

*Daily Worker*, *Midwest Daily Record*, and San Francisco *People's World* have, in their limited way, done much to expose and occasionally forestall the depredations of the press. But the trade-union movement, by establishing daily papers in, let us say, New York and San Francisco, would be fulfilling its end of unifying all progressive forces in the battle against open and demagogic reaction. The labor movement alone can raise the money necessary to provide papers that would reach the millions with the truth about the news.

Meanwhile, Seldes deserves our thanks, and our study.

MORRIS U. SCHAPPES.

## Three-Penny Opera

A PENNY FOR THE POOR, by Bertolt Brecht. Hillman-Curl, Inc. \$2.50.

YEARS before the World War the cries of the wounded, the insulted, and injured could be heard in the literature of Western Europe. The open split between the individual and society took the form, in the novel and poetry, of a battle in the disguise of symbols; the images of psychological disorder reflected solitary man's defeats and desperation. For the symbolists, their own personalities became besieged and demoralized cities whose inhabitants—fearful ideas, memories, sensations—turned upon and fought one another.

It is easy to see, for example, how the Dane, Jens Peter Jacobsen, exercised so strong an influence on German literature. Phrases such as "Boiled crabs on a platter remind me of the massacre of the innocents in Bethlehem" fit naturally into a consciousness which, like Rilke's or Kafka's, was obsessed with the nightmare aspects of streets, law courts, and hotels peopled with savage, sub-human creatures.

But the living human being could not exist here. His place was taken by an abstract sequence of hallucinations, animated metaphors, the sights and sounds of cities invested with bodies, terrible dreams to which a sleeper was supplied for convention's sake.

It was Brecht's distinction that he led the attempt to restore the objective fact to German literature. His revolutionary mind worked like a broom, sweeping out the fantasies to make way for the stocks and bonds, the business deals and marriages, and the ceremonious murders which are the pillars of contemporary order. In this novel, of which the popular play and film *Drei Groschen Oper* are somewhat altered dramatizations, he has taken London during the Boer War as the scene of operations. Instead of houses with exposed entrails, metal disks that pursue a man, warning him of his approaching collapse, and hairy spiders who live in small rooms at home when they can no longer hold their bank jobs, we have the one-legged veteran, Fewkoombey, hanged for the murder which he *didn't* happen to commit; Peachum, chief of the begging racket and engineer of



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the sale of rotten transport ships to the Admiralty; Coax, whose career can be described in a two-word jingle, "Treachery, Lechery"; MacHeath, a genius who builds his retail-store business upon the wholesale robbery of warehouses; Polly Peachum, who loves her husband dearly, but will sleep with anyone for a nice brooch; and the independent shopkeepers who are privileged to live in rat holes and cough their lungs away at their own free will, praising God and Good Old Mac. In this slaughterhouse—which is England or Germany, or any capitalist country—all the butchers throw cleavers at one another, but that does not keep them from slitting the throats of any sheep that come their way.

Brecht did not, therefore, seek to lessen the horrors of contemporary society. But he transferred them from the plane of illusion to that of everyday and wide-awake existence. His fine social irony penetrated, like emery dust, the mechanism of business transactions. The wheels stop, and we see the parts arrested in their stamping and grinding functions. State, business, and underworld come to a standstill before the reader.

For his purpose, Brecht develops a kind of two-dimensional recital of events, for which psychology is employed only when it is necessary for consistency and credibility. The characters are cut out of whole cloth; that which they are at the beginning determines what they will do throughout the tale.

This method of exposition—by which the intelligence, grasping the laws of social action, replaces the imaginative recreation of reality—has certain inherent limitations. Brecht has given us a natural history of capitalist society. The social life of the business world parades its golden gardeners, Peachum and Coax, and its praying mantis, MacHeath. But, just as among insects, their fixed nature holds for all the individuals of their species. They are types whose character is predetermined by their position in society and does not grow or change, except as their species in general does. Our interest in them is generated by their methods of operation, their successes and failures within the system of adventures which the bourgeois calls civilization. Still, Brecht has no more gotten away from abstraction than his predecessors. For their pattern of symbols and associations, he has substituted a pattern of events and single-plane actions which are really deducible from the analysis of society and of the types engaged in action. They do not arise out of life, but out of a fixed conception of it. They do not spring from the clash of the world views of different people with objective circumstances, but out of the world view of the author alone, applied to circumstances and specimens of humanity. The aphoristic soliloquies in which the characters express their views are brilliant social exposés, but their generality dissipates their intensity and depersonalizes the victims and scoundrels who utter them. Brecht's scheme, however intricately and fascinatingly it is developed, still remains a scheme, chained to the laws of con-

sistency, and to that extent deficient in reality.

Yet Brecht, like any master, transcends the limits of his own method, by his range of wit and broad comedy, his knowledge of the concrete forms which the struggle within and between classes takes, and by his deep vision of human suffering. Between the burgling of the international crime-prevention exposition, from which MacHeath wants to steal only British tools, for patriotism's sake, and the dream of the police inspector, Brown, who sees the legions of misery rising out of the Thames and advancing "in soundless march, transparent and featureless, marching through the walls, into the barracks, into the restaurants, into the art galleries, into the courts of justice . . ." Brecht lays out and cuts open before us the sick corrupted body of capitalist society.

CLARENCE WEINSTOCK.

## Necessary Facts

LABOR FACT BOOK IV, prepared by Labor Research Association. International Publishers. \$1.

INDISPENSABLE is an overworked word, but it is hard to think of any other that fits the *Labor Fact Books*. Today radicals and progressives have to have facts. We are being put on the spot all the time, and we must know what we are talking about. The latest *Labor Fact Book* is a convenient and dependable summary of the things we must know now.

How close did the production of consumers' goods in 1937 come to the 1929 level? How did prices in 1937 compare with prices in 1935? What has the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota actually done? What is the Oregon Commonwealth Federation? How does the National Labor Relations Board function? What is the present extent of unemployment? What really are the living standards of the famous one-third of a nation? How many mortgaged farms are there? In what labor, unemployed, and farm disputes were troops used during 1936 and 1937? How does the strength of the AFL compare with that of the CIO? What is the situation of the labor movement in France? In Germany? In the Soviet Union?

I am not trying to play some radio game. These are questions that are asked of anybody who criticizes capitalism or speaks up in defense of the labor movement or the New Deal. These and hundreds of other questions are answered in *Labor Fact Book IV*.

It seems to me that the Labor Research Association has done a better job than ever before. This volume is clearer and compacter and more wisely selective than its predecessors. Its statements have a precision that makes misinterpretation impossible. It has none of the kind of academic super-cautiousness that amounts to misrepresentation, but it is rigidly factual.

The last two years have been so important that even the statistical tables sometimes make