

The Theater

A Labor Theater for Brooklyn

IN a small theater adjoining the Brooklyn Academy of Music, a group of workers are giving nightly performances of two working-class plays. Employed by day in factories, department stores and offices scattered over New York, these workers have just enough minutes left, after punching the time-clock at night, to rush to their theater, change clothes and daub on some make-up in time for the curtain-rise. Few of them have had previous acting experience, but their director, Kumar Goshal, who last year was in charge of the L.I.D. drama radio-hour, has managed to fuse them into an acting unit of robust enthusiasm. Their performances, to be sure, are not finished or rich or discerning, yet one forgets these things—inherent in their present circumstances—because of the warmth and earnestness of these young men and women who are persisting against limitations they are well aware of in order to found a theater for workers in their community.

The program opens with a new play by Louis Vittes, *Until We Turn*, but Elizabeth England's *Take My Stand*, the second play, is a far better script. It makes real demands and obtains much more discernment from the actors. Those who have read the play (recently published by New Theatre League) remember it as the story of the son of a southern poor white, married to the daughter of his boss whose mill is on the verge of a complete walkout. Flayed by the workers, his former friends who now despise him as a stool-pigeon, he despairs of ever making them understand that he is a "neutral" and decides to pack up and run. But the intensifying struggle invades his scrupulous neutrality. He is driven to new realizations of the situation, which culminate in his "betrayal" of wife and boss and a final alignment with the men.

The lines of *Take My Stand* are sinuous, crisp and clear. Except for some over-zealousness in laying the groundwork, the play drives along swiftly and robustly. Some dashes of color might enrich it with brightness and some sharpening would strengthen the finale, but as it now stands it tells a convincing story and tells it in thoroughly dramatic terms. It is well worth a trip to the Labor Theater (126 St. Felix Street).

Until We Turn, the opening play, is the work of one of their actors, Louis Vittes. A strike is tying up a small mill-town, the militia is going berserk, workers are being framed and wounded and murdered—all of which is depicted from the living-room of a worker's home where some dozen characters meet and clash. Vittes centers his message on the love between the daughter of a dead working-class hero and a striking worker who cracks under the physical horrors of the

strike and decides to run away. But Vittes tries to stuff too many other problems into his play—and it cracks apart. As in much agit-prop drama, his characters are types rather than people. The dialogue is overrun with clichés of thought and phrase. And yet there are occasional fresh flashes, which are made the most of by well-timed direction and spirited if often uncontrolled performances.

The Labor Theater, a member of New Theater League (126 St. Felix Street), is fifteen minutes from Fourteenth Street. Seats are thirty-five and fifty cents; the program continues through September 28. NEW MASSES readers may want to attend the September 27 performance, which is a benefit for New Theater League.

STANLEY BURNshaw.

The Screen

IF you ever doubted that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer attach a special meaning to their firm-slogan *Ars Gratia Artes* (art for art's sake) you have only to sit through *Anna Karenina*, their newest art product, to change your mind. Tolstoy, we always believed, was the author of *Anna Karenina*, but the film is not Tolstoy and *Anna Karenina* is not the novel.

What is it? It is that strange and slightly-nauseating confection: an M.G.M. art-production feature—the result of such judicious editing and remolding and distorting that the only remains of the original are the title and the names of the characters.

Now, it is frequently both necessary and desirable in the filming of a novel to take considerable liberty with the original script. But the M-G-M *artistes* have forgotten the original entirely. The tragedy of Anna's emotional life is a thing of profound beauty when lived against the Tolstoyan background of the nineteenth century Russian upper-class. Tear Anna's love-story away from its background, cut it loose from this organic texture, and it ceases to be significant or moving. It becomes a flat, almost-meaningless chronicle—to which M-G-M has added a generous dose of artistic sensuality.

So stupid and careless have been the M-G-M *artistes* that they sometimes forget *Anna Karenina* takes place in Russia. When the butler announces the guests at a ball, the effect is plainly—if unintentionally—comic. If the uniforms could be blotted out, the spectator would imagine the locale to be Paris, London or even Hollywood.

Greta Garbo, had her directors been interested in more than sex and sensuality, might have created a memorable character—an authentic Anna.

PETER ELLIS.

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Charlie Chaplin's New Picture

B. SHUMIATSKI

CHARLIE CHAPLIN has one never-changing mask: a derby, a cane, triangularly-shaped moustache, a flat-footed walk and worn-out shoes. In each one of his films he plays the role of an eternal failure, a little lonely man in a big world.

The theme of his films—the tragedy of the petty bourgeoisie in capitalist society—he depicts with a most remarkable mastery, presenting new and original ideas in each of his films.

Five years ago Charlie Chaplin became silent. The philistines and prostitutes of the bourgeois press, who always considered Chaplin as a mere clown, attempted to bury him. After five years of silence, however this great artist began to work on a new film.

The new film, unpretentiously called *Modern Times*, depicts the period of "prosperity," the period to which the capitalist bards refer now as the "golden dream"—"a heaven on earth that was" . . . This, in brief, is the theme:

The office of a director of a large factory. The director, like a demigod, rules this kingdom of machines and the thousands of workers who are chained to the conveyors like prisoners on a chain gang. In this world of slavery, exploitation and the cold glitter of the all-powerful machines everything is subordinated to his will. Even his movements are majestic and dominating.

Slowly and majestically he lights a cigar. Slowly and majestically he turns on the lever which projects on a screen the mad tempo of his machines and the workers at them.

Cautiously and cleverly Chaplin laughs at the capitalist system of rationalization.

The director does not have to exhaust himself by making extra motions. He does not have to breathe the stale air of the factory. He controls the work and gives orders without even going out from his office. All he has to do is turn on the lever of a projection machine and even the remotest corners of the factory are flashed across a screen.

Among those who work at a large conveyor is Charlie Chaplin. He stands as though chained to the conveyor. Day in, day out, year in, year out—he has already become stupefied and mad—he executes the same movements. He is screwing on nuts to some parts of a machine.

Chaplin can't stand it any longer. For a moment he leaves the conveyor. He can hardly move. He is so dizzy and fatigued that he mistakes the nose of the foreman who stands nearby for a nut and begins working on it with his wrench. The large buttons on the dress of the office girl who bends

down to fix her stockings, seem like screw-nuts to him. In horror, the office girl runs from this strange worker. Charlie chases after her. On the way he unscrews nuts from dangerous parts of machines, disconnects the power—throws the rhythmical life of the factory into chaos.

Suddenly he hears the voice of the director and sees his angry face shown on screens that hang all over the factory. Subdued by the director's will, he returns to his place. The bell announcing the lunch period brings him somewhat to himself.

The projector takes us again into the director's office where a strange type of a machine is being brought in. It is a dinner apparatus. It can feed the workers automatically, without any loss of time and also with a great deal of economy for the owners.

The director decides to test this new invention. The machine is taken into the factory. Chaplin is chosen for the test. The machine gets hold of him by the neck and a plate of soup is emptied into his throat. Charlie is thrown into a sweat.

Then a new dish comes up on the shelf. Without reaching the level of his mouth,

however, the food, which is pushed out by small shovels, descends into his open collar. The worker begins to wriggle in pain. The food is hot. The inventors are a little confused. They try hastily to fix the defects in the machine.

The mechanic examines some parts of the machine and begins to tighten some nuts. Charlie, as though hypnotized, with his eyes wide open, gazes at the cursed nuts which, even now that he has become a victim of experimenters, give him no rest.

The mechanic is nervous. He forgets to tighten two nuts and leaves them on the shelf. He turns the lever and a new plate full of food appears. Having reached the level of Charlie's chin the plate, automatically, is pressed to his lips and the little shovels begin to push the food down his throat, together with the two forgotten nuts.

Charlie's sad eyes are full of horror. He struggles to free himself from the iron clasp of the machine. He cries out. . . .

The mechanic and agent of the firm rush again to the machine to fix it. The all-powerful director stops them:

"It won't go. It is not practical enough. It feeds all right but it is too complicated

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