

course in modern life," but somehow neglects to tell us what that course is.

Craven winds up with the sweeping conclusion that the four horsemen of modern art are George Grosz, Thomas Benton, Rivera, and Orozco. They have snatched art away from the studio esthetes and given it "a social content." What is "social content?" This Craven does not explain because it involves the crucial question of class content and class alignment. He is not prepared to see it through and admits his own petty-bourgeois reactionary position.

He admires Rivera because he has brought art into the market-place, but regrets that he "has come to view the world from the bias of Marxian dialectic" (a nice reversal of Rivera's retrogression from a revolutionary to a renegade position). Craven has similar fears for Orozco. About Grosz he has no fears, and rightly—the man is a has-been. And about Benton he no longer has any doubts.

"Benton . . . has a healthy realism which, whether our social soothsayers like it or not, may carry us safely into a better society." So if the working class is ready to give up Marx and Lenin to follow Benton. . . . "It is my guess that in a more sensibly planned and orderly society of the future, this great drama of lawless change which he has painted, will stand as one of the supreme arts of the transitional period, and will be valued because it is veracious experience and not futile prophecy."

Craven explains away the confusion and disorder of Benton's murals on the ground that they are essential components of his portrayal of social chaos. In other words, Craven defends against meaningless abstract art those social contents whose meanings and implications are unclear or abstract—this is the meaning of "social content" to the petty-bourgeois mind which is not prepared to face the realities of the class struggle.

O. FRANK.

Politics and Fiction

THE GREAT ONE, by Henry Hart. John Day. \$2.50.

Bayard Stuart, "the great one" of Henry Hart's novel, is a romanticized likeness of Boies Penrose, the late gentleman from Pennsylvania, Republican political boss, aristocrat, hog, cynic, and crook. Like Penrose, our hero is born into a prominent Philadelphia family with a silver spoon in his mouth, graduates from Harvard with ripe political cunning, an inordinate greed for power, and a vague desire for social reform, is housebroken by the political machine which defeats his candidacy for mayor of Philadelphia, and ends up as state boss and United States Senator of the prevalent thank-you-for-check trust-my-services-have-been-satisfactory variety.

Curiously and unfortunately political novels are rare in our literature, and insofar as he has attempted such a novel for his first venture Hart deserves a good deal of credit. The trouble is that he has not been political enough, by which I mean that he has been too much concerned with individuals and not enough with history. The spectacle of a magnificent specimen like a Boies Penrose going to pot may be fascinating in itself, but the real story is what made him get that way. The real story goes beyond politics into economics, and it is the chief weakness of *The Great One* that Hart treats of politics as a self-contained entity, a game of power in a vacuum, rather than as the servants' quarters of big business.

Consequently, he lapses into sentimentality. Looking for a first cause for his hero's downfall he finds a woman; for a second cause, his defeat for mayor. Yet Hart has his hero born on the day of the Lincoln-for-President parade in Philadelphia, that same Lincoln for whom his father and his father's class have the most cynical and open contempt and whom they

intend to use in their war to crush their southern rivals.

The truth is that by the standards of the ruling class then and now the life of a Boies Penrose or a Bayard Stuart was not a failure but a howling success, one increasing crescendo of power and glory. To have the old buzzard dying, therefore, in a vanity-of- vanities-all-is-vanity mood is highly sentimental. This is to imply that his life has been an empty one, that he has not been true to himself, whereas actually his cup has been filled to overflowing with the sweet juices of corruption, with the active undermining of the American democracy and betrayal of the American masses whose interests he was supposed to represent.

What Hart should have left us with is not pity for Bayard Stuart but a healthy hatred, hatred for the individual confidence man and for the whole interlocking mechanism of big business and politics he so ably and gladly served. We are not asking the novelist to stand in judgment; history would have done that for him had he given it the chance. The Bayard Stuarts do not stand or fall by any arbitrary system of ethics. They stand or fall with their ethics, which are only the ideology of the class in power.

EDWIN SEAVER.

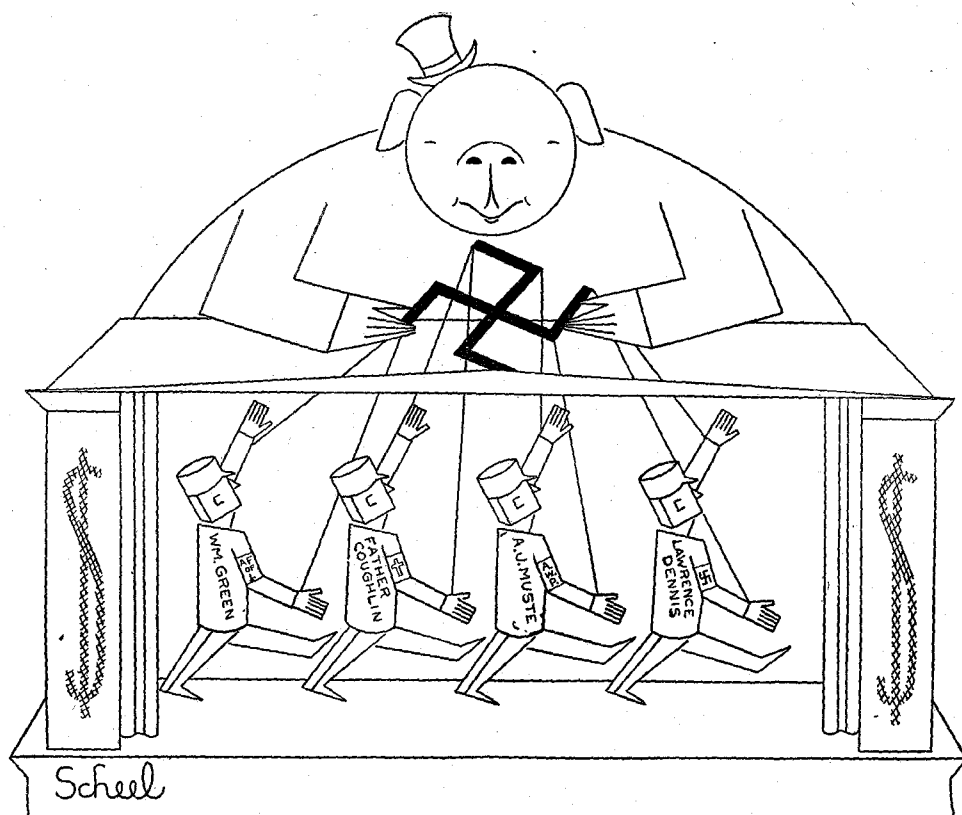
Truth About Russia

INDUSTRIALIZED RUSSIA, by Dr. Alcan Hirsch. The Chemical Catalog Co. \$3.

The fact that Alcan Hirsch is a prominent American engineer may make other engineers and other professionals sit up and listen when he says that Soviet planned economy is succeeding and that the Soviet Union is a great place for any engineer to work. He adds an excellent book to the voluminous literature and other testimony, some of it from the camp of the enemy, proving that while capitalism decays, socialist construction progresses at an unprecedented rate. The anti-Soviet propagandists are having a hard time of it these days, trying to convince anyone that Hitler is correct when he talks about starving Russia and Ukraine, in the face of such overwhelming evidence of Soviet advance.

Hirsch says that he writes this book because conditions change so rapidly in the U. S. S. R. Books that were written six months ago may be already out-of-date, so rapid is social change in the land where workers rule. An illustration of this fact is inadvertently provided by Hirsch himself. When he left the Soviet Union there was still a food shortage. Today all my friends in the Soviet Union write me that they can buy anything they need in the Soviet stores as well as in Torgsin. The shelves are laden as never before with quantities of consumers' goods at reduced prices, the first fruits of the first year of the second Five-Year Plan. So at least one chapter of Hirsch's otherwise illuminating books is already out-of-date.

Dr. Hirsch writes with simple directness and clarity, without literary pretensions, of



what he himself saw in Soviet Russia, and the result is a forceful, convincing style. He lays no claim to being a Marxist, but his interpretations, even when he is not quite objective, are mostly correct. One is impressed with the idea that there is an honest engineer, an acute observer, an alert intelligence, capable, as how many American engineers working for the Soviets were not, of grasping something of the world-shaking significance of what is happening in the proletarian country.

As Chief Consulting Engineer for the Soviet Chemical Industry, he had unusual opportunities to travel throughout the U. S. S. R. and observe the Soviet workers and their achievements in widely separated areas and in industries outside of the newly created chemical industry. He is therefore equipped to write as he does about the agrarian revolution, living conditions, education, finance, religion, and Soviet culture. In one or another of these chapters he answers most of the current slanders about the Soviet Union being spread by the fascists and their allies, the White Guards.

There are mistakes—such as when he says that the Soviet Government and the United States Government are the two great bulwarks of peace. Only the first half of this statement is true. Despite such errors, this book is as good a volume as any I have read to use in combating anti-Soviet lies. It is written in language that any worker will understand, and is so loaded with factual material that it will also be interesting to the person who has followed Soviet developments closely.

LISTON OAK.

A Mirror for the Bourgeoisie

THREE PLAYS, by S. N. Behrman. Farrar and Rinehart. \$2.50.

These three plays present a distillation of Sidney Behrman's brilliant talent, and a definite implication of his motives as an artist. Although fanciful exaggeration, straight character portrayal, and high comedy are his varied media, he strikes a consistent satiric note that implies a sharp criticism of all those brilliantly decadent and ravishingly witty persons who charm the American bourgeois drawing-room.

Serena Blandish, or The Difficulty of Getting Married, is a deliciously implicit comment on the idleness and hypocrisy of all high society, with particular reference to its marriage machine. When Serena, the personification of genteel ingenuousness, finds herself favored by the impossibly exotic Countess who carries red flamingoes in a cage on the roof of her limousine, and when the stylized Lord Ivor Cream attempts a seduction of Serena "at his rooms," the satire becomes pointed, revealing, and valuable.

More realistic and universal is the serious *Second Man*, which is a dissection of Clark Storey, a young writer with "a facile clock-work soul." This is a study of the struggle between heroism and expediency in one individual. The second man, or Storey's alter

ego, is the intelligent personality who struggles to achieve an uncompromising idealism in the face of his equally intelligent practical self. Storey is in the dilemma of the charming, too civilized man, who trades the bread of a sober conversation for the tidbit of repartee, who straddles the fence of tolerant indecision, who, too sophisticated, sacrifices the almost attainable ideal for the attractive compromise. He falls because he is a product of a comfortable and effete society which will accept his mercenary standards in exchange for his aristocratic quips.

Meteor portrays a consummate egotist who rises to unprecedented heights as a financial wizard and then becomes gripped in the destructive vise of his own power. All considerations of humanity and social perspective leave him when self-worship and greed take hold. Although there is an uncomfortable taint of the supernatural in this work, and the ending is inconclusive, the play is a powerful history of a warped soul; of the transition from the poetic, free, fiery youth who brags: "Jack Reed and I were pretty close to Lenin in Russia!"—to the operator of a ruthless capitalistic racket, who, in order to vindicate his brutal methods, affirms: "Lenin's motive wasn't altruism but revenge on the Czarists who shot his brother—the first Utopian who knew how to handle a machine-gun." This could be a fine play, were its issues clearer and its ending more decisive.

Mr. Behrman's prime consideration in all his plays is with ideas, rather than with characters or stories. He is, very likely, our most intellectual dramatist; and, like Molière, whom he resembles both in brilliance and in implicit social comment, he neither steps through the lines to deplore circumstances, nor makes a bow via a reforming preface. He states in a satiric manner, and that statement is worth a world of pointed morals, as far as artistic and intellectual effectiveness is concerned. His writing has understanding, edge, and, most of all, it sets up a circulation of the imagination. A cynic, he makes no affirmation of faith in anything, for he is intellectually beyond O'Neill's latter-day nebulousity, and beyond O'Neill's case histories.

Behrman proclaims no message to the revolutionary writer or revolutionary movement. Instead, he offers an analysis. But he is a gifted analyst of that primarily important relationship, the individual and society, and as such, his plays have a valid and provocative value for the revolutionary intellectual.

E. Y. GILBERT.

A Lively Corpse

THE NEW INTERNATIONALISM, by Clark Foreman. W. W. Norton. \$1.75.

The author of this book, who is a member of Roosevelt's Department of the Interior, traces the rise and fall of *laissez-faire* capitalism and concludes that the world is entering the stage of a "new internationalism" based on national planned economy and inter-governmental trade. He nonchalantly lumps together Turkey, Italy, Germany, the United States,

and the Soviet Union as examples of countries which are putting into effect national planning. As if the so-called "planning" in capitalist countries, plunging them deeper and deeper into a morass of contradictions, were comparable to the real and successful central planning of Soviet Russia which rests on a socialist system of production and distribution in which the institution of profit and private property has been abolished!

Mr. Foreman, while presenting a number of interesting and indisputable facts, is astonishingly naïve in his interpretation of them. No informed person would dispute his claim that *laissez-faire* capitalism has broken down and that increasing governmental control over trade and business has been the result. But there is little indication that Mr. Foreman realizes that the intensified nationalism of recent years and the rise of Fascism and near-Fascism constitute the last desperate attempt of the capitalist class to save its system. The bitter struggle for foreign markets, the higher and ever more provocative tariffs, the international trade and currency wars, the growing danger of large-scale military conflicts, and the fake "national planning" of capitalist-controlled governments all reflect the severity of the economic crisis and the hectic, confused attempts of the ruling class to find a way out.

Most misleading of all is Mr. Foreman's chapter on "Socialist Internationalism." Here he asserts that "after the events of 1933 only the wishful thinkers could hold out hopes for a world system based on international socialism." This typifies the attitude of a growing number of commentators today. Since the increasing success and stability of Soviet Russia have made predictions of the breakdown of the U. S. S. R. less and less plausible, capitalists apologists get and give consolation by daily announcing the collapse of the world revolution. Overlooking entirely the tremendous inspiration and impetus that a successful socialist economy in the Soviet Union provide to the workers everywhere else, these observers argue that this very success of the U. S. S. R. proves that Moscow is abandoning the idea of an international socialist order. This is indeed strange logic. Mr. Foreman forgets that, though Hitler came to power in 1933, it was also in 1933 that Russia had the biggest harvest in its history with the mechanization and collectivization of agriculture winning through to a great and lasting victory. This achievement, with its unmistakable message to the peasants and farmers of other lands, constituted an unprecedented step towards world socialism.

Hitler's accession was, of course, a serious setback to the international working class. But what of it? Is the story over? Is history ended? Evidently Mr. Foreman thinks so. In an analogous manner the capitalist class thought that socialism was finished when Lenin retreated to the New Economic Policy in 1921. The point is that socialism in the world at large as well as in Soviet Russia does not and cannot triumph over-night. It meets temporary defeats; it makes strategic detours. But