. But you recall that you were kind enough to tell me I could return here and make application for employment. Is that privilege still open to me?

Employer: Yes. And this certainly is an improvement on your first appearance.

Applicant: Well, you can go to hell. I've got a job.

The audience to which the writer heard this yarn told was justly enthusiastic in its response. How much more deeply this moved them than a stale pun with a sexy innuendo was obvious.

The simple conclusion of all this, and one with which important vaudeville figures agree, is that if vaudeville is to be revived and preserved it must have new material and new theatres free from the paralyzing grip of commercial monopoly.

How new theatres and new material are to be acquired is, of course, no simple problem. A discussion of the subject with Ralph Whitehead, executive secretary of the American Federation of Actors, convinces this writer that the fate of vaudeville lies in the hands of the members of the profession. Organization on an adequate scale and close collaboration with the rest of the labor movement offer a real possibility of rescuing and raising vaudeville to higher levels than it has ever known.

It is possible to envision the enlargement of the union's booking office, the establishment of a string of vaudeville theatres from coast to coast closely allied

to the union or even owned outright by the actors themselves and thus free from monopoly censorship. Even better, he pictures solid coast to coast year-round bookings for vaudeville shows under the sponsorship of trade unions and other labor groups. After all, here is where vaudeville's real strength lies. It doesn't need a theatre. It can spring to life and do its stuff in any hall or out of doors.

Another possibility is that hundreds of dark theatres could be opened by the use of Federal subsidies and that official stiff-necked censorship could be avoided by actor and audience control of the theatres. Such a program, with its admitted difficulties, could be achieved by effective organization and the combined mass pressure of the actors and the rest of the labor movement.

Mr. Whitehead, who may be regarded as an official spokesman for the vaudeville artists, agrees that the medium needs new material, but just how new and how sharply changed, he isn't sure. He believes that a process of audience-education would be necessary. There is no doubt, however, that a process of actor-education would be an even more pressing need.

Vaudeville actors who have grown up in the stultified atmosphere of mother-in-law jokes, mammy songs and sexy double entendre will have to begin, as did Gallagher and Shean, Will Rogers, Dr. Rockwell, Ed Wynn and Eddie Cantor, to look to the newspapers and to current events for the substance of their acts, only they will have to look deeper into the headlines than their predecessors. They will also have to look into the headlines with greater sympathy for the interests and needs of the wage-earners and lower middle class who constitute the bulk of their audiences.

At least one vaudevillian has already shown himself to be aware of this need—one Steve Evans whose fascinating and intelligently conceived impersonations this writer saw in a typical New York neighborhood theatre. It may be accident that Mr. Evans' portrayal of John D. Rockefeller playing golf on his ninety-sixth birthday is so devastatingly satirical but the enthusiasm of the audience's response should tell him and other variety artists that here is a track worth pursuing. Most moving of all his bits is his characterization of a Polish steel worker getting drunk on pay-day. Those who are redder than the rose may say that the bit is a libel on the working class. Evans acting skill in portraying a drunkard, his oral deftness in portraying the vagar-

(Continued on page 30)

Air Raid Over Harlem

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

Scenario for a Little Black Movie

Who you gonna put in it?
Me.

Who the hell are you?

Harlem.

Alright, then.

AIR RAID OVER HARLEM

You're not talkin' 'bout Harlem, are you?
That's where my home is,
My bed is, my woman is, my kids is!
Harlem, that's where I live!
Look at my streets
Full of black and brown and
Yellow and high-yellow
Jokers like me.
Lenox, Seventh, Edgecombe, 145th.
Listen,
Hear 'em talkin' and laughin'?
Bombs over Harlem'd kill
People like me—
Kill ME!

Sure, I know
The Ethiopian war broke out last night:

BOMBS OVER HARLEM

Cops on every corner

Most of 'em white

COPS IN HARLEM

Guns and billy-clubs

Double duty in Harlem

Walking in pairs

Under every light

Their faces

WHITE

In Harlem

And mixed in with 'em

A black cop or two

For the sake of the vote in Harlem

GUGSA A TRAITOR TOO

No, sir,

I ain't talkin' 'bout you,

Mister Policeman!

No, indeed!

I know we got to keep

ORDER OVER HARLEM

Where the black millions sleep

Shepherds over Harlem

Their armed watch keep

Lest Harlem stirs in its sleep

And maybe remembers

And remembering forgets

To be peaceful and quiet

And has sudden fits

Of raising a black fist

Out of the dark

And that black fist

Becomes a red spark

PLANES OVER HARLEM

Bombs over Harlem

*You're just making up
A fake funny picture, ain't you?*

Not real, not real?

Did you ever taste blood

From an iron heel

Planted in your mouth

In the slavery-time South

Where to whip a nigger's

Easy as hell—

And not even a *living* nigger

Has a tale to tell

Lest the kick of a boot

Bring more blood to his mouth

In the slavery-time South

And a long billy-club

Split his head wide

And a white hand draw

A gun from its side

And send bullets splaying

Through the streets of Harlem

Where the dead're laying

Lest you stir in your sleep

And remember something

You'd best better keep

In the dark, in the dark

Where the ugly things hide

Under the white lights

With guns by their side

In Harlem?



Gus Peck

Say, what are yuh tryin' to do?

Start a riot?

You keep quiet!

You niggers keep quiet!

BLACK WORLD

Never wake up

Lest you knock over the cup

Of gold that the men who

Keep order guard so well

And then—well, then

There'd be hell

To pay

And bombs over Harlem

AIR RAID OVER HARLEM

Bullets through Harlem

And someday

A sleeping giant waking

To snatch bombs from the sky

And push the sun up with a loud cry

Of to hell with the cops on the corners
at night

Armed to the teeth under the light

Lest Harlem see red

And suddenly sit on the edge of its bed

And shake the whole world with a new
dream

As the squad cars come and the sirens
scream

And a big black giant snatches bombs
from the sky

And picks up a cop and lets him fly

Into the dust of the Jimcrow past

And laughs and hollers

Kiss my

!x!&!

Hey!

Scenario For A Little Black Movie,

You say?

A RED MOVIE TO MR. HEARST

Black and white workers united as one

In a city where

There'll never be

Air raids over Harlem

FOR THE WORKERS ARE FREE

What workers are free?

THE BLACK AND WHITE WORK-
ERS—

You and me!

Looky here, everybody!

Look at me!

I'M HARLEM!

Harlem, 1935

The Solo Dance Recital

BY NORMA ROLAND

A New Dance League solo recital is always an exciting event. Its performers are young, socially conscious, talented artists. Their dance themes are timely. In contrast to artists of more mature years who present their annual recitals unrelated to life today, the New Dance League recital, because it is a collective affair, leaves an audience with the feeling that many brilliant things have been said on many different subjects. Each dancer, however, is not handicapped by dividing her talents. She has the opportunity to stress her subject matter in her own fashion.

This season's solo recital took place at the Adelphi Theatre on Sunday evening, December 22nd. It is old stuff to note that the house was packed despite wind and rain; yet these sights tend to repeat themselves, and assure us that the New Dance League performers have something worthy to say to their ever-increasing audience. The performers were Rose Crystal, Jane Dudley, Merle Hirsh, Letitia Ide, Jose Limon, William Matons, Marie Marchowsky, Sophie Maslow, Lily Mehlman and Anna Sokolow.

In dealing with thirteen compositions by different artists, it is a difficult task to give just analyses of each dance. Present on this program were startlingly clear dances whose technique, form, and content were fused to make important dance presentations. Into this category falls *Two Songs About Lenin*, *Speaker*, *Fatherland*, and *Middle Class Portraits*. Sophie Maslow has created a dance of vivid beauty in the two parts to her composition, *Songs About Lenin*. The first part, *In January He Died*, is a deep contrast in mood to the second *In April He Was Born*. Miss Maslow has crystalized its simple significance in a clear form. The dance is successful because of the unity between its construction and idea. Anna Sokolow's *Speaker*, is a dynamic dance, bringing into focus characteristics and typical gestures of the sincere, radical orator. It is an example of clever capturing of gesture translated into true dance movement. *Heil*, *Defiance*, and *Song of Affirmation*, danced by Lily Mehlman, comprise the three dances of *Fatherland*. Many critics have already pointed out Miss Mehlman's admirable use of symbols as integrated dance movements; the entire trilogy is a forceful

condemnation of the brutalities of fascism. *Swivel Chair Hero*, *Dream World Dora*, *Aesthete* and *Liberal*, are the four sketches of Jane Dudley's *Middle Class Portraits*. *Aesthete* and *Liberal* cleverly expose these types to the audience; *Swivel Chair Hero* and *Dream World Dora* are not as ingenious as the first two.

In contrast to the above dances, there are many compositions on the program that did not prove so successful. Their intent was not carried over to the audience, and, as so often happens, we were left with little more than a title for a clue. Rose Crystal's *We Need Space* fails to connect with its title; it remained an abstraction. Merle Hirsh's *Georgia Prisoner*, though built on a simple movement theme, lacks that quality of projection and conviction that would make it a more vital dance. Her *Valse Sentimentale* is more successful because it is performed in a less personal manner, and succeeds in capturing the ludicrousness of the mannered, interpretive dance period. In *Impressions of a Dance Hall*, Anna Sokolow uses movement that contains decadent significance; the dance begins well, but becomes vague towards the end, and thus fails to make its point. Marie Marchowsky's *Conflict* is, curiously enough, similar in interpretation to Martha Graham's *Imperial Gesture*. The similarity, though unintentional we are sure, so impressed us, that we feel unable to criticize this dance in an unbiased fashion. William Matons, one of the few male dancers in the New Dance League, presented *Mad Figure* to the poem *Escape*, by Fearing. It is an attempt at synthesizing dance and the spoken word. It contains movements of technical brilliance, but very often Mr. Matons' dynamic movements tend to drown out the voice accompaniment, thus placing a difficult task on the audience. Bill Matons shows increasing talent in his work. With careful technical adjustments of occasional movement and greater unity in idea and form, his work in the revolutionary dance movement will prove invaluable.

Letitia Ide and Jose Limon, newcomers in the New Dance League recitals, presented *Greeting* and *Nostalgic Fragments*. These dances, skillfully performed, light, colorful, and exuberant, represent the theatrical side of dancing.

Soloists on the New Dance League Recital: Left to right, top, Jane Dudley, Jose Limon and Letitia Ide, Anna Sokolow; center, Merle Hirsh, William Matons, Marie Marchowsky; bottom, Rose Crystal, Lily Mehlman and Sophie Maslow.

Tina Flade

Tina Flade presented a program of dances for the benefit of the Mills College Scholarship Fund at the Guild Theatre on Sunday evening, January 12th. The three years which have intervened since her American debut have marked a decided growth in her stature. Her work on this occasion had undeniable poise and increased sincerity and intensity. Charm and real personal beauty of an almost elfin character prove no mean assets to the dancer's creative gifts. In spite of these talents and a polished technical equipment the recital was, in the final analysis, disappointing.

Figure Might Be Seen in the Moon and *Dance in the Early Morning* succeeded in evoking a strong atmospheric mood with imagination unmarred by the merely ingenious. This power to project atmosphere, characteristic of much German dancing, is of definite theatre value provided it does not become a preoccupation. In *Sinister Resonance*, there were moments of intensity, but the whole was blunted by its obvious derivation from the Wigman tradition. This failing was noticeable again in the second number of the *Fire Cycle* which concluded the program. *Paeans* and *Elegy*, though well received, lacked weight and were undistinguished choreographically. The *Obsession of the Spirale* is a movement study not sufficiently developed for its purpose. Trite in theme and conception, the *Dance for a Huntress* was to some extent redeemed by its excellent display of facile virtuosity in dancing. The program was completed by *Two Sarabandes*, which presented Miss Flade in a style for which she is naturally adapted. Buoyant, and of real charm, they are truly captivating and refreshing.

With so much in her favor, it is unfortunate that the total impression suffers from pointlessness and from immaturity both as an artist personality and as a choreographer. Tina Flade is at present a "little salon" dancer, exquisite always and occasionally the possessor of a delicate radiance, but more often pallid in projection and without convincing significance even within the lighted realms of the dance.

MARJORIE BAHOUTH



Gentlemen, Place Your Bests

BY ROBERT STEBBINS

Among the miscellaneous papers that comprise the *Note Book* of Samuel Butler is the following passage—"Always eat grapes downward, that is, always eat the best grapes first; in this way there will be none better left on the bunch, and each grape will seem good down to the last." The celebrated author of *Erewhon* and *The Way of All Flesh* evidently chose to disregard the likelihood that at a certain point in his progress down the vine the grapes might definitely go bad. In fact, the very best grape to begin with might already be unpalatable. In composing lists of the ten best films of the year our critics seem to be laboring under the same optimistic delusion that affected Butler. Even assuming that the films listed are the best produced, is that any guarantee of their intrinsic value and permanence? It is this question that renders the value of the entire idea of best lists debatable. As far as we have been able to discover these lists serve chiefly to swell box-office intake post-seasonally much in the manner that the Pulitzer Prizes stimulate post-humous sales.

How many films that attained first ten ranking in 1935 were actually good films? How many of them possessed the validity that comes from an honest and integrated reaction to the life of man? With the first choice on most lists we have no argument. *The Informer*, although certainly not the best film of the year, displayed distinct merit and was a sensitively conceived and brilliantly directed job. But what of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, *Ah Wilderness*, *Anna Karenina*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Scoundrel*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*, which were some of the other films figuring prominently on the rolls of honor?

Mutiny on the Bounty was the most expensive film of the year and boasted more stars than any picture since *Grand Hotel*. A budget of two million dollars notwithstanding, *Mutiny* possessed a sprawling, disjointed structure abounding in anti-climaxes, indulging in the pointlessly unrestrained sadism of Charles Laughton's Captain Bligh—all to prove that today His Majesty's navy is just too jolly a place.

Lives of a Bengal Lancer displayed a commonplace variety of epidermal excitement, certainly nothing more profound than that, in the course of an incredibly banal and conventional "white

man's burden" affair. Much is made of the handful of insouciant Englishmen who by sheer charm and good looks keep four hundred million villainous Indians unwilling subjects of the Crown. There is the usual beautiful spy, the demented Maharajah, the mock-heroics of Gary Cooper and Franchot Tone in the torture chamber.

Ah Wilderness was innocuous to the point that it didn't quite matter whether you had seen it or not and half of the time you weren't sure you had. Similarly *Anna Karenina* was chiefly distinguished by the good-mannered facture of its production—a tastefully devised museum-piece. The film had a certain disembodied quality that is mistaken in some parts for universality. But who were these people in the film? Were they the Russians of a corrupt aristocracy that Tolstoy pitied when he was not excoriating it? It was obvious that the characters in the movie had never set a foot outside of the studio.

Midsummer Night's Dream—a hopelessly muddled mixture of styles, bad ballet, midgets, incompetents like Dick Powell (who can ever forget his jaunty leave taking of Hermia to the whistled accompaniment of Mendelssohn's Spring Song?).

Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's *The Scoundrel* afforded at once the most offensive cynicism and meretricious optimism of the year's scripts. It was typical of what happens when two world-weary and wing-clipped boys taste their wounds and find them bitter. We can almost hear the two wonder children saying, "If they want hoke, we can dish it out too," and in the case of *The Scoundrel* they surpassed their foulest expectations.

To conclude, *A Tale of Two Cities* repeated the accustomed Victorian calumny on the French revolution in uneventful and sluggish style. Some left-wing critics seem to have found the first section of the film exciting, particularly the episode wherein the French soldiery unexpectedly join the attack on the Bastille, but it is our impudent suspicion that they were stirred more by the idea than its execution. One has but to compare this sequence with a similar episode—the winning over of the Cossacks under General Kornilov in *Ten Days That Shook the World*—to perceive the former's poverty of invention.

In view of the difficulty best lists seem

to entail, we believe it would be more advisable and modest merely to indicate those films and performances that made movie-going in 1935 worthwhile and at times a profoundly thrilling pursuit.

Frontier, Chapayev (mentioned on Mr. Watt's list), *Crime et Chatiment* (Watt's list), *Peasants*, Disney's *The Band Concert*, *The Informer*, *The Youth of Maxim* and *The Last Multi-Millionaire* were the most satisfying cinema embodiments of the valid concepts of our time.

Interesting, chiefly for the brilliance of their technical accomplishments, were *Broadway Melody of 1936*, *The Whole Town's Talking*, *39 Steps*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *The New Gulliver* and *Mary Burns—Fugitive*.

Memorable performances—Charles Laughton in *Ruggles of Red Gap*, Babouckin as the title role in *Chapayev*, Donald Duck in *The Band Concert*. Alan Baxter in *Mary Burns—Fugitive*, the king and master of ceremonies in *The New Gulliver*, Elizabeth Bergner in *Escape Me Never*, and W. C. Fields in most anything except *Mississippi*. Worst film of the year—*The Big Broadcast of 1936*. Maddest and otherwise unclassifiable—the Marx Brothers' *A Night at the Opera*.

Film Checklist

CEILING ZERO: All things considered the best Cagney film since *Public Enemy*. Director Hawks has had the courage to retain the unhappy conclusion of the original stage play. For once, the peculiar egocentric, anti-social character that is Cagney's creation receives proper solution when, as the philandering aviator, he falls to a spectacular and self-chosen death. The humor of the film, coming after the insipid innuendoes of the average Hollywood discursion into sex, is at times refreshingly bawdy.

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF LOUIS XIV (German film): Thinly disguised parable about the French degenerates and good German blood.

STRIKE ME PINK: According to actual count, over ten scenarists labored to bring forth Cantor's far from hilarious though well-mounted opus. On the credit side—one or two good gags, and an over-elaborated chase. Debit—200 GORGEOUS GOLDWYN GIRLS 200, and Ethel Merman's ditty, "Shake it off with rhythm . . . play bumpety-bump and shove your troubles away . . . everything will be O. K."

KING OF BURLESQUE: Fails to fulfill promise of the title in so far as burlesque shots are few and far between. There is a fleeting glimpse of a runway but the maidens are well-swathed for all these faulty eyes could discover. We must admit that this irate reviewer left shortly after detection of the fraud, or at least wanted to. Story is of the tried and true variety. Warner Baxter overlooks hard-working hooper to marry an aristocratic Park Avenueite with a hankering for the finer things in life and ruins himself in the process. Fortunately heifer, our error, hooper comes to the rescue and rings the curtain down on one hour and a half of larceny passing for amusement.

GRAIN (Russian): A decidedly minor and unimportant account of collectivization. Suffers from fumbling direction and a general lack of credibility. Photography and make-up are poor, even the hero is obviously lip-sticked. Only one characterization remains in memory—the amusing portrait of the early proletarian poet who “dreams of a tractor on the swift-flowing stream.”

DANGEROUS: It's perfectly clear that Bette Davis has the scenarists fretting themselves into psychoses trying to produce a script worthy of half her salt. Ever since *Of Human Bondage* they've muffed it and out of sheer desperation they hit upon *Dangerous* which for all intents and purposes is *Of Human Bondage* all over again—so much so that even lines and sequences are repeated—“So YOU pity ME? ME? Why you poor, shrinking, pitiable fool etc., etc.”

SYLVIA SCARLETT: Another Hepburn portrait of a problem-child floating about in the vague limits between slight decomposition and nebulosity. There never was such a creature outside of a movie-magnate's disordered dream, and it needn't be said, a magnate's dream hardly provide a subject for public edifica-

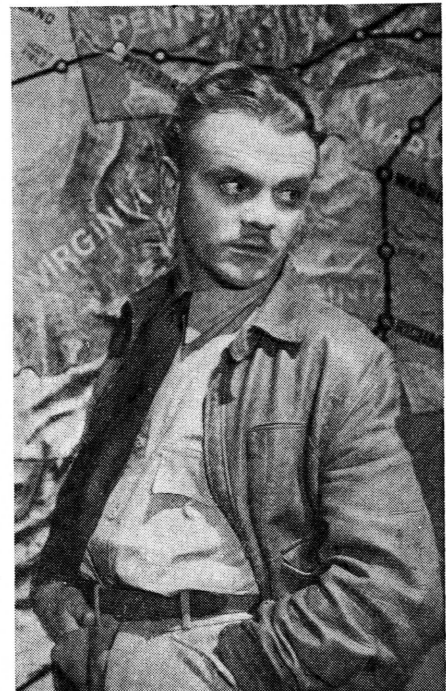
tion. Cary Grant's excellent performance saves the film from complete failure. Whatever merit it possesses is the result of his efforts.

ANNIE OAKLEY: With clarity of intention and good casting this might have made a good movie. But the tendency to idealize the material (the same fault ruined *The Great Barnum*) results in a dull, unaffecting script and still-born characterization. Preston Foster as a braggart with a heart of good legal tender achieves moments of credibility. The Indian in the role of Chief Sitting-Bull lends himself with great willingness to the typical moving picture defamations of his race.

THE GHOST GOES WEST (Gaumont-British): Worth seeing. Rene Clair's first introduction to the English speaking world in a witty discourse on the follies of clannish pride and the ignorance of the American ruling class. To be sure, Mr. Clair's touch in this film is not exactly what one would call incisive, but perhaps after he familiarizes himself with the subject he will polish off us Americans with all the brilliance he brought to bear on his own people in *The Italian Straw Hat*.

RIFF-RAFF: To be boycotted. At present writing, workers' and liberal organizations all over the country are preparing to protest and picket showings of the film. This is the first time that an anti-labor production has enlisted a popular star to help put it over. It is hardly likely, however, that Miss Jean Harlow's newest hairshade, “brownette,” and fantastic poses will put labor in its place.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES: Those blood-bibbers, the French revolutionists, are at it again. Again the noble knobs of their noble nibs fall merrily into the baskets as Madame Lafargue proceeds with her knittin'. To outfit the revolutionaries, MGM cornered all the dandrophulous wigs in existence and then



JAMES CAGNEY IN "CEILING ZERO"

dragged them in mud for six months. And they must have dragged their revolutionaries in mud for six months to acquire the proper patina of filth. In fact, the entire film is little more than mud in your eye. Ronald Colman is hardly convincing as the alcoholic Sidney Carton, and the rest of the cast, save for Edna May Oliver and Basil Rathbone's excellent Evremonde, is mediocre.

AH WILDERNESS: We had to be reminded that we saw this one. It possesses a certain quiet obsolescent quality that is difficult to tell apart from non-existence. Somewhere in the film we remember a young gawky girl in long braids who plays a clarinet, and there is an actor Eric Linden and something vaguely about desire under the linden and a keg of beer and a . . .

(Continued on page 31)



"RIFF RAFF": MGM'S CALUMNY ON WEST COAST LABOR



"A TALE OF TWO CITIES": ANOTHER MGM CALUMNY

Dancers, Take a Bow

BY EDNA OCKO

The temptation to parallel film and theatre critics in their "year's ten best" is too persuasive to disregard. As the editor of this quiet unassuming section of the magazine, we have shyly prepared our own honor roll. While we confess to its quixotic catholicity, we condone it on the grounds of its completely personal outlook, unconcerned with the dictates of high-sounding esthetics, or small-minded dance snobs. Under risk of permanently defiling our private little escutcheon, we take our stand, a stand ranging from the most intimate of studio recitals to Minsky's burlesque, from the high-arched bare footedness of the Graham school to the black-footed nonchalance of the soft shoe in vaudeville.

In the past year we have seen movies and plays as well as dance recitals, and whenever a good dance performance came our way, whether it occurred in a nightclub or a cinema palace, we glowed with pleasure and burned the fact in our memory. Our list is by no means exhaustive; we have seen very few of the night club dancers; our attendance at recitals has been in New York, for the most part, and we have doubtlessly forgotten several items which at the time seemed stirring and significant.

The following presentation, arranged chronologically, afforded us the most pleasure because they achieved complete, or almost complete, realization of their purpose, whether the purpose was sheer entertainment, or significant social comment:

The Barman's dance by Massine in the Monte Carlo Ballet *Union Pacific*. At this time, we should like to single out Irina Baronova as the outstanding ballerina of the company.

Frontier, a solo number by Martha Graham.

The entire ballet *Dreams*, presented by the American Ballet company, particularly for the costumes and set by Derain, and the sensitive work by Annabelle Lyon.

Course, a group dance created by Martha Graham and danced by her and her Concert Group.

Strange American Funeral by the Dance Unit of the New Dance League, directed by Anna Sokolow.

The duet performed by Anna Sokolow and Anita Alvarez in *Panorama*, directed by Martha Graham.

Death in the Afternoon featuring Paul

Haakon in the musical, *At Home Abroad*.

The dance by Vilma and Buddy Ebsen done to *Sing before Breakfast* in the film *Broadway Melody of 1936*. At this time, one must praise Eleanor Powell for her amazing precision in ballet and tap as well as her rhythmic ingenuity. She appeared both in *Broadway Melody* and *At Home Abroad*.

New Dance by Doris Humphrey, featuring both Miss Humphrey's and Charles Weidman's groups. The emergence of Beatrice Seckler as a solo performer of great merit contributed to our pleasure.

Johnny Inkslinger's dance in *American Saga*, and parts of *Stock Exchange* by Charles Weidman and his group (the first dance is a solo).

Finally, without commending any one dance, we accolated Fred Astaire for his brilliant work in all his film appearances.

While on the subject of movies, we would give them their share of praise. Orchids to —

Broadway Melody of 1936, the outstanding musical of the year, having the best dancing we have ever seen in the movies, featuring the excellent work of Eleanor Powell, Vilma and Buddy Ebsen, June Knight, and her partner, whose name I have never ascertained.

Frontier, a Soviet made picture, directed by Dovjenco, in which the cinematic sequences are presented with such poetic and rhythmic insight, that many episodes actually traverse the screen in dance design; e.g. the flight of the airplane in the opening scene, the Sumurai's sword ritual, the secret church ritual by the Kulaks, etc. We recommend this picture to all dancers as a study in rhythm and form.

The ballet and mazurka in *Anna Karenina*, the former directed by Margaret Wallman.

The dancing of Escudero in *Here's to Romance*, an otherwise stupid picture.

In Caliente, which wins everlasting glory for its casual mention in a speech by one of its characters of such dancers as Mary Wigman and Martha Graham. We never knew Hollywood was aware of their existence, and we still don't believe it.

Although *Cock o' the Walk*, a Disney Silly Symphony, rightfully does not belong here since it appeared in 1936, we cannot refrain from exulting in its brilliant parody of the Astaire-Rogers combination, and the Busby Berkely

dance extravaganzas in musical films.

The American movie, however, has a lot to learn about dancing, and choreographic taste. They can never be forgiven for the ballet of elephants in *The Big Broadcast of 1936*, and the dance of the grand pianos in *Gold Diggers of 1935*. And who was able to endure the ballet in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, where a chifony, winged corps de ballet, headed by Nini Theilade, embarrassed its audience by its ineptitude and its anachronisms. Bronislava Nijinska, director of the ballet, needs a good talking to. Incidentally, this roving reviewer must call to the attention of readers the amazing fact that the modern dance has found its way into burlesque. A chance visit to Minsky's presented us with the astonishing spectacle of an arty dance number to *St. Louis Blues*, where the dancers, on three levels, in three different styles of movement (one angular and grotesque, another sinuous and slow, the third wavy and violent interpreted the music along "modernistic" lines. And the audience loved it!

While we are classifying, we might as well call attention to the outstanding recitals of last year. The New Dance League and the entire left-wing movement carries off the honors. Notable recitals were:

1. The New Dance League recital at the Center Theatre, when the largest modern dance recital audience New York had ever seen assembled to witness group and solo numbers by the League members.

2. The New Dance League recital of men, when for the first time, a cross-section of men in the dance was attempted.

3. Benjamin Zemach's recital of *Victory Ball* at Hollywood Bowl, when the West Coast witnessed an extended work on an anti-war theme for the first time. (Mr. Zemach is a member of the New Dance League.)

4. The New Dance League solo recital which, in its presentation of debut performers, is constantly encouraging creative work by our younger artists.

5. The International Labor Defense recital at Carnegie Hall at which time the outstanding exponents of the modern dance, Graham, Humphrey Tamkris, Weidman and the Dance Unit united for a benefit performance.

Finally, this would be a poor survey indeed if we failed to look forward to

the new year and to suggest plans for the future.

With the recent organization of the Dance Project in New York, we look forward to the establishment of a national Federal Dance Project, covering the entire country.

We look forward to the work of the Dancers Association as a new organization that, together with the New Dance League, will prove to the world at large that artists working together for the betterment of their conditions, can only hope to achieve results by united and militant effort.

While we are on the subject of the New Dance League, we look forward to the time when professional people will volunteer their time and their interest to better the production end of their recitals.

We look forward to the time when dancing in the movies will not be solely in the hands of Busby Berkely or the ballet names of years ago, but modern cinematic choreographers will be encouraged to utilize popular dance forms in artistically intelligent productions, so that these tasteless, sensational interludes will definitely go by the boards.

We look forward to a new, independent generation of dancers, competently trained in the modern schools, to assume creative responsibility, and come forward as leaders in their own right, unhampered by the self-imposed check which personal loyalties to school or teacher have created for them.

We look forward to an increasing number of intelligent and searching books and articles on the modern dance, written by those who are eager to analyze and crystallize the current trends in the light of social conditions, rather than publicize individual dancers and their pet theories.

We look forward to dance reviews on every metropolitan newspaper being written by authentic dance critics rather than well-meaning but incompetent music critics, or third-string dramatic reviewers.

We look forward to the conscious re-orientation of the modern dance towards experimental theatre forms, towards modern ballets, towards straightforward presentation of social themes, aimed at comprehensibility for the widest possible audience. We unofficially announce the New Dance Group is devoting itself to just that problem.

We look forward to a united front of all dancers, a unity that will never contribute in any way to pro-war or profascist propaganda, either in dance or in other activities, economic, artistic, personal or political. At the same time, we

fervently hope to have heard the end of the art-versus-propaganda bugaboo, and to learn that all dancers are ready to grant a social point of view to works of art, and the dance should claim no exemption.

We look forward to the time when the dance as an art form assumes that depth and scope necessary to make it a powerful force working towards the greater social good in the cultural renaissance of our time.

The Dancer Organizes BY TAMIRIS

The dancers are coming of age, or so it seemed by their response to a call for the establishment of a Dance Project on the Works Progress Administration. Fed up with being told they are temperamental, irresponsible and incapable of joint action, about two hundred dancers—employed, unemployed and “successful” ones, representing every approach to the dance, assembled at the Union Church Auditorium in New York City on January 6th, and in the process of fighting for a project, formed a Dancers Association. To the now defunct Dancers Union goes the credit for the initial step in the development of the Dance Project. Committees of dancers—instead of dancing, devoted weeks and weeks to the formulation of plans—submitted them to the Administration, were interviewed by the directors of the FERA, the TERA—were sent flying from one department to another—ever hopeful, and ever rebuffed.

As awareness of the dancer's part in the cultural life of the city developed and as the public demand for its participation in both the educational and entertainment field grew, it became increasingly clear that only through organization could it make its needs known. And so these dancers met for a common aim to insure the professional status and economic stabilization of dancers.

John Cauldwell, vice president of the City Projects Council, told the gathering of the many difficulties encountered in the organization of the Music, Writers, Drama and Artists Projects and how they were overcome. He stressed the fact that their problems were little different from those of the dancer. There, too, were internal battles, aesthetic feuds, “personalities”, and cliques. Stephen Karnot, managing project supervisor of the Municipal Theatre Project addressed the meeting unofficially. He announced that two dance units had been established to function within the Federal Theatre Project. One to consist of a group of thirteen, to work along with the Children's Theatre under the direction of Don Oscar Becque and the other, a Production Unit to present

El Amor Brujo, Salome, Petrushka Tempo—ballets formerly presented by Gluck-Sandor in his own Dance Center, with Mr. Sandor as director. This was not enough—so said the two hundred dancers at this meeting. Two small units could not adequately cope with the many problems of the professional dancers, choreographers, and teachers in need of employment, nor were these units designed to include the various methods and technique that make up the dance world.

All of this made it clear that an independent Dance Project with its own administrative staff, with many performing units—a permanent Dance Theatre with its attending musicians—a Folk Dance Unit—a Service Bureau to supply dancers and choreographers and teachers to the Theatre Project—was needed. To this end the Dancers Association committed itself. The organization was not to be concerned solely with the success or failure of a project. The basic function of the Dancers Association is to continue building a consciousness of the dance as a legitimate force in the theatre arts. Some of the sponsors for this association are Alvin Johnson, director of the New School for Social Research, Mrs. Edgar Varese, Cheryl Crawford and Lee Strasberg of the Group Theatre, Samuel Chotzinoff, Ruth Pickering, Romola Nijinska. An executive committee of twenty, including Doris Humphrey, Felicia Sorel, Gluck-Sandor, Don Oscar Becque, Roger Pryor Dodge, Louise Kloepper, Miriam Blecher, Ruth Allerhand, Nancy McKnight, Tamiris, among others, are working on two major problems; plans for a dance project to be submitted to Mr. Harry Hopkins and Mrs. Hallie Flanagan, and the constitution of the organization, so that it is assured permanence. Any further information can be obtained by writing to the offices of the Dancers Association, 11 West 42nd Street, New York City.

NOTE: A Dance Project as part of the Federal Theatre Project has just been realized. See the editorial on page five of this issue for further details.

Drama of Negro Life

BY HERBERT KLINE

"In one sense, Negroes have always known fascism." When Langston Hughes made this statement at the recent Congress Against War and Fascism in Cleveland, the famous Negro author presented the key to what is often described as "the race problem." For there has never been a day in the entire history of our great democracy that millions of Negroes have not had to face and suffer a type of social and economic discrimination, oppression and terror comparable in its extremes to that suffered by the Jews today in Nazi Germany.

Negro life! The phrase, the very juxtaposition of the words Negro and life becomes ironical. For the word life is closely associated with words like light, air, nourishment, love, tenderness, joy, happiness. Scattered phrases and lines uttered by Negroes rush to my mind—

"Yo head, 'tain' no apple fo hangin' from a tree."

"Ol King Cotton, ol man Cotton, keeps you slaving till you's dead an rotten."

"Way down south in Dixie, break the heart of me, they hung my black young lover to a black and gnarled tree."

"A nigger's life is mis'ry, Lawd I wish I was dead."

"Helped to build dis railroad, cain' ford ridin tag."

"My ol man died in a big white house, my mother in a shack. I wonder where I'm gonna die, being neither white nor black."

Lynching, drudgery in the same cotton fields they knew in slavery days, a lover or relative burned to death, bastardy, exploitation, hunger, disease, Jim Crow—all in the background of their lives, rushing to the lips of men like Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown and countless anonymous folk poets whose cries are at once the voice and conscience of their people.

Negro life! A living hell for the majority of Negroes despite all their immense capacity for joy, for laughter.

Let anyone who thinks I exaggerate recall for one moment any slight he has suffered—the kind of jeer or insult that one never forgets, the intentional or unintentional slight that marks one for life.

That is the every day lot of the Negro. Every day he gets up, throughout life he faces slights, jeers, insults. Wherever he goes—as a child on the streets or during his few years in school, later on in the search for a job. Last to be hired, first to



ANTON REFREGIER

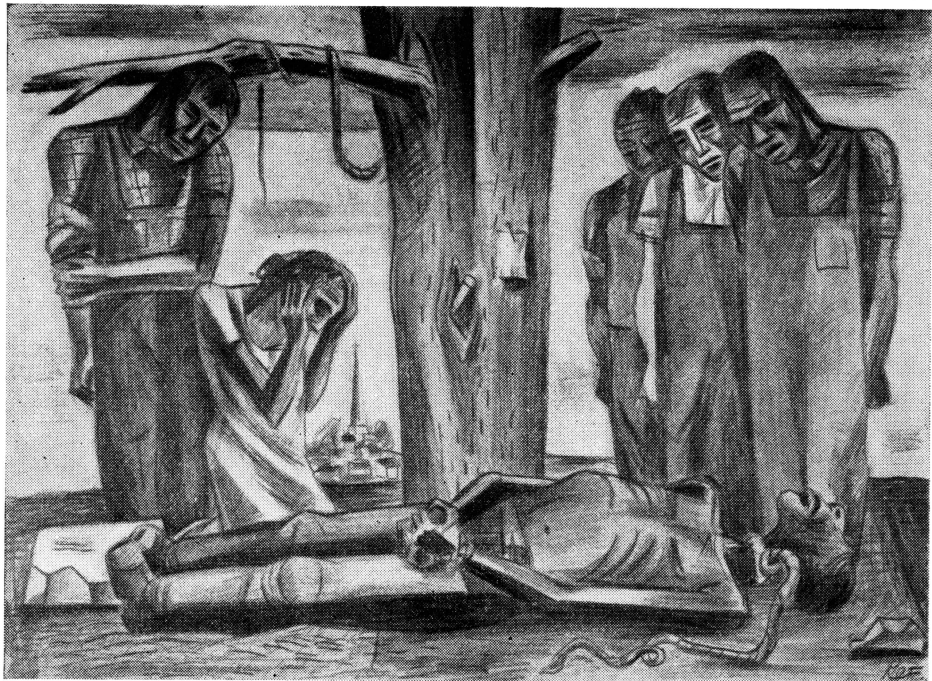
be fired. Doing the dirty work everywhere. Cleaning spittoons. Porterage. Prostitution. Washing white people's clothes. Serving others. Doing the dangerous work. "Only Mexes and Niggers work there—they wouldn't send any white man, not even a hunky or polack, into that hell-hole," I heard a factory foreman say.

Exploitation, discrimination, poverty, disease, hunger and lynchings . . . these are the basic truths of Negro life, and form the basis for the type of dramas we must stage in order to counter the influence of such caricatures of the Negro people as *Run Lil' Chillun*, *Porgy and Bess*, *Imitation of Life*, *Mississippi*, *Harlem*, etc. Although the commercial stage and screen have never been at a loss to find works misrepresenting Negro life, the new theatre movement, despite all efforts since the early workers theatre days, has never been able to build a repertory of plays that would provide the basis for a strong Negro people's theatre movement. The need for short plays of Negro life has been so great that many theatre groups have presented condensed versions of John Wexley's *They Shall Not Die* and Peters and Sklar's *Stevedore*. The two prize play contests announced in the July Negro issue of *NEW THEATRE* were counted on to supply the demand of theatres and audiences the country over for such plays.

With the exception of *Angelo Herndon Jones*, the prize-winning play by Lang-

ston Hughes, none of the plays submitted to the contest for plays about the young Negro hero were worthy of production without major revisions and most of them were worthless. And Langston Hughes' interesting but only partially successful attempt to fuse the living symbol of the Negro leader Herndon into the struggles and aspirations of a group of oppressed Negroes ranging from unemployed workers to prostitutes does not even begin to compare with the outstanding work he has done in the fields of poetry, the novel and the short story. Hughes' play has no spine, no essential line of conflict and development. He tells his separate stories well but does not dramatize them. As in *Mulatto*, now in its fourth month on Broadway, the dramatic weaknesses of *Angelo Herndon Jones* are covered to a certain extent by the significance of the material and by the richness of Hughes' writing. Since the theatre is a medium that is beginning to concern him more and more, it is to be expected that Langston Hughes will soon develop the same skill in dramaturgy that has already won him a high place in American literature.

The plays submitted in the contest dealing with any aspect of Negro life were equally disappointing. As in the Herndon contest not one play other than the prize-winner, *Trouble With the Angels* by Bernard Schoenfeld, is ready for production without revisions. Schoenfeld's play is



ANTON REFREGIER

based on Langston Hughes' brilliant account of an attempted strike during *The Green Pastures* run in Washington, D. C.

In Hughes' story (published in our July 1935 issue) one of the "angels" urged the others to walk out on the show rather than play in a city that refused to permit Negroes to see the famous drama in which a Negro plays "De Lawd." In Schoenfeld's version, the strike is carried out. Although the new ending is convincing, Hughes' original ending, showing the subservience of a lifetime dominating all the company except the one rebellious angel, brought the point of the story home more forcefully. In addition, Schoenfeld's characterization of "De Lawd" is comparably static and the dialogue does not match the quoted conversations in the Hughes original. Nevertheless, Schoenfeld's version of *Trouble With the Angels* is a creditable one.

Neither of these plays measure up to the standards set by *Waiting for Lefty* and *Private Hicks*, winners of the two previous contests for short plays sponsored by NEW THEATRE and the New Theatre League. And the bulk of the plays were so badly written, so hopelessly muddled, so completely unconvincing and inept for all their sincerity that it would be futile for the playreaders of the League's repertory department to labor over suggestions for revisions. The few scripts outside of the prize-winners that showed any real worth will receive careful criticism in order to help the more able playwrights to make needed revisions. As for the others—the best one can do is recommend that they study two things primarily, the theory and technique of playwriting and, needless to say, Negro life. For the most appalling and discouraging facts about these plays were the confusion, ignorance and inexpertness of the playwrights, most of them whites whose lack of knowledge of Negro life leads them on the one hand into unconsciously chauvinistic presentation of what they evidently regard as the admirable "peculiarities" of the Negro and on the other hand into a "lily white" type of idealization that most Negroes would object to as unrealistic and dehumanizing. (In one play, these two tendencies are combined . . . Angelo Herndon is depicted as breaking into a jig when off-stage noises tell him that the I. L. D. is "coming for to carry him home.")

These playwrights have to learn that there is no generalized Negro type, that Negroes have as much individuality as whites and that they have particular values, as do any other people, which distinguish them and mark their general

contribution to the scheme of things. We need plays about specific experiences of Negro life, not vague generalizations about "the Negro." Because Negroes become class-conscious is no reason to depict them as being without normal human reactions and weaknesses. We want to do away with the white man's concept of the Negro as a lazy, superstitious, murderous and sex-starved lout. But to counter this with a cross between a sexless saint and a labor preacher is to reject the rich capacities of the Negro for creating and enjoying life, despite all persecution, in a way that can best be described by that much over used but still valid term "earthy." The people who created the Spirituals and the Work and Folk Songs also created jazz and the Charleston. Their heroes include Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, Duke Ellington and Bill Robinson as well as Nat Turner, John Henry and Angelo Herndon. Until white playwrights learn something about Negroes, their habits, customs, background and language (and by this I do not mean the phony, jumbled distortion of dialects pre-

sented in many of these contest plays but the inner rhythm as well as the surface differences of Negro speech), their plays will continue to be unacceptable either to white or to Negro audiences.

The most disappointing thing of all was the failure of such outstanding Negro writers as Countee Cullen, Richard Wright, Sterling Brown and Randolph Edmonds to submit plays to these contests. I am not in sympathy with those who believe that white playwrights cannot turn out first-rate plays of Negro life, but I do believe that the main impetus and force making for a vital Negro drama will come from Negroes themselves.

The problem of building a strong repertory of Negro plays of social protest still faces us. A great play is still to be written about Angelo Herndon—another about the share-croppers' struggles in the south—another about the March 19th riots against starvation and police-terror in Harlem! There are a thousand and one themes related to Negro life that are literally crying out for dramatization. It's up to the playwrights.

The American Artists' Congress

Norman Bel Geddes, Cleon Throckmorton, Mordecai Gorelik, and Boris Soudeikine, four noted scenic designers, have signed the call to the American Artists' Congress, which will open on the night of February 15th at Town Hall. Among NEW THEATRE contributors participating in the congress are Anton Refregier, William Gropper, Harry Sternberg, Reginald Marsh, Adolf Dehn, Ralph Steiner, John Groth, Paul Strand and Jacob Burck.

This is the first artists' congress ever held in the U.S.A. Originally sponsored by 110 artists, aware of the critical situation facing the artists today, the call was sent out, urging all artists of standing to mobilize against the impending danger of war and fascism and to rally to the defence of culture. The result has been an overwhelming enthusiastic response. Today over 300 delegates, representing twenty states of the union, have signed the call and will attend the congress. These delegates include artists of widely varied interests and of different aesthetic schools. Members of the National Academy, as well as modernists of the extreme left wing of painting, will attend. Among the signers of the call are mural painters, sculptors, easel painters, photographers, scenic designers, cartoonists, and graphic artists.

Among the distinguished painters who

have signed the call are Rockwell Kent, George Biddle, Max Weber, Joseph Stella, Arnold Blanch, Arnold Friedman, Joe Jones, Doris Lee, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Alexander Brook, Hilaire Hiler, Morris Kantor, Ernest Fiene, Emil Holzhauser, Louis Lozowick, Peggy Bacon, etc.

Stuart Davis, secretary of the congress, has announced that the meeting at Town Hall (which will be open to the public) will have Lewis Mumford as chairman. Heywood Brown will address the congress in the name of the Newspaper Guild. Artists on the program will be Paul Manship, Rockwell Kent, Peter Blume, Margaret Bourke-White, and Aaron Douglas. Joe Jones, who will lead a delegation of St. Louis artists, will discuss the repression of art in America. George Biddle will favor the artists' boycott of the art exhibition, which will be held in Germany in connection with the Olympic Games. After the open meeting, the congress will convene for two days at the New School for Social Research. These sessions will be open to delegates and invited guests. Specific problems of the artist—social, economic, aesthetic and cultural—will be discussed. Plans for a permanent organization of artists on a national scale will be worked out. There is no doubt that the Artists' Congress is of genuine historic import in the history of art in the U.S.A.

Harry Alan Potamkin

BY DAVID WOLFF

His death-mask still burns with the concentration of youth. The eyes are empty as the plaster itself, but the mouth is still tender, witty and charming. In that pale head we can see the replica of a mind at once rapid and profound, sensitive and exact as a scientific instrument; a mind whose genius sometimes seemed incongruously huge beside the films it was analyzing.

The basis of his extraordinary years as a film critic, was a mental cross-index of thousands of movies, from the Kineascope's *Mabel's First Blush*, to Carl Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*, which he characteristically considered the apex of cinema. He himself relates that as a boy he was hired by an enterprising theatre to imitate hooves as they receded on the screen, and to *pow!* as the buckskin hero blasted his way to a fair bosom. From that time his association with the movies was nearly continuous. He knew many of the geniuses of the cinema personally, and he was at ease among masterpieces. Yet he never cared to perfume the seriousness of his work with gossip. It was inevitable that the heavy leftward shift of cultural values during the crisis should drive a social standard deep into his criticism. The nature of cinema itself, which even at its falsest gives the impression of reality, led him to think in social terms. His method broadened from mere sensitivity and egotism of abstraction (the 1931 articles in *Experimental Cinema*) to the brilliant, solid pages of the four Hound and Horn articles: on Pabst, René Clair, Pudovkin, and Eisenstein, each of whom he judged in the larger metric of a matured social viewpoint.

Potamkin's earlier work was published largely in the "little literary" magazines, and naturally was influenced by them; although their narrow aesthetic warped his judgments less than his style. Too often he would allow himself to denounce "demi-truth," christen sound-films "opto-phonetic," and allude to "aspic Cleoparas." Many readers therefore misunderstood his sincere complexity for the stance of a poseur; one unjust, but tart young man referred to Potamkin as a "cinemetaphysic'an." Nevertheless, Potamkin's interest in words often helped give his judgments the sharpest felicity. One is tempted to over-quote his phrases, sometimes only a bon-mot: "Vienna, the head to a nation that has no torso"; often a precise value: the "Clair arabesque";



Irving Lerner

HARRY ALAN POTAMKIN: 1900-1933

or the social judgment: "The Germans thought if a character was anonymous, he was universal"; and the essential depiction of a man: "Eisenstein's theory is frequently a rationalization, not only of his practices, but of his temperament," but he is "an engineer who sees each film as an individual problem to solve."

Potamkin was among the earliest of that group of sincere critics of the arts who began to see as the ground of culture the great masses of productive humanity, and as its destroyer, the box-officialdom and their class. The times are rapid, and Potamkin came by his standards rapidly, and not without exaggerated leaps to the left. Whereas in 1929 (speaking of the sound film), he asks that we "free our (aesthetic) categories from confusion. In that way we are freeing life itself from its current confusion, which borders on bewilderment,"—yet in *Front* (1931) he proclaims "The Death of the Bourgeois Film" rather prematurely. Sometimes, also, he was guilty of over-simplification of the social processes, although the fault was usually literary; thus he believed that Griffith is what Pudovkin would have been in the U. S., and vice-versa! (1931 in the *Revue du Cinema*); but a later article (1933) deletes that error.

Potamkin came to think of the film, not as solely (even when truthful) commentary, but as an element in the convulsions of society: "The film is at once *response* of the mind which the dominant class has *effected*; and the *agent* of the dominant class to *affect* the response."

He saw the changes in the form of the American movie, determined, yes, by the slimy insanities of the industry itself, but more fundamentally, and in the long run, by the upheavals in the American economic structure, and he came to believe that our best films must project the truth of this structure. He seriously warned Pabst against a depiction of "social plight" which did not involve "social base," and foresaw the banal operatics of Pabst's *Don Quixote*. In the case of Pudovkin, Potamkin pointed out that a director's weaknesses are not necessarily fatal, for the Soviet Union, without softening its criticism, sustained and re-directed Pudovkin beyond his vagaries; there the kino is "a process serving a process," "the response and the agent of the progressive conscience."

With the edge of these standards, Potamkin was able to cut deeper than the dazzling costume which the modern movie wears. He described the shameful use of movies for war: "the rape of Belgium was committed in the studios of Hollywood"; he was the first to scent the more insidious taint of the so-called pacifist films, which preach against war by presenting it as misty, exalting, speedy, and exciting. At once he added that only a film in which war is an episode, "the hideous peak of a competitive society," dare call itself an anti-war film. Again: in the subtler domains of film humor, one is apt to disregard truth for the easy bursts of laughter; Potamkin did not allow himself this vacation. He saw that Clair's *A Nous La Liberté* was "a diffused fantasy à la horseplay, though it wants so much to be satire," and that it "offers the solution of wanderlust (provided it's summer of course)." Naturally he praises Clair, but asks him for depth and idea, "the humor of society."

Granted a basic social approach, what then? Potamkin's theory here falls into two divisions, the first, necessary; the second, personal. He utilized for the first the extremely important idea of "reality-as-symbol." The film, more even than the strictly representational arts, becomes perforce symbolic; its screen resembles a window which insists on its version of the moving universe. But symbolism, though a necessary, is yet a dangerous method. Potamkin criticized the figure of the Mongol in *Storm Over Asia*, as a "mass-accu-

(Continued on page 33)



Irving Lerner

HARRY ALAN POTAMKIN: 1900-1933

Book Reviews

KING PANTO (The Story of Pantomime). By A. E. Wilson. E. P. Dutton & Co.

Mr. Wilson, dramatic critic of the London Star, has given us, here, a pleasant if uninspired history of the art of pantomime in England. Beginning with its innovator Rich, an actor who is supposed to have turned to pantomime because of his own illiterate speech, it covers the field conscientiously, dealing with the subject matter, style of production, actors and audience from the early eighteenth century to the present day Christmas pantomime. The book is interesting chiefly because of the material it has brought together, especially from the early "stage books." The standard plot that of the young lovers Harlequin and Columbine, who aided by the clown, escape from the clutches of the stern guardian, Pantaloon, was seldom varied. Later on as the clown became the most important personage there were innumerable excuses for comedy, most of which were conceived in simplest folk terms and have to do with that still universal theme—a poor man who tries to get the better of the policeman around the corner. Later on the pantomimes became much more elaborate, so that at present their chief emphasis is on gorgeousness of pageantry. There are no longer any outstanding pantomime actors, no clear-cut simple comedy—but only great expensive shows kept alive in the provinces because Britain is loth to give up an old tradition. Whether Mr. Wilson regrets the new decadence it is hard to say. He points out with amusing quotations that critics in all times have lamented the vulgarity and artificiality of contemporary pantomime as compared with that of their youth. Perhaps, since it is still supported by the English people, it still has a real vitality. The author seems so fond of the medium, so anxious that it shall continue, that he does not go very deeply into the problem of a new pantomime which is based on elaborate costume rather than on a live folk art. The book is enriched by gay and valuable illustrations. Some of its quotations may give hints to groups interested in improvisation; on the whole, it is a pleasantly informative, but not essential book for anyone interested in the history of the theatre. D. Y.

SO YOU'RE WRITING A PLAY. By Clayton Hamilton, Boston: Little Brown and Company. \$1.75.

Clayton Hamilton belongs to the small circle of scholars who made the unscholarly discovery that the theatre is not a library of plays. This book will not produce geniuses, but it should help beginners with its homely and frequently wholesome truth. Unfortunately, in trying to take the drama out of the library Mr. Hamilton has cast it, body and soul, into the market-place. He identifies artistic success with the successful wooing of an audience, which moreover he leaves undefined. Nowhere in the book is there any treatment of the experimental theatre or the drama of social protest. Mr. Hamilton, who sometimes seems displeased with the commercial theatre, has written the perfect Baedeker to Broadway.

Only when it is a question of the lowly foreigner does the gentlemanly author seem to become a champion of the theatre as a temple of art. "Most of the habitual patrons of our theatres in the district of Times Square are obviously of recent foreign origin . . . In order to appeal to these people, our current playwrights are condemned to write their dialogue in some convenient form of Times Square slang . . ." This statement is of course sheer nonsense. When did the audience of "recent foreign origin" condemn O'Neill, Anderson, Howard, Behrman (the finest prose stylist of our theatre, though "of recent foreign origin"), Glaspell, Sherwood, Barry and others to write

their dialogue "in some convenient form of Times Square slang?" On the contrary, plays of artistic merit have found their strongest supporters among these "habitual patrons," and the New York theatre despite its many shortcomings is today superior in content and invention to the theatre of any other city in America or Western Europe. J. W. G.

BEN JONSON ON THE ENGLISH STAGE: 1660-1776. By Robert Gale Noyes. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935. \$3.50.

This is an academic account of the place of Ben Jonson's plays on the English stage and in English criticism after the Restoration. It is useful to the research worker, but its value to the general worker in the theatre lies mainly in the fact that it calls attention to one of the greatest of English playwrights. His topical references and his ponderousness may interfere with his popularity, but his sharpness and his fine capacity for indignation are qualities we

could use to advantage. The contemporary theatre has room for his slashing satire, and at least one of the comedies, *Volpone*, calls for revival once more. If we had a real repertory theatre, this satire on avarice would certainly be on the program.

SHAKESPEARE AND THE AUDIENCE. By A. C. Sprague. Harvard University Press. \$2.50.

A study of that sector of Shakespeare's technique in which the playwright uses his lines for expositional purposes. This falls into two parts: primary exposition of situation, and the guidance of the audience's feeling toward the characters through their self-descriptions and their comments upon each other. The first part in particular is suggestive to playwrights working in the craft today. It presents very fully a variety of skilled solutions to one of their prime difficulties. In limiting himself to a consideration of lines alone and omitting the more basic analysis of action, Professor Sprague has forced his treatment of character exposition into a purely academic mold. For the typical Elizabethan treatment of characters in description has an archaic flavor today, especially when it is removed from the context of action. The book is documented with full quotations from the plays. M. D. T.

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New Theatre in Philadelphia

BY MOLLY DAY THACHER

The amateur actors of the Philadelphia New Theatre have just finished a production of *Black Pit* which ran two weeks in a large theatre, and which forces comparison with the professional production of the same play by the Theatre Union last year in New York. In fact "amateur" and "professional" become less and less definitive terms as the social theatres get into their stride. Amateurism used to connote after-hours recreation—and incompetence, sloppiness, and often a loose dilettantism. Today professional actors are handicapped and their talents frequently atrophied by unemployment, type-casting, and the haphazard sequence of their work when they find it. A director who hires them for one show has no time or reason to worry about their general development: he wants to fit them into his production with a minimum of effort. On the other side of the picture, following the line first chartered by the Artef, are the young theatres of unpaid and preponderantly untrained actors who have a program to express, who feel that their job is important and urgent, and who know that they must fit themselves to carry it out in the most effective and efficient theatre terms.

In spite of inexperience and experimental organization and the pressure of time, certain effectivenesses of the so-called amateur theatres begin to show themselves. In the case of the New Theatre of Philadelphia, a particularly realistic attack on their problems, and sustained work, has moved them ahead very fast in their one year of existence. *Black Pit*, their second full-length play, shows the company, with two exceptions, inferior to their professional predecessors in the attributes which come from long experience. The professionals gave their individual performances more range and variety through the purely technical means of voice flexibility, body control, and a trained sense of pace. They were able with these devices to cover, to a certain extent, the weaknesses of the play's least theatrical scenes: the first scene in the miner's home which is almost entirely atmospheric and without action, and the final scene of the play in which action already witnessed by the audience is retold in detail for the benefit of one of the characters. On the other hand, the Philadelphia actors had a freshness of attack, a sincerity and vitality of action, a common understanding and seriousness about

the play, which gave their performance superior impact, a more forthright sense of importance. Two experienced actors in the company stood out, not by facile professionalism, but because the spirit of the performance, which they shared with their fellow-actors, was enriched by a surer handling of themselves in their roles. Lem Ward's Superintendent Prescott was rich and three-dimensional in execution, enhancing the character as it is written in the script. Ben Low, as Tony, the crippled miner, had a plain and convincing proletarian quality, which won a strong sympathy colored by respect, free of the sort of commiseration which a self-pitying interpretation could easily attach to him. An inexperienced actor, Peter Haydn, played the protagonist Joe Kovarsky who turns stool pigeon with a youthfulness, understanding, and directness, which gave him, too, an extraordinary sympathy. The technical side of the production was on a plane of up-to-the-minute efficiency, and the sets were workmanlike and substantially realistic. There was no excursion beyond that, however, into a creative use of the physical appurtenances of the theatre. The lighting, while adequate, was badly conventional.

I am setting the production against high standards, because it is too good a piece of work to measure by any others. It is not as profound, as unified nor as definitive a production as the same theatre should be able to do a year, or three years from now, but it seems to me an extraordinary achievement for one year of work. And the most important thing about the New Theatre is that it is working in a way which opens the possibility of constantly improving artistic creation, and continuous healthy contact with its audience. When the members of the company have played together for another twelve months, when they have had the benefit of a variety of parts and kinds of production, when they have utilized the work that is being done in Studio classes, when they have absorbed the experience of playing to many kinds of audiences in the shorter plays and skits which they send out to union meetings, it is inconceivable that they should not grow in craftsmanship. There is not space here to go into the form of their organization, or the details of their trade union contacts. It can simply be indicated that the New Theatre has a building of its own which it uses for rehearsal, meetings,

classes, and minor performances; that it has a very mixed and representative membership of eighty-five, which controls its policy; that of these about thirty-five have been selected as the acting company, while the rest concentrate on training classes; that it has been very successful in reaching audiences through the short plays and bringing them into a professional theatre for the long productions. The Philadelphia unions have welcomed it, and the central A. F. of L. body was so impressed by *Black Pit* that it endorsed the New Theatre and opened meetings of locals to speakers and performers. In addition, two locals (one the Stagehands) made donations from their treasury to keep the play running.

During rehearsals of *Black Pit*, the New Theatre took time to put on *Private Hicks*. In the programs of *Black Pit* were leaflets announcing and building up interest for the next production, *Let Freedom Ring*. This kind of set-up, this tempo and opportunity for work, this manifestation of support from the audience for whom they set out to work should hearten the New Theatre members. It is intensive and collective and purposeful work which should be the envy of any professional not fortunate enough to be connected with a permanent theatre. And the whole picture should be considered by anyone who has not yet discovered for himself the discrepancy between "Broadway" individualism and the aims of the social theatre.

Vaudeville Fights

(Continued from page 18)

ies of a Slavic tongue wrestling with an unfamiliar tongue, are not the point, however. What makes his Polish bit vital vaudeville art is the manner in which he conveys the motivations of the character he portrays. You feel that here is a guy who's got a right to get drunk. Your sympathies are entirely with him. You want to climb over the footlights, make the big, shambling good-natured fool put his money back in his pocket and take him home to his wife. But when he suddenly discovers that he hasn't the "pflent-yeh moonyeh" of which he has been boasting, you realize that he has been robbed not merely by a pickpocket who preys on drunks, but by the life he lives. When he goes staggering off stage with a crying-jag about his wife and the six kids waiting for him at home, you are moved

not by the maudlin sentimentality so common to vaudeville but by a deeper and more powerful emotion that remains in your consciousness long after you've left the theatre. Maybe Mr. Evans didn't think all of this out in advance but it's all there and it's all vaudeville.

The audience-education postulated by Mr. Whitehead doesn't seem so essential. Certainly no advance build-up went into the wild acclaim and sweeping popularity which met *Waiting for Lefty*. (Seems you can't write about the stage without mentioning that play.) By the same token any act which could do as much for the vaudeville stage, would need no process of education to make it acceptable to audiences.

Another possibility grows from all these considerations. Should the idea of a self-sustaining, mass-supported labor vaudeville stage be quickly realized, and it could be, the masses of America would have a lever for freeing the movies from the grip of the Wall Street-Hollywood monopoly. With an established audience and a reliable source of financial support which would make it possible to tour vaudeville from coast to coast at a profit, the surpluses could be diverted to the production, distribution and exhibition of labor films which are now impossible because of a lack of financial resources.

One additional proof of the argument that vaudeville needs new material and that new material will interest large audiences may be offered. The experiments of the new theatre movements with vaudeville forms in New York, Chicago, San Francisco and other cities have been highly successful. Like its other efforts, the vaudeville of the new theatre movement has attracted not only audiences from the limited field of the organized labor movement but from the middle class groups as well who are perhaps the most hungry for good theatre. It is from both of these groups that vaudeville has drawn the vast bulk of its past audiences and from these that vaudeville must rebuild its support.

Vaudeville isn't dead by a long shot, but from now on its life depends on what it can give to labor and the middle class and what these groups are prepared to give it. On one last point the body of vaudeville artists themselves should be reassured. The actors must disregard mother-in-law jokes and mammy songs for acts that mean something to the great mass of the American people. If they do so, they will have only passing difficulties in finding paying audiences throughout the country that won't sit on their hands.

The Films of Rene Clair

(Continued from page 13)

The Ghost Goes West, his latest film, made in England, gave Clair a chance to prepare himself for the Hollywood factories. *The Ghost Goes West* abounds in gags. Not the kind Clair is noted for—innuendoes of camera treatment—but polite drawing room gossip where everyone is on his best behavior. For these gags we have Robert Sherwood to thank; he adapted the story from one in *Punch*. This is the first time that Clair has allowed someone else to do his screen story. Is this forced collaboration a first concession to the Hollywood system?

During the making of *The Ghost Goes West*, Clair said in discussing dialogue with Robert Herring in England, "... It is the first time I have been able to (use a good deal of dialogue)! Before, I had to use music and songs, and I had to find ways to avoid dialogue, because much French dialogue would have meant the pictures could have been sold only in France. But this language (English) I make a picture in, now means that it can be understood here and in America, and many places, so I can use more." Almost everything Clair has learned about film structure has been thrown to the lions of "Bob Sherwood's brilliant dialogue." Clair told me he was so delighted with the dialogue that he often altered his shots to point Sherwood's wit. A sad mistake.

A bit of the old Clair is the sequence in which he employs a sliding screen showing Edinburgh and Washington separated by the Atlantic Ocean. Off screen voices accompany these sliding images, proclaim their country's attitude toward the "ghost going west." A simple yet imaginative treatment.

Despite Clair's denial of satirical intent, the extravagant welcome given the ghost in New York is a sly take-off on national gullibility. A procession of autos goes triumphantly up Broadway, amidst falling confetti and tumultuous acclaim, we see a luxurious automobile driven by a liveried chauffeur. In the honored seat is a huge placard: "Reserved for the Ghost!"

However for the craftsman Clair, the film as a whole is his most self-conscious work. Handicapped by a new language, a new technical crew, ignorant of national mannerisms in which he had to deal and which are such a vital part of his French films, *The Ghost Goes West* emerges heavy laden. Although amusing, it is static in the stage tradition. Unless he is careful, it may not only be true as Evelyn Gerstein said, "Hollywood is ready for Clair," but that Clair may soon be ready for

Hollywood. And this would be a sad loss indeed!

Film Checklist

(Continued from page 23)

ROSE OF THE RANCHO: Old California in triple time with Gladys Swarthout as the leader of the Spanish vigilantes. The movie serves as a splendid vehicle for the destructive talents of Willie Howard. From the very moment that Howard, as Pancho Spiegelglass sidles up to the bar of the toughest joint in town and demands a "glass from meelk," the proceedings turn into a football for him to kick around. And since John Boles is one of the principals, there should be no complaint.

CAPTAIN BLOOD: Two hours of Raphael Sabatini. A loose, rambling narrative plethoric with battles, homicides, struggles to the death for the hand of the fairest Englishwoman that ever slid out of a hoopskirt and the personable Errol Flynn who seems slated for America's latest phantom lover. He may object at first, but love will find a way.

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Shifting Scenes



NADYA RAMONOV, SCHOOL DIRECTOR, TEACHING A CLASS IN ACTING Dushon

The New Theatre School

The Spring term of the New Theatre school in New York City opens March 9th with eighteen courses, a faculty of twenty and an indicated enrollment of more than two hundred students. In one year of existence the school has twice enlarged its quarters to accommodate students demanding instruction. It has nearly doubled the number of courses offered and quadrupled its teaching staff.

The New Theatre School is growing rapidly because, unlike so many school ventures, it was founded to meet definite needs and to perform specific functions. The New Theatre School is concerned with the social drama. It is not concerned with developing individual idiosyncracies for exploitation in the commercial theatre. It concentrates on giving essential knowledge and experience to workers in affiliated theatre groups, members of trade unions and individuals so that these students may, in turn, help raise both the artistic and technical levels of the productions in which they participate.

This difference in attitude is reflected throughout the entire School. There is no teaching of elocutionary horrors "with gestures," nor any meaningless palaver about "advanced conversational form." Rather, students are trained to function within a group. They are given the fundamentals with which to make the most of their own particular abilities in that special branch of the theatre which most interests them. The theatre is not presented as a series of air tight compartments, segregated from each other by suspicion and envy, with actors and directors in Olympian aloofness and stage hands a necessary evil. It is presented as a collective enterprise in which all parts are important for the success of the whole. Courses dovetail and overlap. Acting students learn the social and economic significance of the history of the theatre. Playwrights and directors study acting that they may have some understanding of the peculiar problem involved in playing a part.

If you are familiar with the usual classroom, you may have noticed a certain atmosphere of dead calm; an apathy that acts as an insulation between instructor and students. Were you to visit any New Theatre School class you would

be impressed with the vitality of the atmosphere. You can sense that eagerness and excitement, in both students and instructors, which is the first step towards any education.

Because it represents a vital part of the new theatre movement, the School has attracted a highly capable faculty of instructors. The present teaching staff includes Benno Schneider, Howard Bay, Bidda Blakely, John Bonn, Helen Cross, Harry Elion, John W. Gassner, Henry Infield, Margaret Larkin, Paul Leitner, John O'Shaughnessy, Herta Pauley, Nadya Ramonov, Jean Rosenthal, George Sklar, Moi Solotaroff, Tamiris, Mary Tarcai.

The School offers courses in eighteen individual subjects. Complete courses are available in Acting, Playwriting, Stage Design and Directing. These courses comprise a grouping of related subjects which give the student a well rounded training. They are available at a special rate. The ordinary cost per subject is \$10.

Special discounts are given to members of Trade Unions, Negro organizations and members of affiliated theatre groups. Scholarships are available to students of proved ability who need financial aid.

Among the new courses added for the Spring term are Speech Improvement, Costume Designing, Puppets and Marionettes, Children's Work (for adults working with children) History of the Negro Theatre and Stage Lighting.

New Theatre School students come from many states, including a group from the Pacific Coast. Some are professionals, some are factory workers, many are members of theatre groups. Almost all types of occupation are represented—teachers, carpenters, office workers, painters, milliners—the list is endless.

Student activities are one of the most important parts of the school. The students, through the Student Council, are active participants in all school affairs. Their representative sits with the School Board, makes suggestions, acts as a sounding board of student opinion and helps mold the policy of the school.

Student social activities include Theatre parties, Sunday night forums and symposia with outstanding speakers, a student bulletin board and the building of a theatre library.

Last, but by no means least, is the Experimental Theatre formed of students from the complete courses. A group of such students is now working collectively on a script which will be presented at the end of the term for the student body. If warranted, an outside production will be given.

These are some of the high lights of the New Theatre School. Space prevents my detailing many other features. Personally, I feel that New Theatre School is the place for any one with an inkling of interest in the theatre of today and tomorrow. This is the opinion of an acidulous person who, for fifteen years, has been wholly opposed to all schools of acting and the theatre. Take it for what it may be worth but at least visit New Theatre School, at 55 West 45th Street and see for yourself just what is going on there. Perhaps you'll capture some of our enthusiasm. It's quite contagious.

HAROLD PRESTON

With the New Theatres

The *Lefty* saga is ever growing. It has seen production recently, along with *Till the Day I Die*, in Dallas, Texas and Mt. Vernon, New York; it is in rehearsal in Moberly, Missouri and has been approved as the Progressive Art Club's entry in the Dominion Drama Festival in Vancouver, B. C., after censorship threatened. Dallas is having an Odets season, for following the Dallas Little Theatre's performances of the one-acters for their subscription audience, *Awake and Sing* was put on by the Texas Jewish Art Theatre under the direction of Louis Hexter. The Mt. Vernon performance, where Anne Segal directed, marked the first public appearance of the Social Theatre Group. Jack Conroy, author of *The Disinherited* and *A World to Win*, who will take the part of one of the striking hackies in the Moberly Little Theatre production, has been cast for the part of Tony when the theatre puts on the last act of *Black Pit*.

First to reaffiliate with the New Theatre League under its re-organizational plan are the Union Players of New York. The group, which won a prize of three books on the theatre for their quick action, was formerly the Studio Group of the Theatre of Action and a part of the Office Workers Union. Their most recent productions, under the direction of Muni Diamond and Carl Lerner, have been *On the Dotted Line* and *Take a Letter* and they are now working on *The Great Philanthropist*. From all over the country comes news of other new membership cards and charters. Under the announced plans, all non-affiliated theatres must pay double the rates charged to members for play scripts, royalties, training school fees and all other services of the League.

Two new pamphlets are being considered by the League for publication, the one a detailed analysis of *Audience Organization for Peoples Theatres* and the other *The Work of the Actor*, by I. Rapoport of the Vakhtangov Theatre.

Peter Frye, former director of dramatics at Commonwealth College and long a League member, has been added to the staff of the Chicago Section office.

The Forum Theatre, which has been quietly putting on social plays these three or four years, is the first we know of to present *A Million Torments* in this country. It is another farce-comedy by Valentin Katayev who wrote *Squaring the Circle*, and a high-spirited comedy of errors in which a musty member of the old intelligentsia mistakes his alcoholic son-in-law of "good" family for the proletarian son-in-law whom he expects to find a boor. It is a piece of hilarity which destroys the old pretensions with laughter, but whose only "propaganda" is the health it breathes. Because it is elementary and even bald in its situations, the play may look deceptively simple in manuscript. Actually this sort of simplicity takes very particular skill in staging. Even more than a serious play it

requires expert timing, relaxation, acceleration, surprise, constant nimble-witted business, very great variety in characterization. . . .

The dramatic group at Madison House recently played for six nights to lower East Side audiences in Samuel Ornitz' *In New Kentucky*, and *Waiting for Lefty*.

Crime

On Sunday, February 23rd, at the Civic Repertory Theatre, the Theatre of Action will give the first showing of Michael Blankfort's one act play *Crime*. It is being directed by Alfred Saxe of the Theatre of Action and Elia Kazan of the Group Theatre, who acts Kewpie, the gangster of *Paradise Lost*. The same pair directed last spring's production of *The Young Go First*. The Blankfort play is based on one of the most dramatic of labor struggles: a meat-packer strike which began more than a year ago in a North Dakota town, and is still being fought out. On the same program will be a new short play *The Little Green Bundle*, by Paul Peters.

The IWO Affiliates

As we go to press the International Workers Order, that impressively widespread and democratically organized workers fraternal society, has announced its affiliation to the New Theatre League. David Green and Sam Pevner, heads of the Educational Department, who were instrumental in bringing the IWO to recognize the importance of theatre in its cultural work, will cooperate with the League in stimulating dramatic work in the branches. Reports of their dramatic activities will appear hereafter in *Shifting Scenes*. The League looks forward to similar cooperation with other mass organizations, and hopes for similar affiliation with other mass organizations to which it can be of use, notably the Workman's Circle.

Repertory Notes

Playwrights are urged to take special cognizance this month of our new playwriting contest for plays on the relief situation, announced in last month's *NEW THEATRE*. In addition to this subject we strongly recommend that a treatment of the case of Joseph Shoemaker, militant Socialist, murdered in Florida by vigilantes last month, would make an extremely timely and exciting play at this time.

The author of the latest contribution to the Repertory Department, Mrs. Bernice Kelley Harris of North Carolina, is an outstanding representative of the little theatre movement in the South. Her play, *His Jewels*, is an authentic picture of Southern life by one who knows it well. Mrs. Harris, after graduating from the University of North Carolina where she studied with Professor Koch, taught school from 1916 to 1926 and from 1926 to 1930 directed community playwriting and productions and, in her own words, "prepared Northampton soil for my own annual original Festivals, the outstanding dramatic event in this section." The Carolina Playmakers have published two of Mrs. Harris' plays, *Judgment Comes to Daniel* and *Ca'line* and Samuel French has published *The Evidence* by Mrs. Harris and Leilia Edwards, a tangible result of their community playwriting project.

ELSA FINDLAY

MODERN DANCE
EURYTHMICS

64 East 34th Street
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Harry Alan Potamkin

(Continued from page 28)

mulation, not organic but declarative," urged Pabst to be "more literal, less statistical," and excoriated Dovjenco for turning "the heroic into the mock-heroic." In Dovjenco's *Ivan*, the protagonist is an algebraic symbol, a lowest-common-denominator who hammered nails with the wrong technique; but compare him with Chapayev: so rich, flavorful, and interesting a characterization, who was yet a symbol of his country and his time. Symbolism must be an electrification of chosen realities. "The most convincing and not irreducible instance shall prevail."

It must be insisted that Potamkin did not understand by "symbol" some empty figurine with half-red, half-white drapery, which must carry a label to be understood. He meant rather a person as real as our contemporaries, events as complete as strikes and A.A.A. The art of the film-maker, as he conceived it, was to select the best action and light it so that there appeared behind it the enormous outlines of class motives and events.

Potamkin's secondary theory was the desire that the mature cinema turn away from the "muscular" movie, the more active, rapid type, to a reflective, searching, "intensive" style. He felt always that *The Passion and Death of Joan of Arc* was the highest point yet attained along this avenue. He noted that this method is essentially non-theatrical; in *Joan of Arc*, the conflicts are expressed in a succession of massive close-ups; or in the alternated juxtapositions of close-up and object—as, for example, when the close-up of the threatening Bishop is followed by the turning spikes of the torture wheel, it seems to impale the mind rather than the flesh. Potamkin saw this stylism as the completest expression of cinema.

He seemed to feel that the inter-penetration of an image and its spectator, required rigidity on the part of both. Waking suddenly in sunlight, when one's hands and the objects of a room appear so intense with meaning that they seem nearly transparent; Van Gogh's drawing of a pair of workman's shoes, dark, twisted and burning with significance,—these qualities are perhaps what Potamkin wished to recapture in the cinema. There is no evidence that he ever conceived a film that could be beyond this method.

It is vital at our stage to disagree. Not only is it necessary for contemporary film-makers (especially amateur, non-commercial, left-wing groups) to theatricalize their productions, but they should not even begin to think in terms of "intensive, not extensive" cinema, until they

have produced a series of living, even if "muscular" films, interesting by the sheer force of impact. In the trio of films which won the joint Moscow medal (*Chapayev*, *Youth of Maxim*, and *Peasants*), the separation on which Potamkin almost insisted (he would perhaps now agree), is become a synthesis: action and character are one. It remains, I think, to raise this synthesis to the level which Potamkin visualized.

Potamkin had more obvious faults of judgment—the most amusing being his reference to Mickey Mouse as "insipid lycanthropy"—but on the whole he possessed an extraordinary knowledge of the medium and an accuracy of taste whose sparkle continuously excites the reader. He had not yet learned to be a popular critic: his pamphlet *Eyes of the Movie* is quite bad: a vast hodge-podge of self-plagiarisms; written no doubt in a hurry. His best work is indubitably complex, with its huge paragraphs of darting references and interplay of values from every art. To be a serious critic, he felt, compels one to stand on the highest cultural level. He justly condemned "numerous young writers . . . who are not familiar enough with other arts."

As yet there is no left wing critic who has in any field (except possibly Meyer Shapiro for the plastic arts) brought himself to Potamkin's level. His work is as rich, and often richer than his subject. He would write brilliant paragraphs on a Hollywood movie whose intention was no more than to stimulate like a cup of coffee. But where a film approximated the levels of his own mind, the result was criticism—premature and dazzling, and extinguished in mid-career—that is the first classic of America's future.

LILLIAN SHAPERO

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Trade Union Notes

The retrenchment program of the movie moguls has pushed Hollywood film workers into the labor movement. When expenses are "curtailed" workers feel it first. And California has a good fighting union history. One Hollywood headline, January 20th, screamed "LABOR COUNCIL LOOMS!" It does more than "loom." The Film Labor Council is being formed.

It is composed of membership representatives of every union or employee group in the studios. Its purpose is to coordinate the activities and actions of these groups, and it will add immeasurably to their prestige and power. (*Stage unions, please note.*) Two member unions, The Screen Actors and Screen Writers Guilds are affiliated with the A. F. of L., the former through its charter from Actors Equity, the latter through the Dramatists Guild of the Authors League.

A third key group, and a mightily important one has just been formed: the Screen Directors Guild. King Vidor, outstanding progressive director has been elected President, and a junior branch for assistant directors is projected. With its members holding strategic positions on the lots, this organization will have tremendous weight. Moreover, its formation unites the last unorganized category of creative film workers and saps the last pretense of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts to represent workers in pictures. It shapes a real chance of winning the closed shop that is now being demanded in the three fields.

In addition to enforcing contract and wage standards the new Guild at once framed demands to protect the artistic integrity and control of its members. They protested the speed-up and mechanical methods which have damaged the quality of their work. They demanded reasonable time to work on scripts before shooting begins, adequate time for production, a chance to consult on cutting of their films, and, in general, conditions which will enable them to make artistic units out of their pictures, instead of hashing them out piece-meal.

NEW THEATRE congratulates the members of the new union on the clarity and forcefulness of their action. It is in order to hope that these directors, having experienced the need for organization themselves will begin to see the danger of making films that encourage fascist trends, and directly or indirectly undermine the basis of free trade unionism. Their fellow workers in other fields have the right to demand that these new trade unionists refuse to lend themselves to the making of pictures that misrepresent or attack organized labor.

NEW THEATRE is gathering material for a series of articles dealing with radio. Workers in the industry who have first-hand definite information on working conditions of writers, actors, or technicians, or instances of censorship or control of social content of programs by advertisers, are urged to help us bring out a thorough, smashing, expose of the field. Correspondents' names will not be divulged without their permission.

At the same time, in response to requests from member theatres the New Theatre League is assembling information on the technical preparation of radio scripts and performances. Professionals who are willing to volunteer help are asked to get in touch with the League at 55 West 45th St., N. Y. C.

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INTERNATIONAL THEATRE. August, 1935.

Published by the International Union of the Revolutionary Theatre, Moscow, USSR. 20c.

This issue of International Theatre, now being distributed in this country, contains many authoritative articles of extreme usefulness and interest to theatre workers. An article by Erwin Piscator reviews the development of the international people's theatre movement and surveys the new perspectives created by a development of its artistic work and by the entrance of new elements into the ranks of those presenting the militant social drama. A. Gvosdev's *Problems in the Study of the History of the Theatre* is an excellent Marxist contribution to the history of the theatre, and G. Boyadzhiev's *Origin and Development of the Classical Theatre in France* is a fresh interpretation of the drama of Moliere, Corneille and Racine.

Friedrich Wolf's definitive study of *The Western Drama of the World War* traces the close relationship of the European drama to the changing human consciousness of that cataclysm. One sees "the spirit of the front" reflected in such early German plays as *Der Hias*, followed later by pacifist plays such as *A Generation* by Fritz von Unruh, which appeared soon after the bold revolts of the Kiel sailors and the workers in the industrial centers who all expressed the common sentiment: "We want peace! No more shooting!" Wolf shows that by 1930 correct and revolutionary interpretations of the World War began to appear. Plivier-Piscator's *The Kaiser's Coolies*, Toller's *The Pot-Fires* and his own *Sailors of Catarro* delivered successive revolutionary hammer-blows at war. The accession of the Nazis destroyed this fine trend and encouraged the production of plays that propagandized war as "the steel bath" and the "father of things."

Other important articles on the theatre, music, and film make this the most interesting and valuable issue of International Theatre published to date. Copies may be ordered from the Social Drama Book Service. M. M.

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A Letter from the Theatre Union

TO THE EDITORS:

The Theatre Union, which though only in its third season, has become a fixture, and an important one in the American scene as the first professional social theatre in America, is appealing to its friends and its audiences to aid its drive for \$15,000. This amount is its annual deficit, and will insure the production of its next three plays.

This deficit does not come from lack of audience support. Its first five plays (not including the current *Let Freedom Ring*) were seen by 523,000 persons, with a total of 528 performances, or an average run of more than 12 weeks apiece. Nor does it come from lack of sound economics in putting on its plays. The average cost of production, from the time a script is chosen until the curtain is raised on opening night, is \$6,000 per play; an amount, as the Evening Post commented, "that will cause most Broadway managers to swoon with envy." And the World-Telegram said, of the quality of these productions, "the major number of their shows left even the Broadway mercenaries envious."

The deficit arises from the fact that the Theatre Union's income is limited by a low price scale of from 30 cents to \$1.50 with more than half the seats for each performance priced at well under a dollar (30 to 75 cents, in fact). This low price scale is an essential part of its program. The kind of plays it does and the kind of audience it reaches demand it. Thus the weekly income, though it shows a modest profit over running costs, is usually not sufficient to pay back the original cost of production.

An intensive subscription drive has been started; a series of Sunday night benefit performances will begin shortly; and other plans are under way for the raising of the needed amount. But as yet contributions, large or

small, are our mainstay in raising money, outside of box-office receipts. This theatre's friends are asked to contribute.

THE THEATRE UNION.

The Relief Play Contest

What happens to the doctor, teacher, small business man or any one of the millions of professional and white collar workers uprooted from their traditional position in society by economic forces and placed side by side with other working people on a relief project? This is one of the numerous dramatic facets of the relief set-up that affects the lives of millions of people in America today.

Recognizing the rich material for good theatre inherent in the conditions under which the depression stricken American people have been existing these past six years, the City Projects Council and the New Theatre League launched a contest last month for plays dealing with the relief situation.

The contest offers \$75.00 in prizes: a \$50.00 first prize and a \$25.00 second prize and closes March 15th. Judges are Clifford Odets, Albert Bein, Virgil Geddes, Emjo Basshe, Harry Elion and Willis Morgan. Full details may be secured from last month's *NEW THEATRE*, or details and a bibliography of material may be secured upon request from the New Theatre League, P. O. Box 300, Grand Central Annex, N.Y.C.

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The Person in the Play

(Continued from page 16)

an address from the throne, and can undergo transformation from milk-white youth to robust old age without a hint of artifice. The front rows may also derive lingering comfort from the fact that royalty (in the person of Mr. Vincent Price's excellent studied Prince Albert) shaves daily and has its domestic combats.

When the drama, however, aspires to significance as a study of contemporary realities, and allows its meaning to evaporate or becomes a confusion of realities, the situation is more serious and more regrettable. The appearance of such plays is an inevitable reflection of the fluctuations of a period in which men's allegiances are shifting and uncertain. The effect upon dramaturgy, which is more than most people realize a form of logic, can only be disastrous. Transitional drama is often poignant in its cry of suffering and doubt, and appealing in its groping toward the light of day. Its shifting nuances can make a richly varied pattern, and the writing is generally superlative, for the transitional artist is not as a rule a callow youngster, and he is certain to be a highly sensitive personality. Unfortunately, the work as a whole is frequently unsure and confusing. The crystalline clarity and the un-failing balance of *Romeo and Juliet* is not even faintly approached by these artists, witness *Winterset* which begins in anger and ends in metaphysics. And in all cases the total effect, no matter how admirable the partial effects, is one of inconclusiveness.

The latest contribution to this category, Lynn Riggs' *Russet Mantle*, is also one of the most literate. This fine artist has always had a penchant for youth and poetry. He has remained true to the fountain of youth, guarding it with his sympathy and understanding. He has done more incisive work in *Cherokee Nights*, and he has caught the spirit of the soil more completely in *Green Grow the Lilacs*, but his latest play is perhaps the most ambitious. The gropings of youth extend beyond the narrow confines of his earlier and simpler study of adolescence, *Sump'n Like Wings*. In fact they extend right into the social order, for the girl is one of those aimless children of the rich who are seething with a sense of futility, and the boy belongs to the generation for which there seems to be no place in the economic life of the nation. For her there is one outlet, nymphomania. For him there is vagabondage and a hand-to-mouth existence. The lost man and the lost woman meet, and together they defy the pragmatic world

which tells them that they must not love. This makes a neat story, but we are led to expect more. In some mysterious fashion this triumph of love presages the saving of the world, and solves something very vital. We fail to see how. Prosaically, we must ask how the love of a boy and a girl will unravel the economic tangle, how they will live unless the family relents and subsidizes their marriage, how other young people in their condition will be saved by simply loving each other and hoping. Unfortunately their private love is no security against starvation, against the frustrations and humiliations of grubbing for a living, against the bitterness of rearing children in stunting poverty. Even this love of theirs may turn sour with disappointment, and may seem less glorious in a hall bedroom. The private solution of the two young people is no solution at all. Riggs has allowed himself to be deflected from his search for an answer to the fundamental question, "How shall these people live?" He has accepted a make-shift and illusory reply.

But Riggs does not fail altogether.

On the contrary, he has created a touching picture of the plight of the younger generation; not a complete picture, but a significant one. And he has contributed a penetrative portrait of middle-aged middle-class people. Horace Kincaid gave a life-time to his stocks and bonds. Came the crash, and where is he? Growing apples on a Santa Fe ranch! In middle-age he is saddled with a silly wife who never loved him, a load of worthless securities, and a collection of prejudices and confusions. Susanna Kincaid married safely after refusing to follow her reckless lover to Spain. She has never loved her husband, and at forty or fifty she is raising chickens in the Southwest because Santa Fe reminds her of Spain! *Russet Mantle* is good work by a writer who can do still better, but it is far from satisfactory. Images of a bewildered middle-aged couple, a foolish woman, and two well-realized youngsters remain in the memory, along with recollections of an extremely efficacious production by a first-rate cast under the direction of Alexander Dean. The total picture is inconclusive.

The case of *Mid-West*, the only other serious play on our list, is far more grave. Here there is not only an evasion and confusion of social realities, but a perversion of them rarely found on the stage

NEW THEATRE SCHOOL

announces its

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MARCH 9th—JUNE 20th

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NEW THEATRE SCHOOL, 55 West 45th Street, New York City

(Established by New Theatre League)

Director:

NADYA RAMONOV

Managing Director:

C. VICTOR

and never since 1919, so crassly, so try-
ingly.

It is impossible to figure out the au-
thor's purpose in *Mid-West*. If it was his
original intention to describe the effects
of the drought on the farmers of the Mid-
dle-West then he has been side-tracked into
confused sniping at the government's agri-
cultural policy and incomprehensibly vi-
cious misrepresentation of the farm strug-
gles of recent years, which have taken
place not between the small farmer and
his field hands, as in the Hagan play, but
between whole sectors of the farming popu-
lation and the men who control the sale
of their produce along with the mort-
gages on the land that they work.

Mr. Hagan's mistake lies in handling
a subject which he does not understand.
He arouses our expectations with his sub-
ject but gives us a fantastic picture of
a farm-strike, a fragmentary description
of a drought, and a pollyanna ending.
All we know at the end is what we sur-
mise at the beginning; that the farmer
is a hard-working, simple fellow, and
that he is having a difficult time.

Luke Zanhiser is a poor farmer. One
of his sons has married a city girl who
is unhappy on the farm and whose baby
sickens in the course of the drought.
The farmer's other son, a college gradu-
ate who finds no place in the world for
himself, calls for the destruction of
everything in sight in the name of "com-
munism," makes a general nuisance of
himself and finally in the pay of under-
ground "Party" organizers (from San
Francisco of all places!) foments a lu-
dicrously unreasonable strike among his
father's field hands. After much prepara-
tory justification of lynch action against
"agitators," he is strung up by vigilantes
along with his two equally fantastic ac-
complices. But the farmer and his wife
bear up wonderfully. Although Luke
Zanhiser cries out that they had no right
to take a human life, he has a kind word
for the vigilantes. In their position he
would have done virtually the same thing,
regretting only that they did not select
such gentler methods of persuasion as
tarring and feathering or riding on a
rail. And Providence is kind to the be-
reaved couple. A kindly country doctor
enables the older son to take his wife
and baby to the city, and a timely shower
ends the drought.

Exhortations to violence abound in
the play and their effectiveness was
brought home rather forcibly to this re-
viewer when he found his guest of the
evening, Herbert Kline of NEW THEATRE,
involved in a fist fight. It was begun by
an aroused gentleman in the row ahead
who resented Mr. Kline's disapproval of
the play's misrepresentations and overt

appeal for lynching. If this play's ful-
minations are not propaganda, what is?
Though none of the gentlemen who raised
the cry of "propaganda" against *Peace
On Earth* and even *Little Ol' Boy* seem
to have noticed it in *Mid-West*! A promi-
nent reviewer, noted for his fairminded-
ness, even found "everything in Midwest
. . . true and important."

This reviewer refuses to believe that
the author's distortion of realities was
intentionally malicious, because there are
contradictions in his attitude as when he
declares that Tooteboy "had a right to
think." The play merely proves that *dis-
tortion* is the next step after *confusion*.
One trusts that the author will return to
the genial art of *One Sunday Afternoon*,
since his qualifications for social drama
are extremely dubious.

It is only fair to add that the produc-
tion is guiltless of the play's befuddle-
ment. The Messrs. Schubert have chosen
two eminently fine actors in Jean Adair
and Curtis Cooksey, as well as a number
of other excellent performers, all of whom
should find their way some day into a
sounder play about the Mid-West.

The lighter theatre is mercifully more
relaxing. One merely notes that the Bella
and Samuel Spewack contribution to the
gayety of the nation, a knock-down farce
called *Boy Meets Girl*, takes leave of all
plausibility and so propels itself into a
leading position as a satire on Hollywood.
But it is only incidentally satire, being
both field-day and wish-fulfillment for
the sober clan of writers. For authors to
set Hollywood on its head is miracle and
"release" enough in anybody's language.
The play is one of the most successful
examples of American satire which de-
lights in extravagance and robustness.
The Paul Bunyan tradition of humor runs
riot in *Boy Meets Girl*.

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Backstage

NEW THEATRE is now in possession of information tending to prove again that William Randolph Hearst can't take it.

Following the publication of Joel Faith's devastating portrait of Louella Parsons in our August issue an order was issued to all the Hearst papers prohibiting any mention of NEW THEATRE, the New Theatre League and any of its affiliates, in whole or in part.

If the suppressive order were evidence of a new policy of news censorship on the part of a heretofore apparently decent and self-respecting publisher, we would be alarmed. We would regard the incident as a new threat to the freedom of the press. But when Mr. Hearst and his high-powered hirelings have already attacked and befouled everything that is decent in American culture who are we not to be barred from the Hearst publications? News of the prescriptive order reaches us just in time to keep us from feeling that we're losing our fighting capacity.

More serious is the Chicago city ordinance barring from licensed newsstands any daily newspapers save those published in Chicago. If Bill Thompson were still mayor we might believe this piece of insular legislation was designed to defend Chicago against incursions of pro-British propaganda which the celebrated Mr. Thompson felt was an outstanding danger. As it is, the ordinance seems to be merely an unwarranted attempt to tell Chicagoans what not to read, in all possibility stimulated by Mr. Hearst, whose papers have been losing circulation and advertising lineage as a result of the liberal boycott movement against them.

NEW THEATRE is concerned with the ordinance because it seems to be a typical example of Mr. Hearst's back door efforts to put over laws for the suppression of everything except Hearst. If such a law can be put into

effect against daily newspapers, there is the undoubted danger that it can also be directed against periodicals and if that danger should become more immediate, watch us fight.

* * * *

Although over 800 late comers were turned away there was serious overcrowding at NEW THEATRE's New Year's Eve Frolic. Much as we agree with guests who protested, we must point out that approximately 1,000 people came in from out of town, an unexpected response to an out-of-town mailing list. We could not turn these people away. Result: we've learned a lesson and will limit admission even more drastically at our next affair. We apologize also for Jimmy Durante's failure to appear. Although Jimmy begs your collective pardon, we know that won't make up for your disappointment. Since this is only the second time an advertised star has failed to appear on a NEW THEATRE program, we trust our readers will be tolerant of this matter.

* * * *

Since this column is being devoted to explanations, an important one is due our subscribers. Approximately one out of every twenty subscribers received their magazines late in January. This was unavoidable due to a change of publication office from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to New York City. We apologize to those subscribers who got their copies late, and ask them to notify us if this should occur again. Ordinarily, subscribers' copies arrive on the morning that the magazine appears on the newsstands.

* * * *

The full treatment accorded the resignation of Elmer Rice, news of which broke just as NEW THEATRE was going to press, forced us to hold the following material: A report on the National Theatre Conference, an article on Afingenev's new play by H. W. L. Dana, dance reviews by Marjorie Bauhouth, and a number of book reviews.

As we go to press, reports come through that the Experimental Theatre under Virgil Geddes, which is preparing a production of *Chalk Dust*, a play dealing with the educational set-up in the United States, has been refused rights of presentation over WNYC, municipal station. The program director reported that it was objectionable to the Board of Education.

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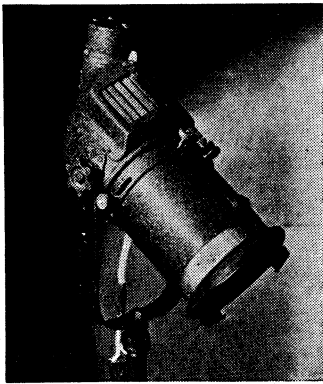
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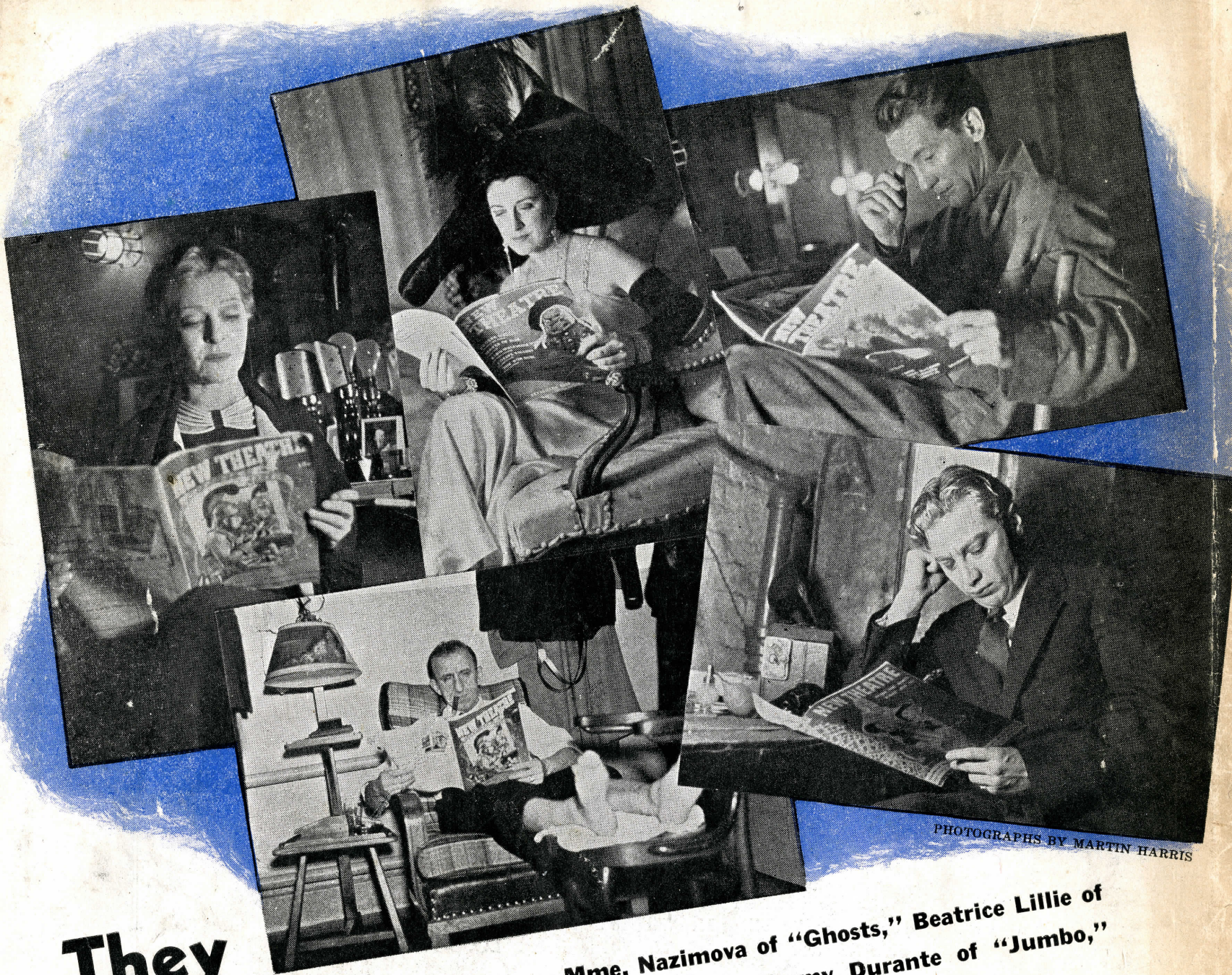
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