

Brief Review

SAFEGUARD PRODUCTIVE CAPITAL, by Louis Wallis. (Doubleday Doran. 75 cents.) According to the subtitle, this is "A new approach to the business problem"; in reality, Mr. Wallis' detour has the same old destination: a cut in taxes on industry and a June wedding between capital and labor. The new highway to prosperity is *Capretax* (Capital-Relief-Tax), which would safeguard productive capital by taxing ground values and untaxing industry. Capretax would shift the burden of social conflict from the "illusory" struggle between capital and labor to the "genuine" opposition of capital and labor versus land. Labor should combine with industry in revolt against the parasitical land barons living on inflated land values. This economic wizardry depends on three false assumptions: 1. That large industrial concerns, like U.S. Steel, pay excessive rents to a feudal baron, instead of transferring money from one pocket to another. 2. That higher industrial profits are automatically passed on in the form of higher wages. 3. That a single tax on land could not be passed on by landlords, assuming that their interests are hostile to those of the capitalists, just as the tax on business is passed on by the industrialists. Mr. Wallis adds another confused voice to the growing chorus of the saviors of capitalism.

"Mr. Spivak," I began, "We boys on the AMERICAN want to know how you do it." I fancied his face changed color a bit. I am certain his eyelids trembled slightly. . . ."

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Music

New Recordings—

EVERY so often one can find a note of mild protest in a few of the Negro blues records which are tucked away in the "race" catalogs of the Vocalion, Melotone-Perfect, Bluebird, Decca and Champion companies. But in general the studio supervisors are careful to see that the blues sound a note of defeat and futility, for it is middle-class whites and large chain stores that distribute records to Negroes in the South.

The way Negro talent is abused in recording studios deserves more space than I can possibly devote to it here. Each year the South is thoroughly searched for artists too naive to know their worth, who are transported in busses to New York or Chicago. The companies are careful to see that no one belongs to a union of any kind, and treat performers with a brutality that cannot be believed in the North. It is a rare phenomenon for the artist-composer to receive even royalties for his tunes, since the recording manager has already had the foresight to copyright them. The usual payment awarded these musicians is a jug of gin, but occasionally the officials give them a few dollars, just to show that their hearts are in the right place. It is interesting to note that these records are far more profitable as a rule than the popular records by world-famed orchestras.

The most significant of recent "race" records is "W.P.A. Blues" (Vocalion 03186), in which Casey Bill Welden expresses mild resentment with existing conditions in relief. A more recent record is "Silicosis Is Killin' Me" (Melotone 60551), by Pinewood Tom, with guitar accompaniment. Coming out soon on Melotone is an extraordinarily fine blues based on the burning of twenty convicts in Scottsboro, composed and sung by

the very talented Joshua White to his own inspired guitar accompaniment. Leadbelly, the convict discovery of the Lomaxes, has recorded for the same company (60455) his own "Pigment Papa" and "Becky Derm," "She Was a Gambler Gal," accompanying himself on his strange guitar-like instrument.

HENRY JOHNSON.

Check New List Records

BACH: *Brandenburg Concertos 1-4* (Columbia Set 249). By the Busch Chamber Players under Adolf Busch's direction. Extraordinarily fine recordings, by far the best on the market. Excellent tempi, superb soloists, and completely free of the pedantry so often associated with Busch.

HAYDN: *Quartet in C Major "Emperor"* (Columbia Set 246). By the Lener Quartet. Good ensemble, bad intonation, needless sentimentalizing. The Leners are not suited to the crispness of Haydn.

MARION ANDERSON: *City Called Heaven, Lord I Can't Stay Away, and Heaven, Heaven, Negro spirituals* (Victor 8958). The American recording debut of this great contralto is an event of importance. To be reviewed in detail later.

WAGNER: *Die Walkure*, first act complete (Victor Set 298). With Lotte Lehmann, Melchior, Emanuel List, and Bruno Walter conducting the Vienna Philharmonic.

WEBBER: *Concertstuck in F Minor* (Columbia). By Robert Casadesu and an unspecified French orchestra under Eugene Bigot. A repetitious, banal work with a few charming moments, very much suited to the small-scale accomplishments of the pianist Casadesu, who exhibits fine technique and good tone.

MOZART: *Symphony in G Minor* (Victor Set 293). By Serge Koussevitzky and the London Philharmonic. Uneven tempi in the first movement ruin an otherwise adequate performance. Better recordings, but otherwise not comparable to Bruno Walter's Columbia interpretation.

Popular Swing Records

ANDY KIRK AND HIS TWELVE CLOUDS OF JOY: Christopher Columbus and Froggy Bottom (Decca 729). Badly recorded examples of a fine band from Kansas City, featuring a first-rate girl pianist, Mary Lou Williams. The second side has the better solos.

GENE KRUPA AND HIS SWING BAND: I'm Gonna Clap My Hands, Mutiny in the Parlor, I Hope Gabriel Likes My Music, The Swing Is Here. (Victor). Some of the finest colored and white musicians in the country, including Benny Goodman, "Choo" Berry, and Israel Crosby. Very bad vocal choruses and undistinguished tunes, but fine ensemble and solos.

H. J.

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The Theater

"Case of Clyde Griffiths"

THREE years ago Erwin Piscator, director of the Berlin People's Theater, was preparing a startling spectacle. In collaboration with Lena Goldschmidt, he had made a new departure in dramatization, transmuting the essence of Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* into a play that evolved a form and substance of its own. It was nearly ready for presentation before the 250,000 Volksbühne subscribers when the great Nazi misfortune fell on Germany, crushing the people and suffocating their arts. Piscator and Goldschmidt with hundreds of others were driven out of the country; their play temporarily abandoned. And the lapse continued till last May when Jasper Deeter staged its world premiere in his small Hedgerow Theater outside Philadelphia. But it remained for the Group Theater to bring this work to the attention of the theater capital, where it has immediately provoked the controversy which was inherent in its theme.

Even those who cordially hate it admit that the *Case of Clyde Griffiths* is one of the most remarkable theater spectacles (Barrymore Theater). Divided into rich camp and poor camp with "nobody's world" between, the stage at once comes alive as a dynamic illuminator of class divisions. Lee Strasberg's direction molds the action upon an absorbing background of rich scenic surprise; and the whole speeds on at a tempo precisely geared to the mood. As an imaginative accomplishment, the whole production is indispensable to anyone interested in the living theater.

It is scarcely necessary in 1936 to elaborate on the story. Dreiser's novel has been read by millions, it was staged here once before (1926), it was made into a Paramount film—or rather "vivisected," as Dreiser's lawyers charged. Based largely on the life of Chester Gillette, a Cortlandt, N. Y. youth who, thirty years ago drowned his sweetheart in an attempt to solve his predicament, the *Case of Clyde Griffiths* retells a wild, emotional tragedy. Employed in his uncle's collar factory, Clyde pushes out of his own poor class toward the luxury-world he craves; breaks with his fellow-workers, seduces Roberta, a factory girl, succumbs when the wealthy, glistening Sondra invites his attentions. He is ready to drop Roberta when she announces that she is pregnant. Half-mad with desperation, he is sufficiently sober to calculate his course in line with his supreme objective.

Roberta is drowned, just as he had planned, but court's evidence charges him with the guilt. His death as the murderer closes the tragedy.

But Piscator attempts to unravel it in terms of basic social responsibility. And he introduces a Speaker "in order to formulate clearly the underlying ground-motive. . . ." Stationed in the orchestra pit from where he intimately addresses the audience, the Speaker is a transformer who turns the emotional current of the action into thought-waves sent on to the audience. He wholly succeeds in giving point to the story—perhaps too much point for purposes of simple emotional impact. For when he makes no comment or when the stage-action draws him in as a participant, the play accumulates intensity: the emotion flows in an uninterrupted line from the stage to the audience. But if Piscator had intended an impact of simple emotion he would never have added a Speaker whose business is to guide the feelings evoked in the audience to precise, reasonable conclusions. In the opening words of the Speaker:

It is a mathematical theorem to the effect that today a Destiny of Fate leads and governs mankind as inexorably and absolutely as Fate in a Greek tragedy. The Greeks, however, looked on sin as a revolt against the commands of the gods. Our revolt is a revolt against the laws of man, and naturally must end with the triumph of reason. The personal responsibility goes back of the law. But there is one fate for us all: the law of Business, or, in other words, Money.

And finally, when Clyde stands charged with murder, the Speaker adds to the audience: "just as any single one of you might stand," for Clyde is the victim of this "Fate"; he "dies as a sacrifice to society."

It is this conclusion, of course, that has brought down the wrath of people who refuse to hold the social order guilty for the crime of a "youth who was bad from the start." As far as they are concerned, the conclusion of the play is not only false but "intellectually contemptible." Now Piscator's conception of Fate as "the law of Economics that inexorably and without compassion controls the destiny of mankind" may be mechanical in that it ignores man's power to change and guide his destiny. But he does not claim that capitalism has taken a random, typical worker and turned him into a murderer. He takes pains to show that from the time Clyde was a bell-hop in a Chicago hotel he was obsessed with the desire to

share the life of the ruling-wealthy; that this passion conditioned his conduct all along; and that the *social order, with its ruthless and insane alternatives of action, aggravated his obsession.* Clyde would be a sad symbol of a worker. His first working-class experience shows him up as a scab. He even cheats his ragged parents. Faced with telling the truth, he runs away from the difficulty till the Speaker charges: "It seems to me you're as weak as water." When the Speaker asks him if he will lie to Roberta, he replies: "No. Only not tell her the truth."

But if Clyde's poverty of spirit and weakness of character are unmistakable, it by no means follows that they are responsible for his end. Where did he get this obsession for wealth and luxury?—where could he catch this disease except in the mental climate of the profit system? Who told him that cheating and scabbing and lying would send him to the top of the pile, if it was not the cynical code of success proclaimed in every tabloid, movie, pulp-tale and true-life-story dedicated to the get-rich theme? And finally, who held before his eyes the law that emotional problems must be reduced to brutal, degrading alternatives but the moral code of a corrupt and terrified social order? What would have happened to Clyde Griffiths in a socialist world where his native weakness could not be aggravated by temptations to scab, lie, cheat, flinch? Would he have been driven to murder in a world rid of all-consuming envy for wealth and a tortured, frustrated moral code?

Piscator makes no attempt to follow all the social implications. He has tried merely to deepen and explore a significant case-history. In the hands of the Group Theater it has become an extraordinary theater experience.

STANLEY BURNSHAW.

Current Theater

Theater Collective: Three Plays (Provincetown Playhouse, Macdougall Street). Robert Forsythe thinks this production of Maltz's *Private Hicks* "one of the best things in the left theater." The other numbers: *You Can't Change Human Nature* (Philip Stevenson), *The Pastry Baker* (Lope de Vega). Closes March 29. Seats 50 cents.

Bury the Dead. Irwin Shaw's play, produced March 14, 15 is by far the most brilliant, most powerful anti-war play—an unforgettable work. Watch for its next performance and be sure to go. (To be reviewed shortly.)

Triple-A Plowed Under (Biltmore Theater). Vibrant, incisive W.P.A. production of the Living Newspaper. Don't miss it! Seats 25 cents.

Bitter Stream (Civic Repertory Theater). The Theater Union's seventh production begins March 30. It is the first play about Fascist Italy to reach the American stage. Victor Wolfson is the author. Tickets 35 cents.

Theater Piece: New Dance (Adelphi Theater). The New Dance League sponsors this special repeat performance of the new work by Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. Divided into two parts, (1) a satirical analysis of our each-man-for himself system, (2) striving toward harmonious common action, it is often magnificent work, rich in design, beautifully executed. April 5.

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