

## Between Ourselves

META BERGER'S husband, the late Victor L. Berger, was the first Socialist Congressman elected in the United States.

Joseph North will have another article in next week's issue. While Herndon was going back to Fulton Tower, Atlanta's county prison, under an 18-to-20-year sentence on the chain gang, the American Prison Association was holding its convention in Atlanta. North's article will deal, at least in part, with the prison specialists' views of the Herndon case, chain gangs and floggings.

Walter Wilson has interviewed Gen. Smedley Butler for THE NEW MASSES, and his article will appear next week. The retired Marine commander states his views on labor, the bonus, unemployment insurance, the American Legion, and fascism and war.

A section from Martin Russak's novel, *Weaver's Son*, called "The Women's Battalion," will appear shortly. This novel was the second choice in THE NEW MASSES Novel Contest, conducted jointly with the John Day Company, publishers.

Eddy Gilmore is a Washington newspaperman.

Sue Adams has been in Aztec, N. M., reporting the Gallup trial for The Daily Worker.

Due to a typographical error, the letter appearing among correspondence in the October 29 issue from the secretary of the Committee in Support of Southern Miners was signed "Louis Kamsley." The secretary is Louise Kamsley.

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ng speeches nettle the spectator and the dialogue sometimes sounds unauthentic, despite Hughes' excellent ear, simply because he asks too much of his characters.

The play also suffers from inept direction. In the first act, which has all the earmarks of having got into the play after it left Hughes' hands, the son is made to swagger and declaim that he is Captain Tom's son. The normal reaction is that he is a tactless braggart. From that time on the director struggles hopelessly to correct the original impression and to depict the boy in a better light. The diffuse character of the ending is also a major blunder. Sympathy has been built up for the son who has committed suicide, the mother who has gone mad, the father who has been murdered and the girl who has been raped. The spectator is a little dazed.

Both plays had the benefit of good acting. There were times when I feared that *Porgy and Bess* might turn into banal musical comedy but it was always rescued by the excellent acting and singing of a cast headed by Duncan Allen, as Porgy, and Anne Brown as Bess. Rose McCleendon, as Cora, contributed most to *Mulatto*; it was her sensitive artistry that kept the play from slipping over into blood-and-thunder melodrama at times.

*Porgy and Bess* is being touted as the great American folk opera. It is not. It does not probe deeply enough into the life of the folk to deserve that title. There is far more to Negro folk life than its undeniable color. I am convinced that *Porgy and Bess* would

have been a better opera if the authors had spent a little more time trying to understand the prosaic details of the struggle for existence in Catfish Row. I think that such an investigation would have had a sobering effect on the authors and would have taught them that the colorful aspects of life in the ghetto are not to be mistaken for the whole of its existence. *Mulatto*, for all of its faults, is the more significant of the two plays. It is at least a realistic attempt to grapple with a problem that is begging for honest drama-

tic treatment. The complexities of the Negro question are such that the dramatist who essays to deal with it must be armed both with skill and a willingness to burrow far beneath the surface. Langston Hughes has the talent and his more recent work indicates that he is better equipped to wrestle with the subject matter. That richer understanding will help him eliminate the technical faults that mar *Mulatto*.

LOREN MILLER.

### Current Films

*Rendezvous* (M.G.M.—Capitol): William Powell wise-cracks his way through the World War in the witty manner of *The Thin Man* as head of the American Secret Service. There are spies and counter-spies. The German espionage ring in Washington is pretty smart, but the Americans are smarter. The War is presented as a pretty gay and romantic adventure. All you need is urbanity.

*Transatlantic Tunnel* (Gaumont-British—Roxy): A group of British and American capitalists (including a munitions magnate) promote the building of a tunnel between England and the United States in the interest of world peace. This is theoretically accomplished by advancing the chauvinistic theory that this tunnel will unite the English-speaking peoples against the nations of the East.

*Last Days of Pompeii* (R.K.O.—Center): The rise and fall of an ancient Tex Rickard. There are sadists, crooked Pompeian politicians and plenty of religious fervor.

*Crusades* (Paramount): Plenty of tinsel, crowds, violent battles, noise, raids and counter-raids and biblical scenes with "Rembrandt lighting." One must, however, applaud Ian Keith for his splendid portrayal of Saladin, the ruler of Islam. The film is dull and undramatic.

*Red Army Days* (Amkino—Cameo): A slight and superficial study of the Red Army during maneuvers in the Ukraine. This will not add any prestige to the Soviet cinema.

*Pepo* (Amkino—Acme): The first talking film to be made in Soviet Armenia. The story isn't much and the filming quite conventional. However, the native songs, music, and dancing and their ethnologic value make it worth seeing.

*Barbary Coast* (United Artists): The rich and exciting background of the gold-rush days in San Francisco ignored in the anxiety of the producer to make another *Face on the Barroom Floor*. There are vigilantes; there is a hero who quotes Shelley and there is pure love.

*Wings Over Ethiopia* (Paramount): The distributors trying to cash in on the Italo-Ethiopian war with a travelogue of an airplane trip from Switzerland to Ethiopia made for the Swiss air line.  
P. E.

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