

NEW THEATRE

A CALL FOR A NATIONAL THEATRE BY MARK MARVIN



Augustus Peck

JULY 1936 15c

THEATRE FESTIVAL



A scene from Meyerhold's interpretation of "Woe to the Wise", by Griboyedov at the New Meyerhold State Theatre.

NO dates in the world of the stage gleam brighter than those of the theatre festival in Moscow and Leningrad September 1 to 10 this year. The Soviet theatre is known for its greatness to theatre lovers and people of the stage in every land. For the fourth successive year, the leaders of the Soviet theatre, opera, ballet and screen have arranged a program of the outstanding productions from their famous repertoires. Meyerhold, Stanislavsky, Elanskaya, Natalie Satz, Moskvina, Kachalov! Twelve history-making performances . . . discussions with directors, playwrights and artists . . . backstage observations! All-inclusive rates in the Soviet Union have been set at \$65 third class, \$95 tourist and \$165 first. These include hotels, meals, *theatre tickets*, sightseeing in Moscow and Leningrad and *transportation by special train between the two cities.*

SPECIAL GROUPS

A number of special study groups on the Soviet theatre are being organized under the leadership of outstanding authorities on the theatre such as Prof. H. W. L. Dana, Herbert Kline, editor of *New Theatre*, Harold Ehrensperger, of the Drama League. Frederick Redefers, Secretary of the Progressive Education Association, and M. Zamustin of Philadelphia are conducting tours of theatre-lovers to the festival. Intourist will give full information on these groups and send also its booklet N.T.7 giving the program and a description of the festival. [For details on Herbert Kline's "New Theatre Tour" see page 30.]

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A scene from Meyerhold's interpretation
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NEW THEATRE

JULY, 1936

Maxim Gorky

The death of Maxim Gorky at the height of his powers and influence is a tragic loss. From his earliest stories to his last creative and critical works, Gorky lived and wrote for one cause only: the liberation of mankind through the revolutionary struggle of the working class. Fortunately he lived to see and participate in the successful uprising of the Russian workers, from whose ranks he came, and the establishment of Socialism in his native land. And just before his death, like a prophecy of the new Socialist world he envisaged, came the great victory of the People's Front in France. Gorky's dramatic works (to be dealt with by H. W. L. Dana in our next issue) are forerunners of the theatre of social protest of today. Those of us in America who are in sympathy with Gorky's ideals must pledge ourselves to intensify our work on the occasion of his death.

First Round

The banning of *The Children's Hour* in Boston last fall has led to the first victory in the fight against censorship in that city. Backed by the Boston Civil Liberties Committee, Herman Shumlin, producer of Lillian Hellman's fine play, fought a legal battle against the ban which, although unsuccessful, attracted widespread public attention and resulted in a law enacted by the Massachusetts Legislature providing in effect that no play could be censored in Boston without giving at least one performance. Gone are the days, therefore, when plays such as *Strange Interlude*, *Green Pastures*, *Tobacco Road*, *Within the Gates* and *The Children's Hour* could be banned on the word of a "censor" sent to New York to decide whether a play was fit for Boston playgoers, or on a reading of the script. It should be remembered however that this is only the first step and that constant public education and pressure are needed to insure liberal decisions by the licensing committee. Meanwhile, our congratulations to Mr. Shumlin!

Summer Theatres

The summer theatres are growing up. Having operated professionally

and profitably for several seasons, a number of them are planning important classical and modern plays this summer, thereby attesting their belief that summer audiences do not consist exclusively of Tired Business Men in search of a bromide.

The theatre at Skowhegan, Maine, has announced *Beyond the Horizon*, *Anna Christie*, *Strange Interlude*, and *Both Your Houses*. June Walker will tour a section of the country circuit in *They Knew What They Wanted*, and Peggy Wood and Rollo Peters will do *Taming of the Shrew* in several spots. Westchester will be vouchsafed *Elizabeth the Queen* and *Liliom*, the latter with Burgess Meredith. The Langers' theatre at Westport, which has presented revivals successfully for several past seasons, will offer Congreve's *Love for Love* with Eva LeGallienne, as well as *Fannie's First Play*; *Candida* and *The Wild Duck* will be done at Pawling, and Jasper Deeter's Hedgerow Theatre at Rose Valley, Pa., will revive a series of Shavian comedies.

An interesting feature of the season will be the number of Shakespearean productions, some at festivals, others at regular summer theatres not usually given to such ambitious undertakings. The Rockridge Theatre at Carmel will present *Twelfth Night*; the Pasadena Playhouse plans a summer season of the Greco-Roman plays, seven productions in seven weeks: *Troilus and Cressida*, *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles* (all rarely presented works), *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Cymbeline*! In the same tradition of classic revivals will be the Coburns' program at Union College, which will include *Macbeth*, *The Rivals*, and Molière's *Imaginary Invalid*.

And finally the social drama has made a breach in the hitherto unbroken front of "light summer entertainment." At Nichols, Conn., the Group Theatre will revive *Awake and Sing!*, *Paradise Lost*, *Waiting for Lefty* and *Success Story*; the Brattleboro Theatre will give Irwin Shaw's *Bury the Dead* at Brattleboro, Vt., in August; the Barter Theatre at Abingdon, Va., will feature several folk plays of the locale, and in Seattle the local Federal Theatre Project and the Seattle Repertory Playhouse are joining forces to present a unique season of

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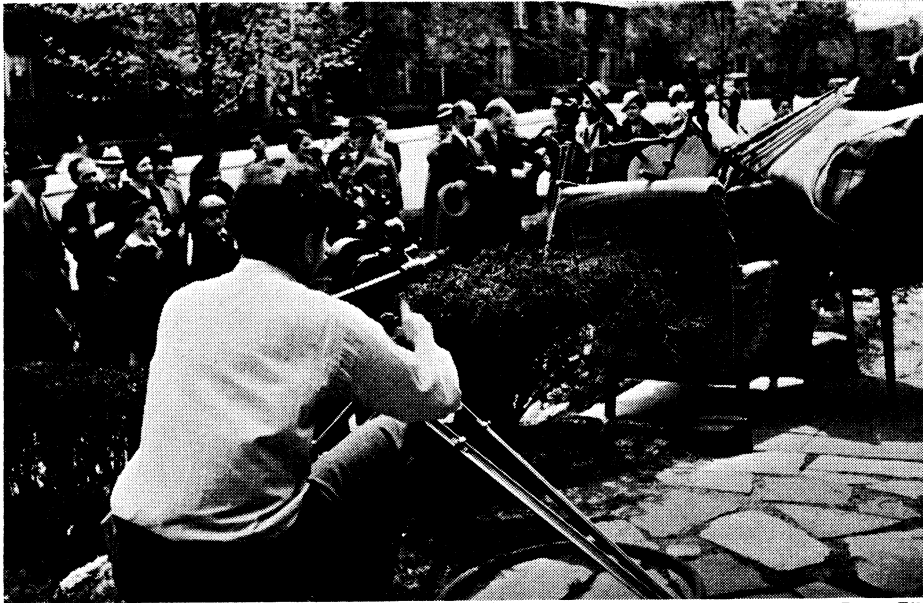
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PRODUCTION STILL FROM NYKINO'S FORTHCOMING LABOR FILM.

Peter Ellis

three Negro plays: *Stevedore*, Andre Obey's *Noah* (done for the first time with an all-Negro cast), and a "swing" revue called *Swing, Gates, Swing!*

The Dramatists' Sign

The dramatists' fight to win further protection against managerial and motion picture interests has been partially successful. After a three months' deadlock a new Minimum Basic Agreement, to replace the one which expired in February, has been ratified by the Dramatists' Guild on the one hand, and the League of New York Theatres, acting for a large number of producers, on the other. Because it contains certain definite gains for the playwrights, the motion picture companies who had a large, albeit concealed, say-so in the framing of the agreement, are now declaring that they will not back plays produced under it, since it does not sufficiently safeguard their interests. This plaint may be attributed to their desire to achieve still further concessions, a possibility which is unfortunately amply provided for in the agreement itself.

Although the "strike" showed beyond any question the unity of the dramatists themselves, the Guild's contract committee, pledged to make no concessions, nevertheless accepted a settlement containing compromises on vital issues on which the Guild membership had specifically voted *not* to compromise, and then took it back to the Guild, not as a possible settlement to be discussed on its merits, but as an agreement which had to be ratified. The leaders presented the settlement in an extremely defeatist light, as the best that could be achieved; it was even hinted that it was dangerous to hold out longer, and that the membership could not be counted on to hold together

for a further struggle. This last threat can only be explained by fear of a split such as the one which recently took place in the Screen Writers' Guild, a fear for which there was no foundation.

Although the settlement contains certain definite gains for the dramatists, its merits are to some extent vitiated by concessions to the managers. The latter are permitted to produce one English play and any number of continental plays a year by authors not in the Dramatists' Guild; in the case of a future strike this provides the managers with possible scab material. Although the division of motion picture sales money is now 60% to the playwright and 40% to the manager, as compared with the former 50-50 division, only the small proportion of the Guild membership who sell their plays to Hollywood profit by this gain. In return for it, the 50-50 division of royalties from stock and non-professional performances, which affects a very large number of playwrights, has been retained, a compromise which sacrifices the interests of the majority to a prosperous minority, and is an essentially undemocratic concession.

Above all the new agreement seriously invalidates the author's control over his material. His sole ownership of material is stated in the contract itself, but actually it is abrogated by a set of extra-contractual instructions governing motion picture sales, which are designed to implement the contract. These instructions are bad enough as they now stand (they make for even less competitive bidding on a fair, open market, and for more price fixing, than ever). In addition, however, because they are *outside* the contract, they have been made subject to further change by a joint committee of

five managers and five dramatists, thus opening the door for the managers, and behind them the motion picture companies, to put further pressure on the playwrights, and extort even greater concessions from them.

The developments in Hollywood and New York during the past months have demonstrated that all writers are engaged in a fight with trustified industry which is threatening freedom of expression, the right of copyright and control over material, and the economic security of all American writers. It will take a unified and democratically led Authors' League to win this fight. Fortunately the elements of both these essentials are present. Already both the dramatists and screenwriters have shown splendid solidarity in the face of threats and pressure which these professional workers have never before faced. Sidney Howard, president of the Dramatists' Guild, has the complete confidence of all members. Many believe that he was seriously outmanoeuvred in the negotiations with the managers, but it is generally agreed that whatever mistakes were made were due chiefly to lack of close contact between Mr. Howard and the council, and the membership; this could have been remedied by more frequent meetings. Such meetings as were held (three, during the three months of the strike) were conducted with scrupulous regard for fair hearing and discussion, and indicated the enthusiastic willingness of the members to support every move made by the leadership. Mr. Howard showed his own desire for democratic procedure by proposing that the Guild discard its previous custom of having committees appointed by the president, and that the important committees provided for under the new contract be elected by the members.

What is now needed is further education of the entire Authors' League, the breaking down of craft distinctions between dramatists and their fellow writers, and the widest participation of the entire membership in all policies and decisions.

So It Won't Happen Here

"The Hollywood League Against Nazism" has been formed to defend American democratic rights against Nazi influences. Congratulations are due to the organizing group which includes Donald Ogden Stewart, chairman, Dorothy Parker, Alan Campbell, Gloria Stuart, Edwin Justus Mayer, Herbert Biberman, Frederic March, Florence Eldridge, Viola Brothers Shore, Gale Sondergaard, Moss Hart, Marion Spitzer, Bess Meredyth, Mrs. Lynn Root, Erin O'Brien Moore and Charles Brackett.



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Peter Ellis

Case of the Group Theatre

BY NORMAN STEVENS

Undoubtedly the Group Theatre is the most important forerunner of the new theatre in America. It is today the foremost professional, permanent company in America, the most advanced technically, the most progressive in its aims and social orientation. In its plays and production methods, it has accomplished much toward the revitalizing of our backward American theatre art. Because of what it has accomplished in five years of struggle, the Group occupies a unique position of influence and respect.

But our very admiration and realization of the Group's values must cause us also to regard it constantly with a critical anxiety which must strive to penetrate its problems, coldly and clearly, yet with understanding.

In order to understand the problems of the Group we must consider realistically what the Group is: in the first place, it is an association of actors and directors which is to some extent cooperatively controlled, but the degree of democratic control exercised by the actors has never been sharply defined. It is primarily a project definitely guided by three directors whose relationship to the actors has similarly not been sharply defined. And finally, it is a producing company which depends for financing on three sources: (a) the direct investment of motion picture capital; (b) the business support of commercial theatrical firms, such as Harmon and Ullman, D. A. Doran, or the Shuberts; (c) independent financing from other sources.

Organizationally, the Group has made tremendous progress since the day in 1931 when Harold Clurman told the assembled Group actors that the Group consisted of the three directors only. That statement seems to us an enormity; it was not so then. The three directors, Harold Clurman (chairman), Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford, had all been connected for some years in different capacities with the Theatre Guild. They had already proved themselves as able and sincere artists with the courage, vision and capacity to form a company of their own and carry it through to an artistic success in its first New York production. The Group, apart from the directors who are also the corporation, at that time still remained to be created out of its own blood and sweat. A year and a half later, an actors' committee was formed to represent the acting company. This committee had consultative and advisory powers only; no real will to organization or self-

government had been stimulated among the members. Consequently, the actors' committee languished for another eighteen months, when the increasing organizational clarity of part of the membership brought the committee into active functioning, widened its powers and insisted upon a greater company democracy and responsibility in the choice of policies and the conduct of affairs. The actors' growing social consciousness found its organizational expression in trade-union activities in Equity and its creative expression in the writing and performing of *Dimitroff*, *Tide Rises* and *Waiting For Lefty*, one-act plays which received thrilling receptions from the labor audiences for whose benefit they were first performed.

Yet this progress has been full of weakness and backsliding and the exact form and powers of its organization seem not to have been clarified and fully accepted either by the directors or the entire membership. There is still a split between the business firm, known as the Group Theatre, Incorporated, which includes no member of the acting company, and the Group Theatre. These two by now are indissoluble; one cannot live without the other and both know it. But on many recent issues, it has been distressingly evident that there is an as yet unsolved contradiction between the "good-business" policy adopted by the organization and the æsthetic and social ideals of which the acting company, along with the directors, is the organic expression. For example, the Group membership held meetings at which it was decided to give full support to the Dramatists' Guild in their recent controversy with theatrical managers and motion picture producers. This was a wise and logical decision, because it was evident that the fight of the playwrights related not only to their own interests but was a stand for the protection of all creative workers in the theatre. However, the Group directors ignored the vote of the membership, and delayed signing until the amended version of the contract was accepted by the League of New York Theatres, and the Group could sign safely along with the "commercial" managers. This actually constituted tacit capitulation to motion picture interests in their attempt to break trade unionism among writers. Surely the Group must realize that if the reactionary elements of motion picture capital succeed in dominating Broadway production, such domination will shortly mean dictation and

subjection from which the Group will not be able to claim exemption?

The lack of clarity which led the Group directors to misunderstand the actual forces involved in the Dramatists' Guild strike and their own relationship to these forces may also be held responsible for statements which appeared this season over the signature of Cheryl Crawford and Harold Clurman.

In the New York Herald-Tribune, February 16th, appeared a reprint of a letter written by Clurman to the play agents: "Due to the success of *Waiting for Lefty* and the other Odets' plays, the impression has arisen that the Group Theatre is primarily interested in the production of so-called 'propaganda' plays. This is false. The Group is essentially interested in plays that make for exciting and intelligent theatre. . . . To make this clear, I might say that any of the following plays would have been considered by us as possible Group material: *Journey's End*, *First Lady*, *Russet Mantle*, *Winterset*, *Petrified Forest*, *Road to Rome*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Children's Hour*, *The Jest* and *Dinner at Eight*. . . . In short, we would like to receive a greater variety of plays than have been submitted to us for the past year."

In the New York Post, April 17th, John Mason Brown printed a letter in which Cheryl Crawford declared: "We have produced plays because we felt that what they had to say was of interest and value, not necessarily because we agreed completely with the playwright's individual philosophy or his individual method of expression. When the Theatre Guild presents *They Shall Not Die*, it is not taken to mean that the members of their board of directors have all become radicals any more than a production of *Days Without End* signifies that they all propose to embrace the Catholic faith. . . . We believe too, in allowing collaborators, playwrights as well as others, the privileges of their own idiosyncracies, prejudices and partisanship; as a theatre, however, we cannot be held responsible for all of them and a quarrel with Mr. Dreiser or Mr. Piscator, for example, cannot legitimately be made into a quarrel with the Group."

When the three directors left the Theatre Guild to form the Group, one of their differences with the older organization was not only the heterogeneous techniques employed but also the heterogeneous viewpoint and lack of line. The Guild is a commercial-æsthetic producing unit.

(Continued on page 26)

Federal Theatre Plays

BY JOHN W. GASSNER

Last month's farewell to the season appears to have been premature. The Federal Theatre's determination to remain at the old stand, come what may in the nature of torrid weather and lukewarm receptions, requires a postscript. In no sense were the plays masterpieces or the productions signal achievements, but the major pieces were still superior to a great deal that is launched on Broadway in the name of art and private enterprise. And probably at less than half the cost. The provocativeness of the dramas justified their inclusion on a non-commercial program.

The most finished contribution has been the Experimental Theatre's *Battle Hymn*, by Michael Blankfort and Michael Gold, directed with spirit by Vincent Sherman, and played to the hilt by a large cast. The play implies that the John Brown days, when a great issue divided the nation and insisted upon resolution, are with us again. Brown should no longer be considered the province of the workaday playwrights who merely rifle the biographical dictionaries in an effort to conceal their want of inventiveness. John Brown's story is seen as only one aspect of the larger and still immediate problem of property *versus* man. The drama is exciting, for there is a heroic tradition in American life which the authors have plumbed and called attention to. The passion for justice and the courage to fight for it illuminates the best pages of our history—a fact too often overlooked by debunkers, and too glibly dissipated in generalities by politicians and chauvinists. When Brown, who has detested violence, finds himself with a gun in his hand defending a slave, when his sons follow him even while their hearts cry out for peace, when his wife lets them go without betraying her deep hurt and concern, when his men, after realizing the hopelessness of their venture, nevertheless take up their guns silently and march to Harpers Ferry, the stage rings with a spirit too rarely audible in our theatre. Brown's character and his personal tragedy are only half-realized, both in the text and in Grover Burgess' rugged but rather one-dimensional performance. Still a consistent and suggestive characterization such as the play achieves cannot be prized too highly.

The American Historical Theatre's *Ballad of Davy Crockett* by H. R. Hays also stresses the value of resuscitating the significant personalities of our past. A

much lesser figure than Brown, Davy Crockett nonetheless represents the pioneer element that was responsible for the successive waves of democratic protest without which the encroachments of finance and industrialism would have remained unchallenged. It was Crockett's tragedy that the work of opening up the West resulted in increasing riches for the speculators and decreasing liberty and land for himself and his fellow-pioneers. After dallying with the theme in a poorly organized first act, the author moves rapidly to a dramatization of the defeat of pioneer America. When the free land was gobbled up by the speculators something noble and poetic was lost from American life. A series of colorful scenes impresses this loss upon us, while an exciting conflict between Crockett and the House-broken President Andrew Jackson presents the issues incisively. If the play drags frequently, dissipates its effects and is deficient in unity, it nevertheless represents a genuine attempt to weld folk-poetry and historical criticism. If the production, directed by John Lyman, is uneven and fails to overcome the inadequacies of the text, the picture is still colorful and Hiram Hoover's Crockett is appealing.

Both *Battle Hymn* and *The Ballad of Davy Crockett* stem from a reconsideration of our history and open avenues of biographical drama which were already evident in last year's *Valley Forge* and *Jayhawker*. The possibilities in the field are far from exhausted and may be recommended to playwrights—with the caveat that sentiment is not enough and that a mere chronicle is no substitute for a play.

It is less easy to praise W. H. Auden's *Dance of Death*. Turning first to the play, one is inclined to tire of its endless statement that the middle-class is dying, of its doggerel, its parodies, and its inconclusiveness. There is a certain strident dogmatism in tone which tends to alienate rather than to convince. The production exaggerates these inadequacies by generally pedestrian choreography and costuming. It would have been undoubtedly wiser to confine the play to its proper dimensions as a skit over which there is no necessity of lingering too long or too lovingly. Still Auden's work is important, not merely in some of its better sallies against decadent and fascist tendencies, as in the *Demagogue Dance* and *The*

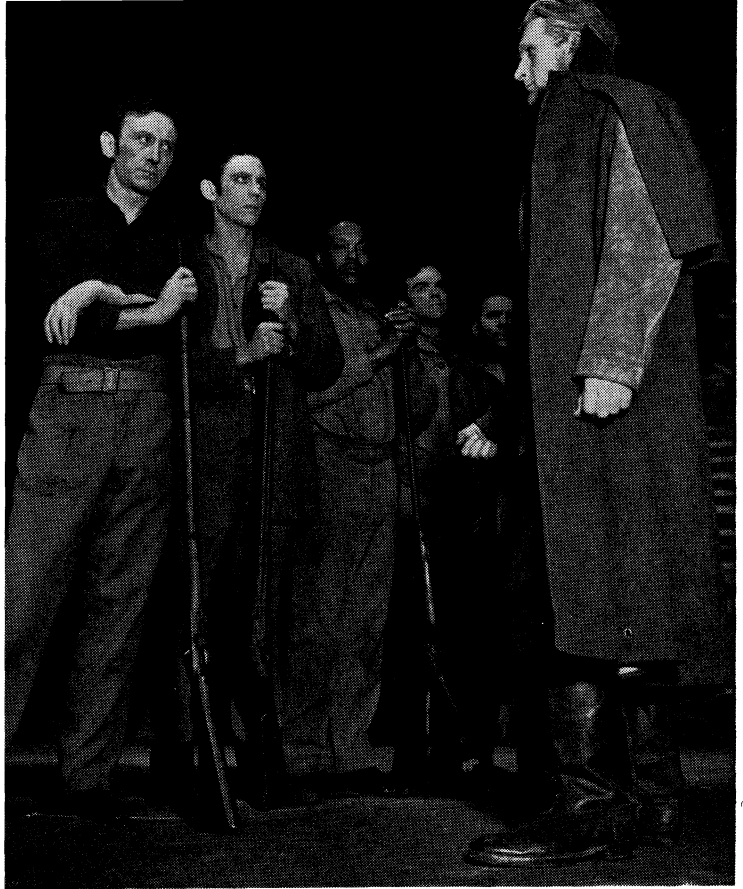
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• Page six, reading up: The Quintuplets' Scene in *Follow the Parade*, Los Angeles Federal Theatre Project; Allan Nourse in *Class of '29*; Children watching a WPA Marionette show. Below: Virgil Geddes, Hallie Flanagan and Harry Hopkins at *Battle Hymn*. Right: John Brown (played by Grover Burgess) lines up his men to march on Harpers Ferry in the Experimental Theatre's *Battle Hymn*.



Steiner & Harris

A Call for a National Theatre

BY MARK MARVIN

Confusion is rife among the twelve thousand Federal Theatre workers. Rumors follow one upon the other in bewildering succession: the Projects will soon be closed completely down; they will be turned over to State control and then abandoned; fifty percent of the present personnel will be released on June 30th; Roosevelt will discontinue the Projects immediately after the election; etc., etc. Mere pawns on a political chess board, these thousands of theatre workers are being shuffled around heedless of their human and artistic needs in a desperate election gamble.

One fact is emerging above the melee. Unwittingly, an *emergency relief* measure has made dramatically apparent the need and usefulness for a permanent national government-subsidized theatre *not* a part of the relief system. Perhaps Mrs. Hallie Flanagan anticipated this eventuality when she pointed out many months ago that "while the immediate aim of the program is to put back to work those theatre workers in all branches of the profession who have been on the relief rolls, one of the more far reaching purposes is to create theatre enterprises of lasting value."

Recognizing that none of the actors, directors, scenic designers, playwrights, stage hands, research workers, ushers, administrators, etc., now employed on

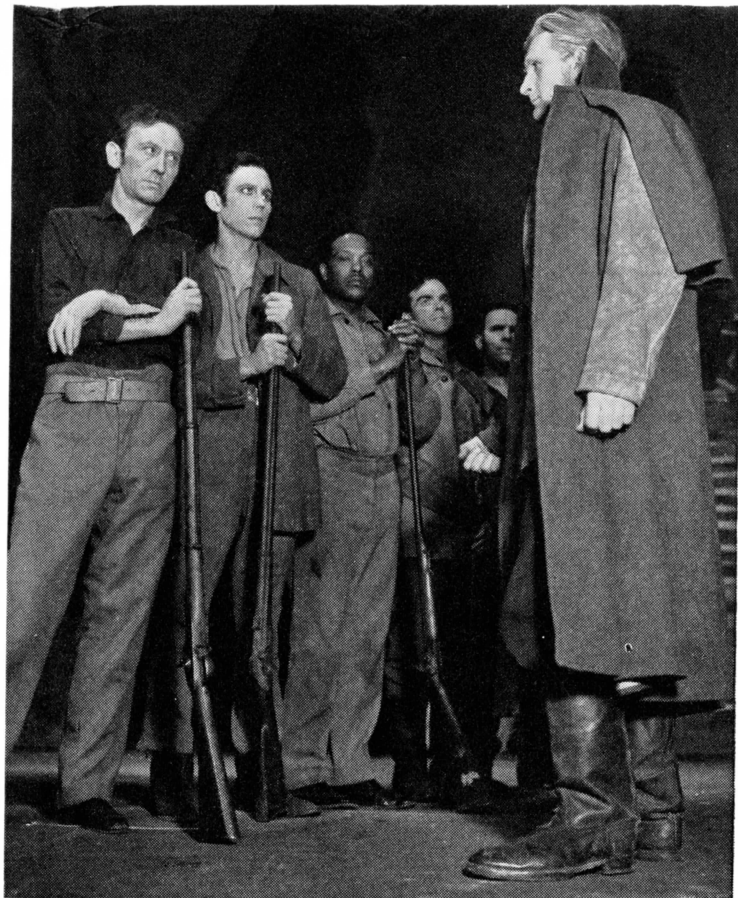
the projects, know from one day to the next whether or not a change in the political or relief situation will bring them a pink release slip, it is really a remarkable tribute to their talents and morale that they have already presented "theatre enterprises of lasting value." Note that *Chalk Dust*, *Triple-A Plowed Under*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, the Negro Theatre's *Macbeth*, *Battle Hymn*, *Class of '29* and *Censored*, to name only a few, are but *first productions* created by a new organization suffering necessarily from initial confusion and governmental red tape. As such they only begin to indicate the great possibilities of a subsidized theatre. What future potentialities exist for this subsidized theatre are now stored in the minds and bodies of talented artists and technicians who would be denied further expression if the Projects were closed down.

Something new and something important has been created. It is not only that thousands of unemployed theatre people are being rehabilitated and put back to work. More than that, a new audience has been created for American drama, an audience hitherto excluded from the theatre. And it is this audience which is at the basis of the demand for a government-subsidized national theatre. Mrs. Flanagan recently stated: "In every city there are thousands of men and women

who haven't been able to go to the theatre because of the expense. This is an audience we want. If you do not know this is a *new* theatre audience, read the Stage. Here is an advertisement from one of its issues: "The first rows are the people—they are the people with the jewels, the furs, the town cars, the smart accessories, all the appurtenances of fine living about which the smart world of the theatre revolves."

That the Projects, playing at 25¢ to 55¢ to millions of American people in New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, Boston and many smaller communities, would shape the American drama in a different direction from "the people with the jewels, the furs, the town cars," must be self-evident. The Theatre Project's productions are now reaching some 500,000 spectators in thirty-one states each week. The commercial theatre could not serve this new audience if it would. Nor can the little theatres, established on such a precarious financial base as most of them now are. The show-business men are out for profits—long profits and quick profits—and such cannot be made on the 25¢ to 55¢ trade. In addition, it is impossible to present scenically and technically competent shows at this price level without state subsidy. The establishment of the

• Page six, reading up: The Quintuplets' Scene in *Follow the Parade*, Los Angeles Federal Theatre Project; Allan Nourse in *Class of '29*; Children watching a WPA Marionette show. Below: Virgil Geddes, Hallie Flanagan and Harry Hopkins at *Battle Hymn*. Right: John Brown (played by Grover Burgess) lines up his men to march on Harpers Ferry in the Experimental Theatre's *Battle Hymn*.



Federal Drama Project as a permanent government-subsidized theatre would not injure the commercial theatre. This is already known on Broadway; the two serve different audiences; there is no question of competition.

The work of the Federal Drama Project has been handicapped by its transitory conception. The original appropriation was intended to carry the Art Projects from November 1935 until June 30, 1936. The dreaded June 30 approaches without any tangible and authoritative statement as to the future of the Projects being issued. The result is the most intolerable fear and morale-destroying worry. No sincere worker can labor under such a guillotine of fear and give his best. The sharp knife of the impending lay-off is whetted by fear of not finding employment. (A. F. of L. figures show an unemployment total of 12,262,000 in January 1936).

The government can do one of two things: throw these people (and other thousands of theatre workers currently unemployed) back into the ignominy and misery of home relief, or continue and give security to a theatre movement that has already proven of great cultural and artistic nourishment to the nation. The government's silence is alarming. Actors and directors, supervisors and rank-and-file, sympathetic artists and theatregoers must join together now to compel the government to face squarely not only the issue of continuing the Project as now constituted but also the whole conception of a subsidized non-relief national theatre. It is not possible in this brief article to present or examine concrete plans for the conversion of the Project into a national theatre system. An authoritative committee financed by government appropriation should be demanded of Congress at once to perform this complex and specialized task. But one important fact must be proclaimed in every dressing room and at every stage door in the land: the most progressive, the most creative and the most numerous factors in the American theatre today, including the powerful theatrical trade-unions, are actively sympathetic to the concept of a properly-established state-subsidized theatre. A just plan (worked out on a strict trade-union basis of course) which could operate free from censorship and political pulling-of-strings, and which would be artistically autonomous would meet with mass support not only from interested theatre workers but also from the hundreds of thousands of voters now enrolled in the enthusiastic audiences of the Federal Drama Project.

The general prospects are attractive and

practicable. A national government-subsidized theatre for the people of America! A theatre that extends far beyond the narrow confines of Broadway. A theatre divorced from the waste the gamble, the sordidness, the low cultural and artistic values that vitiate the commercial stage. A theatre which would present not only a rich repertoire of plays but which would also inspire a regeneration of the arts of the dance, of vaudeville, of puppetry, of the circus, of music and poetry in the theatre. And, finally, a theatre which would stimulate and support a native drama based on the turbulent life and complex history of the American people, a theatre which would contribute to the delineation and development of our complex national (and regional) character and interests. We have the prospect today, through hard work and mass-co-operation, of answering these questions imperative to the future of our American theatre.

The idea of a national theatre is not foreign to the history of our theatre nor to the best of American ideals. It dates from the crude beginnings of our drama, from the days when "foreign tyrants" and native Tories were lashed with the whips of dramatic satire and scorn. In 1833, William Dunlap, painter, playwright, theatre manager, actor, critic, and first historian of the American stage, wrote out of the bitter plenitude of his commercial theatre experience:

"One great theatre in each great city of the Union, supported and guided by the State, would remedy every evil attendant on our present playhouse system. We should then have no managers seeking *only* to fill the treasury or pay hungry creditors—no stars rendering all attraction but that of novelty unprofitable. A theatre, so supported and conducted, must exhibit plays not less attractive for the purpose of mere amusement, and not less popular, but, like the novels of Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper, incomparably more fascinating, as well as instructive, than much of the trash of the stage or the circulating library of former days. . . ."

The ideal of a democratic national theatre, first expressed by this pioneer in American art and theatre, reverberates throughout our cultural history, voiced always by the finest artists and thinkers. In 1897, the question of a national theatre was even proposed in a bill presented to Congress, and this bill became a subject for wide discussion throughout a nation in the hands of the "theatrical trusts" which were exploiting the evils of the "star" system that Dunlap had so earnestly condemned. Those who today attack the conception of a state-subsidized

theatre as "un-American" or as "socialistic" disregard the facts of our vigorous democratic theatrical heritage. Not only this, but the fact is that 1936 finds America so greatly changed from the pre-depression era, that most adults find it difficult to appreciate the momentous social and political transformations taking place. These changes, which cannot be halted by imprecation, or by legal reaction as in the case of recent Supreme Court decisions, are permeating our entire social life and culture. Naturally the theatre—the most social of all the arts—has been deeply affected. Its methods of production and distribution, of employment and management, belong to the "horse and buggy" era for they are obsolete, anarchic and socially wasteful. A collective art which gains vigor and stature from identification with the life of a people must no longer be denied the people for lack of state aid. Dunlap wrote, "What engine is more powerful than the theatre? No arts can be made more effectual for the promotion of good than the dramatic. . . . Make the theatre an object of government patronage; take the mighty engine into the hands of the people as represented by their delegates."

The social and economic relationships of a society are always reflected in its theatre. The Greek theatre, for example, generally accepted the ideas and practice of slavery; the late feudal theatre under the auspices of the Church accepted the practice of serfdom; and the contemporary American theatre, for example, accepts the profit system which the Soviet theatre, on the other hand, rejects. Simultaneously too, in all periods of history we find concomitant to the drama which accepts the social system of the period a vigorous drama of criticism of old, out-worn, and officially accepted ideas. Often this criticism—which is identified with plays which have survived their own period the longest—is introduced into the very theatres which are officially supposed to be the organs only of traditionally-approved ideas! Social progress as well as audience appeal is insured by such means alone. Where this is impossible, where the dramatist cannot express the new ideas which well up from changing social relations, there the drama dies, and the state theatres become museums dedicated to the past and not a living present. Had it been successfully possible to dam the current of new ideas in the drama of the past the works of Euripides, Moliere, Ibsen, Shaw, and Hauptman, for example, would have been denied us. I trust the gentlemen of the Hearst Press will never concede the point, but one cannot over-emphasize the fact that a latitude of free-



NEGRO PERFORMERS—MAY FESTIVAL, CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK



"WE LIVE AND LAUGH," YIDDISH WPA THEATRE

dom is essential to artistic expression in a living theatre! Unmeasureable is the deluge of criticism directed at the Federal Theatre Project for daring to present plays that deal as vigorously with contemporary reality as *Triple-A Plowed Under* and *Class of '29*. Yet, as the history of the drama proves time and time again, what else will a vital theatre principally deal with save current reality? Lee Simonson in his *The Stage is Set* quotes Euripides:

*"I put things on the stage that come from daily life and business
Where men could catch me if I tripped;
could listen without dizziness
To things they knew, and judge my art."*

That governments are responsible for providing their citizenry with public schooling was once an heretical and revolutionary doctrine. But just such doctrines were entertained by the founders of this country and today none questions their truth. (The fact that public schools are supported by municipal funds does not imply that a national theatre should so be financed or controlled; the inner organization and problems of a national theatre, i.e., interchange of actors, touring of good shows, concentration of theatre talent in the East, etc., require that it be established and maintained by Federal funds.) Today the proponents of a national subsidized theatre must debate with and contend against arguments similar to those voiced by now-discredited interests which were formerly opposed to public schooling. History itself has long disproved the "logic" of such arguments. The educational role of the theatre has been recognized since the days of classic Greek drama. A. E. Haigh writes in *The Attic Theatre* that "the leading tragic poets especially exercised a most pro-

found influence on the national mind and character. They were the teachers of the people." He further states, "the management of the dramatic performances was in the hands of the state. . . . To provide for the amusement and instruction of the people was, according to the Greeks, one of the regular duties of a government; and they would have thought it unwise to abandon to private venturers an institution which possessed the educational value and wide popularity of the drama." And later Diderot, whose works did much to inspire the American revolutionaries of 1776, state the conscious, explicit role of the theatre as a factor in progressive education. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* states that Diderot "had . . . consciously sought to proclaim the theatre as an agency of social reform . . . the theatre was (according to Diderot) to become a real and realistic school of the principles of society and the conduct of life and to essay the direct reformation of mankind."

That Diderot's words were taken literally in America is indicated by Montrose J. Moses' chapter of "The Dramatist of the Revolutionary Era" in his authoritative book, *The American Dramatist*. Describing the contents of plays of the period, Mr. Moses says:

"The Revolutionary writers—Whig and Tory—were special pleaders. Into the mouths of their characters they put matters of contemporary interest . . . there was an attempt at realistic treatment, there was an effort made to picture all sorts and conditions of people, there was a generous use of current events, there was a portraiture of American character, lowly and better conditioned. The very fact that the Revolutionary plays did not attempt to be crudely universal, but specifically partisan, makes them of inestim-

able value as human documents."

As a result of decades of agitation and insistent popular demand, parks, playgrounds, and community centers, staffed and maintained by taxation and under the administration of technically-qualified experts are now acknowledged to be a municipal or state obligation to their citizenry. This type of public education and recreation supplements the earlier recognition of the value of publicly maintained libraries, art galleries, and museums for the use of the people. Only reactionaries such as those who once opposed public schooling will deny the fact that additional free educational advantages and recreational opportunities are needed. Mrs. Hallie Flanagan has stated that a Treasury official claims it costs the government more money to have a citizen blown to pieces in the trenches than it does to provide the services of one theatre artist for nine months under the present Federal Drama Project wage scales. Certainly while Congress votes billions of dollars for wars, both past and present, while huge corporations such as the shipping interests come to Congress for lavish subsidies, the American people have the right (and the obligation) to demand adequate funds for public drama education and recreation. And why, ask thousands of theatre workers and theatre goers who have become Federal Theatre enthusiasts overnight, why should there not be an extensive national theatre, which (unlike the public schools and libraries which must depend on municipal and state support) would be financed by the Federal government for the entire nation? Though the problem of national control rather than state control cannot be presented in this brief article it is imperative that the American

(Continued on page 28)



NEGRO PERFORMERS—MAY FESTIVAL, CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK



"WE LIVE AND LAUGH," YIDDISH WPA THEATRE



The Memphis Press

LYNCHING PARTY ON WAY TO ARK. TO PASS THRU MEMPHIS

Mob Holds Negro Invitations Issue For Lynch Part

...of Sheriff Robert...
...of Sheriff Robert...
...of Sheriff Robert...

MOB MEMBER LAUGHS AT PROBE

Officers Won't Act, He Says, Declaring Negro Positively Identified

Gov. Whitfield won't have a hot...
...of Sheriff Robert...
...of Sheriff Robert...

Florida Governor Orin...
...of Sheriff Robert...
...of Sheriff Robert...

BLACK LEGION SAYS 6,000,000 ARE MEMBERS

Invites White Folks to Lynching

Florida Officers Able to Prevent Burning

BLACK LEGION KILLER NAMES DOZEN IN PLOT

can Says Former Mayor Gave Orders to Murder

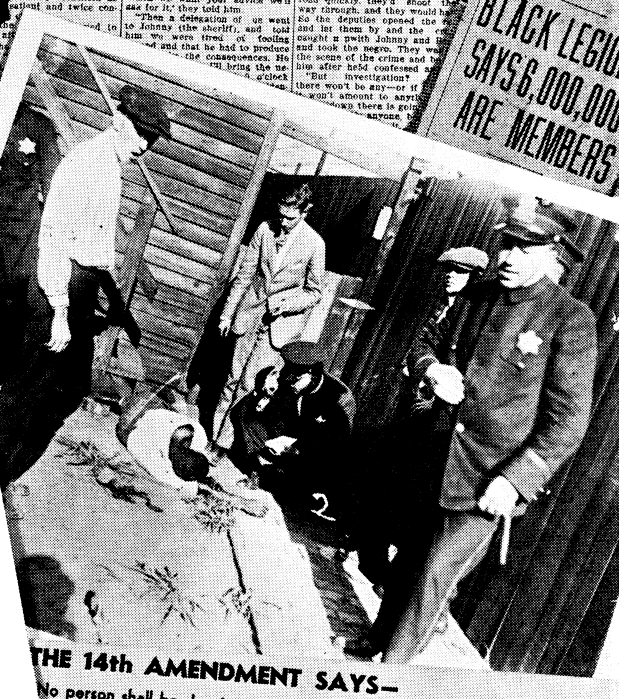
NEW YORK TELEGRAM

...of Sheriff Robert...
...of Sheriff Robert...

FURY: All of America Knew of Lynching in Advance

A lynching occurs in the United States on an average of every three days. Over 5,000 men and women, most of them Negroes, have been lynched in this country since 1882. There have been very few convictions because it is always in the "best interests of the community," as is shown in *Fury*, to cover up such crimes. Ku Klux Klansmen, Vigilantes, leaderless mobs and more recently, Black Legionnaires, have time and again taken the law into their own hands, brutally murdering anyone they wished to put out of the way. Twenty per cent of the victims are accused of sex crimes. Many are labor cases: witness the Tampa killings of the organizers Shoemaker and Taylor, and the Black Legion murders of Michigan trade unionists. The lynching fever is spreading, and something must be done to stop such hysterical outbreaks as that so unforgettably depicted in *Fury*. Because State and Municipal Governments are often a party to the covering up of lynching perpetrators, hope of any effective anti-lynching action lies in the Federal Government. But Congressional legislation has been delayed by the bustling of Senators, including Borah, against the Wagner-Costigan anti-lynching bill. Action has therefore been postponed until the next session of Congress. It must be passed, for lynching is nothing less than a national danger and a national disgrace. We call upon our readers to demand of their Congressional representatives that they support the bill.

—THE EDITORS.



THE 14th AMENDMENT SAYS—

No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law.

1862—5,087 men and women, white and Negro, have been lynched by mobs in America.

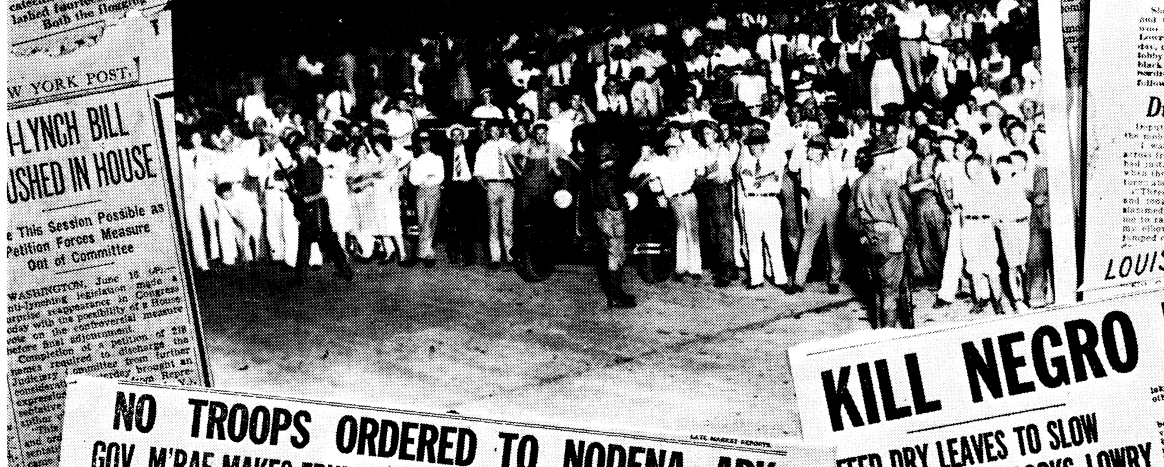
Lynchers have been punished in less than 1/10 of 1% of these cases.

Kansas Mob Flogs Woman and Pastor in Cotton Strike as They Hunt Missing Negro Sharecropper Believed Slain

CERTAIN States Have Shown That They Cannot and Will Not Prevent Lynchings or Punish Lynchers.

Yet Borah, Posing as a Great Liberal, Filibustered and Helped Defeat a Federal Law Against Lynching, Saying that the Government is Powerless Because Such Laws are "Unconstitutional." He Further Said that if Elected President and an Anti-Lynching Bill Were Passed, "I Would Unhesitatingly Veto It."

CROWD AWAITS LYNCHING



MAY LYNCH 3 TO 6 NEGROES THIS EVENING

DEPUTIES' STORY LOWRY NEARS TREE ON WHICH OF HOW NEGRO IS IT IS PLANNED TO HANG HIM; TAKEN FROM THEM TAKEN THRU MEMPHIS TODAY

NO TROOPS ORDERED TO NODENA, ARK.

GOV. M'RAE MAKES FRUITLESS EFFORT TO REACH SHERIFF AS MOB PLANS FOR LYNCHING BEE

Mob Takes Slayer Of Two From Train At Sardis; Carry Him 100 Miles By Auto.

RUMORED OTHERS WILL DIE

KILL NEGRO BY INCHES

FEED DRY LEAVES TO SLOW FIRE WHICH COOKS LOWRY

Tries to End Life by Swallowing Hot Coals as Flames Eat Flesh From Legs.

THOUSANDS IN THROUNG TO SEE

THOUSANDS IN THROUNG TO SEE

THREATENED IF SHERIFF DIES

Shot Officer in Mississippi

Sheriff's Story

MIAMI, FLA. HERALD

MOB PLANS FIERY DEATH FOR KILLER

Fritz Lang and "Fury"

BY ROBERT STEBBINS

In 1929, it was possible for Paul Rotha, the eminent British movie-historian and *documentaire*, to say of Fritz Lang: "One regrets his entire lack of filmic detail, of the play of human emotions, of the intimacy which is so peculiar a property of the film." But that was some five years before *M*, and seven before *Fury*!

When Mr. Rotha penned those words, Fritz Lang, already in his forties, had won wide acclaim for *The Spy*, *Siegfried*, and *Metropolis*, his only film besides *Fury* to be widely distributed in America. As a general rule, most artists at forty have their greatest achievements behind them. Fritz Lang's art, however, has been a consistently unfolding, ripening phenomenon, both in human and filmic terms. Today we see him at the height of his powers confronted with the strong probability that soon there will be no place for him to work. At the present writing it appears that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer does not intend renewing Lang's contract. We wonder if it can be because *Fury* will make their remaining films look so childish, so hopelessly redundant? What is more to the point, is that the man's integrity must have proved extremely trying to the Hollywood producers.

Integrity, honesty of purpose, lies at the foundation of the entire conflict between Lang and MGM or any true artist and Hollywood. For *Fury*, with all its limitations, is among the most honest, forthright films to emerge from a Hollywood cutting-room. Here you will find no sly prurient preface to concupiscence, no Graustarkian pipedream of which Bartolomeo Vanzetti once said ". . . these romances that distort truth and realities; provoke, cultivate and embellish all the morbid emotions, confusions, ignorances, prejudices and horrors; and purposely and skillfully pervert the hearts and still more the minds . . ."

True, Vanzetti's keen and fiery mind would have immediately seized upon the compromises in *Fury*. He'd have pointed out that the second half of the film almost renders invalid its object by shifting the emphasis of guilt from the lynchers to vengeful Joe Wilson (Spencer Tracy); that by contrast with the ingrown, embittered maniacal creature Joe becomes—(he even pulls a gun on his brothers and threatens to kill them if they don't go through with his plans)—the lynchers are portrayed sympathetically. Katherine (Sylvia Sydney), Joe's sweetheart, pleads for them: "You might as well kill

me too and do a good job of it. Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-five, what's the difference? . . . Oh Joe! a mob doesn't think, doesn't know what it's doing." Vanzetti would have pointed out that the institution of lynching has an economic and racial background that is necessary to a complete understanding of the problem and that the film was faulty for the want of it. He'd have proceeded to point out that almost eighty percent of the lynched are Negroes. And lastly, he'd scorn the likelihood of the innocent, dead or alive, receiving legal justice. In his own words, "There is venom in my heart, and fire in my brain, because I see the real things so clearly, to utterly realize what a tragic laughing stock our case and fate are."

Apart from these weaknesses, in all probability compromises demanded by the box-office experts and not of Lang's making, *Fury* is the most forceful indictment of lynch justice ever projected on a screen. In fact, with the exception of certain sequences in *M*, *Fury* is entirely without parallel. Not that lynching hasn't figured in films before! The Westerns crawl with them. But in every case—*Frisco Kid*, *Barbary Coast*—the vigilante is upheld as a noble example, a cow-punching Cincinnatus come to rescue Rome from the alien invader.

To accomplish his ends, Lang has lavished a stupendous fund of illuminating detail on the film. The scenic recreations under the art direction of Cedric Gibbons, William Horning and Edwin B. Wells are extraordinarily effective. The recent revival of *Taxi*, with its fine realistic interiors, made me realize how much Hollywood has lost in exchange for the gold and ivory of the penthouse period. Unlike the sets and appointments in *Taxi*, however, the scenic reconstructions of *Fury* not only convince but even add to a comprehension of the principals, and at times, actually advance the story. When Joe embraces Katherine underneath the "E" the pillars, though almost wavering in the darkness, in their rigidity express the loneliness and heartbreak of the lover's impending separation. When Joe returns to his incredibly untidy apartment you sense at once Joe's life with his brothers and understand the great attraction that Katherine, with her neat school-teacher orderliness, has for him. There are too many instances of Lang's remarkable grip on realistic detail, both scenic and directorial, to include within the limited scope of this piece. Suffice it to

mention the moving solitariness of Joe in the business man's lunch with the Negro bartender and the raucous radio; and that masterpiece of fidelity, the facade of the County jail.

The brilliant use of the newsreels in the court room is another case in point. Lang originally hit on the idea in *Liliom*. You will remember that in the Lang production of the play *Liliom* goes to heaven. There the good Lord, instead of reading *Liliom* a list of his misdemeanours from the book of books, shows him a news reel of his mortal life. But what was a pleasant device in *Liliom*, in *Fury* takes on a cogency and moral force that is terrifying. The tremendous contrast between the piteous woman on trial for her life and the insane caricature of herself she sees on the screen, murderously whirling the firebrand around her head, is a warning to all who take to the rope or torch for the destruction of a fellow human.

The chief glory of the film, however, is the thrillingly dissected and synthesized lynching perpetrated by the brutalized and excitement-starved lower middle-class shop-keepers aided and abetted by the chamber of commerce in close collaboration with the gangsters, hoodlums and strike-breakers of the town. From Joe's arrest by the slow-witted "Bugs" Meyers, who later is unobtrusively shown nabbing flies on the wall while Joe is questioned by the Sheriff to that unforgettable moment when Katherine staggers into the square of Strand to find the entire town hypnotized by Joe's supposed funeral pyre, Lang has given us a memorable example of film making at its apogee.

Felicitations for splendid performances are due the entire cast, are due Norman Krasna for his superb screen original (how he ever got it past the front office is nothing short of a miracle), and Bartlett Cormack for his work with Lang on the screen-play. Bartlett Cormack, however, although a screen librettist of undeniable talent, in his propensity to break out in a voluntary rash of red-baiting, shows unfortunate promise of becoming the Zioncheck of the writers' colony. A week after the preview of *Fury* he inserted the following advertisement in the *Hollywood Reporter*:

BARTLETT CORMACK*
WROTE THE SCREEN PLAY OF
FURY,
A DRAMATIZATION OF SOME
'CELLS' OF THE UNITED STATES,
RATHER THAN OF THE UNITED
FRONT



STILL FROM "FURY"

AND IS PROUD OF IT, AS A GOOD JOB, AND OF ITS STUDIO** AND ITS BOSSES, i. e. captains of entrenched greed, FOR HAVING MADE IT WITH ENTHUSIASM, AND WITHOUT SQUEAMISHNESS OR STINT.

* Member Sons American Revolution.
** Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Assuming that MGM's decision to go through with *Fury* had nothing to do with the unprofitable and sulphurous egg they laid, called *Riffraff*—assuming that MGM got the idea all by itself, totally unaffected by the constant hammering of liberals against the fascist proclivities of the producers, even then, it is too early for Bartlett Cormack to crow. The latest indications, if we are to judge from Douglas W. Churchill's article in the *New York Times* of June 14th, are that MGM never wanted to make the film and even today considers it a mistake. If Mr. Cormack will permit I should like to quote one last time from the letters of Vanzetti. Somehow *Fury* brings Vanzetti inevitably to mind. His letter of May 25th, 1927, to Mrs. Sarah Root Adams, mentions a note a friend once sent him in which she describes the treatment she is taking for her broken arm. ". . . My arm's bone refused to heal again for quite long time, then the Doctor resorted to electricity, apply it to my fracture and I recuperated quickly and well. How sorry I am to think that this same force which healed me may be applied to you." I venture to state that for every film that will heal suffering mankind, there will be 20 to slay the Saccos and Vanzettis. I am afraid MGM is not yet on the side of the angels.

Film Checklist

SECRET AGENT: (Gaumont-British) Based on the Somerset Maugham "Ashenden" stories of espionage during the World War. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, the man who gave us *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, and *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Secret Agent* is in the nature of a keen disappointment. At no point during its hamstrung and confused progress does it rise above pot-boiler status. Peter Lorre manages an amusing performance on the *Grand Guignol* side, but John Gielgud, probably England's most famous actor today, turns in a dime a dozen job. When you've played Shakespeare all season it must be difficult to summon any enthusiasm for the poor stuff that these Maugham stories provide.

THE PRINCESS COMES ACROSS: Will furnish a mildly diverting hour and a half. Carole Lombard is herself again for the first time since *Twentieth Century*. Her marvelous imitation of Lynn Fontanne imitating Greta Garbo imitating herself is fine comedy. The film itself is another of those trans-atlantic, Grand Hotel murder jaunts, of which, dear Lord, there seems no end. William K. Howard directs in his usual bright and understanding manner but when you come down to cases, *The Princess Comes Across* is a waste of his talents.

THE KING STEPS OUT: Important only in so far as the financial success it is enjoying will restore the faith of the producers in Josef von Sternberg. For a time it looked as if Sternberg was through. This would have been a real loss, for Sternberg with all his faults is not an ordinary run of the mine talent. Perhaps he'll have an opportunity to make important films. *The King Steps*

Out is a fair example of a Ruritanian musical. Grace Moore delivers a far more intelligent and effective characterization than we have been assured lies within her powers. Walter Connelly, and Herman Bing, however, steal the show with Franchot Tone offering no competition.

CLOISTERED: (French) We frankly admit an inability to accept *Cloistered* at its face value. We come away from this film which concerns lives forever cut off from the world, moving within the constricted confines of convent life, feeling nothing but sorrow for the waste of humankind. We don't know if this was the purpose of the director, R. Alexander, who incidentally does a fine job of the photography, but that was its effect on us. Particularly disheartening, almost terrifying, was the final ceremony in the long progress from the novitiate to the assumption of the nun's habit. Father Matthew Kelly's commentary impresses as unpleasantly unctuous.

BULLETS OR BALLOTS: Another Warner Brothers' "sociological" venture. This time it's the food and numbers rackets that have got the country on the run, that is, until Edward G. Robinson as a hard-boiled detective, practically single-handed (he does receive some slight assistance from the police) smashes their power forever. A new twist has been given the Warner formula, in that the heads of the rackets are leading citizens—a banker, politician and ex-official. We are sure that the banker angle must have given the Brothers great concern, but it is pretty plain by the end of the film that the banker in question is by no means characteristic of the profession.

(Continued on page 29)



A. Birnbaum Courtesy New York Post
EDWARD G. ROBINSON



STILL FROM "FURY"



A. Birnbaum

Courtesy New York Post

EDWARD G. ROBINSON

A Night at the Movies

BY ALFRED HAYES

After supper I said, "Come on, I'll blow you to a show."

"A treat?" Mom said, "You must be rolling in money."

"You wanna go or don't you?" I said. "Can't I get an attack of generosity sometimes and take you to a movie without you suspecting me?"

"Nut, what am I going to do about Papa's supper?"

"Put it on the stove. He'll take it himself."

"Your father? He wouldn't even know which end of the pot to light."

"Let him learn," I said.

"Ah, the devil with him," Mom said. "One night he can take his own supper. It won't kill him."

I wanted to go to the Loew's but Mom decided she wanted to go to the Eltinge down on the boulevard which had just opened up. A beautiful theatre, the old lady said. Tonight they had Screeno, too, and who knows, maybe we'd win. Once in a blue moon some luck could drop on this family.

So the old lady put her black coat on and we went out and there were pickets in front of the Sheba Beauty Parlor on the corner. The old lady explained that it's not a chain beauty shop but there's a louse who owns it and you think any boss wants to give his workers a chance to lift their heads up? Like the grocery man on the next street. A poor man, you can't make millions in a grocery, and he has two workers and the poor buggers work their feet off and what have they got at the end of the week? Boils. There's always some poor bugger who tries to live off another poor bugger and neither of them have a shirt-tail to wipe themselves with.

It goes on, and the evening is quiet, and we walk down the street on our way to the Eltinge, past the stores, the tenements, the basements, the laundries, the bakeries, the barber shops, the potzy game on the sidewalk, the roller-skating kids. The old lady comes up to my shoulder.

"Hey, you're a shrimp, Mom," I said.

"I have to be tall to scrub floors?" Mom said.

We get to the Eltinge and I pay the four bits admission and we go in past the ticket taker in the scarlet operetta outfit a la Roxy, into the lobby with the candy stand and we buy some Brazil nuts and they were playing *The Magnificent Obsession*, with Irene Dunne, a tragic actress, what I mean,

Mom says, in the hushed red-and-blue

light like a fancy cathedral or a brothel for paper dolls, "Some place!" There are rugs, real rugs, deep, soft, noiseless rugs. You never had rugs like that at home. There are stone ladies on a water fountain, lily cups one cent. They don't even give you water free in these joints, and the stone ladies have undraped stone breasts. Art. I spit the water carefully. Bullseye. The right breast. And the lights up in the ceiling are dim and spectral and blue and soft red and everything is just like Roxy had built itself up here in the Bronx for you and me and the next door neighbor who can't go down to Broadway.

Weekly program at the Eltinge Theatre:

Monday—Free Dinnerware night. One beautiful chipless, crackless, annealed, special handsomely wrought gilt-edged piece of priceless dinnerware free to Every Lady.

Tuesday—Screeno. Win twenty-five dollars in spot cash.

Wednesday—Amateur night. Can you sing, dance, recite, play the harmonica, do imitations, act? A Hollywood career is open to you.

Thursday—Bank night. Fifty dollars cash prize to the holder of the lucky number. Sign in the lobby, please.

Friday—Prosperity night. Leave your name at the box office.

Saturday—Special midnight preview. Screen test latest Hollywood motion picture.

Sunday—Organ recital by Miss Louise Kirchow. Community singing.

Wow!

The old lady and I hunt seats down the aisles. I can't sit down too close because I'm farsighted and she can't sit back too far because she's nearsighted, so we get somewhere in the middle.

Irene is cool and summery in white lawn and about the third reel she goes blind and Mom's face beside me in the paralytic hush of the theatre starts getting soft and wistful and kind of dopey-looking and I get the willies again at the nobility of hero and heroine and there are country houses and Cunard liners and cocktails and courage and penthouses and pathos and the moral of this moving epic is, boys and girls, THAT WHAT WE DO FOR OTHERS BRINGS VIRTUE ON US. GOLDEN RULE BY M.-G.-M. CHARITY CARRIES THE DAY.

FADEOUT and closeup and finis and thank God.

"She's good," says Mom.

"Mom, for Christ's sakes," I hiss. "It stinks." Movie criticism.

"Why does it stink?" says Mom. "To you everything stinks. It can happen."

"Anybody ever give you something for nothing?" I hiss again.

"Nobody gets something for nothing."

"So what do you say it's good for? It's baloney. Charity—a hell of a lot of charity you get."

"Does everything have to be true what you see?" Mom is also hissing by now. "Who'd go to the movies if all you could see was the truth? Who wants it?"

"I do"—a fierce hiss.

"They'll make the truth special for you," Mom says, and that ended that for a while.

The theatre lights up and here comes Screeno, the rage of the hour, the pastime of the nation, it doesn't cost you a penny and you may go home tonight twenty-five bucks richer. The theatre I see now is packed.

Screeno. We have our cards in our hands and there is a wheel up on stage that spins and when your number comes up you punch the number on your card and when you have a row of punched numbers across or diagonally or vertically then don't be bashful, yell, and collect a prize. There are furnishings for the ladies and the gentlemen when the money gives out.

The wheel spins. Everybody has the sharpened stick like a lollypop stick in their hands and watches the pressed figure of the theatre manager on stage as he twirls the wheel embroidered with numbers.

Number. Number. Punch. Punch. The wheel dithers, stops. And Mom is watching and saying as everybody else is saying, maybe I'll win. Maybe the luck in my family will change. It can't rain bad forever. Why shouldn't I win? God thinks of me as much as the next one. Even when I play Screeno.

The old lady and I by now have four numbers one way and four numbers another way but you need five numbers to complete a row. The winners start winning. And we watch the lucky ones blinking in the light of the stage, and charge down the aisles, awkward and trying to be grave in the spotlight, envying the lucky stiff. Maybe the next number he calls will be the number we lack. All we need is one number. What's one number? He got it, why can't we?

Mom is making little tsk-ing noises to
(Continued on page 29)

Theatre and Film

BY HERBERT BIBERMAN

“The motion picture is a director’s medium—it is not an actor’s or a writer’s medium.”

This pronouncement, when voiced by actors and writers, has a tone of hurt and frustration; when voiced by directors, it savors of arrogance. Neither tone is justified although the statement is comparatively true. The truth within the statement, however, is a basic inevitable truth which should be accepted calmly rather than with evidences of wounded pride.

Unlike the theatre, the film impresses with the multiplicity of method, the variety of approach to the realization of subject matter; the limitless physical, psychological and contrapuntal means at one’s disposal in the course of creation. Because of the amazing and infinite choices of approach, it is inevitable that the director must be master of the medium.

Since the matter of choice is so vital, let us examine it in relation to one of the complaining groups—the actor. From this group we shall find our way to other aspects of the subject.

Practically the first words I heard upon entering a motion picture studio—very fresh from the theatre—was a director instructing an actor not to be “stagey.” Subsequently I heard such other phrases as “The nice thing about her is, she doesn’t act,” “I don’t care whether he can act or not—he has a great personality.” Then the ultimate words which resound through every motion picture studio—“Be natural.” To such an extent is this effort to negate acting carried, that many directors shoot scenes before the actors are quite sure of their lines in the hope that out of this uncertainty will come a heightened degree of naturalness. For a time the very word “natural” made my hair stand on end. I had spent too many years in the study and admiration of acting to be party to its destruction. It seemed barbaric and infantile.

Two months later I was urging actors to be “natural” and warning them against becoming “stagey.” In so short a time had I overcome my instinctive repulsion and joined the new faith. The explanation is simple and within it lies one of the fundamental distinctions between the theatre and the film. In the theatre the actor has four weeks to attain credible reality and persuasive effectiveness. In motion pictures one hasn’t four hours, very often, not four minutes. One hasn’t half an act to build to a climax, often one

hasn’t half a second in a given shot. Hence one cannot “act” one’s way to naturalness. The conditions attending the making of motion pictures call for the realization of a scene by “non-acting,” by summoning up spontaneous reflex activity. In the main we photograph spontaneous personality *per se*, so we do not recreate it. This is a school of improvisation. To such an extent is this true that many actors refuse to look at lines until just before they step before the camera. This is not always sheer laziness. It is often a logically arrived at way of preserving all the spontaneous fluids until just before they are called for. The justification usually offered is that a little rehearsal is worse than none at all.

What is lost in technical brilliance in such performances is compensated for by certain qualities of the medium—qualities which make a neat differentiation between the two mediums under examination. In the theatre one attempts through acting to force an audience to give attention to that part of the whole visual scene which is for the moment the most important. One can never be certain one will completely succeed. An audience, or a part of it, may look at a minor character or a lamp or a fireplace or out of the window while *Boy Gets Girl*. In the film you can make it impossible for the audience to see anything but the person or thing you wish it to see. The fight necessary for audience attention is minimized. The mere fact that an actor does not have to fight for attention relieves him of the need for half his technical equipment. Not only his problem but the director’s problem is rendered more primitive.

The need for sustained performance is totally absent in the film. If an actor speaks but one line effectively in an entire scene and that line is anywhere near a climax, not necessarily the climax itself, the shots can be so juggled that only that particular line will be addressed by that actor to the audience. His other lines may be spoken over close-ups of other actors and still give one the impression that he is being presented in first importance by short flashes of him. Indeed, it is possible to magnify the actor’s presence to such a degree that the audience is barely conscious of the words he is speaking. In this connection, it is important to remember that on a strip of film the visual image is three quarters of an inch wide, whereas the sound track is only an eighth of an inch wide. The size of these tracks on the film indicates, in a

measure, the relative importance of each. Film, for all its sound, is still primarily a visual medium. To put this broadly and perhaps a mite incorrectly, the theatre is for the ear and the film for the eye. How often have we heard of a play whose scenery swamped the actors? In film it is impossible to swamp the actor, for the scenery can be dissolved in an instant and be a mere haze behind a towering head close-up. Choice in the hands of the director weighs the value, place and importance of people and background, animate and inanimate elements; and he can and must at his own discretion sacrifice actor for scenery or vice versa in his effort impersonally to arrange the manifold elements constantly at his disposal and begging for proper evaluation in the composite mosaic which is film.

These primary distinctions, based upon the choice available to the director, between the two mediums may now be expressed in a more graphic way. The theatre is a telescope, the film is a microscope. This is curiously not the accepted understanding of the two mediums in the lay mind. We hear so much talk concerning the scope of the camera. It is necessary to define the word scope. Actually in any given second the proscenium arch has more effective scope with it than has the lens of a camera. It is, to illustrate, impossible to photograph effectively and without loss of focus or without distortion, a person very near the camera and one twenty feet from it in the same shot. In the theatre this is constantly happening, one sees all there is within the frame of the arch at all times, with almost equal clarity and power. The camera is hitting on only one cylinder when it reveals all of any scene. The camera, however, reaches its great and unique power when it concentrates on the contorted intimacies of one man’s back and another man’s face, or when it pans down to the signature on a letter. It is when it becomes a microscope that it becomes modern and natural in its own terms. And here one will encounter the heart of the distinction between the two mediums. In the theatre you think of the whole—you have only the whole; vignettes—small sets—spotted areas within blackness—multiple sets—all these cannot break up the whole of the proscenium arch and the set relation of actors to it in size, importance and position. In the theatre there is no smaller unit than the whole—you have it and you must like it. In pictures nothing is fixed in relation to anything

else. Your proscenium arch hops around like a bug in a rug—and there is only one limit to your creation—your own imagination. Choice is the lawless law of the film.

In a given shot do you wish to show the people who are talking—the thing they are talking about—the person listening—talker and listener—talker and listener and thing talked about—do you wish a stationary image of the thing selected or a moving image—do you wish to be very near or very far away—do you wish a scene cut into angles—do you wish the camera moving and the people still or the camera still and the people moving—or both still or both moving—do you wish a face here or only the hand fiddling with a match stick—a hand or just a finger—a finger or just a knuckle—a knuckle or just the scar which you suddenly discover on the knuckle—or a man running down three flights of stairs? You can have all of these if you wish, or just one. There is no compulsion except to make your choice.

It seems logical that stage acting must change in taking its place in the film. Not alone must it change its form but even when it does not change, the use made of it changes it almost beyond its control. For in the film the actor is no longer a whole—he is broken up into pieces and the tiny bits of mosaic are then arranged into a pattern which makes the whole.

A scene may run thirty seconds—but its pieces may have been shot through the better part of a week—a shot of the actor's entire body on Monday, his head on Tuesday, his back on Wednesday, his offstage voice on Thursday, his smile on Friday, and his dilated eyes on Saturday. There is a superstition that the best take of every shot is always left in the can—that some mechanical error invariably spoils the best take of any scene and that the shot printed represents a second choice. This is not a source of great worry. For out of almost any shot the chances are that only a tiny portion will be used. What makes a scene, finally, is the general average of all angle takes of the scene plus the arrangement by the director and editor. So we see that the whole is achieved as a result of choice. Out of a thousand possibilities, let us say, of which a hundred have been tried, only ten are selected. Choice grows more imposing as the essential quality of the film. Filmic excellence, not acting alone, is the determinant.

Let us choose a specific example. In a recent picture, a girl told a boy that she was about to have a baby—a scene which is tender, dangerous, commonplace. In the theatre one could use one's talent to

make that recitation affecting. This could only be accomplished through the combined acting of the whole—the boy and the girl and the entire expanse of the stage. In the film one never saw the girl at all. One heard her announcement over a close shot of the boy's face. The whole scene was played entirely on the young man's reactions. The girl was an offstage voice. She was the announcer—and she did not act. She did not try to convey an emotion. She was a verbal title. The emotion came to us from what was actually a silent shot of the boy reacting to a title. The scene was effective and fresh. It had been made so by the director. He had used the medium. He had exercised his prerogative—choice. The scene might have been played over a shot of two pairs of hands or over a beer truck rattling along a road. The director chose the close shot of the boy as the one way in a thousand possible ways to play that scene.

Time and space suffer no lesser indignities than the actor at the hands of the film. A second may be turned into ten minutes and an inch into infinity. This will even more fully explain the justification for all that has gone before.

In a recent picture I had a jail break to shoot. My script permitted me eighteen men, a machine gun and a gray wall. Had I been in the theatre I would have had just those elements. In film I had a hundred men, a battery of guns and a prison as immense as the sky is vast. Let us analyze that statement. First we saw these men huddled against a distant wall, puppets, pitiable little crusts, tiny scales on a prison wall daring to dream of liberty. In close-up we had a machine gun pointed at them. The machine gun, actually a half-inch in diameter, was made to appear like a ten inch gun. As the men rushed into blackness the impression was of ants charging infinity. With the firing of the machine gun, each of these crusts grew into ten giants. We see a tiny figure firing a gun, a waist-high figure of a man with a gun at this distance already a person, a close-up of a terrorized desperate man, the sheer boiling humanity within him magnified to defiance, a close-up of the gun in his hands discharging its vehement complaint against the prison as the final symbol of his revolt, the man being hit, shrunk again to the stature of a man, the man falling, the man's face falling, the man's hands falling limp at his side after a reflex tearing at the sky. All of these things each of the men became individually, until finally, in long shot, these dead crusts lay still, scattered about the yard of the prison as a searchlight played slowly over their prostrate bodies, as small and quiet

finally as they had been small and terrorized when we first saw them.

The actual length of the scene played from beginning to end was fifteen seconds. The scene we made of it ran for two minutes. In other words, our scene on film played eight times as long as the actual scene. Had we wished, it might have played for ten minutes. The microscope had only begun to analyze, dissect and discover the clues to the complete history of this rebellion. Conversely, had we wished, we could have reduced the fifteen seconds of actual playing time to three seconds and have recorded the entire scene in three shots. A siren, a machine gun exploding, the stiff and open mouth of a man. Time, space, dimension, duration, emotion, these are only points of departure for a writer and a director and an actor in the unlimited exercise of making choices. It must then be clear that one approaches the identical scene very differently depending upon whether one is behind the lens or a telescope or a microscope.

Need I say, this is not an evaluation of the relative values of the film and theatre. That is another question entirely. Certainly the very quality of the telescope was exciting to me in doing such a scene as the final fight between the Chinese and the English in the Theatre Guild production, *Roar China*. There the scene was planned for a telescope—for all the complexity and counterpoint of various movements all constantly within the compass of each spectator. What I have here is not an evaluation but a differentiation of theatre and film.

When I was working in the theatre many people urged me to work in motion pictures. They said they felt in my work a certain scope and dimension—it was, they said, telescopic and, therefore, eminently suited for the film. I came to pictures very eager to get behind a great telescope, as I thought. It took many weeks for me to get over the shock of discovering that the camera was a microscope and that it did not have nearly the scope within a single frame that the theatre had. Its scope, I discovered, lay in its ability to dissect a second or an inch—its amazing resemblance to the art of mosaics in its ability to make the most complex arrangements of seconds and inches. In the very modernity of its nature lay implicit the opportunity of material analysis of fact and fancy, and the joy of creating not merely sequential thematic development, but of lingering beyond the duration of actual time, of moving faster than actual time, of discovering the immensity of a cell and the smallness of a metropolis, of going beyond poetry of description into the poetry of fact, factual contiguity, juxtaposition and opposition.

Francois Villon in Prague

BY CHARLES RECHT

Czechoslovakia is a Slavonic island in a Teutonic sea. Czechoslovakia has unemployment and a severe economic crisis, and she is in constant imminent danger of fascist invasion. Within the country the Sudeten movement, led by Henlein, is a plain fascist Hitler-inspired plot, aiming to disrupt and destroy the Republic. But Czechoslovakia has an awakened group of left intellectuals who are aware of the menace within and without and are trying to rouse the people to a sense of their danger. Among them are George Voskovec and Jan Werrich, who run the Prague Theatre Liberated. In Prague you will see their billboards and their theatre simply designated as V. & W. The Theatre was formerly called Spoutane (*Enchâiné*) but the literary friends and colleagues of the two talented founders objected and in the second year of its existence the title was changed to Theatre Liberated.

They have taken Prague by storm. Their present bill, called *The Ballad of Rags*, has been playing to crowded houses for six months, and will soon be replaced by their new bill, *The Local Patriot*. I am sorry indeed that I'll miss the Patriot. He will probably bear a close resemblance to some people I know in the States.

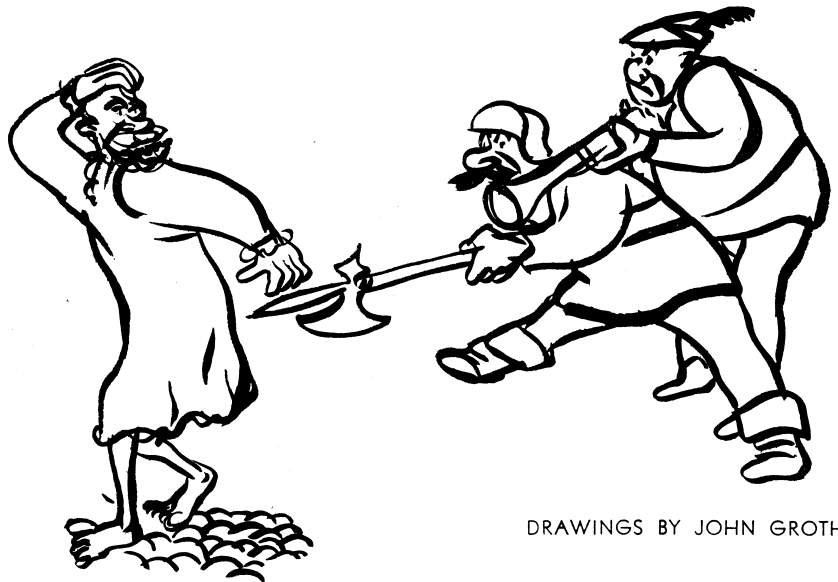
Think of a theatre of the Left, unabashedly so, being frequented by high Government officials! Masaryk, known now as the Father of His Country, not only visited the V. & W., but permitted a photograph of the incident to be used in the program.

Of the show, or the revue, *The Ballad of Rags*, it should be said that it is not the plot which is the thing, but the courage of the theme and the acting of Messrs. V. & W. The play begins with a scene in the "lower depths." An old actor carrying a bundle on a walking stick wanders into a group of poor wretches. The group chide and jeer him about the treasures he has in his bag. He answers that they are mere tatters, the clothes of actors who used to play Shakespeare and the classics. The group fall on the bundle and pull out these tattered costumes. What kind of a play can they give in such rags? Francois Villon, the poet! They all dress on the stage and the play begins. Lines from Villon's poems are mingled with songs and ribaldry, and there are choruses and some dancing. The ballad of the old whore is recited exactly as Villon wrote it, by one of the women

playing the part of an old beggar. Werrich, who is more portly than his colleague, plays the part of a curfew-ringer of Paris, while Voskovec, the more slender, is a town wag, a rogue, and acts most of the time as a stooge for W. As this talented pair, who are not only playwrights but excellent actors and singers, have really no part in even the meager plot, they have great liberty in commenting

pneumatic tires and decided to pinch the legs of the girl. And what do you know, she turned around and hit him on the nose. Which shows the Bolsheviks will never submit to an impartial investigation of the facts. Propaganda, all propaganda, says V. That's what I've been telling you, says W.

The curfew-ringer and his friend catch the Mayor of Paris prowling the streets



DRAWINGS BY JOHN GROTH

on contemporary matters—and how well they do it!

The scene where W. explains to V. how they smashed the atom in America is unforgettable. Local humor is difficult to translate—perhaps one line will give the cue: Werrich, looking very intense and holding the atom between the thumb and forefinger, is showing Voskovec how to hold the atom.—By its end? asks Voskovec.—No, simpleton, did not I just explain that the theory shows its endlessness? So they agree to grasp the atom by its *endlessness*.

One of the topics they discuss is Bolshevik propaganda. Of course, they agree, there is starvation in Russia. But these Bolsheviks are masters at propaganda. They stuff the people with food. The working people all look as though they had had a course in eating at the best restaurant in Prague—but naturally it's all done for show, for sake of the tourist. And do you know what happened to an editor (naming a conservative paper in Prague) when he was in Moscow? He was on to this trick of stuffing 'em as propaganda. He was walking in a park. He saw a very buxom girl, and just for scientific reasons, you understand, wanted to see if it was real fat or

in his nightshirt. They refuse to recognize his identity and jail him. But during the dialogue W. tells how he had to take courses from the city authorities on how to ring the curfew. He goes through the lessons. His demonstration of the component parts of a spear, and how to handle it, is a biting satire on militarism.

None of this is buffoonery. Back of it lies the desire to reflect the rottenness of our world, and change it. Clowns though they are on the stage, appearing in the habiliments of clowns, the authors are dedicated to a serious task.

"Our repertoire," they write in the program of the theatre, "will consist of satire aimed against cultural fascism and for democracy. In the carnival heyday of dictators which prevails today in our fantastic capitalist regime, in the disintegration of bourgeois morality, the imbecility of economic chaos, the grotesque disproportion between the miracles achieved by the scientific mind and the twilight of political fanaticism, in this labyrinth of the Twentieth Century, there appears to us the hope for a new social order, which promises economic justice to reward humanity for the suffering of our day."

Why did they select the period of Fran-

cois Villon? It seems very distant from the struggles waged today. But an analysis of the period reveals many striking parallels between that time and the present. "Try to place yourselves in the France of the beginning of the Fifteenth Century, when the so-called Hundred Years' War had uprooted the economic life of the land, when the weak and cowardly reign of Charles VII could do nothing to remedy conditions. Add to that the deep dissension within the Church and the unrest of the common people who were obliged to carry the burden of the criminal irresponsibility of their rulers. At the very time when Western Europe was at the close of the medieval mystical-gothic civilization, a breach was being made in the stagnating cult of Christian resignation and in its place a new spirit was being ushered in: the renaissance of man. Into this background steps Francois Villon, a poet, the true proletarian of his day. He typifies the dawning of the idea that poverty need not wait until death releases it, but that it can rise up and fight. That was a novel thought for that time. His poet contemporaries were occupying themselves with formalism and empty phrase-mongering. Villon's verses were the revolutionary cries of his day. Five hundred years later they retain their vigor and remind us of the fighting rhymes of Arthur Rimbaud.

"It is the fate of the poet who dares to proclaim a new world order, to live on the extreme periphery of society. He becomes a part of the circle of social outcasts and felons made by man's law. Such was the fate of Villon. We have used such facts as we had of Villon's life, against a background of the poverty of the masses, the worthlessness of social parasites, and the struggle of the poet against the bourgeoisie who were fearful of his poetry lest it provoke the common people.



"If you will compare our satire with the reported life of Villon, you will see that we deal rather freely with the subject. In order to be able to do so, we selected an episode which is even more obscure than most of the data obtainable on the life of the poet, the episode of the love affair of Master Francois with Katherine de Vauxelles. We also took the liberty of coupling this love affair with the brawl which ended with the killing of Philip Sermoise. Our conscience is clear, however. We have not engaged in historical reportage, but in satire based on historical analogy. Not documentary exactness, but dramatic effect, was our concern.

"We have used two or three of Villon's poems as recitations in the play, while our main theme-song is based on this quotation from his works:

'For food the wolf will leave its lair,
And want will drive goodman to
treason.'

In the manner of the Russians, V. & W. have strung a narrow banner across the proscenium which bears the couplet just cited. In addition, they have incorporated it into their own *Song of Villon*, set to music and sung first by themselves and later by the small chorus of the revue. It follows the spirit of the Villon ballad. Villon was probably the

popularizer, if not the real creator, of the ballad form. In the translation of his poetry into other languages much is lost. In the original the crude form is well suited to the primitive language and the theme. In quoting V. & W.'s *Song of Villon*, this writer is faced with a greater difficulty than was Mark Twain with the translation of his own story of the Jumping Frog. The original poem was in old French; it was then translated into poetic Czech by a leading Czech poet, later adapted by V. & W. into a form to suit their theatrical purpose—and is now translated into English with the aim of re-creating it in the style of the Villon period. After so thorough a metamorphosis the Song now appears as follows:

Voskovec and Werrich:
"THE SONG OF VILLON
(Also called *Hey, Mr. King!*)

We sent a questioning to the baccalaurii,
Et item doctor, et item rector,
Why only poor wretches are jailed sine
privilegii?
The rich thief the Cardinal has as benefactor!

If all this the King would just learn
There'd be a turn—

We—the chaff—would be the kern!

Refrain

Oh, Mr. King, do please awake—
Come among us dressed in rags.
Learn how we starve and ache—
Mr. King, for Mercy's sake—
Dine on crust and sleep on bags.
You, mighty Lords, whose foul was
fair,

We too shall have harvest season,
Then thunder will be in the air—
For food the wolf will leave its lair
And want will drive goodman to
treason.

Some day out of den and basement
We, the unfeared, run in unison
Dark'ning your gate and basement.
With lusty shout from goal and
prison

The birds we'll set free of snare.
To fear us now you have good reason
For want does drive goodman to
treason

And hunger has been our fare."



"The Plow That Broke the Plains"

BY PETER ELLIS

When the Resettlement Administration announced last year that it was planning to make a film which would dramatize the tragedy of the Western "Dust Bowl" area and depict the Administration's efforts to reclaim the wasted grasslands, no one was particularly affected one way or the other. The government had used the commercial studios to make films before, and they had all been bad. But when Ralph Steiner, Paul Strand and Leo Hurwitz were engaged as members of the production crew for the projected picture, it was impossible to maintain an air of detachment toward the venture any longer. Here was an opportunity for a group of talented young filmmakers to produce a film of social significance which would have government backing, and receive commercial distribution, something no film art group had ever attained before. But the Hollywood producers were yet to be heard from.

In an effort to keep the screens of America safe for private investment, the motion picture industry not only attempted to block the progress of *The Plow That Broke the Plains* during production by refusing to sell the government the stock shots necessary to round out the narrative, but on completion of this, the first important American documentary film, summarily refused to dis-

tribute it. One studio executive was quoted as saying, "I wouldn't release any government picture, not even if it was *Ben Hur*."

Why this sudden prophylactic attitude toward government films? Only a week previous to the premiere of *The Plow That Broke the Plains* in Washington, the Capitol Theatre in New York (key-house of the Loew-MGM chain) had shown *Around the World With Coffee*, a government film released by the Department of Commerce. And not so long ago the entire motion picture industry was producing and distributing gratis New Deal propaganda in the form of NRA shorts. The answer undoubtedly lies in the industry's fear that the government might go into the picture business in earnest.

The original scenario of *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, as written by Steiner, Strand and Hurwitz, embodied a concept of epic implications: capitalism's anarchic rape of the land, and—by extension—the impoverishment of all the natural resources of America: mines, forests, men. This scenario was approved by Pare Lorenz and John Carter (Jay Franklin), supervisors of the project. Once out in the field, Steiner and his associates drew up a shooting script which made explicit the aims of the scenario. But at this juncture the Administration real-

ized what it had on its hands, and Lorenz substituted a scenario of his own making, which, while keeping a great many of the *pictorial* ideas and transitions of the script, completely vitiated the integrity of the original concept. It might be all right for Rexford Tugwell, Resettlement Administration director, to assert, in *Today* magazine, that the dust storms and despoliation of the Great Plains were but one instance of the general unheeding exploitation of America's natural resources for private gain. But Lorenz evidently felt that as film fare such meat was too strong!

Steiner, Strand and Hurwitz were already in the field. They did not want to disrupt the entire project, and therefore notified Mr. Lorenz that they would continue as photographers, accepting responsibility only for the photography. *Time* magazine of May 25th grossly misstated the facts when it gave the impression that the photographers had withdrawn their objections on seeing the finished job. The film, as put together in its present form by Mr. Lorenz, is a pale imitation of what it was intended to be.

Superficially it does show how a primeval land, a huge grass country which became a huge cattle country and later a wheat area, that great section of the continent known as the Great Plains, became the "Dust Bowl." It ends pessimistically with dust and sand blowing over the stunted grass—the Great American Desert. There is an epilogue, unnecessary and a little silly (done in the standardized manner of the regular commercial film) which makes a sorry attempt to show what the Resettlement Administration wants to do—and has done. Millions of people are homeless; and by means of an animated map you are informed that 4,500 families have been resettled!

A great deal of footage is devoted to the War Boom. The film cuts back and forth from the great plains of the West to the battlefields of Europe, from tractors to tanks, destroying and defacing the land in the war to end war. This is partially successful irony. But where is the major tragedy—the vain sacrifices that generations of struggling men had made to build homes for themselves and their children in the Great Plains? As *Variety* says, speaking of how the farmers are portrayed in the film ". . . they aren't called upon for any histrionics other than staring at the sky or whittling sticks to



STILLS FROM "THE PLOW THAT BROKE THE PLAINS": LOOKING FOR RAIN



STILLS FROM "THE PLOW THAT BROKE THE PLAINS": LOOKING FOR RAIN



IN THE "DUST BOWL"

indicate complete resignation to fate."

In the beginning you are shown fat healthy cattle. Where are the shots of the cattle now starved by the lack of grass and made thirsty by the lack of water, their bones sticking out of their thin-skinned hides? Where is the sequence from the original scenario:

"Great herds are driven in on the range. Countless heads of cattle feed on the sea of grass. Steers grow fat. The cattlemen grow rich. The range is free. More ranchers drive in their herds. The herds increase. Scramble for water rights and control of range, and speculation in cattle. More stock men! Each after what he can get—no responsibility to safeguard the great resource—the grass."

Such was the tone and concept of the original scenario. It was forthright, and its implications were inescapable. Mr. Lorenz's film protests eloquently enough, but it is incoherent and unbalanced. The lack of a clear message or a decisive point of view weakens the structure of the film and makes it rhetorical and literary instead of dramatic. Evasion has never helped the documentary. There is no point in trying to make the documentary show a world that does not exist. If you do, you get an abstract film on the struggle between Man and Nature—you get a *Man of Aran*.

Nevertheless, with all its faults of bad scenario, unimaginative cutting and unclear viewpoint, Mr. Lorenz's film still commands attention because in the various stages of its development he managed

to secure the services of talented artists. *The Plow That Broke the Plains* is endowed with the finest musical score of any American film; it is the work of Virgil Thompson, who wrote the score for *Four Saints in Three Acts*, and it is simple, robust and distinctive. It contributes more to the film than the spoken text. The photography—the sequences taken by Steiner, Strand and Hurwitz—is superb. These sequences are brilliantly conceived and executed, especially the

shots of the cattle in the early part of the film. But the stock shots are definitely inferior; when the picture companies were finally forced by government pressure to let Lorenz have such material as he needed, he failed to select shots which were up to the photographic level of the rest of the film.

Although *The Plow That Broke the Plains* is not a completely realized film, it does set a new standard for the American documentary. Its most important achievement is that it gave an opportunity to real talent. Paul Strand, Ralph Steiner and Leo Hurwitz were not selected at random. They are members of Nykino, a group which is devoting its time to the production of progressive social films. At the moment this organization has in production a documentary film on a labor theme. Not that they have any intention of limiting themselves to the documentary; there is also a dramatic film in preparation.

Yet these films can do no good unless they are distributed. What the moving picture industry did to the government-made *Plow That Broke the Plains*, is only a sample of what it will do to keep all independent films of merit out of its theatres. It is imperative that a strong non-commercial outlet in addition to those already in existence, be organized through the trade unions. It is encouraging to note that in spite of the Hollywood ban, many independent theatres are booking the "Dust Bowl" film. A greater demand by the motion picture-going public will force more and more theatres to show independently-made films.



FIRST CAME THE CATTLE



IN THE "DUST BOWL"



FIRST CAME THE CATTLE

Towards a One-Act Theatre

BY JOHN W. GASSNER

Perhaps the most striking phenomenon of our recent theatre has been the resurgence of the one-act play. Broadway playgoers have been made aware of it by that exciting trio—*Waiting for Lefty*, *Till the Day I Die*, and *Bury the Dead*. But these pieces have been no more than the apex of a broad pyramid consisting of the work of many young organizations and playwrights whose upward climb became noticeable in 1934. For practically a decade the one-act form had lain under a cloud of commercial and æsthetic disapproval. You couldn't make money with it—a serious consideration at a time when everybody in the theatre expected to become enriched. At the same time one was eager to forget the little-theatre days as a kindergarten period which, though fun while it had lasted was something a grown man puts behind him. At best the form was held to be a finger-exercise for the aspiring amateur. The few exceptions that a scrupulous historian might wish to record are revivals of O'Neill's sea-pieces, Schnitzler's *Anatol*, and a few others, and the Theatre Guild's production of George O'Neill's *American Dream*, a brilliant work which was in effect a trilogy of one-act plays, even if not conceived as such.

The years that followed the collapse of the Wall Street bubble in 1929 saw the fat of the theatre transformed into leanness. Darkness fell upon many of Broadway's theatres, productions became fewer and more risky, and the great wide "road" became a mere footpath at the end of which there was a headache instead of a bonanza. At the same time most of the topics that had exercised the theatre of the 'twenties had become pretty much exhausted. The time was ripe for a new movement, which under the stress would be aggressively social in outlook.

It was almost axiomatic that the new movement should express itself to a great extent in the shorter form. Beginnings in the theatre are often punctuated by the one-act play. It is less expensive to produce and requires less expertness on the part of the performers; and it is more adapted to the simple expression of a thought or impression. European drama itself, began with the short forms—the trope or churchly dialogue, the miracle or "mystery" plays, and the moralities. Molière's theatre also started unambitiously; early pieces like *Les Précieuses Ridicules* utilize his satiric mode with less circumlocution than many of his longer works. The birth of the Irish theatre is

inseparable from the history of the one-act play; W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, Synge and their colleagues caught the spirit of Celtic fantasy and the hard realities of peasant life equally well in their short pieces, and managed at the same time to add iron to the resolution of Irish nationalism in the struggle against imperial Britain. The American "little theatre" movement was likewise a predominantly one-act venture, impressed in the service of a cause. Despite formal bows to art for the sake of art, the Provincetown and the Washington Square Players ground an axe quite unabashedly, except that the word "propaganda" was not applied. The object was the enlightenment and emancipation of the younger middle-class that was cutting loose from the ascetic fare of its pioneer ancestors whom thrift and hard application, including ruthless business practice, had enabled to swallow the country. Determined to enrich their lives they imported European sophistication, broadened their own horizon, and fought for sexual liberty and fuller experience even if this included obscenity and naturalistic descriptions of common life in the early O'Neill manner. In the early thirties the task of emancipation and protest devolved upon a new theatre born of direct economic pressure.

The new one-act theatre was born kicking; it was topical, haranguing, strident—agitation first, drama only secondarily. Since these beginnings, the plays have become increasingly finished and complex, but it is well to remember their origins in order to understand their possibilities and present defects.

That the return of the one-act play is vastly encouraging is due not merely to the fact that its appearance is a symptom of freshening forces in the theatre. The shorter form makes experimentation economically feasible and it is more suitable for distribution over the country and participation by larger segments of the people. It increases the number of productions, and adds variety to a theatre that is, for the most part, monotonously devoted to a three-act pattern. It is, finally, admirably suited to the expression of ideas and the exposition of significant situations which have been giving new vitality to the stage. An idea stretched out for three acts sometimes becomes as attenuated as Europe's unpaid war-debt. I have read at least a score of unproduced plays that elaborated upon the causes and consequences of war, the depression, the class struggle and so on with

anæsthetic detail, whereas a single well-chosen episode would have been exciting and sufficient. The theatre as a whole stands to gain when playwrights no longer feel compelled to write full-length plays when the subject range calls for only one act.

The time has, however, come for a little truth-telling or, if you please, blood-letting to counteract unconsidered adulation and self-satisfaction, and ensure the progress of the movement. The situation of the present one-act theatre is far from satisfactory. Though the plays deal with pressing realities, are conceived in sincerity and written honestly, they are distressingly uneven. A scattering of superlative pieces like *Waiting for Lefty*, *Till the Day I Die*, *Hymn To The Rising Sun*, and *Bury the Dead* is supplemented by a host of second-rate efforts, some of them abysmally primitive and naive. I shall endeavor to illustrate this situation in some detail, though it is only fair to state beforehand that all the plays mentioned in this paper are better than the average.

At present the plays, except for a small body of innocuous pieces extraneous to the general movement, fall into two classes: those that have and those that have not outgrown the elementary agitational form. In the latter category the piece dramatizes some single instance of social injustice, grinds close to the issue, and comes to rest with a bang on some definite act of protest—a strike, generally triumphant, or a conversion symbolic of the worker becoming class-conscious. If plays of this brand are deliberately keyed to meet certain practical needs, such as to convert certain workers to unionization, they are *ipso facto* utilitarian, and standards of art are largely inapplicable to them. If on the other hand the plays are intended to be works of art, they must be considered, in a distressingly large number of instances, well-intentioned failures. In most instances it is evident that a serious effort to achieve artistic merit has been made.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that these pieces do not fail because they serve a definite direction and point-of-view. Plays have not been known to die because they possessed definiteness and clarity. That agitational drama is not necessarily doomed to failure is shown by many of the world's great plays, and has been proven again, in the one-act form, by the work of Odets, Green and Shaw. Nor can one quarrel with the

militancy of the dramas. Intensity of conviction, vehemence and passion, are not faults in the theatre. Where, in fact, the militancy is lacking in a play about conditions literally crying for a definite reaction, the piece may well lose incisiveness and dramatic resolution. In *His Jewels*, a play in the New Theatre League's repertory, a sharecropper is not only evicted from his home but driven out of the church in which he has sheltered his children, one of whom is dying of tuberculosis. The drama is based on an actual occurrence, in which the victim maintained possession of the church with his rifle. The real situation is obviously the more dramatic one: the passiveness of the hounded sharecropper muffles the impact of the play.

That action requires reaction, charge demands discharge, is the "pleasure principle" of art as well as of life, and militancy that produces a satisfactory discharge of tension is an asset, not a liability, in the theatre. But cause and effect must be powerful and equal. Thus in *Waiting for Lefty* the provocation producing resentment and action was established in a series of searing scenes; the tension simply clamored for discharge. Similarly, after the horrors of war, the callousness of the generals and the emptiness of the lives of the poor have been burned into the mind, we cannot but want those killed and mangled soldiers of *Bury the Dead* to rise up and march. In contrast, there is the routine militancy of the average piece, in which the plant goes on strike, the vacillating worker joins the pickets, the clerk returns to his class (*Take My Stand*), and so on. Here cause and effect are equally undistinguished. Generally the effect in these plays—the striking back of the oppressed—is meant to be signally powerful. But first of all it cannot be effective unless the provocation is sufficiently realized to make us desire a heroic consummation. Secondly, a stock situation rarely impresses. One may have the highest respect for the strike as a weapon in labor struggles and still fail to thrill to every scene in which workers lay down their tools.

Furthermore not everything that is a correct and logical resolution of the action is necessarily exciting. If one swallow doesn't make a summer, neither does one person's conversation or the distribution of a dozen leaflets make a social upheaval. Here we have the case of a powerful cause and a disproportionately tame effect. It comprises the deadly sin of anti-climax. There is the classic example of the chap who warns his relentless enemy: "You have stolen my cow, you have robbed my home, you have slain

my grandmother and now you are assaulting my wife. If you try my patience any further I shall have you arrested!" A related danger is that of allowing the excitement to run down hill. In *Private Hicks* the national guardsman's initial refusal to fire upon the pickets is the real climax. Everything that follows is merely an explanation and confirmation of an already established fact.

In other instances a major difficulty is the delaying of the climax due to unnecessary preparation. In the first scene of *Trouble with the Angels*, an "angel" of the cast of *Green Pastures* learns that members of his race are not allowed into the theatre and determines to challenge the Jim Crow ruling. In the third or final scene the entire cast with the exception of "De Lawd," refuses to perform unless the theatre alters its policy. The middle scene shows the "angel" persuading his fellow actors to take this course of action. Would not the play be more exciting and the final scene considerably more effective if we didn't already know

what the angels were going to do? A delayed climax is also a basic weakness of Michael Blankfort's *The Crime* and of *Bury the Dead*. In the former play the vacillation of the labor leader does not provide sufficient driving interest in itself while the culminating tragic situation—namely, the loss of the strike—has been imminent so long that it fails to be electrifying when it finally comes. In *Bury the Dead*, fortunately, the macabre power of the initial situation, the pressure of several minor crises and the galvanic strength of the conversations between the dead men and their women are all sufficiently exciting to compensate the long delay between the rising of the men and their marching back into life. Indeed, despite its success and the fine example of effective fantasy it presents, *Bury the Dead* is a dangerous pattern to follow. It strains a single assumption immoderately. It is given to piling a Pelion of gratuitous humor and naturalistic horror upon its Ossa of social indictment and challenge. It is too long to com-

A \$200 PRIZE PLAY CONTEST

NEW THEATRE and New Theatre League announce a \$200.00 Prize Play Contest for the best one-act script of general social significance. With Broadway producers, little theatres, and the growing body of social theatres throughout this country stimulated by the professional successes of *Bury the Dead* and *Waiting for Lefty*, both written for NEW THEATRE contests, there is more reason than ever for both new and established writers to turn to the one-act play form.

Never in the past century has there existed such a wealth of subject matter for the social playwright. The tragedy of war and its appalling imminence; the growth of reactionary tendencies, typified by the Black Legion, the Tampa floggers, the Liberty League-Hearst combination, and the urgency of organization against all these influences; the struggle of industrial vs. craft unionism—these are but a few aspects of the contemporary social scene crying for dramatic presentation. The embodiment of America's most progressive traditions as exemplified by historical characters—Daniel Shay, Tom Paine, John Brown—are also highly desirable for this contest.

Playwrights need by no means confine their scripts to the suggestions given nor need they restrict their material to the realistic manner. Equal attention will be given plays presented in a humorous, satirical, farcical or burlesque style.

RULES: Contest begins immediately and closes October 1, 1936. Winners will be announced in the December issue of NEW THEATRE, and in the daily press. The New Theatre League and NEW THEATRE reserve the right to publish the prize-winning play and to act as agents for all rights, including movie, radio, publication, and amateur and professional stage production rights.

In addition to the \$200.00 main prize, should any other scripts be found worthy of a prize, a \$50 additional award will be made for each of said scripts.

Plays are to be thirty minutes to one hour in length. Manuscripts submitted must be clearly typed on one side of the paper, must bear their title plainly, and must be accompanied by return postage and by a registration fee of fifty cents for handling. No scripts will be accepted without registration fee. Author's name and address are *not to be on the manuscript*, but must be enclosed in a sealed envelope with return postage with the name of the play on the outside of the envelope.

A playwright may submit any number of scripts, but each individual script must be separately entered, with registration fee, return postage and identification envelope. Plays must be submitted to the \$200.00 Play Contest, P. O. Box 300, Grand Central Annex, New York City, or to the offices of New Theatre League at 55 W. 45th Street, New York City.

JUDGES: Herman Shumlin, producer and director of *The Children's Hour*; John W. Gassner, Theatre Guild playreader; Robert Garland, New York *World-Telegram* dramatic critic; Barrett H. Clark, theatre critic, author and lecturer; Ben Irwin, director of the New Theatre League Repertory Department; and George Sklar of the Theatre Union.

pletely hold the tension of the dead rising, and much too concerned with incidental detail such as the stench of the risen, the mockery of the whores and the idiosyncrasies of the general to maintain the illusion. The drive of its singular idea, its trenchant irony, its pity and passion set it to rights. But few playwrights can count upon the extraordinary endowment of talent that went into the making of Shaw's play.

Percival Wilde in what is probably the best book on the subject, *The Craftsmanship of the One-Act Play*, (Little, Brown and Co., 1923) differentiates the one-act play from the full length form by pointing out that "it is superior in unity and economy, playable in a comparatively short space of time, and intended to be assimilated as a whole without the aid of intermissions," that it is not just an abbreviated play—a point that authors would do well to remember. Writing a short play simply because one lacks the patience to write a long one is poor economy. The effects of the two forms are different. The one-act play pursues a single effect and demands "an instantaneous arrest of attention, a continued grasp, and relinquishment only after the curtain has fallen." Character must be likewise quickly established. With the above definition it is impossible to quarrel; it is not an *obiter dictum* but a description of effective writing in the one-act form.

Playwrights sometimes show a rash disregard of the limitations of the medium. They forget that the shorter form requires briefer preparation, quicker attack, and more unified development; that terseness of expression necessarily accompanies such an approach to play material; that, finally, characterization must be swiftly realized and sharply etched. The result is spineless and flabby drama, a play lacking in distinction. Observe by way of contrast how everything in Paul Green's *Hymn To The Rising Sun* is precipitated around the fact that today is the Fourth of July. The Captain makes a speech that becomes a devastating satire on the chain-gang system, at the same time that it fixes the blame upon the legislature of the state and illuminates his own character. A prisoner is brutally flogged—on Independence Day! Another is freed in honor of the day, only to be found dead in the sweat box! The drama of the entire penal system of the South is thus realized by means of a few well-considered strokes. One also notes the despatch with which the character of the Captain has been established. The sadist, the egomaniac, the vestige of a human being under the tyrant's mask, and finally the cynic whose mockery is partly hate

and partly defense—these facets of a personality are flashed before us in rapid succession. *Hymn to the Rising Sun* is a fine example of dramatic compression.

On the other hand, playwrights fumble just as often by failing to exploit the richness of their medium. There is a shrug of the shoulder in their attitude: "After all what can you expect? This is only a one-act play!" The point does not have to be argued in view of the existence of plays that are incontestable evidence of the rich possibilities of the art. A whole devil's kingdom is bounded in a nut-shell in *Hymn to the Rising Sun*. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* captures the strange hard life of the Aran Islanders, as well the the whole tragedy of motherhood, in a few pages of dialogue. Allowing themselves more space, Odets and Irwin Shaw have painted extraordinarily rich canvasses in their plays. It is well to remember that the playwright is free to employ as many scenes as he pleases provided they comprise a closely woven and inevitable pattern. The more of life he can pack into his plays the nearer he may bring it to significance. At the same time, of course, length itself will not guarantee richness. *The Crime* lasts an hour without achieving a commensurate affluence of characterization and situation. Much depends upon an eye for detail, for differences and nuances of character, for dramatic situations. A good deal also depends on a feeling for contrast and variety in every phase of the writing. It distinguishes the natural playwright from the camp-followers. Percival Wilde in one of the brilliant introductions of his extremely interesting compilation, *Contemporary One-Act Plays*. (Little Brown & Co., 1936, \$2.75), writes of *Till the Day I Die*: "His (Odets') swift alternations of light and shade are remarkable."

There remains one general problem of variety about which it is not always easy to speak to young playwrights. A complaint to the effect that their themes duplicate themselves, that they are always assailing us with the same tale of woe, is sure to draw fire. The complainant is a reactionary or at least a compromiser. Doesn't he realize that the world is full of wrong, that mankind is in the grip of a great struggle? Unfortunately, the barrier of human receptivity is a fact of nature. If a man tells you that his grandmother has died you may be exceedingly sorry. But if a hundred men report the same event you may find yourself approving the high rate of mortality and wishing that it also applied to the bereaved. My quarrel is not with the topic of injustice. The fault lies in a tendency to follow a more or less rigid pattern of

economic or racial struggle, the same didactic resolution of the conflict, the same situations, the same characters, and the same sombre tone.

Without greater variety of situation, tone and character the well-springs of the one-act theatre may dry up sooner than its adherents imagine. And this would be a pity, for the possibilities are almost infinite and close at hand. There is, for instance, the wide field of satire, so brilliantly utilized by Molière in short pieces like *Les Précieuses Ridicules* and *Georges Dandin*, and so slightly explored by the new movement. (The single exception seems to be Philip Stevenson, whose *God's in His Heaven* and *You Can't Change Human Nature* have been efforts in this direction.) There is the field of humor that should not be despised even by a theatre that has a sizeable chip on its shoulder. There is the domain of fantasy which, as *Bury the Dead* shows, is not compelled to consort with leprechauns and Celtic mist to be richly imaginative. There is, finally, the poetic drama, in which MacLeish, Auden, Kreymborg and Humbert Wolfe have been leading the way. Here indeed is an extremely suitable medium for one-act writing. As for topics for investigation, current one-act writers have as yet made little use of history, folk-lore and folkways, private relations and the drama of character. Malnutrition, let us remember, is a fatal disease in, as well as outside, the theatre. Incidentally, the righteous who fear that their theatre will suffer dilution from the infiltration of private matters and character studies have no real cause for worry. A majority of the tragedies of the people take place in the home; the full impact of economics is felt there. A majority of actual conflicts, visible on the stage, must take place between characters rather than impersonal forces.

It is not inconceivable that this running fire of comment could be continued indefinitely by multiplying special instances. There is no point, however, in going beyond a general appraisal. If it serves as a purgative and tonic it will have accomplished everything that was intended, and a good deal more than was hoped. It has seemed necessary because after several years of activity the one-act theatre at last stands some chance of becoming as permanent a factor as the full-length variety. If the average in the one-act theatre can be raised sufficiently it can be made to flourish on our stage. Its immediate future lies in the hands of all theatre-workers who are capable of rigorous self-criticism and are not content to look upon the one-act play as a mere stop-gap.

The Dance Congress

BY EDNA OCKO

There have been many reports of the first Dance Congress; there will be many more, some of them contradictory, perhaps. It is inevitable that a venture of such proportions invite criticism and suspicion, together with hosannahs, from unsuspected quarters. That personal antagonisms were unwittingly aroused is unfortunately true; that there were those who, for various reasons, encouraged and contributed to prejudiced reports of the entire proceedings is also true. But the most significant fact remains that the first Dance Congress in America was one of the most notable achievements in the field, and one of which the dance world can be duly proud. For the first time in the United States there was not only dancing for audiences, but sessions for dancers; there were not only discussions on esthetic credos, but on economic and organizational problems as well. For the first time the profession was viewed in its entirety, rather than in segregated, self-centered groupings.

True, there were drawbacks. A major fault of the Congress was its organizational and financial inability to cope with the innumerable unforeseen ramifications of the original plan. Another was, and unfortunately still is, the unpredictable hesitation of certain of our artists to support a cooperative enterprise of this sort. On the one hand, therefore, well-laid plans occasionally went askew because of inadequate coordination. On the other, the Congress became a vulnerable target for mischievous and unreliable reports. It is doubly unfortunate that these uncontrollable sources had sufficient influence to sway the opinions of Mr. John Martin, dance critic of the New York Times, whose critical outlook has had such far reaching consequences in the dance world.

The purpose of this report is not to analyze the reasons for the bitter criticism by a leading dance critic who, in order to discredit the entire undertaking, gave credence to every wild rumor current about the "radical" nature of the Congress.

In all justice, however, it is important that the Congress Committee's refutation (which Mr. Martin has not yet seen fit to print) be given space here. Mr. Martin called the performances "completely futile." We quote from the Committee's letter:

"Disregarding for the moment the arrangement of performances, and dealing with the artists presented, the question

arises, were they representative of the dance in America today? If we list some of them the answer is self-evident. In the ballet there were Arthur Mahoney, Nina Verchinina, and Lisa Parnova. In the folk dance, the English Folk Dancing Society, the Bahaman Group, the Polish Art and Dance Circle, and the Swedish, Ukrainian and American Folk Groups were part of the program. The modern dance was represented by Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Doris Humphrey, Anna Sokolow, Tamiris, Charles Weidman, Benjamin Zemach, and their respective groups. Among the soloists were Fe Alf, Miriam Blecher, Sophia Delza, Polly Korchien, Jose Limon, Bill Matons, Sophie Maslow, Gluck Sandor, Lillian Shapero, Felicia Sorel. While the theatre evening was unfortunately deprived of Harriet Hctor and Gertrude Hoffman, who because of last-minute engagements could not appear (although they had eagerly accepted), there were nevertheless available Avila and Nile, Mura Dehn, Belle Didjah, Roger Pryor Dodge. The list is by no means all-inclusive, but it is absurd to think that any National Dance Congress can include *all* dancers. Can you deny that outstanding representatives of all *forms* of the dance appeared on these programs?"

Mr. Martin then stated that the sessions at the Congress "talked itself to death." The letter answering him continues:

"It is unfortunate that you make this point since it was noticeable to all present that you attended only one session, the one at which you spoke. The interest manifested by those who did attend the Congress, who sat through sessions beginning at ten o'clock and ending at six, attested to the importance of the subjects touched on by these speakers. And what is the function of a conference if not to have as many voices as is possible heard, and all points of view discussed? Again we feel that it is important that your readers know just who these speakers were: Jerome Bayer, author, Gervaise Butler of the Dance Observer, Miss Lenora Cox, Anatole Chujoy and Paul Milton of the American Dancer, Grant Code of the Brooklyn Museum, Oscar Duryea, Frances Hawkins, Doris Humphrey, John Martin, Edna Ocko of NEW THEATRE, Lee Strasberg of the Group Theatre, Ralph Whitehead of the American Federation of Actors."

Mr. Martin concluded his article with an amazing statement that the Congress was an "unofficial political rally, making

use of the dance merely as a springboard," that "young Left-wingers kept the Congress in their own hands," and that the organizers of the venture should be "spanked and put to bed without their suppers." The letter, in proving the untruth of the second statement, lists the members of the Joint Congress Committee: Leon Arkus, Sophia Delza, Mura Dehn, Esther Junger, Margot Mayo, Edna Ocko, Louise Redfield, Tamiris, Ralph B. Tefferteller, and Elizabeth Van Barnavelde. Working with them, but unable to devote as much time, were Franziska Boaz, Doris Humphrey, Pauline Lawrence, Jose Limon, Lily Mehlman, Lisa Parnova, Gluck Sandor, Felicia Sorel, and Charles Weidman. They rightfully ask "by what wide stretch of the imagination" these people can be considered a group of "young Left-wingers" to be spanked and put to bed?

It is incredible that Mr. Martin wrote with such lack of discretion, when the facts themselves could have been so easily secured. An astute attendant at the performances and sessions would realize that there was as much for Left-wingers to deplore as endorse. During the six evenings, the number of dances presented with a social point of view for instance, could be counted on your fingers. As for the sessions, Mr. Gervaise Butler was violently opposed to collective action of any kind; Miss Elizabeth Selden seemed in favor of the licensing of dancers on a national scale; Mr. Dodge delivered himself of a piece in which he stated that Jazz was the sole creation of the whites, that the Negroes aped the white man's rhythms, his dancing, his clothes, his tap shoes. As a matter of record, in the whole galaxy of speakers, there was none present to present a formal Left point of view. This then, was an "unofficial political rally."

There might have been those who still consider the question of unionization, the discussion of economic problems of dancers a radical and dangerous topic to be cautiously avoided unless one wants to be called "Red." It is too bad that Mr. Martin, in his piece, catered to the very elements who have always opposed collective action on economic and artistic problems, and who will find in his article complete justification for attacks henceforth on all organized efforts: the New Dance League and the Dancers Association. Even the second Dance Congress has been rendered permanently suspect by his discovery of nefarious underground

forces in the planning of the first, to which many unsuspecting artists had innocently lent their aid and support.

The danger lies in the fact that the wholesale condemnation indulged in by this critic obscures the many valuable contributions of the Congress. This writer confesses she attended every performance and every session, and found in each event sufficient significant and creditable material to justify the entire enterprise.

The ballet evening was notable for the appearance of Nina Verchinina, leading ballerina of the Monte Carlo company, who presented a suite of modern dances in a distinctive, original style. Miss Verchinina confessed that her work, two years in the making, received its first public performance only because the Congress invited the presentation of experimental efforts.

The evening of folk dances has already received such general acclaim that one can merely reassert one's sorrow that so few attended. The two modern evenings, well attended, while presenting no new work save *Night Riders* by the Tamiris Group, did grant the observer an illuminating panoramic survey of the field. The New Dance League, forced to limit its representatives to one dance each, did itself proud in the work of its soloists and the Dance Unit. The Festival additionally made it possible for a general public to see for the first time the work of Hanya Holm and her Group who have not as yet appeared in formal recital. The demonstration evening, besides affording a valuable slant on the technical training of Doris Humphrey and Martha Graham, also gave some their first glimpse of Dalcroze and Isadora Duncan work, as well as the increasingly interesting work of the Rebel Arts Group. It is hoped that next year's Congress will find room for demonstration and discussion on pedagogy and children's work as well.

The Congress plans to publish a book containing the speeches delivered at the sessions. This volume should be in every dancer's hands. Some of the finest and authoritative papers were prepared expressly for the Congress. Miss Lenora Cox's survey on the Negro in the dance was the first significant contribution we have ever heard on the subject; Mr. Chujoy's factual paper on ballet was equally valuable. Mr. Milton's and Mr. Whitehead's plea for unionization of dancers should encourage immediate research in the possibilities of economic protection for the professional. Louise Redfield's survey of the work of the New Dance League was sympathetic and informative. Mr. Jerome Bayer's talk on the dancer and his world, the concluding speech of the final session, won deserving

commendation from a large audience who saw in it a vigorous attempt to evaluate and broaden the art of the dance.

It is important too, that we call attention to the fact that one of the finest loan exhibitions of dance photographs and pictures by renowned artists was on view during the week, under the guidance of Miss Lily Mehlman.

The final session brought forward the reading and voting on the resolutions, which were indicative of the high tone and serious purpose of the Dance Congress, and the crystallization of aims of dancers all over the country. It should be the duty of all organizations of dancers, students, all individuals to endorse not only these resolutions but the second American Dancers Congress. Only by this wholehearted support can an institution of the artistic and social sig-

"Pins and Needles"—Labor Stage

With no fanfare but with a great deal of purpose the first undertaking of Labor Stage, Inc., was launched Sunday evening, June 14th, in the studios of the Princess Theatre in New York with the Contemporary Theatre Company. It was a satirical musical revue, *Pins and Needles*, which succeeded in being genuinely entertaining, if occasionally over-ambitious.

This revue was the initial tangible product of the decision of the American Federation of Labor at its last convention, when, for the first time in the history of the American labor movement, the concept of theatre as a means of education for workers was officially endorsed in the formation of Labor Stage. This first effort was watched critically by labor leaders and theatre people alike. Neither group had cause to be disappointed.

Presented in a tiny studio (because the Princess Theatre proper in which Labor Stage will ultimately place its productions will not be completely renovated for several weeks yet) and presented on a still tinier stage, *Pins and Needles* managed to project a charm and vitality that one often finds missing in Broadway revues whose production costs run several hundred times that of *Pins and Needles*.

An unusually good looking and gifted cast of girls, among them particularly Peggy Craven and Elizabeth Timberman, a supporting cast of men with Lee Hillery and Louis Latzer deserving special mention, with Harold Rome and Earl Robinson supplying the music with two pianos, all contributed to the general success of the program.

Harold Rome, who supplied the major portion of the lyrics and music, displayed

nificance of the Dance Congress carry on.

The first National Dance Congress resolved that such a Congress become a permanent institution. It went on record as opposing war, fascism, and censorship, and the public appearance of dancers without remuneration; resolutions were passed favoring the organizational unity of all dancers having a common cultural program; the economic organization of dancers; cooperation with existing trade unions; the encouragement of road tours for dancers; the support of any International Dance Congress or Festival except those sponsored by fascist governments or organizations; support of unemployment, social security and relief legislation; the setting up of government dance projects in every possible city and the development of an all-inclusive dancers' publication.

a fresh and engaging talent in his work. S. Syrjala, who was responsible for the production design, created some extraordinarily simple but effective settings for the various revue numbers.

Of the eighteen numbers in the show, several were outstanding, including *Pass At Me*, *Not Cricket*, *You Gotta Dance*, and *Magic at Sea*, the first three of which were contributed by Rome. The production, which now runs well over two hours, might be cut and tightened up to some advantage, although the timing, an important part of any revue, was splendidly handled, considering the limited playing area.

Emanuel Eisenberg's *Mother! Let Freedom Wrong*, a good humored, if caustic bit of fun poking at the social theatre, got the least rise of any of the production material out of this reviewer, although the audience seemed to enjoy it. It was a particularly sophisticated piece of burlesque which apparently attempted to establish the fact that the labor theatre was healthy enough to laugh at itself.

In general, however, Labor Stage has made a valuable excursion into the field of the social revue, and brought forth some really worthwhile material. The new theatres throughout this country, which are working closely with the Central Labor bodies in their communities, will do well to follow the example of Labor Stage and make further experiments with the vaudeville form, a native and important theatre technique.

The Contemporary Theatre Company, which intends to stay together as the permanent company of Labor Stage, has indeed made an auspicious beginning.

BEN IRWIN.



Silverberg

THE KLAN INVADERS A NEGRO FISH FRY IN "WHEN THE JACK HOLLERS," LANGSTON HUGHES' AND ARNA BONTEMPS' COMEDY, GILPIN PLAYERS, CLEVELAND.

Shifting Scenes

In reviewing the Relief Play Contest last month the names of the authors of the second prize winning play, *From Little Acorns*, were omitted. It is the work of Joseph Samuelson and William Hauptmann.

All amateur and New Theatre groups, and summer theatres should be interested in hearing that production rights to Irwin Shaw's *Bury the Dead*, acclaimed as the finest anti-war play of our time, are now available for almost every community. In addition, Paul and Claire Sifton's *Blood on the Moon*, which recently had a successful three weeks' run when presented by the Progressive Players in Brooklyn, N. Y., is available in published form; the price is \$.75 a copy. *Question Before the House*, by Doris Yankauer and Herbert Mayer, has been released for summer production. Originally produced at Vassar College, it deals with a group of University economics students who get their first taste of practical labor experience in a strike in their college town. All inquiries should be addressed to the New Theatre League, 55 West 54th Street, New York City.

The Young Circle League, labor fraternal organization, has extended the closing date of its contest for the best one-act play of social significance to September 1st. The prizes offered are: \$100 plus presentation and possible publication to the winning play; \$50 plus presentation and possible publication, to the winner of the second prize; third prize, presentation only. The judges of the contest are Alfred Kreymborg, David Pinski and Mark Schweid. Manuscripts should be sent to the National Office, Young Circle League, 175 East Broadway, New York City.

The American Federationist, official publication of the American Federation of Labor, reprinted Albert Maltz's *Private Hicks* in condensed form in its June issue. This recognition of an outstanding play in the new theatre movement is of great importance. Groups are urged to procure copies of the June Federationist from the A. F. of L. building in Washington, D. C., and use them in enlisting the support of local trade unions and central trades councils.

As its third and final offering of the 1936 season, the New Theatre Union of Detroit presented Clifford Odets' *Paradise Lost* for three

performances, to audiences totalling 2,600 persons. The production was highly praised by Detroit critics. The Detroit Conference for Protection of Civil Rights (a United Front organization which is leading the fight against the Michigan Black Legion), is getting fifteen minutes on the radio every two weeks on the Labor Forum (A. F. of L.) radio program, and is planning to put on a Labor March of Time. The New Theatre Union, the Musicians Federation and the Writers' Guild have been asked to send delegates to a committee which would plan these programs. . . . The Seattle People's Theatre, working along the same lines, is conducting a class in the writing and directing of radio scripts; the class is now putting on dramatizations for the People's Radio Guild for a program three nights weekly. Some of the continuities have dealt with the Haymarket Riot, the Centralia case, an anti-war broadcast, the 1934 textile strike, the building trade strike of 1923 and the San Francisco Building Trades Council's share in it, the Homestead Steel strike, the present Juneau miners strike and the Minneapolis truckers strike. The broadcasting of labor scripts, working with the broadest possible trade union support, should be an objective for new theatre groups throughout the country.

The Washington New Theatre recently presented three New York actors; Robert Shayne, Lee Cobb and Hester Sondergaard, in a highly successful reading of *Bury the Dead*. The affair, which drew the appreciative comment of Washington critics, was arranged in cooperation with the National office of the New Theatre League. . . . The New Theatre of Pittsburgh, following an amalgamation with several new white and Negro groups, opened its own theatre with a program consisting of *Private Hicks*, *Waiting for Lefty* and Randolph Edmonds' *Breeders*. Its next production will be Paul Peters' *Bivouac Alabama*. . . . The Chicago Repertory Group has reported ever-increasing interest and cooperation from trade union groups as the result of its highly successful one-act production of *The Young Go First*. One direct result has been an invitation to the organization to play at the Illinois Farmer Labor Party convention in Springfield in July. The Group recently entered the Chicago contest of Negro Drama Groups with a production of *Hymn to the Rising Sun*, and won first place in the event. . . . The Cincinnati New Theatre presented *Private Hicks*, three scenes from

George Middleton's *Hiss-Boom-Blah*, and a Hollywood satire called *Artiste*, on June 5. . . . The Philadelphia New Theatre is presenting the government produced film, *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (reviewed in this issue), during the week of the Democratic National Convention. This film, which is of real social significance, has been barred by all commercial distributors, and showings of it will depend solely on efforts such as those of the Philadelphia New Theatre. In addition this group is continually playing to Philadelphia trade union audiences; its performances have been of real value in strengthening the strikes called by Horn & Hardart employees, and woollen and worsted workers. . . . David Pressman, graduate of the Neighborhood Playhouse drama school, has been sent by the New Theatre League to head the theatre school established by the Toronto Theatre of Action. . . . Ben Golden, of the National Executive Board of the New Theatre League, has gone to Seattle to work with the People's Theatre there, and act as the League's representative on the West Coast. . . . The New Haven Progressive Theatre recently sponsored a Negro People's Theatre Night, at which they presented *Mighty Wind A'Blowin'*. . . . The New York Youth Theatre, directed by Jules Garfield of the Group Theatre, is working on an American Youth Act script. The purpose of the organization is to present, and help youth solve its problems through the medium of theatre. Young people interested in joining or organizing such a group should communicate with R. Kean, 324 East 50th Street, New York City.

There are benefits and benefits. That of June 7th, at the Majestic Theatre in New York, the proceeds of which went to the Citizens' Committee for the striking seamen, was in a class by itself. Organized and staged by S. Jay Kaufman, it had the finish of a carefully rehearsed revue, and every star who had been announced beforehand made his appearance. Sam H. Harris helped to get the theatre; Lee Shubert donated 75% of the rent; the musicians, including the noted conductor, Richard Baravelle, appeared gratis; and the stage hands refused pay for rehearsals as well as all tips. The twenty-six acts maintained a high level of quality throughout the show; among them were Rudy Vallee and three of his hit numbers, John Steel, Stan Kavanagh, Patricia Bowman, Irving Caesar, Al Bernie, Rodney McLellan, Roth and Shay, Gipsy Nina, Jules Lande, Roslyn Harvey, Charles Althoff, the Reyes, Mildred Windell, Cora Green, Hamtree Harrington, Will Geer, Kitty Grill, Billie Leonard, Tony Meza and Nick Lucas.

The New York New Theatre Players announce their affiliation with the Workers' Zukunft club of 52 St. Mark's Place. This group, together with other workers' clubs and the International Workers Order, is planning to build a modern center containing a theatre which will seat 600.

Jewish Play Contest

Complete details of a \$100.00 play contest for the best social play on Jewish life, with special emphasis on contemporary American Jewish life, will be outlined in the next issue of NEW THEATRE. The contest opens immediately and will close November 15th. Full details may be secured after July 1st from the New Theatre League, 55 West 45 St., New York. The contest will be jointly sponsored by the New Theatre League, NEW THEATRE and the 92nd Street Y.M.H.A.



Silverberg

THE KLAN INVADERS A NEGRO FISH FRY IN "WHEN THE JACK HOLLERS," LANGSTON HUGHES' AND ARNA BONTEMPS' COMEDY, GILPIN PLAYERS, CLEVELAND.

Case of the Group Theatre

(Continued from page 5)

It has a right to do any play it pleases for any reason. Whatever the playwright has to say, he will say as well as he can through the production and nobody else need be implicated. But the Group, operating as a collective theatre, has always and correctly maintained that it aims at a synthesis of creative elements. We read in "The Group Theatre Project" printed in 1932: "The stage direction of a play shapes it to its real meanings. Seek for the true significance of our work through the complete production, not in the nature of the written play alone." That may be legitimately taken as a statement of the sharing and responsibility which all the theatrical factors have in the content of the production. To try to avoid such identification by evasive publicity is merely another form of playing safe—safe with critics, safe with movie money, safe with conservative audience elements.

Like all action stemming from weakness and fear, its effect tends to be the reverse of what it intends to accomplish. It is significant that all the plays mentioned by Mr. Clurman in his letter are works in which the playwright's lack of social clarity causes a corresponding weakness in technical vigor and emotional force.

Does this criticism suggest that the Group should restrict itself to the presentation of plays which directly picture the working class struggle and which reach a climax which constitutes a "call to action"? Such a suggestion is an absurdity, and could be made only by those who fail to analyze the Group's function in relation to its audience. Indeed, it is precisely the failure to understand this function which confused many Group productions. The Group's audience-function lies in developing and coördinating an audience of a preëminently middle-class character.

If we examine the Group's choice and treatment of plays, we find that the confused approach to such external problems as trade unionism or letters to critics and agents is reflected in a confused approach to and treatment of the three plays produced during the season 1935-36: *Weep for the Virgins*, *Paradise Lost* and *Case of Clyde Griffiths*.

By far the most significant of these was the Odets play. It is not our purpose here to attempt an appraisal of Odets' progress as a playwright. But *Paradise Lost* shows trends which indicate the atmosphere of the Group's thinking as a collective entity. *Paradise Lost* selects a

middle-class theme for presentation to a predominantly middle-class audience. But instead of showing the middle-class *realistically* awakening to a realization of its role in the world today and fighting for its life against reactionary and fascist forces, Odets has shown the middle-class reaching social awareness only through its own annihilation. This constitutes on the one hand an evasion of social issues, and on the other hand a romantic gesture of "leftism" which covers the evasion. In spite of the beauty and power of *Paradise Lost*, the play thus misses the full emotional complexity which the theme demands. In place of this, it repeats the idea of romantic conversion so effectively projected in *Waiting for Lefty*. The conversion is in terms of wishes and hopes which are not translated into living conflict. The romanticism of the closing scene gives overtones of fatalism and defeat.

Can we say that this is solely a phase in the author's development, and is not related to the trend of the Group as a whole? It is evident that *Paradise Lost* indicates a general trend because *precisely the same mistakes* are to be found in other Group productions. In the case of *Paradise Lost*, the psychological uncertainty of the treatment was emphasized in the staging. *Weep for the Virgins* was a play with no defined viewpoint, so one-toned in character as to seem almost a libel on the slice-of-life which it purported to depict; yet the atmosphere of *Weep for the Virgins* was unquestionably fatalistic; and this fatalism, although it never touched the poetic level of *Paradise Lost*, may be traced to a similar evasion of the potentialities of conflict and emotional depth in the life of our time.

The choice and treatment of *Case of Clyde Griffiths* is equally significant: Piscator's version of the Dreiser novel grows out of a particular phase of German radical thought in the period prior to the rise of Hitler: the special characteristic of this thought was the *underestimation of the role of the middle class*. The Speaker continually insists that Clyde is "lost" in a No Man's Land between the classes. Many left critics have hailed the Speaker's role as a "Marxist" interpretation of the economic and social forces underlying an individual tragedy; but the inevitability of defeat which *forces* Clyde to his doom does not give us a fruitful understanding of the inter-action between the individual and his environment; thus not only is the "case" of Clyde himself distorted; but the role of the class to

which Clyde belongs is presented in a false light. The Group's exciting, somewhat circus-like production, did nothing to clarify this problem. Yet the producers had the right of adaptation, and it would have been possible to give the Piscator story an historical perspective and analysis which would have vastly increased its audience-value.

Space does not permit a thorough historical outline of the Group's development. But the psychological trend here noted is not of recent origin: It may be traced in both the text and production technique of earlier Group plays: for example, the emotional confusion of *Success Story*, the brittle bitterness of *Big Night*, the use of the San Francisco earthquake, intended as a prophecy of the impending doom of the capitalist class which comes out in production as the blind force of nature that "solves" the conflict in *Gold Eagle Guy*.

Harold Clurman, one of the directors, has occasionally spoken of the Group as a "Marxist" theatre. At a time when there is widespread distortion of the meaning of Marxism, the loose use of the term is a dangerous matter. One frequently hears the charge that Marxism is based on the theory that the end justifies the means. Any serious student of Marxism knows that there can be no contradiction between the end and the means. The *end* to which the Group's work is dedicated is artistic integrity and independence. The *means* are audience support, critical approval, financial backing. No one doubts that the Group's compromises are made with the best intentions—as a *means* to justify the *end* of keeping the Group together despite the financial and organizational problems that make it so difficult to maintain a permanent company of more than thirty actors and directors on Broadway year in and year out. But it is a grave error to assume that it is "practical" to compromise the present in the interest of some theoretical advantage to be obtained in the future.

The Group has a magnificent task to perform. It is possible that the richest art of our time may be developed out of the conflicts of middle-class life—the attempt of the middle-class to free themselves from the fears and phobias of the past and to take their place with the workers in the struggle for a better world. If the Group is to fulfill this task, it must actually *become a Marxist* theatre. This requires further study and clarification on the part of every member of the organization. It requires the creation of a really democratic collective. It requires the broadening of the organization by the inclusion of other creative workers, particularly playwrights and

scenic designers. It requires the building of audience-support with a view to freeing the Group from dependence on motion picture or other capital.

The Group Theatre, both actors and directors, may rightly object that it is all very well to theorize, but that objective conditions must be realistically met, and that the criticisms voiced in this article do not help them solve the difficulties they are now facing. Since there is no established pattern for maintaining an art theatre dramatizing the vital issues of the time for middle class audiences, it would be presumptuous to prescribe untried antidotes as reliable cure-alls. However if this analysis succeeds in bringing out into the open the problems which the Group must face, it will have accomplished something of value.

This is the seventh summer of the Group's life. The Group is no longer a child theatre. Before it enters upon its next season, we urge the directors and members to meet each other with ruthless frankness and honesty and start the task of clearing up its confusions, eliminating its contradictions, reaffirming its convictions, and mustering its courage for the new struggle to maintain them. It must no longer allow its left hand the luxury of not knowing what its right hand is doing.

Federal Theatre Plays

(Continued from page 6)

Ship of State scenes, but in the utilization of the musical revue technique for incisive satire. The revue is the most popular of the theatre arts. Far from being carefully segregated by the serious artist it should be approached and developed.

Moreover, the Poetic Theatre is fulfilling a distinctly experimental and educational function. Mark Twain complained that everyone talked about the weather but no one ever did anything about it. The same may be said for poetic drama, that beau ideal of all dissenters from the realistic theatre. The Max Reinhardt spectacles evade and at best merely scratch the surface of the problem. The application of poetic diction to *Mary of Scotland* and *Winterset* leaves the structure of the drama unaffected; both plays were constructed within the framework of realism. It is worth gauging how far one can go in the compression and condensation which is the heart of poetry, how comprehensible it is on the stage, and to what extent it needs the trappings of the theatre at all. These questions have already been suggested by expressionist pieces, but never so directly or absolutely as in *The Dance*

of Death. One is not prepared to provide an answer as yet, but Auden's piece suggests that dramatic poetry in order to be effective on the stage cannot do without developed drama, that mere exposition and explication are insufficient; otherwise this form can be endured only briefly. The Japanese appear to have had an inkling of this fact when they made their beautiful "Noh" plays extremely short and to the point. Perhaps, too, poetry still requires little more than that it be spoken, and in its future in the theatre, apart from poetic diction, may reside largely in the mass recitation, of which Kreymborg's *America, America* is such an excellent example; or in modification of the form. At the symposium on *Mother* Archibald MacLeish surmised that one of the true applications of poetry to the theatre might well lie in the association of mass chants with "straight drama."

The Popular Price Theatre's *Class of '29*, by Orrie Lashin and Milo Hastings, seems ready-made for an underscoring of the latter question. It is difficult to think of a more poignant situation than the plight of the college graduates stranded in a world that keeps no place for them and erects seemingly insuperable barriers to the emotional needs of their youth. The play is an unqualified statement of this stalemate, and yet it fails to make the most of it through sheer lack of inspiration. Its dialogue rarely rises to the latent passion of the theme, and the situations are more or less dissipated due to a lack of compression. Discursiveness is the bane of the play. Its other weaknesses are probably more remediable, though far from negligible. The aesthete who commits suicide rather than serve in a uniform has been presented as too contemptibly weak to react so forcefully. The emphasis upon the college men's search for work fails to stress a necessary distinction between work at any price, which is peonage, and work without loss of liberty and self-respect. When Ken Holden returns to the useless job bought for him by his father, the bishop, the authors beg the question. He might just as well take his father's allowance and work by himself. The curtain line shows that he recognizes his degradation, but there is no intention of doing anything about it. When the college graduate "Tippy" washes genteel dogs for a living his un-failing cheerfulness is excusable only on grounds of advanced dementia praecox. If *Class of '29* did not, despite its faults, succeed in exposing an appalling situation it would be extremely weak drama indeed. In lieu of a stronger treatment this tale deserves a place on the contemporary stage.



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A Call for a National Theatre

(Continued from page 9)

national theatre not be left to local initiative or management.

The Federal Drama Project is the logical base from which this theatre can spring. A national theatre, however, must so be drawn up as to include provision for many theatre talents not now on the Projects. It must be so set up as to permit a regular interchange of talents with the commercial and the non-professional theatres. Provision must be made not only for the continued training and development of matured artists but also for the regular absorption of new talents from the theatrical schools and the college and amateur theatres.

Real dangers confront a state-subsidized theatre. The main questions, outside of the physical organization, are, what type of theatre shall such a national theatre be, how much freedom of expression will its artists have, and whether or not the people rather than political appointees shall control its policies. A brief consideration of some of the factors involved must be made.

An American national theatre rooted in regional centres from coast to coast and not an "institution" like the moribund *Comedie-Francaise* (as the Philadelphia society ladies who hold a charter for a national theatre conceive of it), would reflect the complex texture of our life from New York to California—from the Rio Grande to the Canadian border. In addition it would bring out the special

characters that distinguish regional groupings (i.e., the South, Far West, New England, etc.), which are just beginning to find adequate expression on the American stage. Such a theatre would necessarily also have to serve the racial and language minorities which are a traditional and welcome division in American life: the Negro, the Jew, the Italian, the Mexican, the German—all belong on our native stage.

Unlike the present commercial theatre which, with the exception of a few progressive producers and production-groups, present plays *first* because they seem to indicate that a long profit can be made and *secondly* for any intrinsic social or artistic merit the plays may have, the state theatres can follow the dictates for higher drama laid down by the best traditions of the theatre. This has been demonstrated in the United States by the high quality of most of the first Federal Drama Project shows and abroad by the work of the state theatres in Europe and in the Soviet Union. This artistic pre-eminence can only be assured, however, by the proper inner organization of the state theatre itself, and by guaranteeing the freedom of expression outlined above. We have the playwrights, the actors, the technicians—give them the means, the tools and the freedom of expression they require and our national theatre will flourish and grow.

What is to be done?

The issue is not one which will wait for years of discussion; it will not admit procrastination or hesitation.

The lives and creative work of over twelve thousand project workers are involved. Thousands more among the ranks of American theatre workers both professional and non-professional, and recent graduates of the theatre training schools and university dramatic departments, are directly concerned. Hundreds of thousands, yes millions, of spectator-citizens must be served; the commercial theatre and the philanthropy-subsidized little theatres and even what little circus, vaudeville, and puppetry remains seldom reaches them. Prophets of doom have been crying that the theatre is dead, but they did not know how an intelligent economic base such as government subsidy could give it life. Action must begin at once on the broadest possible scale for the conversion of the Federal Drama Project into a permanent, national, subsidized theatre.

A representative provisional committee should be summoned together at once to

begin the campaign for a national theatre. This committee might draw up the plans (rough perhaps but certainly extensive and practical) for the establishment of the theatre system. It should then call as quickly as possible a broad congress of theatre workers (on a nationwide scale) elected from among the Federal Drama Project units, all the theatrical trade unions, professional drama critics, university and little theatre associations, drama schools, and such representative national organizations as the National Theatre Conference and the New Theatre League. This Congress should represent a majority of the personnel and every craft division in the theatre, and its decisions would determine the nature of the national theatre we want to establish in America today. The Congress should result in a permanent, representative organization which would carry on the day-to-day campaign from Washington, D. C., to every cross-road of the country.

There is not a moment to lose! It is my belief that the best forces in our theatre are looking forward hopefully towards such people as Hallie Flanagan, Philip Barber, Rosamund Gilder, Walter Pritchard Eaton, Frederic McConnel, Barrett H. Clark, Lee Simonson, H. K. Motherwell, Mrs. Edith J. R. Isaacs, Sidney Howard, Elmer Rice, Lee Strasberg, John Howard Lawson, Garret H. Leverton, Gilmor Brown, Jasper Deeter, Frederic B. Koch, Thomas Wood Stevens, Robert Garland, Brooks Atkinson, Sheldon Cheney (to name only a representative few) to inaugurate such a provisional committee as is suggested above. If they will come forward to initiate the movement it will meet with mass response and enthusiasm and support at once.

In a written appeal to the Committee of Instruction of the first French republic, Boissy d'Anglas wrote on Feb. 13, 1794:

"In considering the theatre as one of the properest instruments for furthering the development of society and rendering men more virtuous and more enlightened, you will, I am sure, not allow it to become solely an object of financial speculation, but make it a national enterprise. . . . Let this be one of the principal aims of your public service. . . . In this way you will be opening up a path along which the human mind can pursue its way to even greater heights than heretofore . . . and offer the people an even new source of instruction and pleasure, and form the national character as you wish."*

Those who now have the opportunity to assume leadership in the proposed move-

* Quoted by Romain Rolland, *The People's Theatre*, Trans. by Barrett H. Clark.

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ment for an American national theatre might well take these words to heart.

Action is necessary, and action must mark the next step forward!

A Night at the Movies

(Continued from page 13)

herself as she misses the numbers, twenty-eight coming up and what she needs is twenty-seven, or thirty-three being called and she has thirty-one on her card. The lollypop sticks punch the holes until the card looks like a commuter's ticket at the end of the month, but still the number dodges us. At last it is all over, and we still have four numbers one way and four numbers another way, and we don't win.

"I knew it," Mom says. "I knew it. The devil watches to see we don't win. You come from a bad lucky family, my son."

Too bad, and there are four hundred other bad lucky families here tonight, all convinced that the Screeno game is just another proof of how they are doomed, and yet still secretly hoping next week maybe my turn will come, we cannot lose forever. Others have the money and we have Mickey Mouse and Irene Dunne and the *Metrotone News*, and the elegant stone ladies in the lobby we pass again on the way out. We have the scarlet ticket taker and the deep rugs and the hushed lights as consolation as we turn homewards again. The pickets, the laundries, the bakeries, the basements, the thronged roofs, the streets, the potzy game, the stoops, the roller-skating kids, back home again to see if the old man took his supper himself and whether or not he's sore coming home from work and finding nothing waiting on the table for him to eat.

Film Checklist

(Continued from page 12)

IT'S LOVE AGAIN: (Gaumont-British) In fact, *It's Broadway Melody Of 1936 Again*, at least by intention, if not accomplishment. Miss Jessie Matthews provides a pert little face somewhat short of chin, and a listless imitation of Eleanor Powell's tap style. Robert Young's performance as a go-getting American newspaper man working for the London press doesn't help matters.

SONS O' GUNS: Comedy with a world-war setting, and a poor vehicle for one of our best comedians, Joe E. Brown. Although in the course of affairs there are several mild anti-war statements such as Brown's reiterated "I'm not mad at the enemy. They're not mad at me. Why should I fight?", in general the film remains a light-hearted whitewashing of international warfare in which Brown gets the pretty French barmaid (Joan

Blondell) and wins a decoration for distinguished service to the Allied cause.

SEVEN BRAVE MEN: (Soviet film) A movie of modest proportions, directed by S. Gerasimov. Narrates the trials and bravery of a meteorological expedition to the Arctic. It boasts good performances and a pervading wholesomeness that is a relief from the sultry air of the usual Hollywood product, but in the main it is too confused and tentative, both in direction and purpose, to reach the high level set by the Soviet film masters.

THE EX-MRS. BRADFORD: Slightly better than average murder mystery featuring the capable comedy didoes of Jean Arthur and William Powell. Stephen Roberts directs with sufficient skill to compensate for his connection with the late, unlamented *The Lady Consents*.

PRIVATE NUMBER: Based on that reverend tear-jerker *Common Clay*, *Private Number* submerged the Radio Music Hall in a deeper bath of maudlin sentimentality than any film during its short but distinguished career. They will probably be busy scraping mildew-rot from the walls of the auditorium for many months to come.

As unworthy even of the casual comment of this column, include *Nobody's Fool*, *Little Miss Nobody*, *Speed*, and *Three Wise Guys*.



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Backstage

The NEW THEATRE tour to the Soviet Theatre Festival, which will be headed by Herbert Kline, leaves New York on the S. S. Aquitania on August 5th, and arrives in Paris on August 11th. The following countries will be visited in addition to France and the Soviet Union: England, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Poland. The pre-Festival tour in the Soviet Union will extend from Kiev southeastwards to Yalta on the Black Sea and north through Dniepestroy and Kharkov to Moscow and Leningrad. There are still a few reservations open, and interested persons are urged to write or telephone Mr. Kline at NEW THEATRE, (156 West 44th Street, New York City, BRyant 9-8378) before July 20th for details.

Irwin Shaw, whose *Bury the Dead* was recently produced in New York and Hollywood, has turned from straight social drama to social comedy. He is working on a farce to be called *Salute*, dealing with an incident which is shown in the first act to be trivial, which raises a Red scare of tremendous proportions. In addition he has collaborated with such leading writers as Dorothy Parker, Morrie Ryskind, George Kaufman, Edwin Justus Mayer and others in a collectively-written play, to which each author has contributed one scene. The theme is anti-Nazi, and the initial production will be in Hollywood.

An all-partisan organization of citizens opposed to war and fascism called the United Citizens' Committee, formed to aid the American League Against War and Fascism, numbers Sidney Howard as one



BOLSHOI THEATRE, MOSCOW

of its vice-chairmen, and other important leading theatrical figures on its advisory board: H. W. L. Dana, Lillian Hellman, John Haynes Holmes, Robert E. Sherwood, Herman Shumlin, and Elmer Rice.

Herbert Biberman, who contributes an article on *Theatre and Film* to this issue, has directed films for Columbia Pictures, the latest being *Meet Nero Wolfe*, to be released shortly. He has also directed a number of stage plays, among them *Roar China*, *Miracle at Verdun*, *Green Grow the Lilacs* and *Valley Forge*, for the Theatre Guild.

Charles Recht, who has contributed *Francois Villon in Prague*, is an international lawyer, now on an extensive tour through Europe and the Far East.

Subscribers are requested, when sending in changes of address, to state whether the change is a temporary summer address or a permanent address.

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—*Burns Mantle, The News.*



" it is possible to look back on one of the most significant dramatic seasons in many a year. And, upon further reflection, it is interesting to note that one of the elements contributing to its significance was the WPA Federal Theatre."—*Robert Garland, World-Telegram.*

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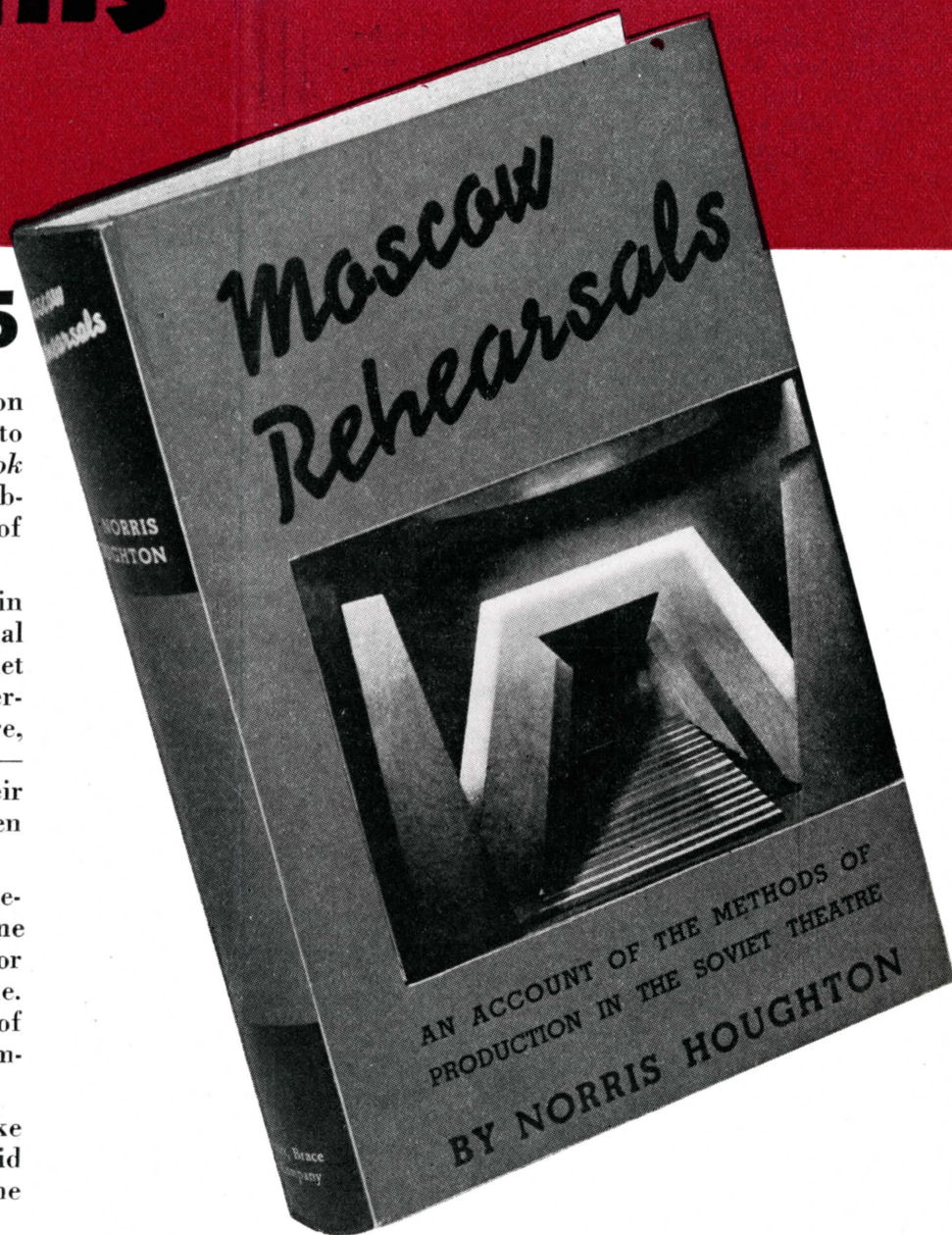
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