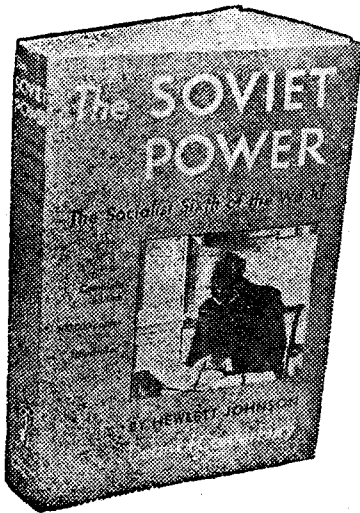


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neither do you suspect the real culprit, and if you have sat through the play thus far you will be considerably exasperated, for Mr. Davis pulls a very shabby and unsubstantial trick on his audience, by introducing in the last two minutes of action a vast amount of hitherto concealed information.

As the Norths, Albert Hackett and Peggy Conklin are close to the conception of the originals; particularly Miss Conklin, in her simulation of brainlessness. She is the sort of gal who parks by hydrants, loses all her house-keys, never understands the issues, talks incessantly and to no purpose. (Only I wish Miss Conklin, who possesses genuine charm and prettiness, would develop at least one other key to her voice—she speaks continuously in A-flat—very). Millard Mitchell makes an excellent stage detective of the traditional variety, Philip Ober an excellent ditto of the more modern school. Both are amiability personified. The other players do not matter very much.

But I do not think you will find *Mr. and Mrs. North* as hilarious as they might have been, for Mr. Davis' drama is slow, mechanical, and uninspired, and the ingenuity so much desired in murder mysteries is conspicuously lacking.

ALVAH BESSIE.

Movie Roundup

Daniel Todd discusses "Night Train" and "Comrade X."

"**N**IGHT TRAIN," a new spy picture from the British Ministry of Information, is something like *The Lady Vanishes*. It begins with a long trucking shot in the midst of high mountains; much of its action takes place on a train; and it has the same pretty heroine and the same two comic English tourists who, in *The Lady Vanishes*, became entangled in international intrigue when they wanted to be left alone to talk about cricket. There are several reasons why *Night Train* is not as good as its model. The characters escape several times, from three different countries, and with so much ground to cover, the director, Carol Reed, has no time to stop for small details. The heroine gets out of a German concentration camp simply by ripping a hole in the barbed wire; in the next scene she is landing in England. Carol Reed has probably not seen any American prison pictures, which I don't think are exported to England. They teach a lesson about prison breaks. Prison breaks are credible only when the physical aspects of the prison have been thoroughly explained so you can see what problems the prisoners face on their way out. Alfred Hitchcock would take two reels to get his prisoners out of concentration camp.

The plot of *Night Train* is not unpleasantly realistic. The heroine's father is an inventor of armor plate employed at the Skoda plant in Czechoslovakia, and in May 1939 he is hustled aboard a plane for England to keep his secret out of German hands. This displays an alarming naivete about the ways

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GOINGS ON

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of munitions makers, particularly of Skoda, which had recently been purchased from Schneider Creusot by Krupp. A munitions plant can work well under any regime, and Skoda, feeling that it could work best under the Nazis, had been contributing to Hitler's campaign fund for as long as fifteen years and kept enough weapons in its store room to supply an army corps in case of civil war. The inventor naturally appears baffled, but he submits to be taken to England, where he is promptly kidnaped and carried to Germany on a submarine, where he is kidnaped and brought back to England by an English secret agent masquerading as a German officer. The excitement is almost too much for him, and if he can remember any military secrets after a wild ride across a deep gorge with Nazis popping away at him, it's a wonder. In the final episode, on the night train from Berlin to Munich, there is some excitement, but it is dissipated in a badly handled scene on a cable-car over a gorge between the Reich and Switzerland. The English are not good at process shots. *Night Train*, like other current British melodramas, has the simple cowboy-and-Indian morality which is typical of official art in wartime.

When an anti-Soviet picture is criticized by the *New York Times*, it is an exceptionally bad picture. The *Times* was disappointed in *Comrade X*, in which Hedy Lamarr endeavors to talk like Greta Garbo in *Ninotchka*, because about all it says against the Soviet Union is that in the Soviet Union doors fall down when they are slammed too hard. Now I have never seen any figures on the number of doors that fall down annually in the Soviet Union, but I don't think it is a particularly significant index of industrial activity. *Comrade X* also accuses the Russians of believing in free love.

The interesting thing about these charges is that they are old-fashioned. Propaganda in the press against the Soviet Union has not mentioned public morals (which are naturally higher under socialism than under capitalism) since the early days when "nationalization of women" was a popular phrase in the commercial papers; and it has not mentioned inefficiency (which is far less, of course, under socialism than under capitalism—with its unemployed, its useless competition, its enormous excess capacity even when producing at top speed for war) since newspaper editors were splitting with laughter over the first five-year plan. The fact that the charges are old-fashioned does not make them any less noxious. MGM intended *Comrade X* to be a devastating attack on the labor movement, in America as well as in Russia, and it is full of pointed remarks about the honesty and discernment of anyone who desires to improve the world. The fact that because of corny acting, incredibly bad dialogue and slovenly directing, the attack is not devastating but ridiculous, does not make it any less noxious either.

By the way, the Irving Place Theater is showing Soviet movies at popular prices.

DANIEL TODD.

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For these reasons, the editors plan to celebrate New Masses' thirtieth birthday. We are preparing a 100,000 anniversary edition of sixty-four pages, out February 14. The details, including contributors from the political, literary, and art world, will be announced next week.

Then on Sunday, February 16, a huge birthday party will take place at Manhattan Center. Earl Browder, Ruth McKenney, Dr. Harry F. Ward, William Gropper, and others will bring personal greetings; an extensive program of entertainment will include Anna Sokolow, Earl Robinson, Billie Holliday, Laura Duncan, and others.

The editors ask you to reserve the date to come to our party as the honored guests. You made this magazine, kept it alive in the most trying times. Come honor it with us.

