

Em Jo Basshe's *The Centuries*, a mass play of the East Side, extraordinary in its scope, technical facility, and poetic force; and *Airways, Inc.*, in which John Dos Passos brought a new approach (psychologically and dramatically) to the treatment of middle-class life.

THESE plays were derived from such earlier works as O'Neill's *Hairy Ape*, Elmer Rice's *Adding Machine*, Susan Glaspell's *Inheritors*, my own early plays, and many others. A dramatic history tracing the interconnection between these plays and their place in the social thought of their time is yet to be written. Unaware of this pattern of development, many people regard the sudden appearance of working-class plays in the early nineteen-thirties as a *complete change*, a spontaneous answer to a demand, with no roots in the life of the theater, and therefore leading nowhere except to a multiplication of similar plays for wider and more enthusiastic audiences.

Each of these plays grew out of a specific change in social consciousness, a new balance of social forces. 1931—, by the Sifttons, grew out of the vast unemployed demonstra-

tions of that period, and its journalistic episodic form reflected the temper of social thought at the time. *Stevedore* coincided with the remarkable awakening of the oppressed Negro and white people of the South. *Waiting for Lefty* was brought to us on a wave of spontaneous strikes and exposure of class-collaboration policies in the labor movement. Its romanticism, its acceptance of conversion as a final solution, its technique of direct audience participation, reflected a mood which was valid at the time. *Black Pit* represented a valid reaction against this mood, a recognition of the complexity of the forces which encircle the individual and make his choice difficult. *Bury the Dead* appeared when the destruction of Ethiopia and the war preparations of Germany and Japan had directed social thought to the indivisibility of world peace.

Today the people of the United States are awakening to new political needs and pressures which affect every phase of the country's life. The theater reflects this crisis. The progressive movement has reached a new stage; a richer and more complex dramatic culture is needed. The theater does not respond to this need in an *accidental*



War Widow

Etching by George Picken

manner; it is not simply that some dramatist takes a notion that it would be pleasant or profitable to write a particular type of play. The dramatist responds to definite pressures which affect his professional activity and methods of work, and which are part of the general social trend.

Today the decisive factor in theater economy is the growth of mechanized entertainment (motion picture, radio, television). Wall Street controls mechanized production; naturally Wall Street wants to use the entertainment machine for big profits and reactionary propaganda. But the theater craftsman does *not* want this, because it destroys his freedom of expression and threatens his economic status. Big business tries to extend its control to the whole entertainment field; in order to oppose this (and their very existence as professional workers depends on opposing it), writers and others are compelled to organize more strongly; this means a closer affiliation with the labor movement and a decisive social orientation.

UNFORTUNATELY the most creative elements in the theater, who might be expected to play a leading role in this process, seem as yet unaware of the nature of the process. Indeed there is a tendency to think that the *broadening* of the Left drama can best be accomplished by diluting or concealing the social content, and by an emphasis on craftsmanship as an end in itself. Those who assume that a middle-class audience can best be reached in this way are simply ignoring the present direction of middle-class thought and the forces which determine its direction.

Ten years ago the New Playwrights looked forward to a people's theater. As one of the framers of that mad prophecy, may I risk the further prediction?—that within another ten years the main body of the American theater will be so thoroughly committed to a program of social action that plays *without* social content will be regarded as curious remnants of a dead past.

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The Tide

There is a tide moving. . . .
And who shall stay that tide?
Sick at heart we wandered ingenious cities,
In our mouths the lasting taste of iron,
In our ears the clamor of many merchants
And footsteps of the homeless, the disinherited,
In our minds stale hopes like old contagion,
Our tread slow, our thought shamed.

What herb for the sick heart? Only
blood of the heart
Purging itself as the sea purges
Itself in war on the cliff, in heavy thunder,
In the long roll, the far spread up the sand.

Over the meaningless words, the broken honors
Like driftwood in the way;

Under the flotsam that floats it, the frail coracles
Of shibboleth, that regular pulse, the mighty
Constant throb, the heart of Mankind beating
Profound and strong.

Scourge, Xerxes—flay the sea with withes!

Carry the throne of Canute down to the marge
That he bid ocean stand—the moon—drawn foam
Flinch and recoil! Hurl mandates, forge strong chains
To grapple brine—brine of our blood, our tears—
Shackle the Sea!

Gathering into itself all waves that war,
Groping deep, and moving without sound
Under the weight of ages, as it has always moved,
Inevitably, far from the shouting breakers,
Forms the tide. . . .

Leave anointed prophets to prophesy
How it will come to the coast, how that lustration
Move inland like the mystery of moving water
To towers of sand. . . .

We only know the tide rising, the wind freshening,
An enormous pulse like a mighty drum-beat beating
Deep and slow.

A tide is moving
In the hearts of men . . .
And who shall stay that tide?

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.

Good-by

The falling of a steel beam made all the difference to Olga, who up to then had not felt that she must escape

By Albert Maltz

OLGA BAKOVCHEN sat in the crowded room and stared at her father. She wanted to cry. It was important to cry. Her mother was watching, and her brother, Charlie. All the neighbors, the church people, the priest, Marty Kristoff, Uncle Raditch, everybody crying, everybody with one eye on her father and one eye on her.

If only he looked different . . .

Over her father the tall candles burned. The room was hot and stuffed to the corners—everybody praying and blowing their noses. Behind the coffin the priest was swaying, pouring out the words like a stream.

Olga looked at him. His dark eyes were fixed on her and his thick beard was wriggling with the words pouring out. She squirmed in her seat. What was the sense of all the praying? It didn't make any difference. It didn't really make any difference.

The priest kept looking at her and she turned away. Goddam him, she thought to herself; what's he keep lookin' at me for? Maybe if I got out in front of him an' did a wiggle of my own or tore off my dress or something—he'd have somethin' real t'look at.

"Poppa," her brother Charlie cried out suddenly in a wail of grief, "Poppa."

Olga felt angry. A big feller like that calling out "Poppa"!

If only he looked different . . .

The candles burned and the room was hot with people. "Why don't you cry?"

"I wanna cry," she tried to say. "Poppa's dead, I wanna cry."

An' the priest was talkin' Polish so fast, but poppa couldn't hear it. Poppa liked to talk Polish. Poppa talked—songs sometimes down by the river. He was a big man but he had a soft voice for a big man.

Olga raised her face. Everybody was looking. "Why don't you cry?"

"I can't," she said, "I can't. If only he looked different."

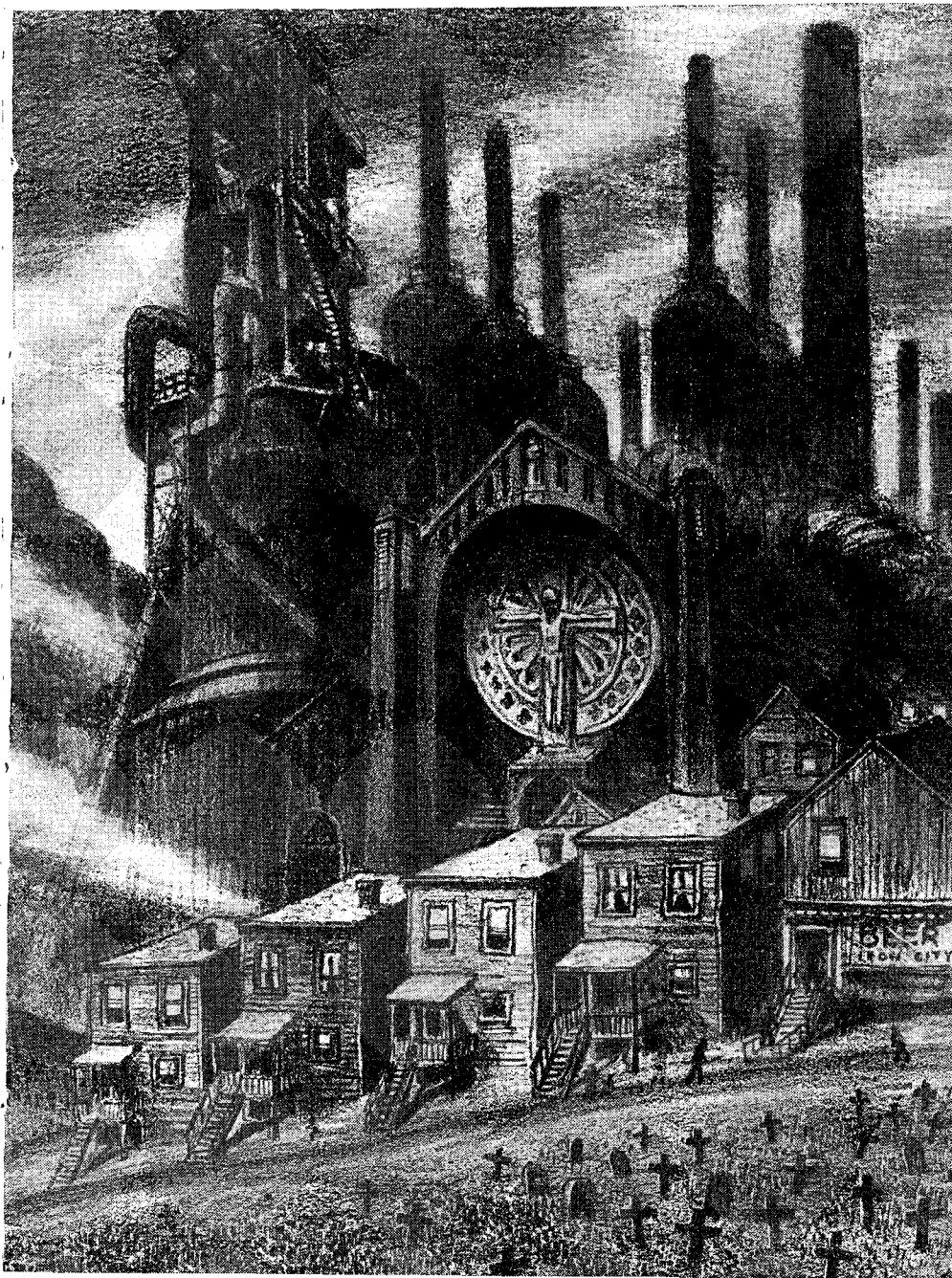
And a knot twisted in her chest and nobody heard her.

How would it be if she got up all of a sudden and played the phonograph? Everybody would jump. They couldn't play it any longer anyway. Uncle Raditch was gonna give them six dollars for it. Uncle Raditch was making money now. He opened a saloon right after prohibition stopped. He wanted to give Charlie a job, but what good was it when Charlie was going deaf? Anybody who wanted a beer would hafta yell. That would be swell for the customers. So he was buying a phonograph and the six dol-

lars would come in handy. "Why don't you cry?"

The wail rose in the hot room and Olga turned her face, mute and twisted. "I wanna cry, Momma." She pressed her hand to the tight knot in her chest. "I wanna cry, Momma . . . Momma, you look terrible."

Her mother's face was all screwed up. It was a million wrinkles, with the tears in a steady flow. She looked at Olga and shook her head. All eyes on Olga and the prayers for the dead pouring out like a stream!



Steel Town

Lithograph by Harry Sternberg

"If only he really looked like Poppa. But it's a different face."

Her father's face had been broad and thick, with a copper-red skin, as far back as she could remember—fiery red, sometimes, when he came back from work. Twenty-eight years of looking into a blast furnace in a steel mill, but now his face was white like a sick baby's, and the skin was all shrunk down over the bone. That damn embalmer should have done something, Olga thought. That damn embalmer.

The priest was silent. His lips moved