

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

China's Communists in a documentary film—New plays, including the Yiddish—Popular records

THE documentary film has taken on new dignity and purpose with the production of *The Spanish Earth* and *Heart of Spain*; now, with *China Strikes Back*, it enlarges its grasp again. This new Chinese film is different from the two Spanish pieces in many ways, and comes as a contribution from another angle. Presented by Frontier Films, which lately gave us the first of a series of labor newsreels, it is distinct because it rests, not on the development of twin symbols (as *Spanish Earth* does, in its meanings for town and battlefield work) nor on the history of a pioneer step (as *Heart of Spain* uses Dr. Bethune's blood transfusions), nor on any dramatic base but the people themselves. *China Strikes Back* is a quick and well-knit presentation of a section of a country defending its rights, but a section glamoured over for us by its remoteness, a district beyond barriers we may have thought of as impassable. This film takes its material, travel material at its best, disclaims a travelogue approach, and builds its records into a picture of the Chinese people's defense, centered around the Eighth Route Army, formerly the Chinese Red Army.

Harry Dunham has shot the first material to come to us out of Soviet China, now the Special Administrative District. His scenes give us in their full activity the lives of the people Philip Jaffe wrote about two weeks ago in the *New Masses*. Here are scenes of life in the People's Anti-Japanese University, the lessons of the young student-soldiers, their games, their unity under a single idea, their war maneuvers which use no bullets. We find them sleeping in their fields; we hear their songs; we learn their news to the people of China when the end of civil war is proclaimed and the transformation of the Chinese Red Army, to form a firm part of the Chinese people's front. Very quickly, we see the range of types: the peasant boy; the soldier from the North, fur-hatted; the student's sharp face exhorting crowds. And this material is given not as newsreel, not as travelogue, but built solidly into a picture of China today, its bombed cities, its escaping refugees followed from above, its need for planes.

China Strikes Back is tied strongly by its editing, and cinched by as powerful and vivid a narrative as any documentary film has had. Although it is smoothed down by its unvaried presentation, David Wolff's text comes through well, functioning as a movie text must: to heighten and approximate the images, rather than in any sense to be notes to the film. It reaches a climax in the poem read as a young Chinese boy sings—a poem which belongs with the pictures it illustrates so closely, but which is printed here for its own worth, as a summary of *China Strikes Back*, and in its place as the first film-poem

used in this country (to the writer's knowledge), comparable to the poems W. H. Auden has made for the British G.P.O. films.

SONG OF THE CHINESE SOLDIER

Brothers, it is midsummer, the hours are still warm,
And the fields are gathered in the North.

The crop is gathered in the black barns, the crop
of ashes,
The fruits of death lie on the burning road.

I remember our life, the shining grain in the sunlight,
The dogs in our village quarreling far off.

The dogs are silent, greedy and fat in the ruins;
The village is dead in the summer sunlight.

Brothers, the wind as we fled was bitter with smoke.
The stars spit bombs on the hills where we lay
hidden.

With words and tears we assailed the enemy,
The Japanese, the locusts with human faces;
We hoped to derail the armored train with a scythe.

Scattered are the families, the children without care,
The homeless people scattered like leaves,
The children like dead leaves on the freezing stream.

The families walk somewhere in slavery,
Toiling till moonlight for the cup of rice.
Hunger moves them—hunger makes them weak.

I have heard that many are locked in the Japanese
mills

Where are you, O younger sister, where are you?

We have no homes, the Japanese stand on Manchuria,
The men without mouths, that speak out of guns.
Where their voice is heard, there are many peasants
already dead.

Stand up, brothers, do not stoop.
As you bend, the Japanese climb on your backs.
Stand up, look, a lion roars in the sky: it is me flying.

Look up, I am armed.
My hands are friends to the rifle.
Look up, brothers and sisters.

I am coming with planes to defend you.

Against this setting are shown, with the army, the two great Chinese leaders, Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung, the dead president, Sun Yat-sen, and one or two student speakers. The other characters are anonymous. They are the supporting audience of Chinese people in their character of victim and defender, the fighters of the Eighth Route Army, and the Japanese planes. *China Strikes Back* is more than a striking picture of a nation rising; it is the explanation of what is, indeed, the

Great Wall. No architecture was sufficient to keep aggression out of Manchuria; it is the people now who are the solid defense.

Those who wrote and edited *China Strikes Back*, and to whom the credit goes for this fine work, are Robert Stebbins, David Wolff, Peter Ellis, and Eugene Hill, as well as Harry Dunham, who contributed the original material, and who now is making a picture in Spain. The musical background, which alternates finely and unobtrusively with the narrator's voice, is by Alex North, and falls short only towards the end, which demands a climbing emphasis. The narrator, who is heard rather flatly, with an overdone restraint which may very well be in the recording, is John O'Shaughnessy.

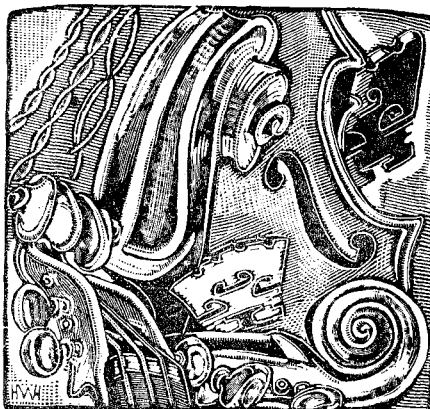
China Strikes Back is playing in New York at the Squire Theater. It is the answer to *Oil for the Lamps of China* and *The Good Earth*, in its treatment as well as in its subject. One evening, a New York newspaper columnist suggested that posters be displayed in front of the Capitol Theater (where *The Good Earth* was showing) reading, "See the Chinese People Defend Their *Good Earth* in *China Strikes Back*." It is true that the big feature pictures have prepared us for a fuller film about today in China, and that we are ready for character and rich development. But, until such a film is made, or until *Man's Fate* becomes a movie, we have, thanks to Frontier Films, *China Strikes Back*. It must be seen.

MURIEL RUKEYSER.

THE THEATER

IF you like your rowdy entertainment more from a chair at a table than a seat in a playhouse, you may want to see *The Fireman's Flame* at the American Music Hall in New York. But if you want more for your \$2.20 or your \$1.65 than a self-conscious collegiate prank and think it ought to include a meal, as it does at a handful of fairly diverting night clubs along the Main Stem, then the price of admission should strike you as discouragingly as it does your correspondent. A bright burlesque of late nineteenth-century melodrama, with the noble hero getting his lady in the end above the machinations of villainy, the show is probably the best the Krinsky brothers have yet exhibited in their remodeled church. But period posturing and whispers to the audience and infantile heckling from the spectators are good for about half an hour; a full evening of it is sure to pall, and you don't get anything to eat or drink with your ticket, anyway.

The Abbey Players, now visiting New York, had a repertoire of fairly frequent changes in schedule announced, but the newspaper reviews of *The Far-Off Hills* were so favorable that they decided to hold off everything else and keep the comedy going for two



Helen West Heller

THE FLIVVER KING

By UPTON SINCLAIR

THE American people believe Henry Ford a great idealist. Once he was that; now he is the owner of a billion dollars. What that money has done to him is a fascinating story. I have written it in time for the big fight between Ford and the union, due this fall.

THE FLIVVER KING: A Story of Ford-America, is a novel of three generations of a family of Ford workers, from 1892 to the present. Henry himself is one of the characters; that part is history, also biography of the richest man in the world.

I HAVE put this into the form of a pocket-size magazine, 128 pages, price 25 cents post-paid; 10 copies, \$1.75; 100 copies, \$15. Use it for the education of your friends. The United Automobile Workers of America are taking a first edition of 200,000; something of a labor event.

NO PASARAN:

A STORY OF THE BATTLE OF MADRID, has been published serially in a score of different countries, and in book form in as many languages. I printed 50,000; still have 7,000 left. Prices same as "The Flivver King"; the two books for 35 cents. With every five copies of "The Flivver King," a free copy of "No Pasaran" if requested.

UPTON SINCLAIR

Station A Pasadena California

AMERICAN ARTISTS SCHOOL

Day, Evening and Weekend Classes

Drawing, Refregier • Painting, Sokole, Soyer, Tschabasov, Wilson • Composition, Holty • Methods of Painting, Filmus • Portrait, Criss • Mural, Amoro • Water Color, Glassgold, Levi • Social Satire, Groth • Sculpture, Cronbach, Gross • Graphic Arts, Hanke, Morley, Miller, Ward • Photography, Alland • Children's Classes, Deutsch, Gikow.

Tuition: \$5 a mo. and up. Catalog. American Artists School, Inc. 131 W. 14 St., N. Y. C. CH 3-9621.



Associated Optometrists

247 West 34th St.
New York City
MEdallion 3-3242

FOR REAL FRENCH COOKING

dine at
RESTAURANT de la TOUR EIFFEL
256 West 52nd St. New York City
Real French dishes. Filet Mignon, Civet de Lapin, Steak Minute, Escargots de Bourgogne
Our regular dinner at 75c includes a glass of wine or special cocktail at no extra charge.

full weeks. This seems unfortunate for two reasons: one, a repertory company ought to stick to its numerous shifts and not drop everything when one offering happens to be well received; two, this is one of the frailest and least juicy of the Irish contingent's productions and is far from meriting the prominence of a hold-over. The Lennox Robinson comedy tells the story of a young girl who thinks she hates worldly pleasures and wants to be a nun until a peppy male invades the household and she realizes she prefers commanding a family and becoming a wife, after all. The nature of the girl's delusions of sanctity is not even touched in examination by the playwright; it is simply mentioned over and over again. Her change in character has not the remotest development or justification; it is merely that arbitrary segment of playmaking known as Act Three. The sheer narrative and realistic progression of the play are accordingly scarcely able to hold your attention, and you will have to sit back and wait for the too rare appearances of the "quaint" characters, in the form of drunks and middle-aged scarecrows, to catch the famous Gaelic charm and music of speech. For real relish of our Abbey cousins, attend their classics: *The Plough and the Stars*, *Juno and the Paycock*, *The Playboy of the Western World*. Speech like that isn't often heard around these parts.

Few experiences could be more instructive than the Federal Theater's revival of John Howard Lawson's *Processional*. A lot of us have been sitting around remembering the play, its use of burlesque and vaudeville forms to convey the extravagances of American life, its audacious poetic picture of awakening labor. We have called for a revival of native high points in the drama and thought of the Lawson work as possibly leading them all. Now that we have been confronted with a revised and "up-to-date" version of the play, we shall know enough to make a long pause next time before indulging in active nostalgia. Because *Processional* doesn't come alive again at all. Far from it, it turns into a disheartening and discouraging mess which casts only discredit on the Federal Theater Project and Lawson. The sodden miner-hero, his loud-laughing and empty-headed fellow-strikers, the pompous and directionless strike-leader—all these may have been moving within the original frame of mysticism and experimentalism, but today they are caricatures and libels. Particularly since the entire flavor of imaginative seeking and conscious poetic distortion has been smothered by Lem Ward's strikingly inept production. The mood, which should be electric and neurotic, is solemn and dank; the sets, which should be strident and gaga, are over-dramatic and weighty; the movement of the performers, which should be agile and circussy, is crushingly deliberate and calculated. Stay home and reread *Processional*, which is interesting to do; but don't bother seeing it.

The legitimate theater, if it is going to have even one leg to stand on in its refined superiority to the low standards of Hollywood, had

better rush to sweep out its own stables. Two little numbers befouled the New York scene last week with truck which the films might have charitably concealed deep in the horse-opera houses. One was Allan Scott's *In Clover*, all about the crazy things that happen when you go and buy a country place. This was picked up by the white wings after its third performance. The other was Stephen Powys's *Wise Tomorrow*, in which a middle-aged Lesbian actress tries to relive her youth by ensnaring Gloria Dickson of *They Won't Forget*. When homosexuality is backgrounded, as in *The Children's Hour*, it has as much legitimate interest as any other theme; when it is presented strictly for its own sensational sake, as in the Powys effort, it gives off an odor such as sent hordes of people scurrying onto the sidewalks long before the end of the play. Nobody seems to be sure whether there is really a Stephen Powys; very soon (as soon as you have ended this sentence, maybe) nobody will be sure there was ever really a play called *Wise Tomorrow*.

A USEFUL STUDY in contrasts is currently afforded by the presence in the Times Square area of two Yiddish theater groups, Maurice Schwartz's at Fifty-ninth Street and the Artef at Sixty-third. Schwartz has invaded Broadway before, but his real home is Second Avenue. The Artef came into being as a protest against the commercial theatrical values of Second Avenue. Both are uptown in the search for broader audiences.

Singer's novel, *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, which you should have read by now, was Schwartz's choice for an opener. What the adaptation and production have done to a rich and thrilling book strikes this reviewer as a fair index to Schwartz and his work. Documentation, character, and social forces have been completely eliminated; conflict without justification and stages of development without inner necessity are all that have been washed down. And it is not as if the novel were hopeless of dramatization or as if one had at any time the feeling that a heroic job had been envisioned and attempted and at least approximated. One is only aware of a deliberate indifference to the values of the original story, of an interest in retaining nothing but what will provide a facile flash of personal idiosyncrasy, an isolated moment of tension for its own sake, a flare of abandoned spectacle which is in no way contributive to the growth of the tale.

When one speaks of the norm of Second Avenue entertainments and accuses them of a vulgarity which they might not even deny, it seems a far cry from the arty pretensions of Schwartz, yet he strikes me as a victim of the very same vulgarity. When settings, costumes, lighting, dance movements, and musical moments combine only to give the impression of expensiveness and hard work, and it rarely matters whether they are genuinely appropriate, then one is obviously in the presence of artistic indiscriminateness and bad taste. The production does have a vitality and an onrush,