

materials it itself did not create. Miracles are thus not to be expected in institutions long dominated by machine politics. Democracy has been formally launched, however, in New York City's public colleges. Its major aims, as set forth by Mr. Tead, are the improvement of the quality of education by the spreading of responsibility and creation of collective leadership, by the revitalization of democratic experience by bringing it into the immediate life of the teachers, and the improvement of morale through people's doing what they themselves have come to want to do rather than what they are told they must do. Pitfalls and dangers exist, but with a strong union, the closest cooperation of all progressive individuals and organizations on the campuses, and a dominantly liberal board of trustees, a democratic front can be forged which will prove of inestimable service to the staffs, the students, and the community at large. The city colleges are on their way towards becoming fortresses of democracy.

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Profits for the Few

CORPORATION tax returns for 1936 recently published by the U. S. Treasury Department show that 203,162 corporations in this country reported an aggregate net income (or net profits) of \$9,477,980,000, while 275,695 reported a deficit aggregating \$2,156,055,000. *Economic Notes*, publication of the Labor Research Association, says of the Treasury report:

Figures are not yet available showing the relative size of the corporations making profits and those reporting losses, but it is probable that the figures, when issued, will indicate an equal or higher concentration of profits in the large companies than was apparent in the Treasury reports on corporation income in 1934 and 1935. The 1935 figures showed that 84 percent of aggregate net profits was piled up by 4 percent of the companies reporting.

But even with all the "little fellows" and all the reported losses included in the aggregate picture, and subtracting the net deficits from the net incomes, we find a final net income of \$7,321,925,000 for all the corporations reporting. And the net income, even after payment of all taxes, came to \$6,130,536,000. When this is compared with the gross income of all companies, we find that the consolidated net income was 4.6 percent of the gross. (It was over 9 percent for the companies reporting net income.)

"On the face of it," admits the *Magazine of Wall Street*, commenting editorially on the report, "this may not appear to be a great deal, but the return was no larger in 1928 and only one-tenth of 1 percent larger in 1929. It is the generally accepted view that 1928 and 1929 were years of great profit in which, by present-day standards, there was no governmental interference with business."

This organ of Wall Street finds some explanation for the high profit return of 1936 "in the increased efficiency and attendant lowering of production costs common to nearly all manufacturing." In other words, the increase of labor productivity and the introduction of speedier speedup systems have contributed in large part to holding up the profit level to that of the boom period before the panic of 1929.

Debate on Humor

A Letter from Hollywood

ELLA WINTER

SINCE NEW MASSES had a debate on humor recently, it may interest readers that Hollywood has just looked up the subject with some seriousness. At the first of a series of discussions, to be held at the newly opened Book-of-the-Day Shop, on La Brea, under joint auspices of the League of American Writers and the bookshop, the evening was started off by Donald Ogden Stewart asking: "Humor—asset or liability?" The negative was filled positively by Robert Benchley of the *New Yorker* and *Sweethearts* (to be released, in technicolor). Mr. Stewart made the point that the "crazy" humor of the twenties in America was a symbol of defeat and despair, and that even though NEW MASSES isn't as funny as the *New Yorker*, it is more of an asset in helping to change the world.

Mr. Benchley said humorists wrote because they had kids to put through college, not to save the world, but that humor had always scoffed at something in the society that is; in the twenties they made fun of clichés. But, he said, humor wasn't taken very seriously; in the movies, for example, straight writers got paid a lot more than funny ones.

Hollywood's humorists had turned out to take part in the talk and it was the kind of turnout you have learned to expect in Hollywood. Phil Dunne, son of "Mr. Dooley," one of the best humorists of his day, had in tow Ellis E. Patterson, Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor; Dunne is himself vice-chairman of the state Democratic organization and chairman of the Motion Picture Democratic Committee. Frank Morgan, comedian of the theater and movies, asked whether any historical movement had been killed by humor; Fredric

March said Mussolini was laughed at on the screen and didn't that help defeat him? Konrad Bercovici said one must distinguish between humor and satire, and satire always had to be against the existing order. Sid Perelman thought humorists didn't always have the gift of satire, that it wasn't lack of desire that didn't let them be Swifts or Popes; and Budd Schulberg, who has been writing a series of searching Hollywood stories for *Collier's*, wanted to know just how far humor could be effective in uncovering social sores.

The *New Yorker* came in for a lot of criticism (many people here have strongly objected to the mean-spirited "Profile" of Earl Browder which wasn't even funny). Aline Barnsdall, wealthy oil-owner of California, who has been interested in Tom Mooney for many years, said surely Germany, Russia, and Italy showed that you didn't need humor to be successful in political life; in fact, they showed you had better be deadly serious. Miss Barnsdall illustrated her own concern by buying three Groppers (including his beautiful *Migrants*) which were on show at the bookshop.

Several speakers made the point that *Pins and Needles* and Cabaret TAC were as good weapons as any the progressive movement has forged. Charles Brackett, president of the Screen Writers Guild, Viola Brothers Shore, Deems Taylor, at present working on musical scores with Walt Disney and Stokowski, Florence Eldridge, and others contributed enthusiastically to the debate, while Ray Mayer, active in the Anti-Nazi League and TAC shows, made a warm plea for treating the fascist danger seriously and not letting a wise-crack interfere with the deeply felt appeals people were making for Spanish orphans and Chinese wounded.

Among those who attended were William Wyler, screen director, Mr. and Mrs. Ira Gershwin, Charles Butterworth, John McClain, Hy Kraft, Sterling Holloway, Mrs. Adelaide Schulberg and her daughter Sonya, seventeen years old and author of a novel, Ted Paramore, and Laura Perelman. While no decision was reached, people had plenty of ideas to take home with them. At midnight groups were still standing in the street arguing.

One fact emphasized and returned to by speaker after speaker was that Robert Forsythe used humor to his high purposes with complete success. There wasn't any dissent to that.



Dan Rice

Return

A Short Story

SAUL LEVITT

EVERYTHING was right—weather, the crowd waiting, that last letter—and yet her heart hammered, there was no stopping it. Even watching the boat come in, hearing them cheer, knowing it was that boat at last and no other, not the Hamburg-American or the Furness-Bermuda boat. And there it was, coming past the statue, it couldn't possibly sink. And perfect day, what a day, blue just blue that's all. Yet her heart hammered. And at last he came down and the fear in her flew up ahead of her, raced back and forth frantically. She tried to hold it, push it deep down because there he was—so much was right in him coming home just like this—just the same except that that sun must have been terribly hot to have darkened him to a deep bronze, his red hair combed back and beginning to twist a little on the right side the way it always does. Like an old canvas brought up out of the cellar and nothing faded, nothing changed, the details right—but his arm in a sling! The fear rose up in her, in the swaying crowd, under that peaceful blue sky at the pier where the ship lay still—the arm, he had never written! Ah, but she'd known it! He wouldn't tell her—

She held him close, she listened to him answer her, his voice amazingly the same, yes, the same—"That! That's funny, you go through eight months of it and nothing happens, but just four days ago I slipped near the rail and fractured the wrist, it'll be out of splints in a week."

"Is that all, you're sure it isn't something else, something much worse like gangrene poisoning or something—how are you?" she asked again, for the fifth time.

He smiled down to *that* tooth, the one chipped a little, his eyes were smiling in the old way, except perhaps that there were more of those tiny wrinkles.

"I'm all right," he said again, smiling broadly, and how he stands there in front of her looking big and capable, how he brushes his hair back, it is all the same again, all the little moves he makes are the same, everything the same, and he kept smiling, looking into the North River glinting in the afternoon sun.

"I've arranged something," she said rapidly, "that is, if you're not tired, Hal, I saw Joe and Mary Colman yesterday and I said to them if you're not too tired when you get back, we might go out to the country for the day—"

"I might call up my uncle," he said, frowning a little. "Do you know, Helen, there's something I ought to be doing but I can't

think of it." He shook his head. "About calling up Uncle Sid, that can wait, I guess, that can wait a little while, let it wait—"

"We'll go up to Coopersville," she said rapidly, "do you remember Coopersville, darling."

"Oh, God, of course I remember it," he said gently, "I've never had more than one wife and one honeymoon."

The fear fell back. She held his good arm tightly, they walked across town, they rode, they went in to eat. She called up Joe and Mary, who came down to the restaurant on Forty-second Street. Once during the meal he held the knife down absently and cut it deep into the cloth through to the table. He flushed, and put down the knife rapidly.

They rode up along the shore, racing. She watched Hal as he sat there, and he kept smiling at the sky and the river and sometimes looking backward along the road.

"What are you looking at," she said, following his gaze.

"I'm not looking at anything."

"I thought you were looking at something, that's the third time you've looked back."

"Nothing at all, except maybe there's something I ought to do that I can't remember—and it'll just have to wait," he laughed, putting his arm around her shoulders. The fingers were bronzed and strong looking, grasping her shoulder. She tried to twist his fingers but they wouldn't twist. His hands had always been hard like that. There was in fact nothing at all that was different. It was like a dream of something. It was uncanny. It was the same road, and the day they went up, it had been like this, sunny and clear, with the cars ahead and back of them making a big, peaceful parade. Except that now Joe and Mary were there instead of Hal and her being alone in the dinky with Hal at the wheel.

The day the same as you looked out on the road and the river. She shivered. Blue like this and she sitting next to him that time, holding his one hand sometimes when he held the wheel with the other, trying to twist his fingers and the fingers strong and not giving.

Yet she shivered, she held it down but she felt it writhing, a great bundle of shiver like the ancient bag of the winds, ready to open and blow, blow, blow the sun, the day, the grip of his hand into nothingness—

She took out her handbag and fixed her hair and powdered her nose until Mary said: "Are you crazy, Helen, trying to powder your nose *now*?"

And she put the handbag away, watching

Hal. He was squinting and smiling into the afternoon sun. Coopersville at last at 2 o'clock and out beyond the town to the cottage. The same old lady stood in the entranceway.

"Well, well!" said the old lady.

"It's us again," said Helen, "we're happy to see you remember us."

"Why, of course I remember you," said the same old lady, "you were both shy—you're looking good, the both of you, and not a day older. In fact you look as if you're having another honeymoon if you don't mind my saying so."

The four of them sat on the porch after the old lady went in. The birds sounded and the leaves of the trees sounded. The white clouds, little patches of them were still and off in the distance a blue haze loitered around mountain tops. The bench creaked.

"Do you remember our first day here, Hal," she said, trying to twist his fingers.

"Of course I do," he said.

"Oh, you wouldn't remember that, you've been through too much, and it's too long ago."

"But I do."

"Do you remember our first afternoon here?"

"We went out on the lake after dinner."

"And after that—"

"We pulled the boat up on the other shore and walked through the woods."

The happy flush rose in her face, watching him remember.

"Let's go!" he said.

They went down to that lake, that honeymoon lake with the trees circling it which bend in the wind and little waves strike up in the lake and they sat in the canoe but this time she paddled because of that arm which he had to fracture in the stupidest kind of accident coming home. She tried to follow that old path across the lake toward a certain birch tree and she scanned the opposite shore and found the tree. At the prow Hal sat, watching the shore.

"Remember?" she said.

"Of course I do," he said, turning, "I'm not a wooden Indian."

And she pulled the canoe up on the shore near the birch, with Hal helping. The red canoe lay halfway up the shore. The trees were still. They stood on the shore.

"Hal!"

"Yes."

He kissed her.

They walked along the path through the woods. They found the big rock, the same as ever. A squirrel standing up, then scuttling off, making a rustle through dead leaves. They sat there, with his arm around her shoulders. But she shivered and shivered in his arms, watching him smile, his eyes smiling but his brow crinkling. It was uncanny, it was as if nothing had happened since then. The fear rose up in her, up to a blue sky like that honeymoon's blue sky, it would not down, it was there, she could not down it. And they walked again, out of the little clump of woods. He was smiling fixedly. Not since he had gotten off the boat had it changed.