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theatre & film

APRIL 1937 25c

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ARE NEWSREELS NEWS?

By Robert Stebbins and Peter Ellis

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B A C K S T A G E



THE struggle for democracy in Spain has come even closer to the new theatre movement than heretofore through the death in action of John Lenthier, organizer and leading actor of the Boston New Theatre, and a member of the company which last summer toured *Let Freedom Ring* through the New England textile centers. Lenthier was killed in March on the Jarama front, where he was fighting as a member of the Lincoln Battalion of American volunteers.

The first Far-Western Conference of the New Theatre League will be held in San Francisco on May 15th and 16th. The San Francisco Theatre Union, the Los Angeles Contemporary Players, the East Bay Theatre Union and the Seattle Repertory Theatre will form the nucleus of the conference to which delegates from other west coast theatres will be invited. The agenda will include a report from the National Office of the New Theatre League, greetings from labor leaders, reports of participating theatres on repertory, on **NEW THEATRE AND FILM** and Theatre Workshop, and discussions on raising the level of the West Coast new theatre movement, and the possibility of opening a western office of the New Theatre League. Communications regarding the conference should be addressed to the San Francisco Theatre Union, 2229½ Geary Street, San Francisco.

American dancers and dance enthusiasts will be glad to hear of a special trip to the Soviet Union being arranged by **NEW THEATRE AND FILM** to take place this summer. For the first time, an organized group of dancers will make a tour of the country, visit the leading dance schools, interview the outstanding dancers and choreographers, and attend, if they wish, the Fifth Annual Theatre Festival to be held in Moscow and Leningrad September 1st to 10th, at which time special folk and ballet performances will be given. The tour, which will start in July and last two months, will include brief stays in France, Germany, Poland, Norway and England, as well as a unique itinerary in the USSR, specially designed to include visits to dance centers in the East (Batum, Tiflis, Rostov-on-Don) as well as Russia proper.

Arrangements are now being made to permit some of the visiting dancers to give informal performances in certain of the cities visited. Dancers and students interested in joining this group can receive further information from Edna Ocko, care of **NEW THEATRE AND FILM**.

Fortified by a group of professional actors, America's pioneer traveling labor theatre, The Brookwood Labor Players, will start their sixth annual tour on Saturday night, April 3, with a performance at the Young Circle League Auditorium, 22 East 15th Street, New York City.

During the following two and one-half months the group, made up of students at Brookwood Labor College, Katonah, N. Y., will put on their program of labor plays, skits, mass recitations, and songs before worker and farmer audiences in some 75 cities scattered between Boston and Milwaukee, with performances as far South as Washington.

NEW THEATRE AND FILM is giving a series of bi-weekly cocktail parties on Sunday afternoons, three of which have already taken place. Readers wishing to attend are asked to write to **NEW THEATRE AND FILM**.

Michael Blankfort's *The Brave and the Blind*, a long one-act play about the inmates of the Alcazar on the fiftieth day of the siege, was performed by the Rebel Arts Players on Sunday evening, March 21st. It will be repeated Sunday night, April 4th.

Julio Dantas, well-known poet and playwright, president of the Portuguese Society of Dramatists and former director of the Public Library of Lisbon, has been jailed by order of the Portuguese dictator Oliveira Salazar, for the crime of writing some letters to literary friends in Spain. Readers are urged to protest to the Portuguese Consul in New York.

The Hollywood Film colony turned out en masse on March 23d for the Mecca Temple meeting in Los Angeles, at which Andre Malraux spoke on Spain. Ernst Toller acted as chairman.

John W. Gassner, drama critic of **NEW THEATRE AND FILM**, has recently been made a member of the New York Drama Critics Circle.

Viola Brothers Shore read *'You Can't Say That!'* as a paper before the Western Writers Congress, held in San Francisco November 13th-16th, 1936.

The puppet and the fashion figure on our cover this month were created by Louis Bunin and Lester Gaba, respectively.

APRIL, 1937

Sitdown Theatre.....	5
• MORRIS WATSON	
Which Way the Federal Theatre?	7
• WALTER PELL	
Tsar to Leon	11
• WILLIAM LORENZ	
Are Newsreels News?.....	12
• ROBERT STEBBINS AND PETER ELLIS	
Editorials	16
Wings Over Broadway.....	19
• JOHN W. CASSNER	
Soviet Scene Design.....	22
• MORDECAI GORELIK	
The Living Theatre.....	24
Month of Bounties.....	26
• ROBERT STEBBINS	
Billy Bitzer: Ace Cameraman	29
• PHILIP STERLING	
Road Show—CIO Style.....	31
• RICHARD PACK	
Wage Scales for Dancers... ..	32
• LOUISE MITCHELL	
Books in Review.....	34
You Can't Say That!.....	37
• VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE	
Shifting Scenes.....	38

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NEW THEATRE & FILM





“Brunhilda’s Farewell!”

Adolf Dehn



“Brunhilda’s Farewell!”

Adolf Dehn

Sitdown Theatre

BY MORRIS WATSON

THE loudspeaker said: "Who are you?"

The worker replied: "I'm an automobile worker."

The loudspeaker said "What have you got there?"

The worker held up a soap box labeled "JOB".

"It's my job," said the worker.

"What are you going to do with it?"

The worker placed it on the floor and squatted on it.

"I'm gonna sit on it!"

Two thousand automobile workers, their wives and children in Union Hall, the Penngelly building, at Flint on the night of their victory in the General Motors strike settlement roared at every line of this colloquy.

"You ever heard of property rights?" asked the loudspeaker.

"You ever heard of human rights?" asked the worker.

"But the court said—"

"I don't care what the court said," replied the worker. "This is my job. I own it, and I'm a gonna sit on it and nobody's gonna take it away from me!"

When I arrived in Flint to lecture for the League for Industrial Democracy on the Monday before the General Motors strike settlement I found Mary Heaton Vorse and Josephine Herbst industriously preparing a Living Newspaper script on the strike. They called it *Strike Marches On—The Living Newspaper*. They asked me to direct it. I had to speak the next night at Lansing and there were only two free days after that. It was with some misgivings that I undertook the job. *Two days to whip up a show with a cast of 80 amateurs!*

The misgivings were unnecessary. The show shaped itself like plaster in a mold and I think the experience was amazing to everybody except the workers who did it. The result was a folk play.

The script was without dialogue. It consisted of a paragraph by paragraph explanation of scenes. Noth-

ing more. Jo Herbst explained it to the workers in Union Hall (Union Hall usually was full, day and night) and asked them to participate. There was no response. I whispered to her to tell them they wouldn't have to act, they would merely be telling the story of their strike. The response was immediate and enthusiastic.

At the outset, each one of the workers in the cast of eighty had his own ideas as to how the play should be directed. I carefully explained that inasmuch as we had only two days in which to stage the play I would have to have strict discipline. I told them there would be only one director and that no matter how painful the scenes seemed to them not one of them was to say a word to me in correction until the end of each rehearsal. They respected the request and maintained admirable discipline.

The first scene called for an assembly line to illustrate the work in an automobile factory. I explained to them that a Loudspeaker was to be used. A worker stepped up and said he would like to try out for the part. Each worker on the assembly line did in pantomime what he had actually done on the job.

The man on the Loudspeaker said: "1928—notice how leisurely the boys work. See the foreman exchanging a chew of tobacco with one of the boys." A slight note of excitement entered his voice. "1930" he said, "Notice the slight speed-up"—and then, "1932—here began the era of industrial progress in America." (His own words). "Now look at the foreman pulling a man out of the line—too slow—the others must do his work—see how fast they go."

Accompanying these words of the Loudspeaker, the workers and the foreman, and a superintendent thrown in for good measure, acted out the scene with improvisation of their own invention. The scene moved with more verve and imagination than any outside script writer or director possibly could have furnished.

The Loudspeaker said:

"1936—now look at them. Tails between their legs."

The foreman jerked out several workers and laid them off. He whipped the others into a frenzy of activity. He grabbed a worker wearing a large button.

"What's that thing?" he asked.

"What's it look like? You know God damn well what it is," the worker replied.

"It's a union button."

"Well, you got eyes."

The foreman and the superintendent, quickly flanked by a couple of company cops roughly pulled the worker from the assembly line and shoved him off the platform. "We don't want no damn union here," shouted the foreman.

It must be remembered here that these lines were not given to the workers. Nor was direction necessary. The only thing I told them was where to stand on the stage. I was bowled over by the fact that a group of workers placed upon a stage and told to tell their story could and did tell it with vigor and directness.

The next scene called for a stool pigeon. Nobody wanted to be a stool pigeon. I had to use powers of persuasiveness to convince a prospective stool pigeon that the representation of such a low creature was in this particular instance an important, a very important strike duty. In the hall, and in the cast was the woman who a few days before the sitdown pointed out a stool pigeon. She played her own part with the same feeling of sincerity (I feel sure) that was exhibited upon the original occasion. It gave the play a thrilling reality.

The Women's Emergency Brigade came on to picket "Chevy-9." Workers carrying their lunch boxes came on to go into the "plant." The women grabbed them: "Don't be a scab!" There was a crash and a scream and the women began to stagger. One of them shouted "Gas" and several of them rushed up to the windows and



began breaking them. "They're gassing our boys." The Loudspeaker said: "Please keep order. Please keep order." The Loudspeaker was playing the part of the sound truck. "Everybody to 'Chevy-4.'" The women stumbled off, rubbing their eyes as people do under the influence of tear gas. The Loudspeaker explained the attempts at strike settlements, the dodges of General Motors.

For the finale the women ran on and circled a small platform which rose above the larger platform on which most of the action took place. They locked hands. Five policemen ran from either side of the hall. The policemen were striking bus drivers in their uniform with large tin badges

pinned on their breasts. The audience hissed loudly. Swinging their clubs with a vigor that frightened many of us for fear that some of the cast would be hurt, they attempted to crash through the Women's Emergency Brigade. The locked hands held fast and the women sang the Women's Auxiliary theme song: "We shall not be moved." A worker leaped up on a window which was in the back of the union hall behind the women and shouted "Brothers and sisters, we have decided to die in the plant rather than on the picket line if this is the way General Motors is going to treat us." The women turned toward the worker, locked hands again and sang: "You shall

not be moved. We are behind you, you shall not be moved." The frustrated policemen fell back toward the corners of the platform and there remained until the Loudspeaker announced settlement of the strike. Then they moved dejectedly off to the accompaniment of hisses.

The women sang the chorus of "Solidarity" and were joined by the men.

The Loudspeaker asked, "Detroit, have you heard of our victory?" From the audience came "Detroit has heard of your victory." This was repeated through "Cadillac," "Ford," on up to France and Spain and the World—and the entire audience roared, "The world has heard of your victory."

The night of the performance was the victory night. The women in the cast all had husbands coming out of the plants. The union hall with its bottle-necked staircase was crowded to capacity and two hours before the beginning of the performance no one could get in or out. A few missing members of the cast managed to fight their way up at the last moment. Two of them never made it and I had to press into service two spectators. There were many speeches to be made on victory night and the cast of *Strike Marches On* waited nearly two hours to get on. The women who hadn't seen their husbands in forty-four days were all for bolting. Never have I had to speak with such persuasiveness!

There were audiences at rehearsal as well as at the performance. Union Hall was always filled—to my mind a valuable rehearsal asset. The workers building their own parts were continually stimulated by the applause received from these rehearsal audiences. To most of the workers both in and out of the cast the meaning of the labor struggle was vague. Unionization was new to them. The play served to clarify their minds, to reduce to simple and understandable terms the purpose of the struggle of which they were a part. It stimulated them to inquiry and it fired them with new enthusiasm. I am convinced that a workers' theatre, of and by the workers, must become an important department of the trade union movement.

Which Way the Federal Theatre?

BY WALTER PELL

ON March 1st, the Federal Theatre Project went through another of its many reorganizations; in the New York area, all authority was taken away from Colonel Brehon Somervell, and actual control has now been placed in the hands of Mrs. Hallie Flanagan. This is a vast improvement, for Mrs. Flanagan is theatre-minded, socially conscious and intelligent: the unlamented Colonel was quite obviously none of these things.

But there is as yet no guarantee that much-needed reforms in the management of the WPA theatre will actually be carried through. The fundamental situation is unchanged: every worker on the project is in daily fear of losing his job. The policy of the Federal government continues to point toward curtailment or total liquidation of the cultural projects.



A PERMANENT ARTS PROJECT?

At the same time that wholesale cuts are demoralizing the personnel of the arts projects, there is a wide popular movement for the creation of a permanent national program covering all the arts.

This creates a curious situation: on the one hand, the creative level of the projects is weakened by the fact that every man and woman carrying on this creative effort knows that he may find himself out of a job and face to face with starvation without warning or explanation. On the other hand, it is the creative achievement of these very people which has stirred the whole country to a recognition of the possibilities of a genuine people's art—sponsored by the people, at the people's expense, for the people's service.

There are certain principles which would seem to serve as a necessary basis for the creation of a permanent Federal Arts Project: democratic method of operation, vested largely in the hands of the workers themselves; in addition to guarantee of continued employment of the whole present personnel of the projects, and compliance with trade union requirements as to hours, wages and conditions of labor.

But the application of these principles requires a thorough understanding of the problems of governmental operation. The whole problem must be viewed realistically, not as an abstract question relating to theatre operation in general, but as a practical job to be carried out under definite conditions in relation to a definite political set-up. Personalities and methods must be appraised unsparingly in relation to this set-up. If we wish to achieve a genuine people's theatre, we cannot do so by accepting uncritically the press-agent accounts of WPA's achievements. Indeed we must realize that these results have been achieved in the face of almost insurmountable difficulties.

The history of the WPA theatre is a record of unbelievable executive errors, political interference, bureaucratic red-tape and even militaristic control. The skill, integrity and endurance of the workers have been pitted against a system which has tended to penalize every evidence of skill or integrity or endurance. In recent months, when the main feature of governmental policy has been the attempt to get rid of personnel on any excuse regardless of ability or degree of need, the system has become more and more unworkable and increasingly detached from the real necessities of efficient production.

It is a magnificent tribute to the project workers (actors, directors, technicians and many others) that so much has been accomplished under these conditions and a heartening in-

dication of what these people might accomplish under a secure and efficiently organized system of work.



FACTS AND FIGURES

Fifteen months of operation offer an impressive statistical record. WPA employs 11,704 theatre people. 150 dramatic companies operate in 29 states. An audience of approximately 400,000 attends weekly. Plays, circuses, marionette and vaudeville shows are offered at an average admission price of fifteen cents. Gross receipts now total \$596,000, a large sum when one considers that 87 per cent of the admissions are free. On any one night, at least forty performances are going on throughout the country. 119 new plays have been produced, of which 71 were dramatic or musical productions, and 48 were marionette shows.

Many New Yorkers think of the WPA theatre solely in terms of its productions in or near the Broadway area. It is startling to discover that there are 390 centers, hospitals and settlement houses in the five boroughs of New York, which are serviced by 235 drama coaches. These coaches work with 890 distinct groups, adults and children, consisting of 40,235 members who play to a weekly audience of 6,000.

Throughout the United States, WPA has succeeded in making a new audience theatre-conscious. A careful survey of this audience, based on questionnaires and tabulated observation, shows that fifty per cent of the spectators come to the theatre as a completely new and untried experience. The demand for dramatic fare has grown so rapidly that the supply has been unable to keep pace with it. Furthermore, a critical taste based on a consciousness of the social function of the theatre has been quick

in developing. This evolution has been reflected in the character of the plays presented.

The experience of one town may be duplicated in hundreds of cities and villages throughout the country: the first production in Peoria, Illinois, was a tent show of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; later came stock productions, and Broadway hits of previous years: on January 9th, 1937, Peoria produced *200 Were Chosen*. Boston progressed from vaudeville to a recent presentation of *Class of '29*. Atlanta began with *The Drunkard*, and lately produced *Around the Corner*.

In Mt. Angel, Oregon, in one of the greatest flax centers of the world, the Federal Theatre of Portland created a flax pageant which pictured the exploitation of the workers in graphic terms. In Birmingham, Alabama, *Altars of Steel* has been collectively written out of the local experience of steel workers.



EARLY HISTORY

The triumphant progress of the past fifteen months was based on several years of subsidized activity on a smaller scale. The first project was launched on January 15th, 1934, under the sponsorship of Equity. For a month it was administered at the Equity offices, under the guidance of Margaret Smith, ex-actress. George Junkin, ex-radio man, was the liaison officer with the government: the alphabetical bureau at that time was known as CWS. By February 17th, Junkin took direct control in his own hands, and in March headquarters were moved to 111 Eighth Avenue. This site became jokingly known as "Alma Mater" to members of the old project who weathered the various changes of administration. Junkin, who knew the theatre only second-hand, was responsible to Grace Gosselin, LaGuardia appointee, and to Walter Langsdorf. Junkin's superiors were frankly unfamiliar with theatre problems, and the project

was run solely as a means of subsidizing needy actors.

At that time, the atmosphere of a paupers' dole was so sedulously created that many actors refused to have their pictures in the papers or their names on programs. The government theatre was not art, it was a breadline, in which one's enforced presence was to be concealed.

One-set plays were produced after two weeks' rehearsal, in schools, hospitals, welfare homes, Y.M.C.A.'s, Y.M.H.A.'s, churches, army posts, C.C.C. camps, Community Centers, Settlement Houses, Boys' Clubs, and similar institutions. The repertory included *The Family Upstairs*, *Skinner's Dress Suit*, *Your Uncle Dudley*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Curtain Rises*, *The Late Christopher Bean*, *The Fall Guy*, *Mabel Looks Ahead*, and *Salt Water*. Not a penny was allotted for settings, properties, costumes or other production expenses. Actors played on bare platforms, using curtains or permanent sets belonging to the institutions visited. Necessary properties were begged, borrowed, or manufactured out of nothing. The government paid the actor's fare to the place of performance, up to a maximum of five cents each way. Beyond that, the cast was forced to ask for a donation covering the fare, or lose the difference.



FIRST OF A SERIES OF COLONELS

On May 1st, 1934, the CWS arrangement was taken over by the Works Division of the Department of Public Welfare. Junkin was superseded by Colonel Booth, an ex-army man whose military preferences were evident in a play reputedly of his authorship, *Meet the Enemy*, a piece of blatant war-propaganda which was produced while he was in charge. Booth was also the author of a set of rules for WPA actors, which aimed to standardize and militarize every waking moment of the actor's time. Among the more popular plays of

this period were *Abraham Lincoln*, *Alcestis*, *The Rivals*, and *A School for Scandal*. In spite of the limitations of this repertoire, the project played to an average of 50,000 people, including CCC camps in five states. There were more than 650 spot bookings in greater New York.

The unexpected response to the ERB theatre in the New York area led Washington to consider the possibilities of government endowed drama. Jacob Baker was one of those who studied the New York situation and reported to Harry Hopkins that local control was undesirable and that entertainment on a nation-wide scale would meet a public need. But Elmer Rice may be credited as the clearest and most energetic proponent of a Federal Theatre.



RICE OFFERED A PLAN

In April, 1935, Rice wrote a letter to Hopkins, in which he defined the objectives of such an enterprise:

1. High standards of quality.
2. Low prices of admission.
3. Security and permanence of employment for workers in the arts.
4. Decentralization, adaptation of regional projects to local needs.

On the basis of these objectives, Rice urged concrete action on the following proposals:

1. To buy or lease existing theatres in one hundred large communities, and to remodel them, thus putting to work architects, electricians, workers in the building trades and technicians.
2. To put into each of these theatres a permanent stock or repertory company.
3. To get out-of-town actors in New York to return to theatres in their home communities.
4. To create a rounded program of activities for these theatres.
5. To work in consultation with civic leaders in the various communities.
6. To use theatres for art exhibitions, concerts, music and dance recitals, and lectures.

7. To exchange acting companies between neighboring cities.

8. To allow independence of each unit, but to have a central clearing house to establish and enforce standards and eliminate waste.

9. By pooling revenues to create a surplus from which more prosperous enterprises could offset deficits among the less prosperous.

Elmer Rice became regional director for New York, in November, 1935: his resignation was forced three months later because of a dispute over the first Living Newspaper production, *Ethiopia*. He was succeeded by his assistant, Philip W. Barber.



RICE KNEW WHAT WAS WRONG

Here is Rice's own analysis of his difficulties: "I never had any authority. Governmental red tape prevented the creation of a flexible theatre. I couldn't do anything without consulting someone else, who promptly passed the buck to another person. Valuable time was lost. I took the job as Regional Director for New York as a practical theatre person, and yet from November to the end of January I was not inside a theatre three times. In the commercial theatre, I could have had three to eight plays rehearsed and playing in five weeks at most. Yet it took me three months to ring up the curtain on a dress rehearsal of *Ethiopia*, which was banned by the administration on the eve of production. The main difficulties were three: (1) I had a desk instead of a production job. I spent all my time signing my name and handling details which any executive without theatre experience could have done as well. (2) I was balked constantly by the fact that the administration was interested only in relief and not in relief in relation to the theatre. (3) The immobility of the project set-up made creative action almost impossible."

Rice holds that the solution lies in giving competent theatre people a free hand: "Artistically, authors, directors, producers and technical people should have an opportunity

to work without interference. You can't divorce art from the theatre and still produce good shows."

Has any real progress been made in giving authors, directors, producers and technical people an opportunity to work? Certainly no reasonable opportunity can exist as long as theatre workers are under the authority of inexperienced and constantly changing administrators.

There have to date been eight heads of the Federal Theatre personnel department: Askling, Mrs. Chapin, Mrs. Nathan, Hevelin, Hexter, Paterno, McGoldrig and now Ryan. Each change in personnel management has involved changes in procedure and vast entanglements of red tape.

In the same period, the Arts Projects in New York have had four administrative heads under various titles: Ridder, Nunn, Englehorn, and Grower. Under each of these officials, there have been innumerable changes in policy which have affected the degree and kind of authority exercised.

In the early days of the project, all rules and regulations stemmed from Washington, although there was no procedure by which the Washington authorities could check or enforce their rulings. Things were badly bogged down under Ridder, whose administration coincided with wholesale espionage, stool pigeons and the Veterans' League. William Nunn brought a welcome attempt to cut red tape, to deal fairly with workers' organizations, and to establish efficient methods. Nunn arranged to have the regional directors of the four Arts Projects work together in the formulation of policy.

With the advent of Englehorn, these attempts at cooperation were swept aside; the regional directors took no further part in matters of policy, but were placed under strict discipline. As Colonel Somervell has remarked on more than one occasion: "That's the way we do things in the army."

It is hard to tell whether Englehorn or Grower achieved the greatest distinction as an exponent of military and semi-fascist methods. Englehorn is known to have fired Edward P. Ehrich, and then reinstated him on

instructions from Washington, because Ehrich refused to permit circulation of an anti-Semitic report on the Dance Project. This report was written by a member of the Lucas group of "patriots" on the Writers' Project. Englehorn also stated at a staff meeting that machine guns should be used against pickets: "Give 'em the Spanish massage," were his exact words on this occasion. Another instructive item about Englehorn: At a time when extensive cuts were being carried through by Englehorn as the responsible head of the projects in the New York area, Englehorn's own secretary received a cut, but the administrator himself received a raise of four hundred dollars per annum. At a later date, Englehorn's salary was cut by a considerably larger amount. Shortly after the election, Englehorn balanced the large number of dismissals at that time by placing a number of guards on the payroll. Thus, although workers were being fired indiscriminately, the payroll was boosted instead of being reduced.

Captain Grower's anti-Negro activities were so flagrant that they were made the subject of an affidavit to Washington. In spite of the proof of these charges, both Lieut. Colonel Somervell and army leaders in Washington made a determined effort to protect Grower; he was officially cleared of the charges, but his removal quickly followed this gesture.

So much for personalities. One may say that all of these individuals, including Somervell who was the main source of militarism and confusion in the affairs of the project, have now been removed from the Arts Projects. But what about the organizational set-up which encouraged the activity of arbitrary and incompetent individuals?

Is there any reason to suppose that the present set-up under the personal supervision of Hallie Flanagan will last long enough to consolidate any lasting reforms? Will the abuses of the past year really be done away with? What part of the Washington control will still be vested in the hands of Mrs. Ellen Woodward, Mississippi Politician, who was mysteriously elevated in the Hopkins organization from Director of the

Women's Project in the Works Division to an Assistant Administrator in charge of the Women's and Professional Division? Will Miss Mary Tinney, a Brooklyn Democratic politician and Mrs. Woodward's representative in the New York City WPA, receive an important administrative job in the New York area?



NIGHTMARE OF CENTRALIZATION

Perhaps the gravest danger to the whole life of the Federal Theatre Project lies in the policy of so-called *centralization*, which has been followed during the past few months and which seems to have had the approval of both Philip Barber and Hallie Flanagan. Centralization means the pooling of all the producing units, the centering of every detail of production in the offices at 701 Eighth Avenue.

Since the main motivation of recent governmental policy has been the dismissal of the largest number of workers in the shortest possible time, it may well be that centralization was selected as the easiest way of accomplishing this task. It is an ideal way of handling dismissals. The workers, instead of being attached to units where they can organize for their protection, are dumped into a central "pool"; theoretically they can be drawn from this "pool" by any Managing Producer who wants them. Practically, the means of obtaining workers through the central office has been made so difficult that problems of casting and production are enormously increased.

This causes a situation of which the authorities have taken such advantage that it seems like deliberate sabotage: on the one hand, whole companies are held up in rehearsal because of inability to get adequate casts; members of these companies can be dismissed because the rehearsals are "unsatisfactory" and the cast is insufficiently "professional." At the same time, hundreds of equally competent workers are being drowned in the "pool" at 701 Eighth Avenue,

and dropped with no opportunity to remonstrate.

But centralization also cuts off all possibilities of independent creative effort: the administration has authority without responsibility and the Managing Producer has responsibility without authority.

For the most part the Managing Producer and the director have no control over the scenic design, lighting or other physical aspects of the production. Nor do they always have control over their own cast, members of which may be removed without consultation with those responsible for the production. A little over a week before the opening of a recent production an extra in the cast was put on "referral": this individual took part in group scenes in the final act which had been as carefully rehearsed as the work of the principals. The director was never informed of this man's dismissal until he learned it from the actor himself; he was forced to give up work on the production and spend some time forcing a reversal of the order.

Whenever a Managing Producer has wanted to take any step, he has had to interview Philip Barber or Walter Hart, Barber's assistant. In recent cases, these interviews were put off from one to three weeks, during which all production activity was suspended.

Centralization causes inefficiency because the people who would naturally take responsibility (the producers of the play) are deprived of any opportunity to check on what is being done. For example, the WPA workshop *lost* four fifty-foot columns which had been used in a production, and which the members of the unit required for another production. The workshop was therefore required to build new columns, and the extra expense will undoubtedly be charged to the unit in question, and not to the carelessness of the workshop.

People familiar with Federal Theatre politics do not hesitate to point out that taking away all initiative from producing groups is not unconnected with a desire to *centralize* all credit for successful accomplishments. The program copy for a recent play came back from the office

of Mr. Theodore A. Mauntz, of the Publicity Department, with the title of the theatre and the name of the Managing Producer omitted. The program was headed only by the words, "Federal Theatre Project, Hallie Flanagan and Philip Barber." The Living Newspaper also received arbitrary orders recently to change certain credits on the program; no member of the Living Newspaper staff was consulted as to the propriety of these changes.

In the Federal Theatre, more money is spent for administration than for the production of plays. How long will the heads of the project labor under the delusion that the occupants of offices at 701 Eighth Avenue (including Mrs. Flanagan and Barber and Hart) are more important than the production groups? This situation is especially aggravated by the fact that members of the administrative staff pay only fleeting visits to rehearsals and are often totally unfamiliar with the dramas over which they exercise complete control.



RED TAPE AND INEFFICIENCY

Centralization has multiplied the red tape which has already obtained a strangling hold on the operation of the Federal Theatre. In recent months, the Business Manager of the New York area has been forbidden to send out anything under his own name, all letters being signed by Lieut. Colonel Somervell. Barber has been allowed to sign his own letters, but recent regulations provided that the Managing Producers could not call Washington on official business; telephone operators were instructed to refuse to put through a call to Washington for any project head.

Examples of past and present inefficiency are superficially amusing; but a real tragedy of wasted effort and bitter disappointment underlies many of these examples.

(Continued on page 42)

Tsar to ^{Leon} Lenin



BY WILLIAM LORENZ



Tsar to Lenin is one of the worst films of the year. For this reason, it might seem that extended comment is unnecessary. However, the use—or misuse—of documentary material is a matter of deep concern to all those who regard the motion picture as a social instrument. The newsreels have developed a technique of distortion through selection and emphasis, as well as through cutting, juxtaposition of material and editorial comment, which is remarkably skilful. In this way pro-fascist, anti-labor, reactionary and military ideas are sugar-coated under the guise of “impartial” news. In *Tsar to Lenin*, similar methods are used as a means of attacking both the present and the past integrity of the Soviet Union—but the selection and comment are so crudely handled that the editorial bias cannot be questioned.



Yet an attempt has been made to rally liberal defense for this picture on the ground that it is a bona-fide historical document. It is hard to see how any liberal who respects the truth and is reasonably well-informed as to historical fact could fail to observe that *Tsar to Lenin* is a hodge-podge of lies of which Hearst might well be proud.

It shows the Russian revolution of 1917 as an unprepared adventure, fruit of an overnight emotion, its protagonists an ignorant mass led by “agitators” and its results pillage, robbery, confusion and terror. The hero of the film is Leon Trotsky.

But Lenin is not neglected. Max Eastman, editor of the film, adds a sort of postscript at the end of the picture in the form of a generalized eulogy of Lenin. This comes almost as an after-thought, apparently intended to cure the astonishingly unhistorical treatment of facts which has preceded it. It is almost as if a history of the American Revolution were written around the heroic role of Benedict Arnold—with a



final reference to George Washington: First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen.

In the opening sequence, another heroic figure shares the honors with Trotsky. There was Tsar Nicholas II. He plays ball with his officers and frolics in the meadows with his daughters. His son rides a horse and the Grand Duke is seven feet tall. The Tsar swims naked for so many feet of film that even if he had been an Apollo the shots would grow tiresome. There were so many pictures of the royal family that, watching the picture, I began to suspect another MGM superfeature like *Rasputin and the Empress*, and to wonder when a Barrymore would make an entrance. Although the royal family is made to appear foolish, the footage has a nostalgic feeling that makes their execution regrettable. A spectator without any knowledge of the period might well experience a shudder and twinge of regret when he is shown the bloodstained walls of the cellar in which they meet their end.

According to Eastman’s narrative, the Empire was quite safe at this time. The Tsar’s idyllic life would have gone on forever if a revolution hadn’t just happened. A couple of shots show harassed workers and starving children, but, in comparison to the happy life at the Imperial court, these seem inconsequential. No hint is given of the degeneracy of court officials, the degradation of human life, the abuse of power, and hardly a word is breathed about the creative and organizational work of the revolutionists before 1917, not a suggestion of the inefficiency of the pro-German army staff.

The most exciting and vivid sections of the film deal with the February revolution. If the background had been valid, if the narrator had been less lyrical and more factual, these photographs of vast crowds with tense bodies and hopeful faces would have provided a great motion picture climax. But the finest shots

in the film are marred by the obvious desire to change the meaning of the events. The revolution is presented as a terror that starts in the night. There is no basis in the form of an organized movement, only a few exiles arriving from Siberia and the capitals of Europe. Suddenly Lenin appears. “All power to the Soviets,” he says. And then—after a few moments of dramatic suspense—“at the same time another great revolutionary arrived from a flat in the Bronx”—and Trotsky gets off a train. He repeats Lenin’s words. “All power to the Soviets.” The effect of the repetition is to make Trotsky’s repetition of Lenin’s words far more significant than Lenin’s statement.

The sections of the film that deal with the period between February and October are confused. Many individuals are introduced and their roles explained, but no theory, no political will is expressed. We meet Zinoviev and Kamenev, Plekhanov, Kerensky, too. We are informed that Kerensky tries to play both sides against the middle and fails, but we are never clear about the struggle against the bourgeois elements and the steps leading to the October revolution. The word Menshevik is defined, but the role of the Mensheviks is never clarified, nor are Trotsky’s Menshevik alliances.

It is in this section that certain quasi-humorous allusions suggest a bias on the part of the narrator or editor. A soldier is hunting in his pockets. The narrator remarks that while the Russians love documents, they often have a hard time finding them. Then a picture of Kalinin is shown. It is a bad photograph and Kalinin looks like a comedy-rube in an old Sennett film. The narrator remarks that the Bolshevik leader refuses to put on his collar even in recognition of victory, the implication being that Bolsheviks are rude and dirty

(Continued on page 47)





ARE NEWSREELS NEWS?

By Robert Stebbins and Peter Ellis

SENATOR LA FOLLETTE immediately introduced an affidavit by a witness to the shooting, asserting that there was no riot at the time, and charging that the shooting was staged 'for the benefit of moving picture men.'—New York Times, March 6, 1937.

The camera operators, however, were not the sole beneficiaries of the "staging." A certain J. M. Roush, sales agent for Federal Laboratories, Inc. (machine-guns, tear gas, etc.) had arranged the stunt as publicity for his company's products. To quote from Roush's letter to the vice-president of Federal Laboratories: "I might mention that during one of the riots I shot a long range projectile into a group, a shell hitting one man and causing a fracture of the skull from which he has since died. (The man actually recovered.—Editor's note.) As he was a Communist, I have had no feeling in the matter and I am sorry that I did not get more. . . ." Yet a man of this murderous character had no difficulty in obtaining the cooperation of the motion picture companies!

The above incident which took place during the 1934 Maritime Strike in San Francisco, was disclosed during the course of the La Follette investigation of labor espionage. It furnishes an insight into the character of the existing motion picture and newsreel concerns. There is to-day no such thing as a liberal newsreel in the sense that we understand a liberal newspaper. The newsreel never really had a chance. By its very nature, it required the investment of large-scale finance in order to obtain commercial distribution. It was inevitable that like the mo-

tion picture in general, the newsreel should become the mouthpiece for monopoly capital. When one considers the character of the newsreel which is based on the assumption that it records actuality, carrying with it complete credibility, then the contradiction between the medium and its ownership becomes particularly ironical.

There are in America today five newsreel concerns — Movietone News, News of the Day (formerly Hearst Metrotone News), Paramount News, Pathé and Universal. These are respectively controlled and distributed by Twentieth Century-Fox, Hearst and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Paramount Pictures, Pathé and RKO, and Universal Pictures, which together with the three remaining picture companies in the field are one hundred percent controlled by monopoly capital. (See diagrams.)

This control is of a dual nature: 1) indirect—by means of monopoly of essential equipment; 2) direct financial control over the eight major companies through majority holdings of voting stock, or monopoly of executive key-positions. (See diagrams.)

In addition to general Wall Street domination, the newsreel situation is rendered further intolerable by the far-reaching power and influence of William Randolph Hearst. It is not commonly known that the Hearst influence extends to the newsreels of at least two other companies besides the Hearst-owned News of the Day. Universal News is edited by former Hearst men and Pathé News is headed by Courtland Smith, brother-in-law of the late Arthur Brisbane, and one time chief of the Fox newsreel. This

Hearst connection with three of the five existing newsreel agencies constitutes a most dangerous source of anti-social, pro-fascist propaganda—a positive threat to the continuance of American democracy. As Thomas Edison said many years ago, "Whoever controls the motion picture industry controls the most powerful medium of influence over the people."

Why is the newsreel to be feared? The answer is obviously the fact that the very nature of the medium permits the manipulation and distortion of truth. Celluloid is extremely flexible. It can be cut by a child without the slightest difficulty. Cause and effect, time, space—none of these are proof when stacked up against a pair of shears. Add to the characteristic malleability of film the advantages of trick, miniature and process photography, re-enactment, optical printing and the enormous possibilities of juggling the sound track and you see before you a practically unlimited apparatus for the manipulation of actuality. Manipulation, *per se*, is certainly not objectionable. On the contrary, the great power of the film as an instrument for the recreation of the illusion of life lies precisely in its vast adaptability. But manipulation becomes objectionable when its total effect violates both the spirit and the letter of truth.

As far back as 1898 falsification was a regular practice in films of documentation. The records for that year show a faked newsreel of the Oberammergau Passion Play which was actually photographed on the roof of the Grand Central Building. At Waukegan, in 1899, E. H. Amet staged the sinking of Admiral Cer-

vera's fleet at Santiago by photographing miniatures. During the World War, in addition to photo-plays like *The Beast of Berlin*, *War Brides* and *The Rape of Belgium*, atrocity newsreels were employed to keep hatred at a fighting pitch. Over forty miles of newsreels were shipped to Russia after the first revolution by President Wilson in an attempt to keep Russia in the war on the side of the Allies.

This was all in the silent days. The coming of sound enormously enriched the means at hand for faking the news. Now it was no longer necessary for the caption writer to falsify the import of the image. By the simple expedient of substituting your own sound track you could make a man belie himself before your very eyes. An extreme, though illuminating, instance of what can be done is furnished by the movie-trailer that opens the Olsen-Johnson vaudeville act. In this masterpiece of questionable humor, the image we see on the screen is Queen Mary but the voice is Mae West's. A heavy Jewish accent drops off the lips of Hitler and later Mussolini employs a conventional vaudeville version of Negro dialect.

One newsreel concern uses a woman's shriek that occurred in the motion-picture *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* for all scenes of accident and terror. This same company uses the voice of Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt to cut through crowd noises because of its peculiar penetrating quality.

But in addition to the ease with which sound made possible the perversion of the image's intent, sound introduced editorial bias in its most virulent form—the commentator. But of this, later.

The entire tendency towards falsification of the news document probably reached its climax in the California gubernatorial campaign of 1935. Fearing that the election of the Epic candidate, Upton Sinclair, would result in larger taxes on the motion picture industry, the Hollywood companies rushed into action with a series of faked newsreels that actually led to the triumph of Merriam, the Hearst nominee. Quoting from the *New York Times* of November 4th, 1935: "The city of Los An-

geles has turned into a huge movie set where many newsreel pictures are made every day, depicting the feelings of the people against Mr. Sinclair. Equipment from one of the major studios, as well as some of its second-rate players may be seen at various street intersections or out in the residential neighborhoods, 'shooting' the melodrama and unconscious comedy of the campaign. Their product can be seen in leading motion picture houses in practically every city of the state.

"In one of the 'melodramas' recently filmed and shown here in Los Angeles, an interviewer approaches a demure old lady, sitting on her front

porch and rocking away in her rocking chair.

"For whom are you voting, Mother?" asks the interviewer.

"I am voting for Governor Merriam," the old lady answers in a faltering voice.

"Why, Mother?"

"Because I want to have my little home. It is all I have left in the world."

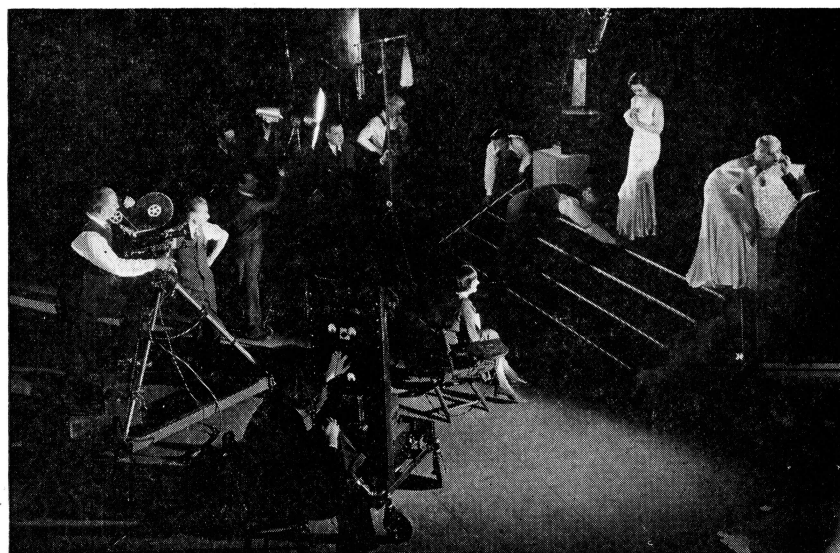
"In another recent newsreel there is shown a shaggy man with bristling Russian whiskers and a menacing look in his eye.

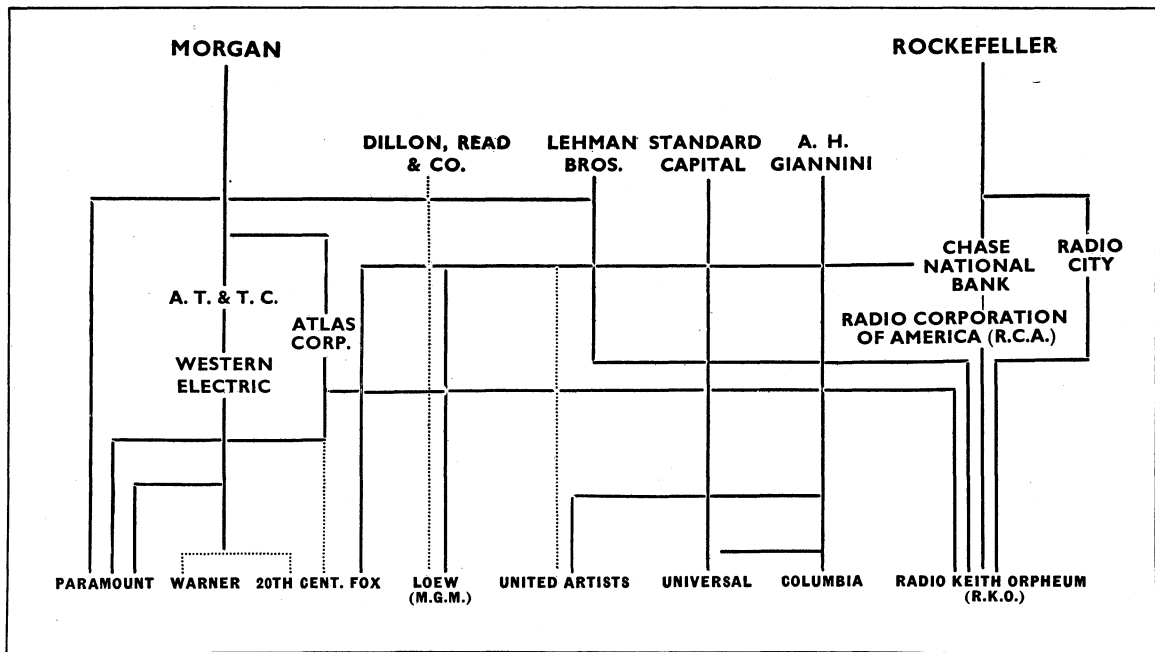
"For whom are you voting?" asked the interviewer.

"Vy, I am foting for Seenclair."



Movietone News picks up the latest reports on what women will wear; above, a bathing beauty parade on a Seminole Indian reservation; below, a studio-enacted style showing.





This chart illustrates the direct financial control over the film industry by the leading financial groups, 1936.

“Why are you voting for Mr. Sinclair?”

“Vell, his system worked well in Russia, vy can’t it vork here?”

“All these releases are presented as ‘newsreels.’”

The great mass of literature on the newsreels is strangely uniform in one respect. Although the propaganda possibilities of the medium are admitted, one always finds set forth “the great enduring fear of the newsreel companies to take sides in any controversy.” To the extent that the newsreel companies are continually subjected to the sharp scrutiny of the Hays Office and the reactionary theatre owners, this is true. But what is highly questionable, in the first place, is the *inclusion* of material that would offend the reactionary interests in America. Again the question enters, *who owns the newsreels?*

Again and again we have heard newsreel workers, who by and large have an honest desire to cover the news, say, “We try to get away with as much as possible, but what do you expect of us—aren’t we banker controlled?” The fact remains, that in all questions that vitally affect the interests of the ruling classes in America, or abroad (sit-down strikes, industrial disputes of all sorts, the united front movement, the C.I.O., the Spanish Civil War, revolution in gen-

eral, imperialism, militarism), the newsreels unerringly take sides against the broad masses of people, in other words, the vast majority of their audience. This is the case not only in individual sequences, but makes itself apparent in the general structure and balance of newsreel subjects the year around.

A survey, *The Movies Join Hearst* (New Republic, October 9th, 1935), undertaken by students of sociology for a period of three consecutive months discloses that sports and so-called “human interest” material such as animal acts, bathing beauties, or the latest perpetual motion machine that wouldn’t work, made up 44.9 per cent of newsreel content—in other words, pure filler of no news interest whatsoever. And of the remainder, 16.3 per cent consisted of pro-military and pro-imperialist matter. Education required only 3.6 per cent of the total and “only 3.3 per cent of all could be construed as pacifistic in effect. Two of these were of the wife of America’s ace draft-dodger pleading for her husband; four were of European diplomats expressing pious hopes for peace.”

The close tie-up between the army, the navy and the newsreel companies is a well established fact. In a letter which appeared in the New York Herald-Tribune some months ago a

writer stated: “I trust that all of your readers will see the newsreel, prepared under the auspices of the Navy League of the United States and showing this week at our leading theatres which demonstrates the need of bringing our first line of defense up to the naval ratio.”

Let us proceed to an examination of each of the newsreel companies and their products. Of all of them, the Pathé News outfit is the most openly vicious, the most frankly reactionary. Greta Palmer in her article *The Orphan Newsreel* (Today Magazine, December 28, 1935), refers playfully to the “editorial policy of Pathé News, which comes out manfully for such crusades as ‘Do Your Christmas Shopping Early’ and whose cartoons point such lessons as the fact that taxes are a burden.”

But Pathé does not confine itself to innocuousness. Variety, January 1st, 1936, mentions Pathé’s clip on Communism. “Its editors went down the line in taking pot shots at Communism and also at Russia. Strikes and other riots, in which actual fighting was not cut from the negative, were blamed quite bluntly on Reds.” The same article in Variety reports that “the Hearst reel also went to bat when it started its exposé of Russia.” In July 1936, Pathé outdid itself in its virulent yellow-press coverage of

the French Popular Front. By means of an animated cartoon, we were shown the octopus of Communism, its head in Moscow, spreading its tentacles all over Europe, with special attention to France and Spain. This clip went on to suggest that only Hitler and Mussolini could be looked to for salvation from this dread menace.

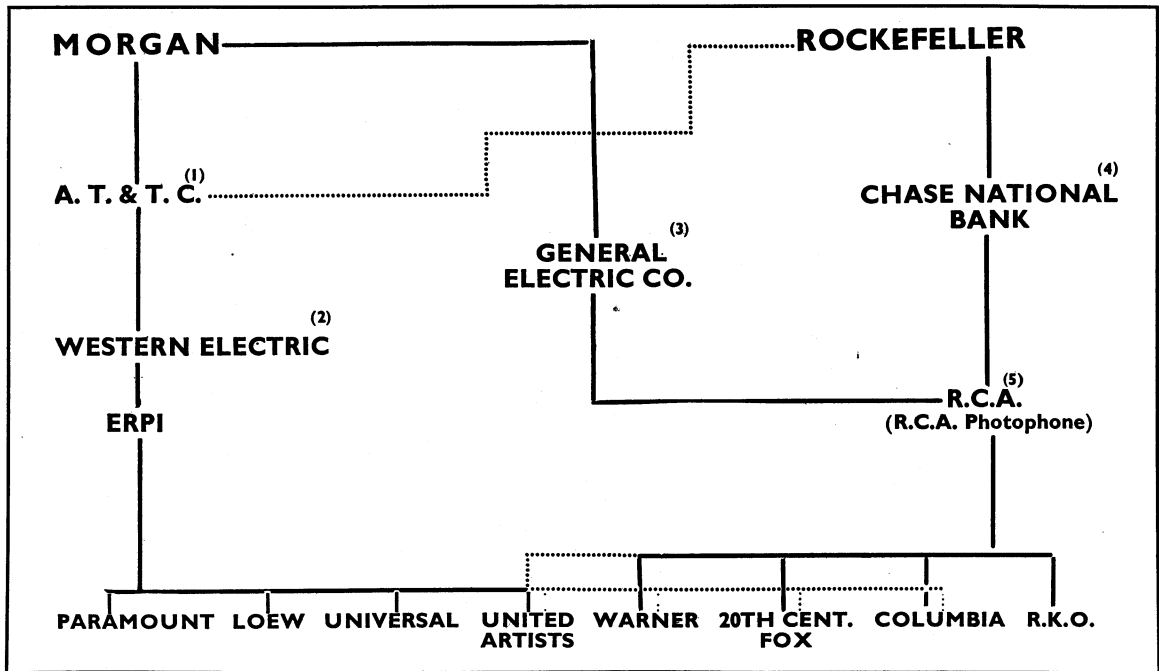
As we go to press, Pathé comes out with an open and undisguised attack on Roosevelt's campaign for Supreme and Federal Court reform. Herbert Hoover, somewhat grayer at the temples but no brighter than before, coins the phrase "Hands off the Supreme Court," and several tottering Tories insist quite unconvincingly that they are as good as new despite some eighty years of uselessness in the service of their country. In the same issue we are regaled with MUMPS FOR DOGS!, LACE SETS SPRING STYLES!, SPEED SKATING, and a short clip on sit-down strikes in which an officer of the law

states that as long as he keeps office he'll see that no one can be dispossessed from his property by strikers.

The editorial policy of Pathé News hews close to the Liberty League-Hearst line. This is not the result of accident. Both its top officers, Prexy Courtland Smith, and General Manager J. S. Connolly, are dyed-in-the-wool conservatives, the former related to Arthur Brisbane by marriage and the latter an ex-lobbyist and politician of the Tammany school. Courtland Smith has to his credit signing up the quintuplets, and the *Man in the Street* feature, a type of interview remarkable for its lack of candor and one-sidedness. At the outset of the C.I.O. drive to unionize auto industry, Pathé came through with a *Man in the Street* sequence in which only company men were interviewed. We are generous enough to believe they were not paid actors. These individuals as a man declared their satisfaction with present conditions and their refusal to strike.

Pathé News has a definite tie-up with Du Pont, owning a large block of stock in the Du Pont Film Manufacturing Company. This stock, incidentally, is one of the chief sources of income for Pathé News, which has lost money ever since the formation of Paramount News when, at one stroke, it lost the entire Paramount-Publix chain of theatres as an outlet. Pathé recoups its losses on its newsreel by the production of commercial shorts on a large scale. Its customers include many of America's largest industries. Despite a consistent anti-Roosevelt policy, Pathé produces the majority of government films, including all the WPA films.

Hearst Metrotone News (now called News of the Day), has been subjected to more attacks than the product of any other newsreel company. Public repugnance for Hearst and what he represents took on the form of picketing, boycotts, booing in the theatres and letters of complaint
(Continued on page 44)



This chart illustrates the indirect control over the film industry exercised by the leading financial groups through their sound patents monopoly.

1. AMERICAN TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH CO.: This four and a quarter billion combine was organized by Morgan and is still under Morgan "management" control. A Rockefeller minority is represented on the board.
2. WESTERN ELECTRIC Co.: Manufacturing subsidiary of A.T. & T.C. Markets sound film equipment through its subsidiary Electrical Research Products Inc. (ERPI).
3. GENERAL ELECTRIC Co.: Largest electrical manufacturers in the world. Organized by Morgan in 1892.
4. CHASE NATIONAL BANK: Largest commercial bank in U.S.A. Controlled by Rockefeller group since 1930.
5. RADIO CORPORATION OF AMERICA: Incorporated in 1919 by G.E.C. to take over control of Marconi Co., and patent rights of G.E.C. and other concerns.

Charts reproduced through the courtesy of World Film News.

EDITORIALS

Mr. Heydt Is Worried

The February issue of Equity Magazine contains an attack by a member of the Council (Louis Jean Heydt) on Equity policies and activities. Mr. Heydt's effusion contains several gems: he denounces the new Equity contract as a "monstrosity of rules and restrictions"; he declares that Equity has "very, very little in common with other unions in the American Federation of Labor"; and he accuses the Council in the following terms: "Council, through five years of pursuance of the labor movement, has been and is proposing revolutionary measure without nearly adequate statistics and without more than the haziest notion concerning the real effect of these measures upon the main body of its constituents." His disapproval is principally directed against the minimum wage restriction, which, he maintains, forces down the salaries of the "middle bracket actors."

It hardly seems to matter to Mr. Heydt that the contract which so draws his fire affords the actor greater protection than he has ever received before; that it was thanks to certain "other unions in the American Federation of Labor" that Equity won the closed shop; that the Screen Actors Guild (with which Equity has an iron-clad membership agreement) is much less supercilious concerning the organized labor movement, from which it is deriving increasing and valuable support. Nor are Mr. Heydt's arguments concerning the minimum wage very cogent. What experienced theatre worker will believe, along with Mr. Heydt, that managers freed from the minimum requirement will gratuitously pass along the difference to the middle bracket players? On the contrary it is obvious that a reduction in wages for any salary group means a drive to reduce salaries all along the line.

The "revolutionary measures" with which Mr. Heydt taxes the Council are actually a number of progressive steps which have been taken by that body *only because of strong pressure from an increasingly progressive membership*. Only by insistent pressure has the Council been forced into demanding (and getting!) such vital reforms as pay for rehearsals, protective minimums, a Cuts Board and protection from rehearsal abuses.

How little Mr. Heydt needs to worry about the "revolutionary" tendencies of the Council has been made evident by two incidents in the past month. One was the matter of salary cuts for the cast of *Dead End*. Norman Bel Geddes' production of the Sidney Kingsley play has been running on Broadway for a year and a half, and has grossed more than a million dollars. Nevertheless when Mr. Bel Geddes asked Equity for permission to cut salaries below the minimum established by the Cuts and Concessions Ruling, permission was granted; moreover, when Geddes threatened to fire members of the cast who refused to accept the cut and replace them by players from the second or "road" company, Equity took no

cognizance of this attempt to induce its members to scab on one another. Second, and even more flagrant, was the recent quarterly meeting of Equity, which witnessed a series of high-handed violations of democratic procedure on the part of the Administration which has rarely been equalled. Ballots were passed out to members ineligible to vote on the secret ballot amendment to the constitution, by a pro-Gillmore member, who was only mildly rebuked by Mr. Gillmore; the petition of 400 New York and Hollywood actors asking that the committee to nominate candidates for the May election of officers be named from the floor, was disregarded; and President Gillmore violated all parliamentary rules in his efforts to block censure for his undemocratic procedure.

As we go to press a petition is being circulated demanding that an immediate national referendum on the Secret Ballot amendment be held. Only by the passage of such an amendment can a fair vote at the May elections be assured. Mr. Heydt can rest easy. The Equity Council and Administration are still a long way from being revolutionary, or even democratic!

The Worm Turns

According to the Hollywood producers, they, and they alone, know "what the public wants," though by now nobody except the producers themselves believes this pretty myth. But in general the public continues to be inarticulate regarding its tastes and preferences save when someone tries to cram a *Red Salute* or a *Siege of the Alcazar* down its throat. Such outbreaks on the part of a sorely-trying patient, though effective, are altogether too scattered and uncoordinated. Now the movement to consolidate progressive opinion on the widest possible basis has materialized in the formation of an organization to be known as Associated Film Audiences, which will furnish a detailed analysis of all films released, will maintain a Hollywood office to supply information on projected pictures, and will furnish a bi-weekly news bulletin to its member affiliates.

Organizations already participating include the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, the American Jewish Congress, the National Negro Congress, the American Youth Congress, the Workers Alliance, the National Urban League, the American League Against War and Fascism, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the United Textile Workers Union, the New Film Alliance and many others. Reviewers from the member organizations will fill out questionnaires asking for detailed information regarding racial, militaristic, anti-labor, and fascist tendencies in the pictures they review, whether historical inaccuracies or distortions occur, whether a false impression of any particular strata of society is given. Associated Film Audiences will publish a summary of these findings in its bulletin, the first issue of which, reviewing *The Good Earth*, *Lost*

Horizon, etc., has already appeared. Its first action has been to call to the attention of the *March of Time* producers the "vicious and criminally lop-sided" character of the current feature on Harlem Black Magic.

Such publicity cannot fail to educate both audiences and moving picture critics. Moreover it is inevitable that a working arrangement be consummated between such an organization and the moving picture trade unions: actors, technicians, and writers, which can exert the proper pressure at the very source of production. The resulting powerful opposition to reactionary films should give the producers something to think about.

No More Ivory Towers

To all Hollywood authors who consider their art too sacred to be profaned by thoughts of trouble outside the studio gates, we recommend Donald Ogden Stewart's article in the March issue of the Screen Guild Magazine, answering a plaint by Mary McCall, Jr. in a previous issue in which she accused writers of neglecting their art to put out fires in other people's houses. Mr. Stewart reminds Miss McCall that in the past a number of writers have taken an active interest in politics, at the same time turning out literature of higher rank than the dialogue of a Hollywood film. While she laments that screen-writers are spending too much of their time in political conversation and too many parties are devoted to collections for Causes, Mr. Stewart regrets that there is not enough political awareness among artists of the swimming-pool set. The example of such men as Byron, Voltaire, Shelley, Blake, Hugo, Zola and Thomas More might serve as some excuse, suggests Stewart, for a Hollywood writer "to interest himself in what is going on in Spain or permit him to attend an anti-Nazi mass meeting without feeling that he is betraying the artistic demands of his contract with Harry Cohn."

Return Address: Sidney Howard

The address of the Authors League of America and its three member Guilds is 9 East 38th Street, New York City, Room 501. A large number of writers recently received an envelope which bore the return address: Sidney Howard, secretary, Room 501, 9 East 38th Street, New York. Mr. Howard is president of the Dramatists Guild of the Authors League of America.

The letter carried an appeal "to the leading American writers, from eight of them," asking them to telegraph their Senators and congressmen demanding delay and further discussion of the President's proposals for judiciary reform. The signers of the letter stated that they were "not aware of the existence of any emergency which justifies the risk of hasty action upon an issue of such importance." The eight signers were James Truslow Adams, Marc Connelly, Edna Ferber, Sinclair Lewis, Robert Littell, Dorothy Thompson, Bernard DeVoto and William Allen White.

One is surprised to find some of these names lined up in defense of the reactionary Supreme Court and in opposition to democratic reform. But what is most surprising



William Hernandez

Oswald, dear, these WPA plays are just plain caricature!

is Sidney Howard's misuse of the address of the Authors League, and of his own official position in that organization, for an appeal which in no way reflects the position of the membership, and which disregards the opinion of a majority of liberal and progressive members.

"We ask you," says the letter, "to mail copies of your telegrams to Sidney Howard, room 501, 9 East 38th Street, New York, so that they may be forwarded to the Judiciary Committees of the House and Senate." It is to be hoped that American authors will *not* neglect to write—both to Mr. Howard and to the Council of the Authors League of America, demanding a clearer understanding of the duties and responsibilities of an elected officer of a trade union.

"Marching Song"

Day after day the newspapers are filled with stirring news from the labor front. The surge of unionization is gathering momentum, and penetrating into every activity in American life. In steel, rubber and autos, along the waterfront, in newspaper offices and moving picture studios, men and women are becoming conscious of the strength which unity and numbers can give them.

In its period of greatest flowering the theatre has always been charged with a sense of excitement and high aspiration. The playhouses clustered around Broadway today proffer their audiences, for the most part, entertainment which is pure escape, or second-hand reality, or tawdry humor. Moreover this theatre of triviality and artificiality is one which aims at, and reaches, chiefly a limited audience. Compare the num-

ber of seats in any New York theatre which sell for \$.55 or even \$1.10 with those priced at \$2.20 or \$3.30, unless the play is in its second year, or a lamentable commercial failure.

At this moment however there is one play which is directed at a public that seeks, not escape, but aspiration in terms of present-day reality. Nightly the spectators at the Bayes Theatre, where the Theatre Union is presenting John Howard Lawson's *Marching Song*, break into cheering applause, not only when the final curtain falls but at intervals throughout the action of the play. For on the stage they are witnessing a struggle which is a part of their own immediate experience as workers and human beings.

A \$.55 to \$1.50 price scale brings *Marching Song* within the range of the people it should reach. But individual interest among theatre-goers is not enough. Only through the trade unions, fraternal and other mass organizations can *Marching Song* find its real audience and in sufficient numbers to make the play the success it deserves to be and which the social theatre needs. Trade union readers of NEW THEATRE AND FILM should take an active part in a campaign to gain organizational support for the play by benefits, publicity, etc.

Nor should the scope of such a play be confined to New York alone. *Marching Song* must carry its message of organization, of racial solidarity, of unity between workers of all categories, to where the struggle of unionization is reaching a new peak in the textile mills of the South, in the steel towns, the Michigan auto factories. The new theatre movement has acquired a new and vital addition to its literature; its groups should make every effort to enlist union support and give it an early production.

The Dancers Unite

In 1936 at the National Dance Congress a recommendation of the Resolutions Committee encouraged the amalgamation of all organizations in the dance world with duplicating cultural programs. In May 1937, exactly one year later, the New Dance League, the Dance Guild and the Dancers Associations are merging to establish one national professional dancers' organization, with a non-professional subsidiary. A slate of officers reading like a Who's Who of the dance world has been selected; a joint provisional committee composed of leading members of all three organizations, has written a constitution. This same provisional committee is now arranging for a convention, to take place May 14th, 15th and 16th, at which there will be a series of closed sessions for professionals, and open forums and concerts for the general public. At this time the new officers will be installed and the constitution formally adopted.

These are the facts. Behind them lies a period in which the art has re-oriented itself towards mass audiences, in which organizations have been established to work for security for the young professional; a period which has produced a crop of new talents: Anna Sokolow, Miriam Blecher, Jane Dudley and others, and which has seen the establishment of a WPA dance Project.

To the New Dance League, and its present executive secretary, Louise Redfield, dancers and audiences alike owe a lasting debt of gratitude for its program of dance recitals for workers and students at prices they could afford. To the Dance Guild, which merged with the New Dance League at the close of its first season, and to Blanche Evan who guided its work, they owe thanks for a series of forums and lecture-recitals of great educational value. The dance world should likewise remember that the group which defeated the Licensing Bill of 1936 and subsequently formed the Dancers Association under the leadership of Tamiris, fought unremittingly for economic security and won a Dance Project for unemployed professionals.

Now the time is ripe for a consolidation of these organizations so that their forces may gain new strength through a more solid foundation. The dance world affords no better evidence of its new maturity than the building of such an association of all dancers, regardless of technical, aesthetic or former organizational differences.

Fiction Preferred

The banning of *Spain in Flames* in Ohio and Pennsylvania and of *Madrid Document* in Philadelphia are outrageous examples of censorship used directly for fascist ends. Both *Spain in Flames* and *Madrid Document* are newsreels and as such do not fall into the category of censorable matter, any more than newspapers themselves are censorable. Neither film contains a single item that cannot be verified as absolute truth, nor is the montage employed unjustified by the facts in any single instance.

We will grant that these films make a point. But this is one of their chief merits. They point out with grave emphasis the danger of fascism to democracy. This Governor Earle of Pennsylvania considers "communistic". What would be Governor Earle's reaction if his office were seized by a pack of military thugs? Governor Earle did not confine himself to ideological fault-finding in upholding the ban of *Spain in Flames*. He found it necessary to bolster his non-existent case against the film by terming it "poorly done". If "poorly done" is any excuse for censorship, what are they going to do about class "B" films in Pennsylvania?

To the absurd subterfuges of Governor Earle, the state of Ohio added another of its own. After vacillating for several weeks Ohio announced a permanent ban on *Spain In Flames* because it was "partisan propaganda and displayed a decidedly negative attitude toward religion." We should like to know why a *positive* attitude toward religion is a prerequisite to freedom of expression?

The question requires no answer. It is obvious that states like Ohio and Pennsylvania will avail themselves of any pretext to prevent Americans from being reminded of their democratic heritage. We strongly urge our readers to write the Governors of Ohio and Pennsylvania and to the Mayor of Philadelphia demanding that the ban on *Spain in Flames* and *Madrid Document* be raised immediately.

Wings Over Broadway

BY JOHN W. GASSNER

IT has been this column's unpleasant duty to lament an absence of exaltation and power in the season's theatre. Its first three months reached an appreciable altitude only in Paul Green's *Johnny Johnson*. Since the turn of the year, it is pleasant to report, there have been occasional wings over the theatre. John Howard Lawson's *Marching Song* has brought passion and resilience to the torpid social stage. *The Wingless Victory*, *High Tor* and *The Masque of Kings*, all by Maxwell Anderson, have given literary distinction to the season. The revival of *King Richard II* has relegated other Shakespearian resuscitations to second place, while the Federal Theatre's *Dr. Faustus* has touched another peak in Elizabethan production. The long-awaited spectacle-drama, *The Eternal Road*, has attained the ultimate in its somewhat dubious genre. At the same time it is to be admitted that one's pleasure is not in all instances unmixed. What might have been a major explosion, like *The Eternal Road*, turns out to be a burst of firecrackers, and elsewhere, too, there are causes for perturbation or disappointment rooted in attitudes inseparable from our time.

John Howard Lawson and his "Marching Song"

Be it said without preface or formality that this reviewer found *Marching Song* a stirring experience. The play is the logical culmination of Lawson's work in the theatre. In early pieces like *Roger Bloomer* and *Processional* he broke with the convention of realism. In later plays he made his peace with the convention, and *Gentlewoman* even saw him in the parlor. But he seemed ill at ease there. He has always been impatient with the plodding three-acter that demonstrates a neatly contrived situation or elaborates a picayune problem. At the core of his endeavor one

could detect not merely the craftsman's contempt for the facile tricks of his trade, but the poet's reach for a far-flung vision, the poet's predilection for moments of tension without preliminary elaborations of the commonplace. His technique has been preferably telescopic. It reflects, moreover, a viewpoint, that finds major drama not in isolated events but in the massing of people and forces in conflict that is collective rather than private. In *Marching Song* Lawson has at last achieved the synthesis toward which his work was tending, the accord that seems most in harmony with his spirit and outlook. The play combines the telescopic technique with the realistic. It is a panorama, but without the expressionist vaudeville of *Processional*. The details—the operation of a blacklist, evictions, vigilantism, professional strike breaking, and sympathy strikes—are authenticated by the daily press. Anyone who finds an iota of unreality in them has not read the newspapers; should a newspaperman fall into this category now and then the fault is surely not Lawson's.

Moreover, this is no jumble of mere detail; there is the march of history in it, the facts following an inner and outer logic. As a result of a compromise settlement Pete Russell lost his job at the Brimmer plant, and was blacklisted. When the curtain rises he has been evicted from his home, and his wife has found shelter in an abandoned factory occupied by various derelicts. Friendly neighbors bring the furniture in out of the brewing storm, and a labor organizer uses the occasion to challenge the betrayal of the workers by the settlement, and galvanizes them into action. During the strike that ensues the abandoned building is alternately occupied by strikers and strike-breaking elements. The industrial conflict produces a variety of responses, affects the lives of a num-



Vandamm

Henry Hull and Margo in Maxwell Anderson's play *The Masque of Kings*.

ber of representative people, and throws a terrible light on the American scene. A young girl and her lover become deeply involved in the fate of the strikers; the boy's romanticism is rudely jolted by the realities of the struggle, his naive optimism is gradually destroyed, and his body is tortured until he reveals the fact that the wounded strike organizer is hidden in the furnace room. The latter is ferreted out by professional strike-breakers and tortured to death. Pete Russell, at first suspicious of unionism which had resulted in his being blacklisted and evicted, blindly resentful to the point of besmirching himself with drink and prostitution, is at last fired by the devotion of his fellow-workers. He renounces an opportunity to regain his home rather than betray the organizer. His wife, keeping apart from a struggle that is repugnant to her respectability, is caught up in the swirl of the conflict when her baby is killed by a stray shot fired by the police or the company guards. The women prevail upon her to lead their procession holding the murdered child in her arms. The Negro worker, who scabbed blindly against the white workers in the first strike in which they were defeated, learns and

teaches a lesson in class solidarity. The derelicts divide into two groups, some supporting the strikers, others toting guns for the sheriff. A roundup of aliens implicated in the strike catches Mrs. Malucci, the mother of nine American children, in its dragnet. One by one the facets of an industrial battle increase in intensity as the bitterness mounts, as the manhunt for the organizer comes closer to its quarry, as the strikers become more resolute in the face of terrorism and tear gas, as the strike spreads and the sympathetic electric workers finally plunge the city in darkness.

By conventional standards Lawson's play seems a crowded drama, tantalizing because it fails to develop any individual story, melodramatic because it piles evil upon evil, and suffering upon suffering. Actually, the effect of the play is that of a pillar of fire. Lawson has written a stormy dramatic poem, throbbing with anguished excitement. Minor flaws are insignificant in the light of its mounting passion, expressed in glowingly poetic speech, whose occasional elaborateness would be generously forgiven if it celebrated the rites of spring and bore the Maxwell Anderson signature! Only the Warren Winkle episode and the conversations between Joe Bell and his girl in the second act are overdone.

The Theatre Union has, moreover, given *Marching Song* the most finished production of its chequered career. Howard Bay's interior of an abandoned factory is one of the most impressive sets of the season, unifying the multifarious action, deepening the anguish, high-lighting the struggle. Anthony Brown's timing of exits and entrances is a fine art in itself, and his management of masses makes dynamic drama of the major episodes. Grover Burgess presents a telling portrait of a bewildered and sulking worker, effectively contrasted by Rex Ingram's brawny Negro leader, who gives incandescence to Lawson's lines. Martin Wolfson's organizer is particularly appealing in the moments of his agony. It would be preposterous to believe that all labor organizers are of his calibre, but Wolfson's portrait is intensely convincing; his pluckiness, set against his slight stature and unassuming speech, is memorable. Frieda Altman seems miscast as Mrs. Russell but gives a finished performance, and a host of lesser roles are invested with true artistry. Lisa Markah's tight-lipped secretary, Hester Sondergaard's frightened and fluttering Mrs. Malucci, Curt Conway's limber hobo Amelia Malucci as the child-prostitute, and Gertrude Flynn's sister are notable.



Above: Maurice Evans in *King Richard II*. Right: Katherine Locke and Jules Garfield in Arthur Kober's *Having Wonderful Time*. Performance photos by Martin Harris. Right below: a scene from John Howard Lawson's *Marching Song*. Photo by Lucas-Pritchard.

The Anderson Secret

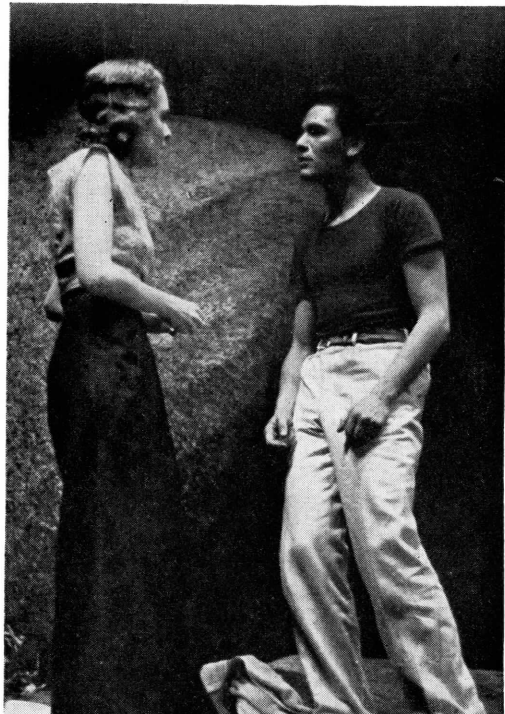
A different problem—one of loss of impact through indefiniteness—is presented by the three plays of Maxwell Anderson which have graced this season with its finest literature. It is no secret that almost single-handedly Anderson has fought and won the war for exalted drama. His recent plays have demonstrated that it is possible to employ poetry and prose of the grand manner. The secret of Anderson's success is not that of a technique, but of a technique wedded to provocative content. *The Wingless Victory* is no mere retelling of the Medea legend, but a blast against intolerance and hypocrisy in a community of merchants. *High Tor* is not mere Celtic fantasy for the Junior Leagues, but a satiric assault on the apostles of greed who defile our civilization both inwardly and outwardly. *The Masque of Kings* marks with gloomy satisfaction the decline of the Hapsburg monarchy and makes some attempt at a liberal exegesis of revolution. Nevertheless, each of the plays is a disappointment; a curious unreality and a sense



George Price's conception of *The Living Newspaper's Power*.

of a task snarled from the beginning make themselves felt in the total impression.

The most substantial of the three dramas, *The Masque of Kings*, shows the old monarchy, which has crushed all opposition, both public and private, clutching at the liberal Prince



Rudolph with its dying fingers. The latter's love for the Baroness Vetsera and conflict with his superbly realized authoritarian father, the Emperor Franz Joseph, make affecting drama. But Rudolph's political destiny, though it produces a powerful second act, peters out in a fog. Quite against his will, he has become party to a palace revolution that culminates in the Emperor's arrest. But faced with the necessity of suppressing his enemies and guarding his rule with force and bloodshed, Rudolph, who has been simultaneously disillusioned about the Baroness Vetsera, returns the crown to his father and runs off to his shooting lodge at Mayerling. It is precisely this type of behavior, supposedly elevating him to the position of a tragic figure, that knocks the pins out from under the play. It is intended to be Rudolph's tragedy, but since he is a sham *The Masque of Kings* suffers precisely to the degree to which it depends upon an invertebrate hero. He is always the bedevilled son, the second-rate Hamlet, instead of the shining spirit struggling against the Hapsburg darkness that ultimately destroys him, as it has destroyed his mother. He joins

the conspiracy because the Baroness Vetsera has been removed by his father. Lacking a real interest in a clearly envisioned new order, devoid of program or purpose, he is frightened by the prospect of a struggle for power. Henry Hull, who has been variously criticized for his performance, could have been twice as effective and yet would have failed to make the Hamlet of Mayerling a materially stronger figure. The flaw in the characterization stems from the playwright. The native hue of his resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of afterthought. In his hierarchy of values vagueness seems to become idealism, insufficiency sufficiency, and a badly disjointed prince a symbol of genuine liberalism. If *The Masque of Kings* is still one of the most impressive plays of the season, this is due to its mordant picture of the Hapsburg monarchy, its rounded portrait of the Emperor, played superlatively by Dudley Digges, and its dynamic structure.

To the credit of *High Tor* there is the most charming poetry of the season and a refreshing fantasy. Both qualities are perhaps subject to ex-
(Continued on page 40)





Scene from the Soviet production of Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Club*. Designer: Williams

SOVIET SCENE DESIGN

BY MORDECAI GORELIK

THE men and women who design the stage settings of the American professional theatre turn out work of a high standard. Yet on my second visit to the Soviet theatre (my first was in 1932), the impression deepens that the designers of the Broadway theatre, whose work was once of great creative importance, are most of them no longer going forward. This is not to say, of course, that all Soviet work is superior to all American work in this field. Soviet design also has its failures; and on the other hand there are instances of recent American design which seem to me worthy of a high rating in their own way. (I may mention Norman Bel Geddes's settings for *Dead End*, Hjalmar Hermanson's designs for the productions of the Living Newspaper, or the decor of New York revues and Radio City spectacles; in the latter case, fine talents working on trivial themes.)

However, comparisons in terms of individual talents no longer mean much in estimating the products of Soviet scene design. It is a fact that the visiting American designer (and even the most uninitiated American layman who attends the Moscow

theatre) is conscious that he is seeing scenic work of a new order. On Broadway a good setting may be exceptionally beautiful, exceptionally convincing in its stylized historical or geographical atmosphere; our Broadway settings give us a heightening of our customary sensations about places and things. But seldom in these days do they stun us with an utterly new evaluation of life. Soviet settings, on the other hand, impel us to see human environment in a new light. The Soviet designer has a bold approach to environment: he does not take it for granted, but catches it in the dynamic process of change.

What is it that constantly startles us before the best work of Soviet design? Not, in most cases, some unexpected trick, but an illuminated section of living environment. Not an inert surrounding, but a place which acts upon human character and upon which human character in turn exerts an influence. So alive is this section of environment that, on the stage, it seems to be only poised in its place. And this is literally true, for many Soviet settings move, with remarkable effectiveness, even in the middle of a scene.

Environment in motion! The idea may be summed up simply; but the artistic examples of this conception are varied beyond measure. In the days of the Russian civil war, a production like the one by Meyerhold of Ostrovsky's play *The Forest*, used constructivism in the manner of a polemic, to sweep out of the theatre at one blow all the accumulated academic rubbish of decades. Today the same production, still in repertory, is a boring performance; it has not held up through the years with an intrinsic interest of the kind which Vakhtangov's direction of *Princess Turandot* and Stanislavsky's direction of *The Blue Bird* still possess. But the initially crude settings of Meyerhold, which did away with the theatre curtain, which exposed the stage lights and brick walls of the stage, which substituted ramps, stairways and platforms, mechanisms of the circus in place of the staid illusions of the former Imperial theatres, have had a profound effect on the whole new theatre. Meyerhold himself afterwards enriched this method with the beauty of materials, textures, colors and vivid detail, as in *Revisor* and *Woe to Wit*. Today we are no longer very conscious of the construc-

tivist influence. But it is there, it is still, in fact, the basic technique of all meaningful Soviet design.

What are some of the new ways of work which are not seen on Broadway? In the New York theatre we often see fragments of locale used as a suggestion of the whole environment—a cathedral pillar for a cathedral, three tables for a restaurant, etc. But the Soviet designers leave behind—successfully—even this kind of symbolism. In *Woe to Wit*, designed by Shostakov for Meyerhold, stairways fly into stage space, doors stand up without walls, windows fade in and out. Yet we do not find the setting implausible. Why? Because the setting is not a room at all, it does not attempt to reproduce a room; strictly speaking, it does not even symbolize a whole room by means of parts of one. It is, actually, a *stage apparatus* whose elements have been derived from the Empire style of interiors. But because every element used is so truly of the period, so vividly related to the actors, we feel that each chair, each door, each spindle of the stairway lives and speaks. In the case of *Revisor*—one of the world's great dramatic productions—the same details of interior are grouped upon a rolling, inclined section of stage, which stands before a semi-circular screen of polished mahogany doors. I shall not attempt to convey here in words the brilliance of this scenic idea, which must be viewed in performance to be fully understood.

In the work of the designer Rabinovich there is a scenic lyricism expressed in a way hitherto unknown. If being lyrical means, even by the most old-fashioned definition, to defy the laws of gravity and to build images which soar on their own wings, then this is a true description of the work of this great artist, who has a mastery of stage space equalled by no other designer. His settings for *Lysistrata* and *Carmen*, already known in the United States, have the quality of flying through the cubic volume of the stage. In Moscow, on the huge stage of the Bolshoi Theatre, whose galleries rise six stories high, Rabinovich has erected, for *Eugene Onegin*, scene constructions of equal grandeur. The duel

scene fills the whole volume of the stage with Tschaikovsky's music, the grief of winter and the distress of a sensitive individual at war with society. The palace scene recreates for us the Tsarist empire, but with a romantic, musical lavishness which the Imperial scene designers themselves could not attain in the pre-Soviet playhouses.

The setting as a dynamic stage apparatus can be seen most clearly in V. F. Rindin's designs for *The Optimistic Tragedy* at the Kamerny Theatre, or the setting by Goncharov and Popov for *M'tsislav the Brave* at the Theatre of the Red Army. Rindin's raked stage (a type much favored by the Soviet designers) is a highly mobile mechanism whose general quality is derived from the idea of a shell-crater. It is so thoroughly geared to the play, however, that it serves equally as a battleship, as trenches, as a prison camp. This ever-moving environment and the lights which play upon it are combined with a cyclorama which does not imitate a sky but is a luminous changing background. The scene of *M'tsislav* is an armored train, but the setting itself is sculpture in iron and steel. The life of the play seems to pound against the riveted steel walls of the car; the armored car and the partisans who defend its slotted windows are an indissoluble interplay of human bodies, steel framing and sheet iron.

Many more such examples could be given in the sophisticated work of Akimov, the grotesque fantasy of Tishler and Falk, the rich humor of Williams, the new problems solved by Shtoffer in his designs for the productions of the Realistic Theatre. It is hard to single out names among the scores of fine artists, some of them doing new work in faraway provincial theatres: Volkov, Erdman, Shlepianov, Gamrakelli, Mandelberg, Yakulov, Dmitriev, Levin, Yefimenko. It is hard, also, not to consider even in a short space the creative theories which support the practice of the Soviet designers. These artists do not admit that there is any cubic inch of stage space of which they cannot make use. They see a necessary relationship between the mechanism of the human figure and that of the set-

ting. They recognize a dramatic interplay of warm and cold color, rough and smooth texture. They do not hesitate to counterpose different styles of graphic technique. As against the old horizontal settings suitable for sedentary actors, they offer constructions adapted to the full expression of the human body.

Soviet design is particularly sensitive to the value of the discoveries made by the lens of the motion picture camera. The human eye in practice does not see things from a fixed viewpoint, but looks up, down and sideways. The cinema can offer similar viewpoints, thus giving a new kind of vividness which the stage has lacked. As modern stage settings divest themselves of the naturalistic and atmospheric style, they begin to take on many cinematic qualities, which they resolve into their own technique. Thus a healthy, creative interchange is established between the two great fields of the theatre.

An American theatregoer may well ask why such fertility of invention has been so lacking, of late, in the Broadway playhouses. Between 1919-1928 the American theatre was developing rapidly; it was then taking over many of the achievements of the Free Theatre period in Europe, whose leaders were world-famous directors and designers such as Antoine, Lugné-Poe, Rouché, Brahm, Jessner, Reinhardt, Copeau, Appia, Fuchs, Craig, Yeats, Stanislavsky, Erler, Stern. The Free Theatre movement, especially during its Symbolist period (about 1890-1910) was notable for its scenic imagination; transferred to the United States the same movement produced a corps of talented designers (with Robert Edmond Jones as its pioneer leader). Since the Broadway peak season of 1927-8, however, scene design has been pushed into an inferior position in the United States. Cheapness has become a primary consideration with many of the commercial producers, who are trying desperately to economize. Besides, the chief interest of the producer is the play-script, which is a financial investment capable of being sold to Hollywood. The setting is no such investment, and too often serves only as a decorative
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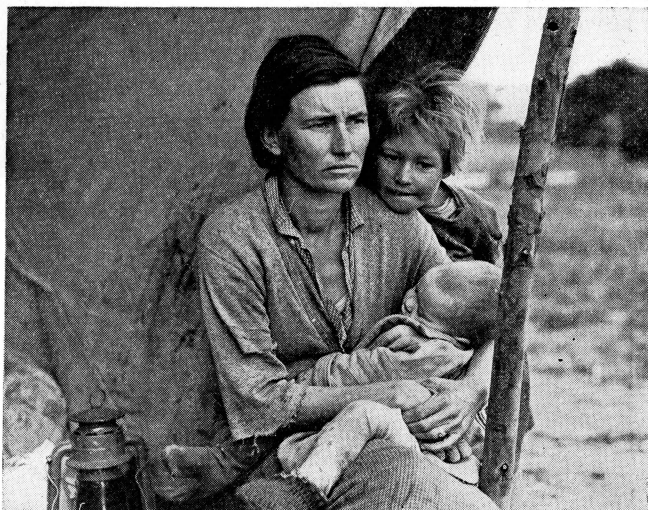
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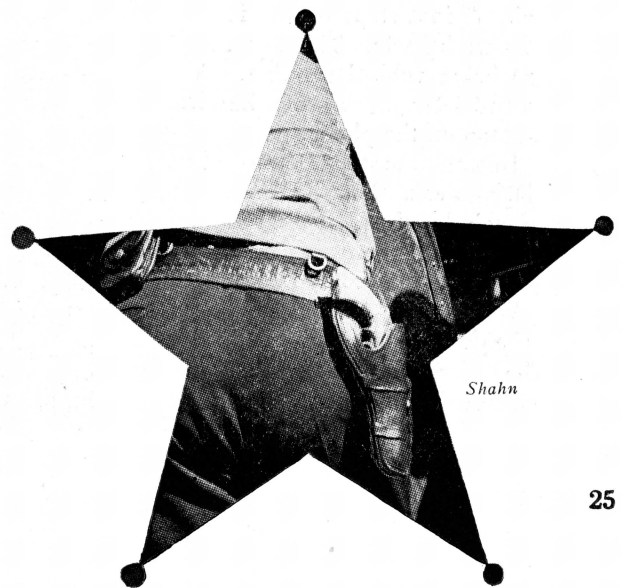
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Lange

The
**L I V I N G
T H E A T R E**

MODERN madonnas whose kids learn fast to be intimate with hunger. Under the plump cherubs stands a child of the Fortuna family in Louisiana; on this page wives and children of sharecroppers in Arkansas and North Carolina, then a mother and two of her seven children, pea pickers in California, seen by the camera-eye of Dorothea Lange and Ben Shahn, Resettlement Administration photographers. Here the Sheriff is no comic figure lurking in the wings, and Tinpan Alley's madrigals never reach the cotton fields of Dixie. These children play a continuous performance against a backdrop of privation and fear. Now the Sharecroppers Union comes into the spotlight and says, "We mean to live."



Shahn

Month of Bounties

BY ROBERT STEBBINS

MARCH was a month of bounties, however mixed they proved on examination. Seldom has the moviegoer had the opportunity of observing within a limited period such varied productions as *You Only Live Once*, *The Plough and the Stars*, *Lost Horizon* and *The Good Earth* and the work of such distinctly divergent talents as Fritz Lang, John Ford, Frank Capra and Sidney Franklin.

Of the directors, Fritz Lang proved far and away the most individualized and absorbing. The scenario of *You Only Live Once*, which Gene Towne and Graham Baker banged out with brass knuckles, may have been bloated beyond decency by over-ripe coincidences, but the film from a directorial point of view provided an occasion of intense pleasure. All the mastery that went into *M* and *Fury* was in evidence, though sadly handicapped by a script that lacked social grounding and strained credulity to the breaking point. Nevertheless, the director, through a highly developed sense of social awareness, subtle implication and sheer drive managed to eke out a temporary victory over his material. Few scenes in recent films possess greater cogency of comment than the attempt of the state to save the life of Eddie Taylor so that it can execute him at the appointed hour. Everything that medical science has stored up during the ages is called upon. We see a brief flash of a modern sterilization tunnel. A foot steps on the foot pedal of a wash basin. The doctor's hands are being rubbed together. A split second later the Warden has Doctor Stanton on the phone.

Doctor Stanton (into phone): "He's weak, but he'll be strong enough by then. I'll keep him in the hospital where we can watch him—until the time comes." (Hangs up)

Warden: "Thanks, Doctor. (Hangs up and turns to Halsey) The execution will go on as scheduled—at eleven o'clock."

Previously in the film, Lang has

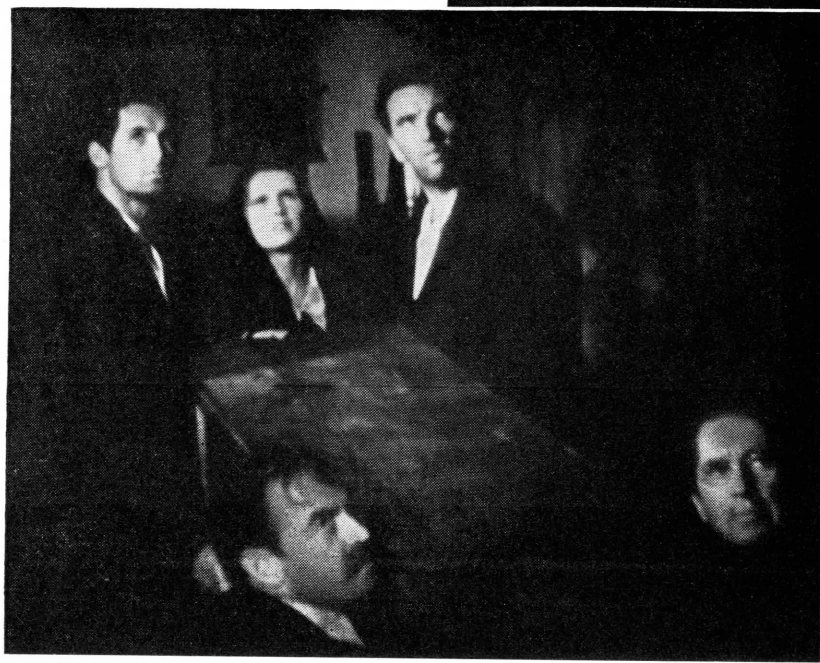
arraigned our institutions most bitterly for refusing the ex-convict the right to rehabilitate himself as a worth-while member of the social organism. The conceptual penetration that goes into the episode where Eddie pleads in vain to get his job back is overwhelming.

Instances of Lang's ingenuity abound throughout the film. We need but mention the newspaper office with the editor awaiting the verdict, or the use made of the rifle sight in the last sequence to create great tension. Lang's ability to achieve dramatic effectiveness by the use of objects, although this is but one of his methods, is possessed to equal degree by no director save possibly Alfred Hitchcock. There is this difference. In Hitchcock, this "Sachlichkeit" seldom justifies itself beyond pure virtuosity. What one gets in his case is almost always shock for shock's sake. We make this distinction only to point out a similar danger that lies before Fritz Lang in the event that the scripts available to him deteriorate even beyond *You Only Live Once*. We devoutly wish this eventuality never to become fact.

You Only Live Once was considerably marred by an unpleasant, mawkish last minute addition to the end of the film, probably through Hays' office insistence. Father Dolan, whom Eddie has murdered, appears from out of a misty heaven to open

the gates for the slain couple. But this is mere child's play in light of the tampering *The Plough and the Stars* endured.

It would not be too extreme to state that, all things considered, *The Plough and the Stars* is not the work of Dudley Nichols, John Ford or Sean O'Casey. The running time of the picture—sixty-seven minutes—should be some indication of what a murderous hacking was here! There is hardly a "quickie" that would attempt to make its points in as little





Reading left to right: scene from *The Plough and the Stars*, Sylvia Sydney in *You Only Live Once*, Luise Rainer in *The Good Earth*, and Paul Muni in the same film. Photos from the screen by Martin Harris.

time. Who is specifically to blame one cannot say. Certainly the fact that Ford has steadfastly refused to see the film and that after he left the lot much of the film was reshot "to get more love interest," as the trade-papers put it, clearly indicates whence the odor rises. To some extent, however, it is possible to discuss *The Plough and the Stars* as the work of Ford and Nichols on the basis of the material that appears both in the film and the original scenario.

The Plough and the Stars must have presented grave difficulties to the scenarist, Dudley Nichols—practically insoluble difficulties in our opinion. To begin with, the play, whatever one may think of its point of view, possesses the validity and prerogatives of a work of art and therefore a great degree of scenaric fidelity was required. But O'Casey obviously regarded the 1916 revolt as a tragic and needless waste of life. On the other hand, Nichols felt strongly, and justifiably so, the great glory of the Dublin uprising. Consequently he was faced with reconciling two dichotomous points of view and the very structure of the film—the awkward shifting back and forth from tenement to the besieged postoffice, bears out this duality.

Apart from scenario, the direction of the film discloses certain fundamental weaknesses. In the main, these result from John Ford's reliance on excessive stylization—a tendency he first betrayed most noticeably in *Mary of Scotland*. The funeral procession of Mollser may be taken as a case in point. This took on almost the character of a slow dance, the three shawled women going through their paces as for a choreographer. Or consider his habit of fading out on a group of people frozen rigid—almost like architecture. Although Ford's desire to invest the character of James Connolly with great nobility was in evidence, his directives were so generalized that the great Irish leader took on the proportions of a stock character. The occupation of the postoffice, though more fully treated in the scenario, still emerged as a sequence of great expressiveness. The undeniably effective chase across the roofs was partly weakened in grip by the unrealistic character of the mise-en-scene. In this respect the choice seems to have been deliberate, for the scenario reads ". . . this roof is only an eerie impression of chimney pots, different roof levels, and smoke."

One might go on with an analysis

of *The Plough and the Stars* if the thought that the film is really not the work of Ford and Nichols did not continually present itself. To all intents and purposes Ford and Nichols have yet to make *The Plough and the Stars*. No one in his senses, for example, could hold either one of them to account for the nauseating drool that splashes out of Barbara Stanwyck in the course of a performance as inept as any the screen has seen.

Unlike Ford, whose connection with *The Plough and the Stars* would appear comparatively slight, Frank Capra, from all evidence we have been able to gather, is solely responsible for *Lost Horizon*, having supervised every stage of its vast production. And great must the blame be. After *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, the all-pervasive triteness of *Lost Horizon* is a disagreeable shock. From the novel by James Hilton we had learned what to expect. Capra's enthusiasm for the novel and his selection of it for filmization was entirely in keeping with his psychological development. From *Broadway Bill* through *Mr. Deeds*, Capra plainly showed his distress that the world was out of joint, that mass misery is the foundation of the fortunes of the few. His distress was

manifestly sincere, his concern genuine, and remains so even on the basis of *Lost Horizon*. He obviously wished he could do something about it. In *Broadway Bill*, Walter Connelly sells his huge interests, gives up money grubbing and goes off with his favorite son-in-law to follow the ponies. Mr. Deeds gives most of his millions to several thousand dispossessed farmers, and retires to "Mandrake Falls, where the scenery enthalls, where no hardship e'er befalls, welcome to Mandrake Falls."

Shangri-La is Mandrake Falls without the United Cigar Store. It has more books than the Congressional Library and a shady approximation of a Tibetan horn that hardly compensates for Mr. Deeds' tuba. As for authentic feeling for the Tibetan scene one is reminded of a British critic's comment on *Mary of Scotland*, "the inaccuracies must have involved tremendous research." One would require but a single sequence, almost a single frame, from *Storm Over Asia* or *Son of Mongolia* to shame the highly publicized "fidelities" of *Lost Horizon*.

Some time last year we concluded our review of *Mr. Deeds* with a fervent wish that in his next picture, *Lost Horizon*, Capra would "in some unaccountable way avoid the chauvinist, jingo pitfalls" that would face him. It is among the more regrettable features of *Lost Horizon* that he fails completely. As evidence we can point to the Chinaman who leers lasciviously at the film's shady lady, Isabel Jewell during the refueling scene. In his treatment of the reception Edward Everett Horton and Thomas Mitchell get from the native women, Capra fails to add one single nuance that distinguishes the scene from any number featuring the amorous exploits of Victor McLaglen and Edmund Lowe. Add to these the incomprehensible singing class conducted by Jane Wyatt and her final "Bob, Bob, you've come back," and you've only got an exciting airplane crash to save from the wreckage of the film. At this date, it is perhaps unnecessary to discuss so completely an escapist philosophy as that summed up in Shangri-La (a refuge for all the delicate perishable

beauties of the world to which men will turn after their civilization is destroyed). It is perhaps supererogatory to point out that today the preservation of culture is a process of complete participation in the struggles of the world. The Spanish workers who at this moment are defending with their lives their great artistic heritage understand this.

We do not wish to be unfair to *Lost Horizon*, and least of all to Capra whose craftsmanship makes itself felt in the tidiness of the film. But we expected more of him and of his scenarist Robert Riskin. In general, criticism is a tricky affair. We often find ourselves praising a poor film on the basis of a single surprising sequence and conversely damning a good film because of certain unexpected defects. *Lost Horizon* unfortunately is not in the latter class. We mention this common pitfall of criticism specifically in connection with *The Good Earth*. However involved we get in tortuous fault-finding we ought to make it clear that *The Good Earth* is an extraordinarily fine work. Sidney Franklin has labored long and well to achieve his results. Attention must also be called to the highly creditable screen adaptation of the novel by Tess Slessinger, Talbot Jennings and Claudine West.

The film's defects are chiefly attributable to the shortcomings of Pearl Buck's novel, as are its virtues. True there have been some modifications. The film ends with the death of O-Lan. Wang's further life with Lotus and later with Pear Blossom is obviously untouched so as to conform with Western notions of marital propriety. For the same reason—conformity with Western ideas—O-Lan and Lotus exchange physiques, O-Lan becoming the petite Louise Rainer, who, incidentally, delivers herself of a remarkable performance, and Lotus assuming the person of Tilly Losch. The finding of the jewels is an unnecessarily labored elaboration. For the most part, however, the film is an unusually faithful transcription, even to the extent of retaining the murder of O-Lan's fourth child born during the drought, an episode profoundly moving and subtly conceived.

With all its limitations, *The Good Earth* is the most humane and truest representation of Chinese life that has come out of a studio outside of the Soviet Union. Pearl Buck, however, in her novel seems to have made a conscious effort to shut her characters in a vacuum isolated from everything save her scrutiny. This she undoubtedly did with the mistaken notion that thereby she was attaining universality. But death and taxes are also universal. They are always with us. It is a source of wonder that nowhere in her novel is the matter of taxes considered. China, the worst tax-ridden area on the globe and no mention of it! This may appear a small point but I believe it indicative of Miss Buck's entire approach to her subject, an approach which is naturally reflected in the film. I would say that the consequence of her approach is *generalization* and not *universality*, which can only accompany *complete reality*. This feeling of *generalization* pervades the entire production. It is largely responsible for the vague, unrealized quality of Paul Muni's performance.

Thousands of feet of film were shot in China for background, not a frame of it appearing in the final result. Instead generalized replicas were created by landscaping a ranch in California as an equivalent. The story itself is that most generalized and unsatisfactory of situations, man's struggle against "nature." Wang's enemies are not man made, only the drought, the sun, the flood. Remove the revolutionary sequence and you have another *Man of Aran*, which won the Mussolini prize. Indeed, it has been suggested with perfect justice that *The Good Earth* would have been impossible, without the early work of Flaherty. I would have preferred more of man's world in *The Good Earth*, but the novel does not permit of it. True, the novel is decidedly more specific about the revolution, but then the film contains one brilliant condensation that almost repays you for the lack of detail. Wang asks one of his fellow-workers the meaning of the word revolution. "I don't know," is the answer, "but it has something to do with food."



BILLY BITZER

ACE CAMERAMAN

BY PHILIP STERLING

THE allocation of honors for creative contributions to the motion picture is a difficult task. But if a medal is ever stamped with the face of David Wark Griffith, its obverse side will have to bear the likeness of Billy Bitzer, Griffith's cameraman.

The association of these two artists from the time Griffith stepped into the old Biograph studio in 1908 to the time he made *Broken Blossoms* is an historic example of the interdependence of the arts in the creation of motion pictures.

None can detract from the stature of Griffith as the single greatest force in the American film. Griffith did more than make great pictures. He brought into being the basic elements of the motion picture's inherent idiom. He developed mere tricks of photography into a method of creative expression. But he didn't do it alone. The collective nature of film art made it inevitable that he should share his efforts and his glory with others, and most of all with Billy Bitzer.

All too rapidly the illusion is growing up among a second generation of film lovers that the visual idiom now commonly employed with skilful variation by all directors sprang full-grown and armor-clad from the foreheads of one or two individuals. Even Griffith himself, in a recent radio broadcast, intimated that pure cerebration and not the

groping trial and error of a new and undeveloped art were responsible for the flash-back, the close-up, the fade-out, the dissolve.

A talk with Bitzer, who is now past sixty, and struggling in obscurity to keep his little family together on a WPA security wage, produces a new appreciation of the movie cameraman's role as a creative agent.

Bitzer's views on camera art need recording, but even more does his present personal relationship to the movie industry need to be told. Bitzer last worked in Hollywood in 1929, when he photographed *Drums of Love*. Having lost a fortune in the easy-come-easy-go days of Coolidge prosperity, he was working in New York filming screen tests and doing other photographic odd jobs, when he asked for a chance to go back to Hollywood. He was assured, on his own insistence, that he would be treated like any other ace cameraman. Bitzer disdains to call himself an artist and the phrase ace cameraman is his own.

Arriving in Hollywood, Bitzer worked the usual two weeks before approaching the pay-window and asking the pay clerk for his check.

If he had ever doubted that the paths of movie glory lead but to obscurity, he ceased doubting as he stood before the cashier's cage. The clerk had never heard of him. Bitzer repeated his name. The clerk looked through his records and came back

saying, "I'm sorry, we have no one by the name of *Mitchell* on the payroll." When Bitzer spelled his name another search was made and still his place on the payroll wasn't found. A conference with the production manager revealed that no provision had ever been made to put Bitzer on the payroll at the \$500 a week which was the common salary of the other top cameramen on the lot. Broke, and without much choice, Bitzer remained to work at a much lower salary than he had been led to expect. How much lower he doesn't care to say.

But Bitzer sought a recourse which has become increasingly popular on the West Coast since 1929. He set about organizing a union. In New York, it is not commonly known, Bitzer had been one of the founders of the International Photographers of the Motion Picture Industries which embraced all of the lower rank cameramen and assistants who could not get into the exclusive and expensive American Society of Cinematographers. That was in 1926, and Bitzer was not only the first president of that local but was elected unanimously to a second term of office.

On the West Coast the industry was in a dither because of the coming of sound. Cameramen and assistants saw a danger in the low salaries which were being paid to many lesser sound technicians.

When Bitzer pointed out to his

fellow photographers that they stood in danger of being reduced to similar levels, they were quick to respond and Local 656 of the International Photographers of the Motion Picture Industries was set up in Hollywood. Meetings were held in secret but membership swelled swiftly. New grievances came to light as the union got under way and not the least of them was a variation of the old kick-back racket. The producers were alarmed and Billy Bitzer, ace cameraman, the creative eye through which the great Griffith captured his visions of beauty and grandeur, was black-listed. By quick steps he was eased off the lot and made to understand that he would be far better off on the coast of another ocean than the Pacific.

Bitzer tells the story of an attempt to bribe him. An offer of \$50,000 to retire from the union was made to him by a cameraman who had served his apprenticeship under him. But Bitzer understands unionism better than the producers who are fighting it.

"Suppose I did quit now," Bitzer said. "I couldn't stop the union. Once these things get started no one man is big enough to call a halt. Besides, what will I be able to say when people ask where the great ace cameraman was during the struggle of his fellow photographers to organize? What will I be able to answer when people ask why Billy Bitzer wasn't in the fight? It isn't worth \$50,000. I've had far more than that and a man who knows the value of money also knows how worthless money can be."

Thus Bitzer left Hollywood and found his way by painful stages to the Objective Reading Project maintained by WPA for the Board of Education in New York City. He has done motion picture work for the WPA administration but his present job is to prepare film strips and recorded lectures used in visual education.

For all Hollywood's ingratitude, Bitzer is not embittered. He eschews the pose of the grand old man who affects indulgence for the mistakes and ineptitudes of his younger successors. On the contrary, his attitude toward motion picture photography

as it appears on the screens of the movie houses he frequents, is keenly critical and appreciative.

"When I see a movie," Bitzer said, "I grow smaller and smaller in my seat as I realize what they're doing in Hollywood today. Today's photography brings to life what I once dreamed of achieving in the era of slow film, inadequate illuminants and unimproved cameras. With better equipment the boys have learned more. They know how to use their new tools."

Bitzer feels that while the average standard of Hollywood photography is high, unusual photography is achieved only when there is the proper kind of collaboration between cameraman and director. If the director has clear ideas of the visual effects he wants to achieve, if he is certain of the composition, the emphasis and the dramatic quality he wants, his cameraman can become a pliant creative agent, Bitzer feels.

Lighting is something Bitzer seems to take for granted. A man can't take pictures unless he knows how to light up, he feels, but his ideas on lighting-up seem to hew closely to the line of the non-realistic Hollywood tradition. He speaks of it largely in terms of keeping unflattering shadows off the faces of feminine stars. Despite this, it must be remembered that the battle scenes which swept over a vast plain in *The Birth of a Nation* are still among the most realistic ever filmed. It is entirely likely that the contemporary Hollywood cinematographer would find himself at somewhat of a loss if he had to depend as completely on sunlight as did the photographers of Bitzer's early days.

To return to the interdependence of the arts in the motion picture, and the inaccurate legends concerning the origin of the basic components of camera expression. In the first decade of the century, screen stories were extremely simple and the methods of visualizing them were even simpler. Falling into a formula, movie makers discovered all too quickly that the easiest pictures to make and the most salable were those in which love interest predominated. In this connection they were constantly troubled by one fact—the big

love scenes appeared and disappeared too abruptly. This was because cutting was then elementary. It consisted simply of splicing sequence to sequence and hoping for the best. To compensate for their inadequate knowledge of cutting everything was tried: soft focusing, gauze screens, whatnot. The first forward step was backlighting, which meant placing the subject between the lens and the source of light. This had always been avoided by cameramen because it meant that the faces of the actors were in shadow and either bad photographs of mere silhouettes would result.

Bitzer relates that on location in Fort Lee one day, while the actors were resting between sequences, Owen Moore and Mary Pickford, who were later married, used the recess for some mild love-making of their own. They happened to be sitting within range of Bitzer's camera, and the playful Billy thought it would be amusing if some scenes of Moore's and Pickford's tender interlude found their way to the screen of the projection room when the day's shooting was done. The blissful couple was between the camera and the sun. There was only one thing for Bitzer to do, turn the crank and shade the lens with his hand.

The little company that sat in the projection room that night got a thrill. Bitzer's trick gave far better results than he expected because the white gravel road at the edge of which Moore and Pickford were sitting, reflected sufficient light to give effective illumination to the faces. Elated by his accidental achievement, he took care to prevent others from thinking it accidental and studied the lighting conditions which made his little stroke possible until he knew how to reproduce them at will. Here was one method of visualizing a love scene different from the drab methods in use. On a second attempt, Bitzer shaded the lens with his cap and part of the cap appeared on the film. H. N. Marvin told Bitzer to "stop fooling around."

Undaunted, Bitzer cut the bottom out of a glue can and made a shade for the lens. When the film was projected it was discovered that the

(Continued on page 46)

Road Show—CIO Style

BY RICHARD PACK

AROUND the alleys and cafes of Broadway where they like to wonder Is the Road Coming Back, there won't be much interest in a certain road company which is going to tour this spring. But in Gary and Pittsburgh, in Detroit and Akron, where the talk is of John L. Lewis and C.I.O., it will be different. The men who make steel and rubber and autos are going to be excited about this show. For the first time, workers in the mass production industries will see their own struggles mirrored on the stage—and for the first time the theatre will be used as an integral part of a drive for union organization. The sponsor of this unique tour is Labor Stage and the play—John Wexley's *Steel*.

A leading organizer of the SWOC, Clinton S. Golden, furnished the incentive for the tour. "I have no idea what would be involved in getting this play presented by a company out on the road," he told Labor Stage after seeing a performance of *Steel*, "But if it could be worked out, I think it would do an immense amount of good in our present organizing campaign."

Other union leaders were also enthusiastic about the play. One hundred members of the Policy Committee of the United Mine Workers of America saw the play, while in town for the recent negotiations with the coal companies, and actually stopped the show—they were so enthused that they began encouraging the hero in his fight with a company thug by yelling "Get 'im!—Go to it boy!—Sock 'im!"

Last month, a conference of unionists and theatre workers was called by Labor Stage and the New Theatre League to discuss a tour of *Steel*. Although no definite action was taken, tentative plans were drawn up. Patrick Fagan, head of the Pittsburgh Central Trades Council, and president of District 5 of the UMWA, came to the conference and pledged \$1,000 for his district towards the expense of the tour.

When the Wexley play finally takes its part in the assault against the feudal rule of the big corporations, the boards of directors may find some consolation in the thought that *Steel* almost reached the screen, and in that medium might have achieved an even larger audience.

The history of *Steel* is curious and significant. While working for Universal Films in 1930, Wexley wrote an original scenario called *Steel*, which was enthusiastically approved by Carl Laemmle, Jr., who was looking for another socially-conscious film to follow *All Quiet On the Western Front*. William Wyler was slated to direct *Steel*, and Lew Ayres, Slim Summerville, and the late Louis Wolheim were assigned to the cast.

"It was a simple story," Wexley recalls, "It concerned a young itinerant worker, who while employed in a steel plant comes in contact with a number of characters . . . And of course, a girl—but not the boss's daughter. The story described the burdensome conditions, low wages, long hours, and culminated in a strike conflict, during which scabs and strikebreakers were brought in . . . Looking back on the matter, I smile at my own innocent intrepidity

of those years. You must understand that Laemmle, Jr., while production manager for the whole studio at that time, was only 21 years old, and an ambitious youngster, though very naive."

However naive Laemmle, Jr., might have been, there were others who realized the implications of the script and visualized its repercussions. After a great amount of money and work had been expended on detailed preparations, the picture was suddenly shelved.

Wexley then re-worked the script for the stage, and in the fall of 1931 Richard Geist produced it in New York. It was the first labor play produced professionally in this country. The critics pounced on it as "propaganda" and the show closed within two weeks. Not long after, *Steel* was produced in a downtown hall for two performances under the auspices of the Workers' School. Before a workers' audience, the play was an overwhelming success. Both performances were sell-outs. More people saw the play in those two performances than in two weeks uptown!

The rejuvenation of *Steel* came
(Continued on page 46)



David McDonald of the SWOC addressing the *Steel* cast and audience.

Wage Scales for Dancers

BY LOUISE MITCHELL

BEHIND the glitter and excitement of performances, behind the encores, bravos and the cheering, behind the bright lights of the marquee, the glamour and the hope for future fame, lies a dancer's bitter struggle for existence. Of all the performers who appear before the public eye, the dancers of the chorus, whether at Roxy's or at Sunday night recitals at the Guild Theatre, are the most underprivileged group. Where the musicians, stage hands and actors have a strong closed shop in their respective fields, dancers are divided into several unions, with thousands completely unorganized.

Among the chorus groups we include the jazz dancers, (high-kickers, tapsters and eccentrics), the ballerinas, the precisionists, night club hoofers, burlesque line-ups and modern dancers. Whether one type of dancer claims superiority over the other as to artistic achievement, the fact remains that they all earn, or should earn, their livelihood by dancing.

Whenever a call is sent out for chorines, two to three hundred appear. About forty are chosen. They rehearse for three weeks at half of the minimum wage in the show. During the last week of rehearsals, when everyone, from star to understudy, is on the set for twenty-four hours a day, the dancers receive fifteen dollars a week. Theirs is the lowest pay of the entire company.

Each year eight to ten musical comedies hit the boards of Broadway. Of this number only half make the grade, and two or three are smash hits. Once the show opens, the chorus performs eight times a week for the length of its run. It may fold up in one month, two or six. Dancers, as well as actors, gamble on the success of the show. The chance of rising to Gypsy Rose Lee fame from obscurity is dangled before them as reward by the producers. According to Mrs. Dorothy Bryant, Executive Secretary of

Chorus Equity, only ten percent ever succeed.

Chorus Equity protects dancers in the chorus for twenty-one dollars initiation fee and twelve dollars a year thereafter. Whenever a dancer leaves the ranks of the chorus to do a specialty bit, she has to join the American Federation of Actors. Intricate distinctions, complicated by overlapping functions, separate the dancer in Equity from her fellow worker in A.F.A. For the past twenty years, Chorus Equity has carried on the task of protecting chorus dancers in musicals and presentations only, and has supposedly achieved a closed shop within its limited field. Out of its five thousand members, only six hundred odd are in good standing. Mrs. Bryant believes that a thousand perhaps are working in nightclubs. (Chorus Equity has no check, however, since nightclub dancers are under the jurisdiction of the A.F.A.) Over three thousand unemployed chorines in New York are thus forced to find employment in other equally overcrowded professions.

There is very little hope that Equity, as it now functions, will ever regain its pre-depression strength, or retain even its present power. The field under its jurisdiction is rapidly shrinking, and, wisely or not, the present Chorus Equity administration continually grants concession after concession to the employer groups.

Approximately thirty-five modern dancers were employed for the dance sequences in *The Eternal Road*. Some were Equity members. Others had no trade union experience whatsoever. In the minds of some, Equity was a trade union, to protect the contract rights of the chorus. In the minds of others, art and the theatre became ART and the THEATRE and the sacred sanctum of Reinhardt must not be interfered with by trade

unions. *The Eternal Road* last year received concessions from Equity amounting to six weeks of extended rehearsal period beyond contract stipulations. This season, the first time Mr. Weisgal, the producer, asked for concessions, Equity refused him. The second time, Mr. Weisgal didn't bother to ask. He defied the Equity ruling, worked the dancers overtime for three days before opening without any additional salary. One of these days, the dancers were worked for twenty hours at a stretch. Chorus Equity was methodically informed of the situation every one of these days. But Chorus Equity never even bothered to send its representative down to investigate. Nor to the knowledge of the members of the cast, has Chorus Equity yet fined Mr. Weisgal for his deliberate violation of trade union laws.

The American Federation of Actors, headed by Ralph Whitehead, is now struggling to organize dancers in vaudeville, picture houses, cabarets, nightclubs, variety shows, circuses, carnivals and all outdoor shows. It has a membership of approximately forty-three thousand dancers, singers and actors.

A.F.A. artists work from week to week. There is no yearly contract. The finest acts are given no more than two to four week contracts. Mr. Whitehead cannot tell when a performer is unemployed. Performers are usually awaiting the "next" engagement. Mr. Whitehead "faces the new year with utmost confidence. We will be able to give our membership even more protection than last year because our membership is larger, more appreciative of unionism and more militant (we just won a picketing campaign against the American Music Hall, New York). We feel sorry for non-members, for they are exposed to vicious conditions which they must combat alone



—without group support which only a union can supply.”

Mr. Whitehead is a realist. He wants a strong A.F.A. He opposes the arbitrary division which classifies one group of dancers for Chorus Equity and another for A.F.A. He



advocates one union for all dancers, from soloists to line-up girls. His interest in unionizing all dancers led to an attempt to organize the modern dance field. Speaking at the Dance Congress last May, he said, in part, “We have found that the problems of dancers are not much different from those of acrobats, comedians, instrumentalists, or magicians. All performers have the same problems of securing work, of bargaining for better salary. . . . We must not permit exploitation of dancers to go on under the guise of bringing culture to the community.” Needless to say, the art groups, both modern and ballet, had no interest in economic organizations of any sort.

The phenomenal success of song and dance screen musicals in the past few years is in part a tribute to the public's love of dancing, and bigger and better dance routines have found their way into practically every singing musical shipped out of Hollywood. Yet in Hollywood a dancer has practically no chance at all, since only a handful are used again and again, being loaned out to different companies. The rest are finally driven out of the profession and resort to jobs as models, waitresses, salesgirls, and of course, to prostitution, which, in the case of comely, unemployed women, finally becomes an easy way out.

The Screen Dancers Guild was a short-lived attempt at unionization on the Coast. There were difficulties in cooperating with the Screen Actors Guild. Finally, lacking competent trade union experience, and unable to cope, therefore, with its own problems, it met with an ugly death, rumors of mismanagement of the Guild's funds actually pursuing some of the officers.

Strange as it seems, burlesque does offer some measure of security to its dancers. The continuous run, the regular hours and pay seem good to Catherine Radin of the Irving Place Burlesque. She never chose burlesque as a profession, she says, but, unable to find work in nightclubs, she was forced to take whatever came her way. She doesn't enjoy dancing “for a pack of morons,” either. Even here, however, “security” is merely the assurance of earning twenty-four dollars for a forty-eight hour week, and in addition rehearsals, four nights a week, from 11:30 to 1:00 A.M. Every fourteen days she gets one day off. Although burlesque dancers of the Burlesque Artists Association won their strike over a year ago, they are still the lowest paid workers in the profession. The only virtue in their job is its comparatively permanent character.

So much for dancers' unions. What little protection these offer the dancer is still a bulwark of security, compared with those innumerable dancers and groups on the outside, with neither assurance of tenure, nor any form of collective bargaining.

The hardest-working dancers in the world are probably the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes. Dancers have to train for years before they can reach the pace of these performers. Thousands aspire to this job requiring the services only of thirty-three. They earn forty dollars a week, a comparatively high salary, but they work eighty-three hours for four weeks and get the fifth one off, then work three weeks and knock off on the fourth, etc. Moreover, this average of sixty-five hours a week was only started at the time of the N.R.A. Tuberculosis and intestinal diseases are prevalent among dancers, due to lack of fresh air and the strain of work. At thirty these dancers are old. A “protective association” within the Music Hall is responsible for the welfare of the dancers.

At the Metropolitan where ballet is part of the institution of Opera, the corps de

ballet (the American Ballet) have contracts to work fourteen weeks during the winter season at an average of thirty-two dollars a week. During the spring season, they earn “whatever the budget allows.” No comment is necessary here. The promise of a job at the Opera for the coming winter induces them to accept any conditions. During the summer they flock to the already overcrowded nightclubs and road companies. Mr. Warburg, director of the American Ballet, believes, very naively, that “esprit de corps” makes the dancers return to the Opera each fall. We can suggest other reasons.

According to the director of the American Ballet, it is impossible for the ballet dancers to join Chorus Equity or any other union, “due to the conditions under which the Ballet is forced to work.” Not all the “esprit de corps” in the world however will prevent the firing of a ballerina for any reason whatsoever, or the sudden cutting of the pay checks of all the dancers, subject to “budget allowances.” Obviously, the education of the members of the Ballet to these truths can only be carried on by an existing organization. What is Equity doing about this?

The ballerinas who take the greatest pride in their profession belong to the Monte Carlo Ballet. So says Mr. Gerald Goode, press representative for the company. The dancers live up to the “past heritage of the great Russian Ballet!” (Incidentally one of the factors contributing to Nijinsky's insanity was constant financial worry.) The Monte Carlo dancers have contracts for eleven months of the year at thirty-five dollars a week. On the twelfth month, they vacation—without pay, of course. Traveling through Europe and America during the season they

often receive bookings for future jobs in London, Paris and New York. According to Mr. Goode, there is no need for unionization, since the girls “have no complaints.” But suppose they had, what
(Cont'd on page 50)



Sophia Delza

Books in Review

The Modern Dance in America

AMERICA DANCING. By John Martin. New York: Dodge Publishing Co. \$2.00.

America Dancing, by John Martin, is an informative saga of the modern dance in this country, opening with the author's analysis of the social forces which gave rise to a "modern" dance in the United States, and closing with brief sketches of those who founded the movement as well as those who, he believes, will carry it to greater heights.

Written in a gracious, informal manner, the book, in the main, recommends itself as a primer to the layman as well as the young practitioner, who will find there a simple exposition of his methods of work, and a heartening justification of his efforts.

Mr. Martin is a champion of the dance which, in the work of its first great prophet, Isadora Duncan, "revealed itself as anti-authoritarian in that it rejected all set formulations of movement codes, functional in that it dealt with problems of human emotion instead of with the plight of distraught butterflies, democratic in that it took the dance away from a little cult of initiates and urged everybody to practice it." He avers that only America, founded on a tradition of religious and political freedom, could produce the democratic Isadora Duncan, who saw in dancing "the living leap of the child springing towards the heights, towards its future accomplishment, towards a new great vision of life that would express America."

The really vigorous and penetrating analysis of this background of the modern dance, which constitutes almost two thirds of the book, is not maintained in those chapters estimating the personalities in the contemporary field. Here Mr. Martin evaluates their purely formal accom-

plishment without establishing any relationship between these developments and a fundamental dance philosophy resulting from their environment and background. The portrait of each dancer, therefore, lacks definitiveness.

Any acceptance, *in toto*, of Mr. Martin's book as gospel or Baedeker, although it partakes of the nature of both, would be a mistake. *America Dancing*, in the first place, is a misleading title. The book deals only with one aspect of the contemporary field; surely ballet companies which have implanted themselves in American soil, and are constantly subjected to American ways of thinking, deserve evaluation within these pages. There is no material whatsoever on folk sources, on such native forms as find expression in tap and in social dancing. Certainly personalities of the stature of Angna Enters warrant fuller treatment. A "dancing America" is a continent of more manifestations than those treated in the book under discussion.

Further, in Mr. Martin's endeavor to establish a guide for laymen on how to look at dancing, he stresses over and over again what he believes is the sole prerequisite: "the kinesthetic sense." "It is this and this alone which the average man must bring with him to a dance performance." And again, as a recipe for the enjoyment of modern dancing: "When entering the theatre it is well first of all to leave as much of the intellect as possible in the check room with the hat. . . . When the performance begins, abandon all effort to figure out what it means. . . . Merely relax and let the muscles do the thinking."

These rules, if applied, would actually deny the validity of some of the most significant contributions made in the modern dance today. How can one disregard the visual and pictorial aspects of the dance? Blind oneself to the dancer's selection of costume? Ignore the effects

of lighting and color? The costumes for *Frontier* or *Act of Piety* by Martha Graham were surely not designed solely for the evocation of a kinesthetic response. If we checked our intellects with our hats, our plight at a modern dance recital would be sorry indeed! Pity the poor beheaded spectator when confronted with a forty minute suite, with seriously written program notes, with costumes—yes, even with musical themes and tonalities introduced and repeated according to the plans conceived by the dancer. What means has he at his disposal for placing these phenomena in their proper relationship? His sensitive musculature will be painfully overtaxed by the dancer who wilfully, consciously, creates an organic choreographic whole, designed to *mean* something to an audience. No kinesthetic sense, however attuned, can understand the use of a chorale in a section of *Frontier*, for instance, or of a tango rhythm in *Masque*. These are devices which cannot be overlooked as incidental or trivial; they are definite contributions to the dance and require therefore a minimum use of intellectual processes for adequate response and appreciation.

If Mr. Martin honestly believes the audience need possess only muscular receptivity, then the modern dance today, with its increasing use of costume, sets and music, must retrace its steps. For surely the direction among dancers the author lists as "great" is towards a broadening of the scope of the dance, the development of a form capable of provoking associations in the mind and the emotions, as well as the muscles.

However, despite the objections we raise to certain of Mr. Martin's theories, *America Dancing* is the best, if not the only, book on the subject to date. Its style is expressive and fresh—the two chapters on Graham and Humphrey read beautifully. The social viewpoint of its author, belonging as it does to a New

York Times newspaper critic, is gratifyingly progressive and broad. No better comprehensive justification for the modern dance has yet been written, nor is there one better able to affirm and substantiate the existence of this dance which grows "out of the life and conditions of its immediate time and place."

EDNA OCKO

Mr. Nathan Embroiders Shakespeare

THE AVON FLOWS. By George Jean Nathan. New York: Random House. \$2.00.

If you've grown bored with your last year's parlor-games and puzzles, throw them away and gather around George Jean Nathan. He has devised a new one, which he calls *The Avon Flows*. He also calls it a play, but no matter how you look at it, it is still fundamentally a dramatic anagram—an intellectual and educational one, so that your precious time is not wasted.

The game is very simple. All it requires is a pot of paste, a pair of scissors, a volume of Shakespeare's complete works and some ingenuity. As in most puzzle-games, the last is of greatest importance, for it is the particular object of Mr. Nathan's anagram problem to 'take three of Shakespeare's dramas and so cut them up and re-arrange them that a fourth is finally obtained. Like the old army game, this is one you can't lose. With Master Will supplying the dialogue, the characters, the plots and you the paste and ingenuity, you are bound to get, at worst, some of the most brilliant lines ever penned.

The specific example Mr. Nathan chooses to illustrate his game is a combination of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* so contrived that the result is *The Avon Flows*, described as an "Editorial Variation Constituting a Comedy of Modern Marriage." In the first act Romeo woos and weds Juliet, but the lovers are saved from their usual tragic fate for one more domestic by Mr. Nathan's dropping the curtain on their marriage. He lifts it again on a scene several years later with Romeo suddenly developing strange, Othello-like traits and

being egged on by Tybalt in Iago's clothing to suspect Juliet of un-Desdemonian acts with Cassio, called Paris. Again however, the usual tragic consequences are forestalled by our anagramist's theatrical ingenuity. Prompting Romeo-Othello to eavesdrop on the plotting Tybalt-Iago, and later suggesting to Juliet-Desdemona that she parry her husband's recriminations with Emilia's famous "great price for a small vice" speech, Mr. Nathan saves our heroine's neck. It seems a shame now that Shakespeare didn't think of so rescuing Desdemona in the first place. But then Shakespeare is no Nathan. The anagram finally winds up with Romeo-Othello taking several leaves out of Petruccio's book to tame Juliet-Desdemona of her Katharina-like shrewishness when she runs home to mother. So all's well that ends well in spite of much ado about nothing, etc., etc., etc.—add your own titular puns.

Mr. Nathan, of course, cannot be of the mistaken belief that his game of "editorial variations" is original with him. He certainly must know that Tin Pan Alleyists long ago conceived fundamentally the same idea with their re-arrangements of musical masterpieces into popular songs.

It is to be regretted that the motion picture industry didn't know of *The Avon Flows* before they shot *Romeo and Juliet*. It would have saved them a great deal of worry as to how to make the tragic ending nugatory. Mr. Nathan, with his ingenious method of contriving the happy ending through "editorial variations" should be worth his weight in gold to the Cinema Capital. But perhaps he has already been out there. The film version of *The Plough and the Stars* is replete with the Nathanish spirit of the "editorial variation."

Why *The Avon Flows* was "orchestrated" I have no way of knowing, but I am certain it was all conceived in good, clean, boyish fun—the kind that can't be restrained from adding the "editorial variation" of a penciled mustache to those sublime masterpieces of the girl-with-the-skin-you-love-to-touch, which our Underground Art Galleries are so fond of exhibiting.

LEOPOLD ATLAS

Job-Hunting Made Easy

SO YOU WANT TO GO INTO THE THEATRE? By Shepard Traube. Boston: Little Brown. \$1.75.

In Deadwood, South Dakota, a young girl recites Portia's plea for mercy in front of a mirror. In Duluth a middle-aged reporter works on a play he has been writing for fifteen years. At Princeton, a snappy sophomore directs a Theatre Intime play and imagines he is Philip Moeller. Somewhere in the Michigan backwoods a dreamy lad builds a toy theatre, with Norman Bel Geddes and Lee Simonson perched at the back of his mind. Most of these theatre-stricken hopefuls are cut off before they catch their first breath by what seems an insurpassable distance between them and the only theatre that counts (unfortunately)—Broadway. Those courageous few, pennies in hand, who trickle to the Big City are welcomed, generally speaking, with as much warmth as a newly arrived sparrow in Central Park.

Don't take my word for it. Read Shepard Traube's dispassionate guide-book to the New York theatre. If you are an actor, ponder the figures Mr. Traube presents. There are approximately 8,400 actors in New York. 2,000 (of whom 200 are newcomers), get jobs each season. The odds against the Duse from Detroit are 40 to 1. But luck is with you; you get a job. Then your yearly average earnings will run from \$150 to \$600, or, to quote Mr. Traube's mathematics, \$2.88 to \$12 a week. According to figures issued by Actors Equity (your trade union) "between 5% and 10% of all professional actors earn enough money to live adequately."

If, on the other hand, you are a playwright, remember that only about 150 plays are produced each season. A hundred of them provide the author with as much money as a self-respecting floor-walker receives in a year. For most designers, stage managers, press agents and company managers, the yearly bankroll slightly exceeds that of a neighborhood newsdealer.

Even the producer, the man who, generally speaking, doesn't produce

anything but the cash with which to present other's people's labors, is best described in Mr. Traube's own slightly satirical words: "He is a kind of potentate, sitting on top of the theatre heap. It all spells success, luxury, power. It's an enviable position.—Very few producers know what it's like."

In other words the theatre is an unholy gamble, whereas it should be a source of entertainment, education, work and art not only for its audiences but for its creators. Sometimes the gamble is successful. For those who are not dissuaded by the fact that the odds are heavily against them, Mr. Traube offers a compilation of the best, and most honest, "short-cuts." He lists the producers, the play-agents, the actors' agents. In a bright to-the-point manner he answers such questions as how to get your first job, what are the chances of becoming a dramatic critic, what to expect as salary, what a "walk-on" is, and why playwrights go to Hollywood. The newcomer to Broadway will bless Mr. Traube for saving him many weary months of learning the ropes.

My one hope is that his book will not discourage real talent, but will instead encourage beginners to take their stand towards making the theatre a healthier place in which to work.

MICHAEL BLANKFORT

The Wrong Foot Forward

THE THEATRE GUILD ANTHOLOGY. New York: Random House. 1936. \$3.50. (Contents: *John Ferguson* by St. John Ervine, *Mr. Pim Passes By* by A. A. Milne, *Liliom* by Ferenc Molnar, *He Who Gets Slapped* by Leonid Andreyev, *The Adding Machine* by Elmer Rice, *Saint Joan* by Bernard Shaw, *Goat Song* by Franz Werfel, *The Silver Cord* by Sidney Howard, *Porgy* by Dorothy and DuBose Heyward, *Strange Interlude* by Eugene O'Neill, *Hotel Universe* by Philip Barry, *Reunion in Vienna* by Robert E. Sherwood, *Mary of Scotland* by Maxwell Anderson, *Rain from Heaven* by S. N. Behrman.

"We submit the fourteen plays reprinted in this volume as a represen-

tative cross-section of the Guild's scope and activities." Signed, The Theatre Guild Board of Directors.

If I could substitute "taste" for "activities," nothing that I can say would be a better summary of this anthology. Nevertheless, as it stands both the book and the Board's statement are misleading. If they wish to be judged by the selections made herein, they have a right to say so, but I think they are being unjust to themselves when they prefer these to other of their productions as best representing their activities. How about another anthology including such plays as *From Morn to Midnight*, *Processional*, *Man and the Masses*, *Roar China*, *Red Rust*, *They Shall Not Die*, *R.U.R.*, *The House of Connelly*, *The Moon in the Yellow River*, *Wings Over Europe*, *Miracle at Verdun*, *Major Barbara*, *Both Your Houses*, etc? All Guild plays, but not one is in this collection. *The Adding Machine* would go in this new anthology too, but it is the only play appearing in the present volume which I would include. This would make, I believe, far more interesting reading for the new theatre-going public of today. It would also make a volume which would be much less embarrassing to the many earnest students of the drama, in our universities and elsewhere, into whose hands a publication such as this will naturally fall for guidance under the present system; as well as to the professors who are obliged to recommend whatever the publishers see fit to put between covers.

The Theatre Guild's main temper, with its fear of troubled waters, dominated as it usually has been by European middle-class tastes, is well represented, however, by the selections in this volume. The American pieces are particularly significant, including as they do Anderson's *Mary of Scotland*, O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*, Sherwood's *Reunion in Vienna*, and Barry's *Hotel Universe*. In all, a fairly representative collection of nostalgia in American drama of the last ten years—somewhat interesting to the dramatic antiquarian but of no use whatever in advancing the world theatre and its dramatic art.

It is impossible, of course, to take too seriously a compilation of this

kind which is obviously intended, among other things, for those who wish to have it merely lying on their tables. All I can say is that from the standpoint of the serious dramatist in the year 1937 it represents practically every ideal of dramatic art to which he hopes never to attain.

VIRGIL GEDDES

A Critic Should Know

THE ART OF PLAYGOING. By John Mason Brown. New York. W. W. Norton. \$2.50.

In *The Art of Playgoing* John Mason Brown, dramatic critic of the New York Post, discusses such aspects of the theatre as realism, technique, acting and dramaturgy, from the point of view of that composite participant in creating the theatrical illusion of make-believe, the audience. His style, that of the Hazlitt "familiar essay," while literate and polished, suffers from a prolixity of similes and too much generalization, particularly in the earlier chapters.

To Mr. Brown the theatre is Make-believe for the sake of Entertainment which occasionally and fortuitously rises to the heights of Art. "We must not forget that the most frequent duty of the theatre is, always has been and probably always will be, diversion, not exaltation." There is no reference throughout to its cultural, civilizing, educational function, its power to interpret life, its responsibility to stimulate life for the better. Nor is there any consideration of its somewhat different role at different periods in its history or in different social circumstances. One questions not only the fruitfulness but the accuracy of this conception. Moreover, Mr. Brown discusses the theatre of today solely in terms of the Broadway-going public, which seems a dangerous narrowing of an ever broadening field, and moreover, makes no distinction, within that public, between the tastes and backgrounds of patrons paying \$4.40 a seat probably twice a week, and those expending \$.55 of their hard-earned budget once a month. Presumably theatre-goers, being members of one big human family, are all alike.

ELEANOR FLEXNER

You Can't Say That!

BY VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE

THE entire subject of censorship as it relates to the movies is considered a nuisance—an irritant—a hindrance to unobstructed creativeness—not to be taken too seriously. Even those of us who realize that the mosquito has played a serious role in his historic day—are not prone to regard him, in our daily dealings, as anything except a nuisance.

Our attitude toward censorship is due partly to the form in which it has been presented to us. Individual state and city boards had been in the habit of making amateur deletions and amputations, which, with the advent of sound, often permitted the life-blood of a story to flow out through an inept incision; so that we welcomed the idea of our own association, which would advise us beforehand of censorable rocks in our path, so that we could avoid the mutilation of pictures, after they had left our loving hands. We were asked to cooperate with this central organization—our own organization—for the good of the industry—our industry.

The form in which the instructions of the association came to us, happened to be funny. You couldn't really be serious about a piece of paper which read — *Expressions Banned in England*:

Bloody—contraction of *By our Lady* and is blasphemous.

Bum—refers to the posterior.

Christ, or Jesus Christ—forbidden, no matter how fervently used. Also any quotations from Christ's teachings.

Fanny—not exactly the same portion of the female anatomy as over here—but not far from it.

Free love—the institution flourishes, but reference to it is not permitted.

Lord—reference to God as the Lord, is invariably deleted.

Nuts—any use of the word "nuts" except as an edible fruit, or as a synonym for crazy, is forbidden. This also includes the euphemism "nerts to you."

Sex appeal—is considered vulgar, and always cut.

Sissy—is a pansy in England—not that they don't have them, but they don't care to be reminded about it.

Bawled up—does not suggest to the British—confusion.

Crap—is not a dice game over there.

Closet—is not a cupboard.

The proper name, *Jerry*, is a bedroom utensil, which has been replaced by modern plumbing.

Pan—is not a face in England, but a sick-room utensil.

The proper name, *Randy*, always gets a laugh. It means "hot pants."

Spunk—a slang term for spermatozoa—to say an Englishman has no spunk is a serious charge.

To toss off a couple of "*quick ones*"—is not an acceptable drinking reference in England, and is likely to bring down the house.

The words "damn" and "hell" were rigidly banned, together with the female dog and her offspring, and several other questionable expressions which had crept into the films, in a desperate attempt to attract audiences during the depression. Most of us had always had, in regard to those words, a guilty feeling that we were writing with chalk on the walls. But expressions like damn have become such a natural and inevitable part of the language that it is impossible without their use to report certain scenes with any degree of verisimilitude. There are rugged types, who, forced to say, at moments of great drama, "Oh dang"—lose completely their sense of reality. After spending hours trying to get a character not to say damn, when damn is the only thing that character could and would plausibly say, you must either resign from the movies in a pet—because the Big, Bad Wolf won't let you say damn—or you must laugh. Most of us remained in the movies.

However, there is really nothing

funny about a fine story unsold because of a sex angle. Most of us in this century, brought up with a full knowledge of the bees and the flowers, have become familiar with the fact that men and women sometimes live together without the formality of marriage, and that there are occasions where they even share the same bed without the formality of living together. And inherent in those occasions are the situations of great drama—situations which have been the province of drama since its birth. They must be eliminated or surgically sterilized before they may reach the screen. Many sections of the Bible are not considered fit subjects for screen audiences.

If the artistic loss were the only consideration, we, as serious workers, should grant it more than an amused resignation. The threat of a gag—and the carrying out of that threat—have always been a challenge to the thinking writer. The struggle against the gag has been considered at all times a duty on the part of all courageous progressives. Free speech is an elementary and inalienable right of humanity. Any threatened curtailment of that right has always been a gauntlet thrown down to all who are not die-hard reactionaries. That gauntlet was lifted by Socrates, both in his life, and in the manner of his death. Also, it is no accident that one of the classics in libertarian literature should have come from the pen of John Milton, in his brief against censorship, *Areopagitica*. One might actually, in writing the history of progress in America, trace a continuous line of struggle against censorship in various forms.

But at this particular time, the question of censorship contains a graver menace than the crippling of the muse—the mutilation of the classics—the elimination from circulation of fine works of art—the vitiating of creative incentive and the complementary encouragement of mediocrity in the most widely disseminated

(Continued on page 48)

Shifting Scenes

IN this issue of *NEW THEATRE AND FILM* the editors are inaugurating an experiment with *Shifting Scenes*. Heretofore this section of the magazine has carried a statistical record of the progress of the new theatre movement and a summary of its activities. By now the success of *Waiting For Lefty*, *Bury the Dead* and other social plays is so well known that a monthly report of so and so many new performances has ceased to have any element of novelty.

But the growth of the movement, the increasing scope of the New Theatre League, which serves as its organizer and leader, have created new social, organizational and artistic problems which require discussion and a thorough interchange of experience and opinion. Under these circumstances *Shifting Scenes* should serve a more creative function. With this issue, therefore, it ceases to be a survey and becomes a forum, which invites comment, correspondence and argument on any topic connected with the new theatre movement.

A SPEECH BY ALBERT MALTZ

A basic problem which faces the movement was discussed by Albert Maltz recently in a speech delivered before the membership of the Contemporary Theatre of Detroit. Because of its immediacy, this speech has been sent out by the National Office of the New Theatre League to all its member theatres with a request for comment.

Maltz dealt with the audience-orientation of dramatic groups. He felt that many groups, in spite of a developing consciousness of their social function, still tend to seek their audience in the middle class, and thus neglect the great possibilities of audience support in the organized labor movement. "This is unsound financially for a labor theatre," said Maltz. "It is restrictive organizationally and it is false artistically. . . .

The continued existence of the theatre depends too much on the financial success, or lack of success, of its full-length productions. A smashing defeat in one or two plays . . . can mean the end of the theatre."

"The audience," he went on to say, "dominates the theatre. It literally dictates what shall be written for it and what produced . . . This does not mean that a social theatre shall not have a mixed audience. Its purpose should be to have the largest audience possible. But it does mean that it should change its *base*. This effects its price-scale, and the content and point of view of its plays. It must choose between an audience of a few thousand people, or the vast audience of the labor movement. If it chooses the latter it will find, strangely enough, that it is more likely to get a larger middle-class following than if it makes the former choice. And if it makes the former choice it will not stop there but will probably find itself turning into an 'art' theatre which is appealing to the upper crust of society—an upper crust which will shortly repudiate it because it can get the same fare served better by other organizations."

As an initial step in the orientation of a theatre towards a primarily labor audience, Maltz envisaged the creation of a mobile unit as the basic section of the theatre. "The plays must be taken to the workers, to their unions, strike scenes, churches, etc. Once they learn about you and your stuff they will come to you. The practical advantages of the mobile group are many: it means that the theatre need never die because of a financial reverse on a big play. A mobile theatre can be run without finances and be a source of finance. Plays can be rehearsed in somebody's home, if necessary. It is a training ground for new directors and actors not yet capable of handling longer parts. This is terribly important. New forces must be trained."

A labor theatre must build up active relations with the unions outside of actual performances, Maltz urged. It should send directors to the unions to help them develop their own dramatic work. This would result, not in competition, but in larger and more appreciative audiences. Workers must be encouraged to attend courses in acting, writing, and on the social basis of the theatre. In return, union members should talk to the membership of the theatre on labor history, the trade union movement, etc. Active relations should be maintained with the trade union educational departments. Union officials should be invited to special meetings of the executive board, or special committees, of the theatre. Lead the union to create committees from its own ranks to support given plays. Where machinery exists within the union for handling large-scale benefits, take advantage of it. Where it doesn't, conduct special membership campaigns with the union publicity apparatus at the theatre's disposal.

COMMENT BY JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

At almost the same time that Albert Maltz was making this plea for labor-orientation in Detroit, John Howard Lawson was speaking before the New Theatre of Philadelphia along precisely the same lines. Lawson declared that the present development of the labor movement offered an unparalleled opportunity for the creation of an American people's theatre: "We are not taking advantage of this opportunity," he said, "because of lack of clarity as to the social function of the theatre. We still think in terms of the middle class, we think of 'art' as a middle class prerogative; we talk about a 'social' theatre, but we continually compromise the reality of such a theatre by failing to see that it must be rooted in the life of the workers."

MOBILE WORK IN DETROIT

Correspondence from theatres throughout the country reveals that there is considerable difference of opinion as to the orientation outlined in these two speeches. In Detroit, for example, the Contemporary Theatre has recently been astonishingly successful in going directly to workers with mobile agitational material. In Flint members of this group were hoisted through the windows into Fisher Plants One and Two in order to perform for the sit-down strikers. Sit-downers in the Woolworth stores were similarly entertained, and the following extract from a letter from Charlotte Standish of the Contemporary Theatre shows how this activity brought a flood of requests for similar performances:

"We have decided to postpone our production of *Bury the Dead* until the second or third week in May and to devote the entire month of March to rehearsals of skits for mobile work, and to carry on mobile work for the unions more extensively. We are so swamped with bookings now that it is impossible to rehearse a large production. Last night we performed *Virtue Rewarded* for sit-downers at the Ferro Stamping Company (500 strikers, the majority women), and the Michigan Malleable Iron Works (600 strikers, Negroes and foreign-born). Thursday we are performing for the girls on strike at Woolworth's and at several cigar factories. We've got the opportunity of a lifetime, and the doors are wide open. We are taking advantage of it now. The telephone at our studio is ringing constantly with calls for the 'Mobile Theatre.' One of our members has written a five-minute sketch called *St. Peter and the Scab*, which we are using. We must have some more of these sketches."

WHAT ABOUT "PROPAGANDA"?

Another correspondent, this time from a Canadian theatre, writes asking for plays "with the propaganda adroitly concealed and inherent rather than too open . . . We are rather consciously academic and there is in evidence an articulate re-

actionary element, so that for the present such plays as *Waiting for Lefty* and *Bury the Dead*, which some of us had hoped to put on this year, are out! Propaganda!"

Shifting Scenes hopes for some stimulating discussion on whether the problem of "articulate reactionaries" is best handled in this manner. We realize that a solution cannot be reached dogmatically, and that it will depend on the background, conditions of operation, present character of audience support, etc., of the organization in question.

AUDIENCE ORGANIZATION

While the Minneapolis Theatre Union is making a realistic attempt to reach the labor movement, its emphasis is more on audience organization and far less on mobile activity, as an extract from a recent communication indicates:

"This time we are starting out better than ever before as regards audience (the production referred to is one of *Bury the Dead*). We made out a schedule of trade union meetings, Farmer Labor clubs, and other groups where we think we might sell tickets. We approached the bigger unions with blocks of tickets. We succeeded in selling out the whole house (at a discount, of course) to the Ladies Garment Workers Union. They are taking the house for the first night. Then we are taking a little skit—just two of us—to all the other unions, especially big ones. So far we have sold 100 tickets to the Painters Union, and 100 to the Building Laborers. It looks very hopeful. This is the first time that we've really made a big drive. Before we sent people around who made very dry speeches about the play and maybe sold \$5 worth of tickets. But now they go for the play in a big way. But it is a big job for two people to cover two and three unions every night!

"Since the unions are taking tickets so well and since we want them to be involved, we are considering sending a letter to each one explaining what we are and asking for a representative from the union to come to a meeting to help us work

out plans of how we can help them and they can help us. The same for Farmer Labor clubs. Also at the play to have a union representative speak on the nights that his union is present. Also to give a free ad in the program to any group taking over a hundred tickets."

The fact that only two members of the Minneapolis group appear to be actively participating in mobile work may well be related to an organizational problem raised in another letter from the same group:

"Everyone who was not cast in the big plays should work in the studio group, doing short plays to take to unions and other organizations to advertise the main productions, and at the same time provide experience for all the people working in them . . . The only trouble with this was that everybody wanted to act in the big plays and it is hard to get people to work in the studio group or even to attend classes."

This raises several debatable questions, regarding not only theatre organization but the purpose of mobile work. Is it true that the two purposes of mobile work are (as suggested above), "to advertise the main productions," and to "provide experience?"

A NEW TECHNIQUE

The story of the Living Newspaper production directed in Flint by Morris Watson and described by him in this issue of *NEW THEATRE AND FILM*, shows what can be accomplished, even on the shortest notice, with worker participation on a large scale in a novel type of mobile production. The technique lends itself admirably to the prompt and timely dramatization of immediate local issues by new theatre groups, at the same time that it offers a vast new field for the creation of a people's theatre in the most literal sense of the word—since the people serve in the triple capacity of creators, actors and audience.



Wings Over Broadway

(Continued from page 21)

aggeration because the theatre's general standard is so low. The poetry is rarely incisive or dramatic, and the fantasy oscillates confusingly between objective and subjective states. We are expected, I believe, to accept the entire play as a fable, in which all things are possible. But the realistic beginning and close of the play do not provide a sound basis for such an assumption. *High Tor* is not, however, materially impaired by the limitations of its poetry and fantasy; both are of relatively too high an order to be discounted. *High Tor* is impaired by its content. Its nostalgia is ineffectual. Those who compare the play with *Midsummer Night's Dream* fail to distinguish between energy and weariness.

A boy refusing to sell his mountain, quarreling with his girl, and later falling in love with a shade and falling asleep in her lap is not a very dramatic subject. A ghostly crew longing for a ship does not produce much excitement. The whole truth is that the issues are too attenuated to make strong drama. There is no more drama in Van Dorn's attempted escape from the machine-age than there is in the ghostly Dutchman's expectation of a ship that vanished in Henrik Hudson's time. He is a clean-cut likable lad, but not even so supple an actor as Burgess Meredith can make him important enough to matter; he remains a moon-struck adolescent whose plight is never serious, whose egocentric aims never fire one into tangible admiration and hope. Van Dorn, moving blithely from mountain to mountain, is not a reliable symbol of the harassed youth of our time. Hence it happens that one may fall completely under the play's enchantment, as did this reviewer, and yet find that the impressions fade into thin air and cannot be recaptured even after a reading of the published text, which only confirms the tenuousness of the drama. The substantial matter of the play, which lasts longest, is the horseplay at the expense of the realtors, so ably played by Harold Moffett and Thomas W. Ross, and the satirization of the cut-

throat greed men live by in this business world. (From which, incidentally, no mountain will be a refuge; not even the next one Van Dorn chooses!) We know what Maxwell Anderson detests. Would it were equally apparent that this sensitive and intelligent artist knows what it is he wants.

The Wingless Victory is likewise successful only in so far as the playwright's negations form the woof and warp of the play. His fury lashes the hypocrites who mask avarice with religion, venality with morality. There is a tense struggle in the foreground, and the background of a Puritan community in Salem at the dawn of the nineteenth century makes a sinister picture. The story of a man who brings home a dark-skinned woman, who becomes an object of persecution, while he is the pawn of his property-minded relatives and neighbors, is intensely dramatic. It is effectively projected by performances like Effie Shannon's, Helen Zelinskaya's, Kent Smith's, and Myron McCormick's.

If nevertheless, much of the play remains in the limbo of half-realized efforts, the reasons are again to be located in an amorphous viewpoint. On the one hand, the playwright proposes a romantic contrast between a noble savage and an ignoble white race. On the other hand, he hastens to assure us that his dark woman is not a Negress but a Malay, but one shade darker than he, a Christian, and a princess to boot. If this tight-rope walking were merely a minimization of the racial issue it could be perhaps discounted; Anderson is not concerning himself with the Negro question but with the villainy of a god-fearing community and the tragedy of a single Oriental woman in a hostile environment. Unfortunately he does lessen the impact of his challenge to intolerance by idealizing his dark-skinned subject beyond recognition. His procedure is part and parcel of the operatic conception of the play. Oparre, the Malay, speaks perfect Shakespearian verse, holds pantheistic views, understands the relativism of religion and speaks like a phi-

losopher shortly after she has killed her children. She is conceived in the spirit of *Aida* and *Madame Butterfly*, and acted as such by Katharine Cornell, who speaks the lines beautifully and is appealing in her own manner, without ever achieving complete plausibility. Half of *The Wingless Victory* is provocative melodrama; the other half is no more than a literary exercise. The playwright's initial inspiration must have contained this dichotomy: the contempt for hypocrisy was genuine and deeply personal, while Oparre was no doubt a figment from *Java Head* and the *Medea*, and her problem a spurious one in lieu of the actual conflicts the author could have found in the surrounding world.

"Power"— and the Living Newspaper

Adding another trophy to its collection, the Federal Theatre has produced a "living newspaper" that is altogether worthy of its pioneering intentions. By combining reasoned social analysis with humor and local color, and addressing itself to the people as consumers, *Power* manages to be an eminently persuasive case history. Its colorful presentation of moot questions regarding utility rates, holding companies, government enterprise and the legal controversies arising therefrom is, at the same time, exceptionally lucid. Fortunately, moreover, *Power* does not content itself with mere exposition. Few current plays possess as much consecutive drama as the dramatically realized sequences that tell the story of the electrification of the Tennessee Valley. A sizable portion of *Power* is folk-theatre as native as the Kentucky mountains.

To the persuasiveness of the general plan Norman Lloyd presents a vivid comic strip version of Mr. Consumer. More than a dozen well-primed performances support his contribution to the hilarity of the evening. An effective pictorial device is the use of masks by Louis Bunin to represent the "nine old men" of the Supreme Court, and Brett Warren has directed the production to the hilt.

The main criticism that would oc-

cur to a serious student of historical trends is that *Power* evinces a somewhat naive trust in reformism and oversimplifies its problem, as if government operation of utilities were something apart from the general economic structure. The play moreover introduces an artificial distinction between the consuming public and the producing public. Nevertheless the current production is too incisive a reflection upon the entire profit system and raises too many significant questions not to be a provocative contribution to the topical theatre, which it also advances by its dramatic technique.

Confusion on "The Eternal Road"

Seldom is it necessary to judge a pageant by other standards than those of visual beauty. It is to the credit of *The Eternal Road* that it transcends its own medium. Judged in terms of this medium it is nearly everything one could desire, and a volume could be written on the nuances of Reinhard's direction.

But *The Eternal Road* was intended to be more than spectacle. Long-heralded as Jewry's answer to the German persecutions, it is meant to be a drama of protest, encouragement and affirmation. That, except in a few stirring synagogue episodes and in the death of Moses, it makes diffuse, diluted drama is due in part to the exigencies of the pageant form. But no less to the lack of a driving idea. A nostalgic harking back to ancient glories is a tepid and negative attitude. The failure of *The Eternal Road* is inherent in its viewpoint. It answers the racial sentimentalism of the German with the racial sentimentalism of the Jew, intolerance of scepticism in Germany with intolerance of scepticism in the synagogue, and for very much the same reason. One notes the expulsion of the Sceptic from the community of exiles because he weakens the morale, and the caricaturing bias that identifies him with the Adversary. No note is taken of the modern Jew's Western European heritage. To relinquish Western European civilization, to which the Jew has contributed so signally,

is to play into Hitler's hands; that worthy wants little more than to oust the Jew from Europe. Finally, the play ignores the sources of anti-semitism, does not clarify the issue, and does not face it. One looks in vain for any realization that that Jew and Christian must join hands in a common struggle against the masters who divide them in order to confuse and oppress them both. Endurance and flight are the keynotes of this so persuasively invested and occasionally stirring drama. The idealism of *The Eternal Road* is ghetto idealism. Its spirit—no matter how unintentionally—is reactionary. Its dramatic effect is divided, ambiguous and anti-climactic. It would take more than a brief review, and someone more expert than a mere drama critic, to explore the causes and consequences of this state of affairs. But certain it is that there is confusion somewhere on "the eternal road."

Other Plays

It has already been noted that *King Richard II* is a high-water mark in Shakespearian revivals. It owes this triumph to the superb direction of Margaret Webster, excellent anonymous settings, and notable performances by Maurice Evans, Augustin Duncan, Ian Keith and others. But for occasional echoes of *St. Helena*, which Mr. Evans should suppress, there is perfect illusion in his Richard, who is an apprentice to many moods and master of none. No mean factor in the triumph is Shakespeare himself. His is a masterly portrait of the mercurial tyrant who became England's landlord and was overthrown in an uprising of the feudal gentry.

In the comic department, Mark Reed's *Yes, My Darling Daughter* and Clare Boothe's *The Women*, appear to be among the conspicuous successes. Mark Reed's comedy has been considerably overrated. Its humors are contrived, its characters are stock figures, and the story is resolved in the flip manner dear to our audiences. Its tolerant attitude toward rampant adolescence is an endearing quality, but there is smugness in this attitude, too, hardly appro-

priate to the youth of our world which has the makings of a progressive force or a serious menace not to be brushed away with a smile. Because the play is eminently literate it belongs to the more digestible items of the season, but it is at best a bromide for cultivated middle-age. The playwright is vastly indebted to Lucile Watson, Peggy Conklin and Violet Heming for right performances.

Miss Boothe tempers her wind to the shorn lambs by wooing our sympathy for a sublimely innocent society woman whose husband is seduced by a vampire. At the final curtain, using some of the weapons of her rival and cronies, Miss Gillman is retrieving the errant gentleman. Miss Boothe warns women not to break up their homes when husbands gravitate into strange bedrooms; the way to hold the male is to hold him. The author does not seem to realize that that her puling heroine is as much of a parasite as her tough-minded friends and foes. Miss Boothe does, however, succeed brilliantly and acidly in drawing a picture of parasitic women that is completely devastating. In her small sphere she is a superlative satirist. This is no mean achievement, and forty women, among whom Ilka Chase is the queen of vipers, do ignobly by themselves in a deft production.

Arthur Kober's comedy about "hill-billies from the Bronx" bids fair to join the list of commercial successes. *Having Wonderful Time* is not the sort of play one cavils at; it is too congenial to be satirical, too exaggerated to be regarded as a true picture. It does not, however, seem to this reviewer the height of wisdom to make capital out of the idiosyncrasies of a portion of a minority race; they are too easily extended to the race as a whole, and given a different construction than that intended by the playwright. Despite this qualification, which might be thrashed out some other time, and is minimized by an understanding of economics, this reviewer was "having wonderful time." All the performances were capital, but if Mr. Winchell has any orchids left he might send them to Janet Fox, Katharine Locke, Loise Reichard and Jules Garfield.

Which Way the Federal Theatre?

(Continued from page 10)

It takes four to five weeks to get an advance poster for a play made, and every detail of this transaction must be handled personally by the Managing Producer, who thus takes time for a routine business matter which ought to be given to production activity. Similarly, it is a hard and fast rule that the Managing Producer must *personally* pull tickets in the office of Ed Rowland who is in charge of booking. It would seem a very simple matter to arrange that someone might be sent to call for these tickets.

One man has been signing requisitions for his Managing Producer for six months. On February 16th last, it suddenly turned out that this man had no right to sign, and a whole tangle of red-tape was piled up in order to straighten out a routine followed for six months.

During all of last winter, telephone operators refused to give out phone numbers of Federal Theatre headquarters or box offices of Federal theatres because the numbers were "confidential" government business. It took months to get an order through giving customers the right to find out by telephone where they might see WPA entertainments.

Plays are kept in rehearsal for such long periods that one can only assume that the administration has forgotten their existence. The Negro Youth Theatre picketed 701 Eighth Avenue in order to force a production of *Sweet Land* which had been in rehearsal almost a year. *Bassa Moona* rehearsed for eleven months before Alfred Kreyborg managed to get it before the public. Can one suppose that there has been any improvement in the quality of these performances between the second or third, and the tenth or eleventh months of preparation? Anyone familiar with the theatre must be aware that these heartbreaking delays, combined with the uncertainty of an eventual showing, destroy the morale of the most enthusiastic workers.

The Disappointment (produced as *The Treasure Hunt*) rehearsed for

over fifty weeks. Instead of cooperating to eliminate these delays, Lieut. Colonel Somervell is reliably reported to have threatened to hold people who rehearsed and failed to produce a play for embezzlement.

This attitude is characteristic of the widespread administrative tendency to think of the WPA personnel, not as serious artists, but as beggars who are under an obligation to the government.



WHAT ABOUT CIVIL RIGHTS?

An anonymous complaint, an unsigned letter or even a phone call, is used as the basis for an investigation of anyone employed on the projects. Such investigations are as thorough, as brutal, and as illegal as the particular investigators care to make them.

Not only are representatives of the Department of Investigation active in spying on the theatre employees, but it has been proved that private detective agencies are employed in considerable numbers. A representative of a detective agency recently confessed that he worked as a stool pigeon on the project, and implicated twenty-four other people, although he refused to divulge their names. The government refused to make any investigation of this confession, and the man who made it is still employed.



THE CLUGSTON CASE

One of the most extraordinary cases of the violation of the right to a fair hearing on any charges was that of Katharine Clugston, who was summarily dismissed as director of the Play Bureau because of a petition circulated by a small group of members of the Bureau, including Francis Bosworth, who became Miss Clugston's successor.

Miss Clugston, who was away on her vacation, was asked to resign over the long-distance telephone without a chance to see or answer the charges. The matter has been vigorously protested by the Supervisors Council and by the Dramatists Guild but no hearing has ever been held on this case: the alleged charges against Miss Clugston have twice been altered, and include the fantastic assertion that she had been guilty of a "crime" because persons in the Play Bureau had collected funds for the Spanish loyalists. It is interesting to note that such a collection in a government bureau among government employees constitutes a prison offense, and that Miss Clugston was regarded as criminally responsible although it was never claimed that she had even been aware that the collection was taking place.

In most cases, removal from such a supervisory position would automatically carry with it transfer to some other job on the project. Miss Clugston's "crime" was of such a serious nature that no opportunity was given for further work under the WPA *in any capacity*.



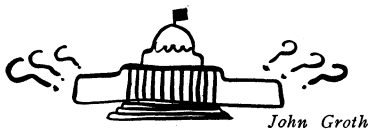
WHAT ABOUT VACATIONS AND SICK LEAVE?

Demands made by Federal Theatre supervisors and administrative employees during the summer of 1936 for vacations with pay were denied on the grounds that such persons were project employees rather than administrative employees and hence could not legally be granted vacations. Three legal actions were filed and an order granting vacations was sent to New York from Washington. This order was filed in answer to the suits, but shortly it was learned that the order had been sent by mistake. After hurried conferences it was decided that since many people were already on vacations the original order would stand. Thus are legal issues decided in the WPA!

A Congressional decree declares that vacations and sick leaves must be granted to all government employees. Are Federal Theatre workers employed by the government?

It may not be amiss to mention that in the month of February, when three major productions (*Power*, *The Sun and I*, and *Native Ground*) were about to have their metropolitan premieres, both Barber and Lieut. Colonel Somervell found it necessary to take vacations.

A week before February 22nd, the head of the payroll department did not know whether Washington's Birthday would be a holiday or not; this meant that no one on the project knew whether he might take a vacation on this day, or whether he would be paid if he stayed at his job.



A MAGNIFICENT OPPORTUNITY

At the present time, Mrs. Hallie Flanagan and her associates have a great opportunity. For the first time in the history of the project, the working control has been taken out of the hands of politicians and militarists, and placed in the hands of theatre people. A new faith, a new enthusiasm, is stirring the workers in every department of the Federal Theatre. The workers are aware of all the weaknesses and stupidities which have been touched on in the present article. They know that these mistakes can be corrected within the present framework of the WPA administration. They look to Mrs. Flanagan and her staff for concrete action toward the remedying of abuses and the adoption of efficient creative methods.

The workers want to work. They are disgusted with executive confusion which prevents them from doing the jobs for which they are fitted. They want to rehearse plays for *production*. They want the rehearsal period to be limited to the time necessary for effective presentation of the play. Those who are not ac-

tive in production want to study and improve their technique as craftsmen.

The basic principle for the achievement of these things is: **CENTRALIZATION OF SERVICES, NO CENTRALIZATION OF CONTROL.** Superficial modifications of the present system will only lead to additional complications if they are not based on the principle that theatrical production cannot be carried on by remote control. Theatre artists must be accustomed to working together, they must be free from constant fear of interference or dismissal; individual responsibility and energy must be encouraged.

This can be accomplished only through the cooperation of the workers themselves. If such cooperation is established, it will put an end to the present atmosphere of suspicion and political intrigue which surrounds the present Federal Theatre. The succession of Colonels has (at least temporarily) come to an end; but the military atmosphere remains; the visitor to 701 Eighth Avenue continues to run a gauntlet of armed guards which is more suggestive of a prison camp than of the peaceful development of dramatic art. Similar guards greet one at the stage doors of WPA theatres.

The abolition of guards, and of all the things which the guards signify and which have made their presence necessary, is a first step toward a new kind of Federal Theatre. Let us hope that Mrs. Flanagan will have the courage to take this step, and that she will take advantage of the present opportunity to make the dream of a People's Theatre a living reality.

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Are Newsreels News?

(Continued from page 15)

to the management. In many cases individual theatres dropped the reel's main title and in other ways, such as opening the curtain after the title had been flashed, tried to disguise the film's identity. But these attempts to circumvent audience disgust failed. The title had to go. In November, 1936, Hearst Metrotone News became News of the Day. The product was further altered by the substitution of Jean Paul King for Edwin C. Hill as commentator. The change so far seems to have achieved the desired effect on the demonstrativeness of audiences. As long as the name Hearst does not appear audiences control themselves.

This change in title is not the first. Hearst's connection with newsreels started in 1913 with a feature on the inauguration of President Wilson which was distributed by Harry Warner of Warner Features. In 1914 Hearst officially entered the field as Hearst-Selig under the leadership of Edgar B. Hatrick, director of the photographic department of the Hearst press. Hatrick is still general manager of the Hearst newsreel. Hearst-Selig eventually became Hearst-Pathé. This arrangement persisted until 1918 when Pathé forced Hearst to withdraw from the partnership because of his pro-German sympathies. Then Hearst organized International News which in 1930 became Hearst Metrotone News, produced by Fox-Movietone, and distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. This rather lengthy and certainly complicated story is important in so far as it proves Hearst's active connection at one time or other with three of the five existing companies, as has been previously mentioned. The content of News of the Day does not differ materially from Movietone News or Universal except for the fact that more footage is devoted to favorable clips on Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. This for obvious reasons.

Movietone News, produced by Truman Talley, is a subsidiary of Twentieth Century-Fox. The distinguishing characteristic of Movietone is its use of "name" commentators. In this connection, it has been re-

marked that a magazine is no better than its editors and Movietone amply bears out this truism as applied to the newsreel. Chief commentator and foreign news "expert" is Lowell Thomas of Sonoco and Explorer Club fame—a distinguished nonentity noted chiefly for his urbane mastery of platitudes. Mr. Thomas takes a special delight in reminding the Russians that at heart they are capitalists just like the rest of us. A case in point is his commentary on the return of the three Soviet flyers to Moscow after successfully exploring the Arctic regions—"Is this Red Russia? All this festivity and confetti looks more like capitalistic Wall Street," or words to that effect. All of which is delivered in a nasal drawl most delightful when not heard.

There is no limit to Mr. Thomas's jocular urbanity. During a recent broadcast he spent a good five minutes chuckling over his inability to pronounce Orjonikidze's name. His only comment on the passing of this great Soviet citizen was an incredibly vulgar attempt at wit: "heart-failure, this time, not the firing squad."

For company on Movietone, Lowell Thomas has Ed Thorgeson, a colorless sports-announcer, Lew Lehr's tenth-rate vaudeville, and Vyvyan Donner and Louise Vance who specialize in routine descriptions of finery beyond the dreams and purchasing price of ninety-nine per cent of their audiences.

The Universal newsreel is the most infantile of all. It is openly committed to a pure entertainment policy with the result that "news" in the legitimate sense is almost completely neglected. This, however, does not prevent the amazing Graham MacNamee from setting himself up as an authority on world affairs, not to mention the pun putrid. An instance of his vast knowledge was a recent clip on Spain showing us trainloads of young, enthusiastic fighters, their clenched fists raised in the unmistakable People's Front salute. This was evidence to Mr. MacNamee that all over Spain masses of happy warriors were rushing to join the ranks of the Insurgents!

There remains Paramount News which by comparison is the most liberal and honest in its attempt to cover news objectively and completely, though naturally subject to the limitations imposed by its ownership. In reporting industrial disputes, for example, this company has at least had the decency to present both sides of the question. Of great contrast with the other companies has been Paramount's treatment of Russian news. Two years ago Paramount succeeded in obtaining the exclusive services of Boris Zeitlin, well-known Soviet cameraman. The material from this source has invariably been well-handled and of unusual interest.

Paramount, for its pains, however, managed to incur the wrath of Hearst in the editorial columns of his newspapers. The gentleman-farmer of San Simeon was particularly worked up over a shot of Stalin kissing a child, which, he claimed, would result in making Communism acceptable to the American masses. The enmity of Hearst speaks well for Paramount; the company has been guilty along with all the others of its share of military propaganda and of padding its reels with featurettes, but to a far lesser degree.

The unprecedented success of the *March of Time* indicated, if anything, that audiences had tired of the perennial parade of monkeys in Milwaukee, the salmon returning to the spawning grounds, the Annapolis midshipmen tossing their hats in the air and Alfred E. Smith his derby into the ring. The essential appeal of the *March of Time* lies in its attempt to *dramatize* the news. It employs both the methods of re-enactment and of the dramatic documentary. When the *March of Time* first appeared it constituted a fresh idea in the presentation of news and it still has enough force as a novelty and superiority over the conventional newsreel to command audience and critic interest.

At present writing the *March of Time* is being shown in approximately six thousand American theatres and in over eight hundred British houses. Upon analysis of their issues, however, it becomes apparent that they have failed to take advantage of the great advantages of the

genre. The subjects are never more than sketchily documented. They are unimaginatively edited, and feature a species of re-enactment invariably wooden and unreal.

From a formal point of view the *March of Time* contains a double danger. Not only does the dramatic frame free the editors from strict reportage, but the audience is inclined to accept this admittedly dramatized material as actuality. In consideration of the fact that the *March of Time* is owned by the reactionary Time-Fortune-Life enterprises and distributed by RKO one should not be surprised by its distinctly reactionary bias.

Taken all in all, the issues of the *March of Time* for the past two years run the entire gamut from conservatism to fascism. It has presented us with roseate pictures of the benefits of Japanese imperialism to the Chinese coolie. The Stavisky incident has been laid to the door of Communists and other criminals. Colonel de la Rocque and the Croix de Feu have been hailed as the hope of France. It has approved of sneaking frame-ups in ridding CCC camps of "discontented agitators." It has ridiculed the unemployed by malicious re-enactments of their behavior during the occupation of the New Jersey Assembly last winter. The French peasants have been shown as opposed to the Popular Front. Governor Talmadge of Georgia has been given the guise of a working class hero. The Nicaragua dope ring incident was utilized to discredit revolutionary movements.

The *March of Time* has slyly suggested that John L. Lewis is a Communist, that he went into auto because his power in steel and coal is slipping; that he has a secret desire to become a dictator like Mussolini.

In its treatment of Mormonism in the United States it states that the unemployed in Salt Lake City, and by implication all over the country, would rather accept relief from the government than go to work—a typical Liberty League libel. One could go on indefinitely. From this welter of reaction there are only two items on the credit side—the really excellent *Lunatic Fringe* (Gerald Smith, Coughlin, Townsend, Hitler, Musso-

lini) and the awkward though comparatively neutral clip on the Sharecroppers.

The *March of Time* is one with the newsreels in claiming that it does not take sides, which statement is partly true. *The newsreels do not take sides against finance capital.* They are unanimous in their violation of both the letter and spirit of truth. Why did Gaumont (British) News refer to the heroic workers who were defending Socialist Vienna against the Dollfuss murderers as "unruly elements"? Why does Graham MacNamee cackle over the "pronto" eviction of the sit-down strikers at the New London, Connecticut, ship yards? Why does the ordinarily flippant voice of Lowell Thomas grow grave and apocalyptic in describing the "atrocities" of the Spanish "reds"? Does this represent 1) "a simple desire to amuse the public," and 2) "a pathological fear of taking sides in any dispute," to quote from Gretta Palmer's apology for the newsreels mentioned above? The answer is surely obvious by this time.

This article would fail in its purpose if it dropped the discussion without at least intimating what can be done to counteract the power for evil of the newsreels, at least partially. Audience protest is, of course, still the most effective means at our disposal and must be persevered in. In this connection it is encouraging to note the formation of Associated Film Audiences, an organization composed of delegates representing the interests of church, social, racial, labor, student and educational groups, to encourage the production of films that will give a true and socially useful picture of the contemporary scene; and conversely to discourage those films which discredit the traditions of American democracy.

In addition to organizations which stimulate and channel public pressure against reaction, the struggle against the reactionary newsreel cannot become fully effective until a strong independent film movement is an actuality. Frontier Films, with its newsreel *The World Today* has proven that honest reportage, vigorously dramatized, plus valid entertainment value, is within the capacities of non-

Hollywood production. The continued activity of Frontier Films and other groups in this direction is of prime importance. When the time comes that the great masses of people have at their disposal an honest newsreel that truly represents them, then they will not have to rely for information on outfits that, as the La-Follette investigation indicated, will participate in attempted murder for the sake of sensationalism.

Soviet Scene Design

(Continued from page 23)

sales-wrapper for the play. Under these conditions, many gifted designers have left behind them the period of experiment, and are simply executing one commission after another in a "competent" and safe manner. It is not too much to say that creative American scene design is threatened with a revival of stereotyped settings, turned out by the cheap commercial scenic studios.

In spite of its temporary comeback, the Broadway theatre with its unemployment, its diminished audiences, forms a somber picture compared with the tremendous development of the Soviet theatre. The question of audiences is a basic one. While the audiences of the American professional theatre continue to decrease, Soviet audiences increase at a rate that staggers the imagination. In 1935 there was an estimated attendance of 714 million people at theatrical productions in the Soviet Union. This figure indicates not only how many people go to the theatre, but how often, since the population of the country is 160 million. What a contrast between this audience and the little "carriage-trade" clientele of Broadway! The Soviet public, overwhelmingly working class in composition, brings to the theatre freshness, enthusiasm, and a serious, critical appreciation. This public wants to see plays which not only reflect life but which show how life can be changed for the better!

And this is the viewpoint also of the Soviet scene designers, who are given, in their theatres, almost unlimited resources, who are loved and publicly honored as creative workers, and who are proud of their particular task in the creation of a new society.

Billy Bitzer

(Continued from page 30)

corners of the film frames were cut off by the curves of the glue can. The result of the glue can incident was the development of the iris which made possible the fade-in and fade-out. Irises for fading didn't exist then. It was necessary to describe the non-existent device and ask a manufacturer to produce one.

Griffith had long recognized the need for broadening and improving methods of camera expression and Bitzer proceeding from accident to conscious experiment had produced the means.

Like the iris, the close-up and the flash-back came into use as devices by which the director increased the expressiveness of his medium. Griffith often used to complain to Bitzer that there was no way of centering attention on a single individual in the highly dramatic moments of a picture. One early attempt to approximate the close-up consisted of photographing through a gauze screen with a circular opening. The effect was to throw the minor characters into a shadowy haze while the principal actor's face was seen sharply through the opening in the screen. This was quickly abandoned. Filters with clear centers were also tried and found wanting. Finally the fade combined with the close-up gave an effective means of centering attention on the emotions and actions of a single individual in a film.

Even Mary Pickford, who makes no claims in this field, contributed her bit to movie photography, according to Bitzer.

She complained repeatedly that when she went to the movies with her mother to see her pictures, she was discomfited to find that her screen images gave her a ghostly pallor. Bitzer, immersed in other problems, paid scant heed to the complaints of the little girl with the curls. He told her she had seen a bad copy of the film. When she persisted, saying that all the copies gave the same ghost-like effect, Bitzer gave the matter some thought, but Mary herself solved the problem by suggesting that she use darker make-up. Tests

proved Mary was right and make-up finally began to receive the detailed attention needed for its development into the highly specialized art which it is today.

"We took our work seriously in those days," Bitzer declares. "We were always experimenting, fooling around, playing with lenses and lights, not because we had any clear idea of what we were after but because we had a vague hope that we would hit on something."

There could be no end and no limit to unplanned striving of this kind because art in the film, if any, was then only one or two short steps ahead of the imperfect and unfamiliar tools at the command of the film makers. Ingenuity in the use of the camera was the measure of film art. It was not merely unschooled taste that led people to regard as art those things which are now dismissed as mere trick photography.

Bitzer, it has been pointed out, hasn't been embittered by his last Hollywood experience. He still hopes to get back into the industry, for he is as good a cameraman today as he ever was, if one takes him at his own word. There seems no reason to disbelieve him. But whether his name ever appears on the credit frames of another Hollywood movie or not, the camera will still be Bitzer's great and abiding passion. As long as he can lay hands on a box and a few feet of film he will continue to make pictures.

Road Show—CIO Style

(Continued from page 31)

about when Louis Schaffer, general manager of Labor Stage, began looking for a suitable script. He wanted a play for the C.I.O. whose drive had just started. Wexley's play suited him, but it had to be brought up to date.

Wexley, who started out to revise *Steel*, ended up with what is really a new play. Before he wrote his new *Steel*, he put in six weeks of research, although in his youth he had once worked in a steel mill. Labor Stage furnished him with credentials, and he spent hours with organizers and with steel workers. He sat in union

headquarters and watched workers come in to sign up; afterwards he walked home with them, asked them a multitude of questions—why they joined up, conditions in the mill, etc. From one worker he even secured the minutes to a company union meeting, which furnished the background for a particularly revealing scene in *Steel*.

At the present time, *Steel* is playing Friday evening, and Saturday afternoon and evening at the theatre of Labor Stage, instead of nightly as originally planned. A regular run had to be abandoned temporarily while the garment industry was in the midst of its rush season. *Steel* is performed by members of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, who couldn't manage eight performances a week, while working overtime in their shops.

When *Steel* goes on the road, this New York production will remain at Labor Stage. This month, conferences similar to that recently held in New York, will be called in Chicago and Pittsburgh to enlist the support of local unions and theatrical groups. Labor Stage will send out a director and seven or eight professional actors for the touring company, with the balance of the cast to be recruited from little theatres in Pittsburgh and Chicago. *Steel* will bring its dramatized message of industrial organization not only to steel workers, but to men and women in other industries in which the C.I.O. is active—rubber, coal, auto, oil.

Steel should prove a powerful ally of the C.I.O. The play will undoubtedly contribute to morale; it may even be the final clinching argument for unionization to many a worker who hesitates at signing. Labor—which in recent months has adopted such modern devices as the sound truck—has found another new technique.

And the social theatre has found a new audience, new meaning, and new strength. It has achieved that closer cooperation with the labor movement which it has so long sought. Sections of this country have seen no "shows" other than the moving pictures for years; *Steel* and plays like it will bring them the theatre at its best.

Tsar to Leon

(Continued from page 11)



creatures who have no respect for the amenities.

In reference to the Brest-Litovsk treaty, the narrator tells us that "Trotsky felt the terms imposed by Germany were absolutely impossible. He walked out. It was the only such walkout in history." What he quaintly refrains from telling his audience is the fact that Lenin insisted on signing the treaty, and that signing it was the condition of Russia's withdrawal from the war, the move that gave Russia a breathing spell in which to create the Revolution and prepare for the Civil War. The audience sees Trotsky walking out of a door. Some confusing mumbo-jumbo follows about "demonstrations in Germany followed just as Trotsky had hoped." The demonstrations are suppressed. It seems that Trotsky erred in his judgment but what this has to do with Brest-Litovsk it is impossible to say.

All of this background, however, leads to the great dramatic section of the picture dedicated to the Civil War. Just as the Tsar took the stage in the early section of the film, Kolchak now becomes the largest figure. Again Kolchak and his depredations are frankly used as a build-up for Trotsky. Kolchak's soldiers march in as many feet of film as those devoted to the Tsar and his friends. Again and again, squads of Red officers are marched over the snow and shot down as neatly as nine-pins by Kolchak's Whites. Priests are shown blessing Kolchak's men, priests marching with banners and ikons in ceremonies which invoke heavenly intervention. It is never made clear that the priests are instruments of reaction, that they are the allies of forces seeking to destroy the workers' government. Almost as fanatically as the defenders of the Spanish Rebels cry revenge upon the Loyalist heretics, does the editor of this film suggest that the Revolution was unholy. Sometimes as I watched I wondered whether the emphasis on Kolchak's activities was not intended to make the audience sympathetic to the counter-revolutionary leader.

When Kolchak's men rifle the monastery tombs seeking treasure (there are a great many vivid and unnecessary close-ups of skeletons and mummified bodies) the narrator remarks that "the Bolsheviks had been there first," and once again we are given the impression that robbery and pillage are revolutionary policy.

That Trotsky stepped in and single-handed saved the Revolution from Kolchak's forces is obviously inferred. During the Brest-Litovsk section we saw Trotsky walking out of a door. Now, he keeps getting off trains. But the film cutters should have disguised more carefully the fact that these war shots are part of the same sequence showing his triumphant arrival after the February Revolution. The narrative, typical of Eastman's book on Trotsky, dramatically repeats the information that Trotsky rushed from front to front giving courage to disheartened Red Armies.

The same generalizations distort this "authentic document" throughout the rest of the Civil War sections. Of Trotsky's almost fatal errors not a word, of Voroshilov no mention. Stalin is shown in only one shot, while the narrator observes that no one at this time would have thought such an insignificant person would some day take Lenin's place. These are not the exact words but there is unmistakably the inference that destiny must be whimsical to account for such an unforeseen event.

There is no recognition of Stalin's role in defeating the Krassnov Cosacks, his work in reorganizing the almost hopeless Third Army and checking the enemy on the Eastern Front, his part in the defense of Petrograd nor his victorious activities on the Southern Front. Trotsky, according to the film, was omnipresent and ever-victorious; by implication and generalization the audience is informed that victory in the Crimea and the end of intervention were due to Trotsky's superior military intelligence. The defense of Petrograd and the routing of General Yudenich's Whiteguard army are accompanied by pictures of soldiers running across snowy fields while a voice of command whips out military

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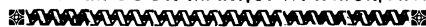
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order after military order, "signed, Leon Trotsky"—"signed, Leon Trotsky"—"signed, Leon Trotsky."

After this staccato sequence, there are a number of shots showing the Communist International (1921) as evidence, I suppose, of Soviet victory. And there are Kamenev, Zinoviev and Radek—Kamenev, Zinoviev and Radek—whose faces are now familiar. No more is said. The brief, anticlimactic tribute to Lenin ends the film. Such an effect could not have been accidental! The effect of this postscript is subtle. One wonders about Trotsky; one remembers the names Kamenev, Zinoviev, Radek. Where are they now? Why isn't Trotsky riding in an armoured automobile and reaping the reward of all his victories? No answer is given. Silence is golden. The inference is that exile and martyrdom are the rewards of revolutionary leadership, and that something must be vastly wrong with a government that, after all the storm and danger has passed, hails the wrong heroes.

You Can't Say That!

(Continued from page 37)

educational force in the country (excepting radio, which suffers from an even more rigid censorship). At all times the struggle against censorship requires that its proponents face the issue in relation to the historic moment. Such an approach on our part makes it obvious that censorship in the United States carries with it at this time certain political implications which were absent from past efforts at gagging the social and liberal voice.

What is this new facet? Censorship today represents part of the general drive against social liberties—the offensive of fascism. If in the past we have been called upon to wage a fight against censorial attempts, today we are called upon to multiply our efforts a hundredfold because of the fascist purport of that censorship.

Who are the main clamorers for censorship? Look at them and you will find that they are also the main carriers of the fascist agitation—the Hearsts—the Gerald K. Smiths—the Father Coughlins. All liberal writ-

ers are familiar with the caution they must exercise against introducing into their scripts anything which approaches a note of political progress. Does the fascist-minded writer so have to guard himself? When Twentieth Century-Fox announced its intention of making a film glorifying the heroism of the defenders of the Alcazar—(although these fascist defenders were in active rebellion against their legitimately elected democratic government) no prohibition appeared from the Hays office. Only protests from progressive and liberal groups all over the country caused the temporary abandonment of the project. Whereas any screen writer will tell you that it is practically impossible for anti-fascist propaganda to slip through the fine teeth of the censorship comb.

Where will this lead us? It is only one step from "Don't do this" to "Do this"—one step from "Don't make a heavy out of fascism" to "Glorify fascism" and passive acceptance of "Don't do this" is a bridge to forced acceptance of "Do this." In case of a war obviously no anti-war stories will pass the censorship and writers will be commandeered into becoming open servitors of the promoters of war and fascism—a role which they can resist now—at the first encroachments. But it would be difficult—almost impossible to resist once it had been imposed on us.

I know that this liberal Congress is single-mindedly opposed to any prostitution of creative talent for reactionary purposes. And any attempt to rouse them against censorship is carrying vaseline to Greece. But it is our duty as liberal writers not only to resent to-day—but to look ahead to tomorrow, and to halt encroachments upon our intellectual integrity before they shall have assumed formidable proportions. We all appreciate the inimical nature of censorship. We all feel the need of some organized resistance to censorship. But our feeling can only become potent when we *do* something about it. And this paper is submitted in the hope that it will contribute an incentive to this Congress to find ways and means of combating the fascist trend of present-day censorship.



SPAIN IN FLAMES (Amkino. Produced in Spain by photographers of the Spanish and Russian governments): Deeply stirring account of the Civil War with a concise relation of its background. Must be seen.

REVOLUTIONISTS: Reviewed in March. A worthy Soviet item. Can be seen in some neighborhood houses.

WE'RE ON THE JURY (Adapted by Franklin Coen from the play, *Ladies of the Jury*. With Victor Moore and Helen Broderick. Directed by Ben Holmes for RKO): Insignificant save for Vic Moore who is worth the price of admission.

WHEN YOU'RE IN LOVE (Written and directed by Robert Riskin for Columbia. Music by Jerome Kern. With Grace Moore, Cary Grant, Aline MacMahon, Henry Stephenson, Thomas Mitchell, Catherine Doucet, Luis Alberni): Nothing to cheer about particularly. Marks Riskin's debut as director. Moderately entertaining.

ON THE AVENUE. (Written by Gene Markey and William Conselman. Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin. With Madeleine Carroll, Dick Powell, Alice Faye and the Ritz Brothers. Directed by Roy Del Ruth for Twentieth-Century-Fox): The brothers are always worth seeing if you're not acquainted with them. It's hard to say what Miss Carroll is doing in this film but she's not a detriment.

LAST OF MRS. CHENEY (Directed for MGM by the late Richard Boleslavski. With Joan Crawford, Robert Montgomery, William Powell): Based on creaky comedy by Frederick Lonsdale. Is the second movie version. The first was a silent with Norma Shearer. If you've seen the first your attendance this time is not obligatory.

FIRE OVER ENGLAND (Pro-

duced by Erich Pommery for London Films. Presented by Alexander Korda. Directed by William K. Howard. Photographed by James Wong Howe. With Lawrence Olivier, Leslie Banks, Raymond Massey, Flora Robson, Vivien Leigh, Tamara Desni): In days of old when they'd have us believe royalty stood for something and the Spanish Armada went up in smoke. Film is undoubtedly tied up with recent drive in England for a larger navy and recruitment. On a slightly higher plane than the American film *Captain Blood*, but likewise pulp.

PRISONERS (Mosfilm. Directed by Evgeny Cherviakov. With Chaban, Dobronravov, Astangov, Yanukova): Inexplicably indifferent treatment of a great theme—the rehabilitation of criminals in the Soviet Union. Has its moments but should be filmed over again.

STOLEN HOLIDAY (Warner Brothers. With Kay Francis, Ian Hunter, Claude Rains): A faint echo of the Stavisky case in twelve changes of costume.

THE MAN WHO COULD WORK MIRACLES (Scenario by H. G. Wells. With Roland Young. Directed for London Films by Lothar Mendes): Combines thinly coated cynicism—"Why give man control of the universe? He'll only make a fool of himself"—and the British attitude, "Let's blunder it thru." Roland Young is a fine performer. Wretched photography and recording.

GREEN LIGHT (With Errol Flynn, Anita Louise, Margaret Lindsay, Walter Abel, Sir Cedric Harwicke. Directed by Frank Borzage for Warner Brothers): Insulting drivel of the most mawkish sort. Actually on a lower level than Beatrice Fairfax but on the mystical side.

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Wage Scales for Dancers

(Continued from page 33)

then? Who hires them? Who fires them? Is there sick leave with pay? Are rehearsal hours regulated? Or is the prestige of the Monte Carlo Ballet ample compensation for whatever overwork and insecurity may or may not exist? Probably! For in this field, as in one other (the concert dance field) over and above economic security, tenure of position, respectable salary, lies a mystical and apologetic illusion that poverty and art are bosom companions, that one feeds on the other. But neither, unfortunately, feeds the artist.

The final category of dancers, called, for purposes of differentiation, the concert dancer, has the Herculean task of surviving as a performer, together with the added responsibility of introducing a new form, the "modern dance." To date, the modern dance is largely the expression of a mere handful of performers. It has gone a great distance pulling itself up by its well-worn bootstraps, but as yet, it is comparatively unknown to the great American audience; except for a few tours, it flourishes best within the precincts of New York.

When one considers that even foremost exponents of the modern dance cannot survive by concerts alone, then one realizes the almost indeterminable wage scale of the members of a modern dance group. Dancers of outstanding companies, such as Martha Graham's, Doris Humphrey's or Charles Weidman's, average the unbelievable amount of seventy-five to one hundred dollars a year at the rate of ten dollars a concert. This is the consummate reward for years of training and weeks of continuous rehearsals. It is no wonder, then, that professionalism in the modern dance is practically unheard of; no dancer can make a living in that profession.

Many of these dancers are supposedly recompensed with various kinds of scholarships. On the strength of belonging to these groups, they get teaching and posing jobs—or they become salesgirls, secretaries, receptionists, taking these very jobs away from professional workers who

also feel the same pressure of insecurity. Though many of these dancers are usually willing to make unusual sacrifices for what they consider a requisite artistic apprenticeship, they unconsciously perpetuate the vicious cycle of which they are already victims.

Frances Hawkins, business manager for Martha Graham, feels that these problems will be solved when the modern dance eventually becomes more familiar to the general public. But we see that even though ballet has a three hundred year old heritage, ballet dancers are not much better off than their confreres. Audience familiarity with a dance form plays a small role in the establishment of wage scales if the wage earners themselves fail to establish respectable economic standards.

The problem then resolves itself into the acceptance of two facts. First, wage scales for all professionals are maintained only by militantly organized unions. Where, as in the case of certain ballet and modern dance groups, there is no union protection, economic problems must be temporarily dealt with by whatever cultural or educational organizations are already in existence. To date, the Dancers Association has limited its interest in dancers' employment to the establishment of the Dance Project.

A Federal Dance Project is, without doubt, one of the most significant developments in the field. It is through this project that a nationwide audience can familiarize itself with the best aspects of the dance. It is through this project that the needy, unemployed professional can finally occupy herself with the dance and its national development at a fairly respectable wage scale. For this reason, the devotion to the Project by the Association was and still is a commendable activity. But hundreds, even thousands of dancers still need economic protection and trade union education. And, unless a sturdy drive for the unionization of all dancers is undertaken by existing trade unions, professionals in all fields will find dancing without a wage scale a precarious and dangerous practice.

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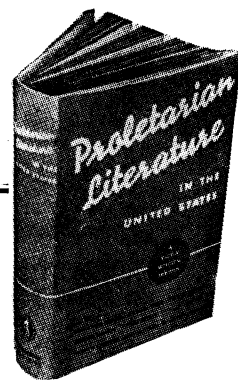
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