

gave a realistic estimate of Soviet economic, political, and military strength. Their new book is reprinted, with modifications and additions, from the Introduction to the 1941 re-issue of *Soviet Communism*. It is an up-to-date summary of the conclusions reached by the Webbs as to the internal organization of the Soviet Union.

The Webbs feel that the war has made it more than ever imperative for the people of Britain and the United States to understand the principles on which Soviet life is organized. In order to win the war and insure a permanent peace, "we must treat the government and people of Soviet Russia as equals, without any reserve arising from the deep-seated antagonism of our ruling class to the internal organization of the socialist fatherland." We must understand, say the Webbs emphatically, that Stalin is not a "dictator," that the USSR is a political democracy, that the western democracies have a great deal to learn from Soviet practice with respect to racial equality and the democratic control of the instruments of production.

The Webbs are particularly impressed with the philosophical basis of Soviet life, "scientific humanism," which rejects superstition, ignorance, and exploitation. This philosophy is embodied in the Soviet Constitution of 1936, the full text of which appears here in a translation by Anna Louise Strong. By studying this Constitution and Soviet life in general, "We may discover that many of the newly formed institutions are not contrary to the living philosophy of the Christian religion which the political leaders of the capitalist democracies assure us is the foundation stone of our own civilization, but are actually more in accordance with the precept of 'love thy neighbor as thyself' than the root impulse of profit-making enterprise, 'each man for himself and devil take the hindmost.'"

The Webbs express deep regret that the International Federation of Trade Unions has refused to accept, as members, representatives of the All-Union Central Committee of Trade Unions with its 23,000,000 members. They oppose every attempt to trace Soviet resistance to "racial" factors rather than to the conviction of Soviet citizens that their political and industrial democracy is worth defending.

This volume is prefaced by an essay on the Webbs by George Bernard Shaw. It is in some respects, particularly in its references to Marx, a silly essay; but no fair-minded observer can dispute Shaw's high estimate of the authors of *Soviet Communism*. Events have proved the soundness of their analysis and the wisdom of their judgment. Their new book, while it adds nothing substantially new to their previous findings, should be read and studied by everyone who wants to understand the social aims and political means of our Russian ally. It is a fine contribution to that full and unequivocal cooperation between the Soviet Union and all the other anti-Axis powers on which victory and a permanent peace depend.

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MR. ANDERSON'S PACIFIC OUTPOST

In "The Eve of St. Mark" he has projected in heartfelt terms the life of men who have left simple homes for the frontlines. Affirmations that needed more than symbols.

MAXWELL ANDERSON's new play is the only drama of the war—and particularly America's participation in it—that is worthy of serious consideration. It is written by a man whose heart is in the cause for which we fight; who is in many ways close to the mainstream of American life; and who, whatever his shortcomings as a dramatist, is serious about his craft and its possibilities.

What he has attempted to do in *The Eve of St. Mark* is both simple and direct. He chose his materials with the greatest care, and his selection of characters was sound. Central figure of the play is Quizz West, a farm boy from upper New York state, a milieu with which the playwright is familiar. By presenting the home life of young West, his father and mother, his two younger brothers, the hired man, and Quizz's girl from the farm down the road, Mr. Anderson simultaneously presented a representative and solid segment of American life.

He follows his farm boy into the army, to the shores of the Pacific, to an island in our farthest outpost. The simple line of the narrative thus parallels the experience of millions of our men who have left simple homes they love for the strangeness of army life and the ordeal of fire. The figures and experiences encountered on the way are valid, even if somewhat stereotyped. There is the New York Jewish soldier, the Irish soldier, the old-time top sergeant, the boy from the South who describes himself as a representative of decaying southern aristocracy, the young Filipino nurse. There is the desperate last stand our men put up on Wake and at Bataan and Corregidor. So the material and the pattern are recognizable.

NOW Mr. Anderson has been soundly criticized in the past for an approach to human problems that borders on the mystical; for his recurring temptation to resolve the pattern of his plays by reference to extra-human considerations. Therefore it is encouraging to see him strip from the present drama practically all considerations of a supra-sensory nature, and refer the resolution of his conflict directly to the understanding and experience of his characters. These men on the island have been given permission by their commanding officer to retire to another place. But the CO has left it to their own discretion; for if they remain, it is possible that they can hold up—if only for a few hours—the Japanese invasion barges. In this situation Mr. Anderson—and his char-

acters—takes an active stand. The men elect to remain; they are all wiped out.

And the parents of Quizz West, back home, knowing of his loss, give their other two sons to the struggle. They know it is a struggle for life or death. It is not an easy choice they face, but they face it correctly in the confident knowledge that America and the life they represent are at stake.

Curiously missing from the play—in the face of these positive and honest attributes, which boil themselves down to the fact that our men are fighting for homes they love—is any comment (direct or indirect) about the war. What is this war that is carrying our men to battlefronts so many thousands of miles from home? What is it all about? What are the issues? Mr. Anderson seems studiously to have left them out. I am sure his choice was not capricious, and perhaps he felt that he would like to *symbolize* the universal conflict and give it a timeless quality by avoiding the "local, temporal, and contingent." If so, I feel that he was wrong. For would it not have strengthened the audience's understanding of the war (and its participation in the drama) to see clearly that America does not stand alone in this fight? That the war has been going on a long time now; that other people fought it before we did and are fighting it with us all over the world? Would it not have helped cement unity (and made for better drama) to know that there exist the United Nations; to know the nature of the enemy we fight—*fascism*?

Through failure deeply to characterize Quizz West and the other figures in his landscape, the landscape seems static and the characters two-dimensional. You can believe in Quizz, but you cannot be terribly moved by him. And what such a play, or *any* serious play demands, is that you should be both deeply moved by and profoundly identified with its characters.

FOR more was needed in this play—to round out the characters, to explain their heroic action—than to know that Quizz was a typical farm boy, and his companions were typical Irish-Americans, Jews, Southerners, Filipinos, juke girls, top sergeants. And with the exception of the southern boy, most of these people are therefore rubber stamps rather than people.

The narrative is carried forward by a long series of scenes that are really sketches, and too few of these contain more than the rudi-

ments of drama. The one that does—the desperate choice our handful of men must make against staying to fight or retreating—is both the most moving scene in the play and, characteristically, one of the most violently overwritten. And the motivation for this scene is unfortunately too closely tied up to a really bad scene—the dream sequence, in which the playwright permitted the valid human emotion of homesickness to slop over into patent sentimentalism, with the hero on the island holding long conversations with his sleeping mother and sweetheart in America.

Mr. Anderson wanted badly to make an affirmative statement about the war, and he has succeeded in doing so. We need to be told, over and over again, that this is a just war; a war in which it is a privilege to fight, or die; a war that demands action, fighting, sacrifice to the utmost. And Mr. Anderson is closer to the mainstream of American understanding when he states these facts.

A BETTED brilliantly by Howard Bay, the designer, whose sets possess a dignity worthy a great work of art, Lem Ward, the director, has sensitively projected every value the author gave him and many of his own. He has made you believe, at moments, in characters the author's words do not project, sheerly through his handling of a cast of generally mediocre performers. For compared with Aline MacMahon, who is excellent, the other players are merely adequate. The Quizz West of William Prince and his sweetheart (Mary Rolfe) are pleasant but unexciting figures against a neutral background. The southern boy, as played by James Monks, is a real character—drawn much larger than life because Mr. Anderson, in some way, sees this character as his spokesman. He is called Frances Marion and is a descendant of Patrick Henry. He is a drunkard and a weakling, redeemed (melodramatically but unconvincingly) by some inherited (?) spark of American integrity, when the final choice is made. Martin Ritt is amusing in a small role; Joann Dolan, as a juke girl, is exactly right; and George Matthews, Grover Burgess, and Joven Rola carry conviction as the top sergeant, the hired hand, and the Filipino nurse.

The Eve of St. Mark is a great advance over Mr. Anderson's *Candle in the Wind*, *Journey to Jerusalem*, and *Key Largo*, and even when it is not sufficiently explicit about the war or its characters, it is moving and deserving of respect. ALVAH BESSIE.