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#### NEW MASSES

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Enclosed please find \$10 for two one-year subscriptions. Of the following choice of books, Oboler Omnibus, by Arch Oboler; Sowing the Wind, by Martha Dodd; African Journey, by Eslanda Goode Robeson; The Patern of Soviet Power, by Edgar Snow; Dragon Harvest, by Upton Sinclair; A Street in Bronzeville, by Gwendolyn Brooks; Rickshaw Boy, by Lau Shaw. I should like the book listed below:

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Negro worker during the war, let him read pages 169 and 170. He will find out that while very important advances were made, there were 1,000,000 Negroes employed in domestic service in 1944, the same figure as in 1940. The number employed in industries such as steel and smelting, with heavy and dangerous work, had increased to twenty-five percent and thirty-three percent respectively. There was "late admittance" of Negroes into war industries. "Training, upgrading and promotion of Negroes generally lagged behind employment." This means that employers still clung to their discriminatory, divisive policies of hiring Negroes for the lowest paid jobs, or the heaviest and most dangerous. At the same time, by retarding their entry into war industry, they tried to make sure that the Negro workers would be the first fired when the layoffs came, or if retained, kept in the low-skill jobs.

Those who already know its value from previous issues of *Labor Fact Book* will need no further persuasion from a reviewer; for those who have not yet made use of it *Labor Fact Book* can be unreservedly recommended as a reference handbook of the highest quality in the most important area of American life.

GEORGE SQUIER.

### Three War Books

THIS IS WHERE I CAME IN, by Robert J. Casey. Bobbs Merrill. \$3.

SILVERSIDES, by Robert Trumbull. Holt. \$2.50.

GUERRILLA WIFE, by Louise Reid Spencer. Crowell. \$2.75.

NONE of these books need be bought and only one read. Casey and Trumbull have written their reports in weary journalese, which cannot be accepted as a substitute for English. Casey tells stories of a convoy and of the Normandy campaign. He concentrates upon "characters" and the "spectacle of death." Fortunately, his hero is Maj. Gen. Maurice Rose. His portrait of that great soldier will refute many an anti-Semite's argument. Trumbull's *Silversides* is so badly written that some alert publisher should give us a book worthy of the submarine service in its place.

A good war book must be based upon either wonder or understanding. Bill Mauldin's *Up Front* has that understanding. Mrs. Spencer's *Guerrilla Wife* has some of the quality of wonder. She was taken quite by surprise, like a Scarsdale matron discovering a snake at a garden party. Mrs. Spencer flees to the

edge of the Panay wilderness with a group of American mine employes and missionaries in order to escape internment by the Japanese. The group organizes itself into a replica of Scarsdale, even to church services, burnt roasts and bitchy remarks. The destruction of this community, Hopevale, by the Japanese has a nightmare reality that Mrs. Spencer's ingenuous style succeeds in conveying. In spite of her thoroughly middle-class attitude towards the native population, I feel you might enjoy this book. At least, you will understand the "good" American imperialist and his wife.

BILL AALTO.

### Healing a Sick Town

A CITY FOR LINCOLN, by John R. Tunis. Harcourt, Brace. \$2.

JOHN R. TUNIS' latest book, *A City for Lincoln*, is a boy's story that is entertaining and instructive not only to the young citizens for whom it is intended, but for anyone who enjoys a good tale. In it the ailments of a politically sick American town are attacked by the united efforts of labor, small businessmen, and independents organized into a Citizens' Committee, aided by the untiring interest and effort of high school boys and girls who have learned to have faith in honesty and democratic self-government.

A hot struggle takes place in which the progressive forces face a violently reactionary kept press, a Red-baiting campaign, a banker-dominated radio station, and a corrupt political machine out to steal ballot boxes and prevent citizens from exercising their franchise. The result is a new popular government, an end of big-shot wire-pulling, a start on municipal ownership of the local electric power plant, and the operation of a Juvenile Aid Bureau by the youngsters themselves.

The book has some faults, but none to diminish its interests. The total effect permits its hearty recommendation for all kids from the age of twelve upwards.

MACK ENNIUS.

### Southern Orator

SERGEANT S. PRENTISS, by Dallas C. Dickey. Louisiana State University Press. \$4.

THIS biography of a pre-Civil War Southern politician noted for his oratorical prowess is written by a professor of speech. The book, therefore, is devoted largely to rather technical and detailed reports of the mode of delivery, contents, and contemporary critiques of

# NEW MASSES

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the oratory. Also, and incidentally, it contains a treatment of local Mississippi politics from 1830 to 1850 written from the viewpoint (comparatively enlightened) of the Federalist standard historians to whom Jackson and the Loco-focos were anathema.

Such a viewpoint is necessary to any sympathetic handling of Prentiss who was a bank director, large landholder, slaveholder, real estate speculator, newspaper proprietor—and a leading Southern Whig, whose personal letters stated that he had "lost confidence in the people," and was certain that since Jackson "the Republic no longer exists." In spite of Professor Dickey's specialized interests and ideological preferences the essential facts concerning Prentiss' considerable role in the economic and political life of ante-bellum Mississippi appear in this volume.

HERBERT APTHEKER.

## Worth Noting

TO PHOTOGRAPHERS: The Photo League is collecting photographs for an exhibition on race relations which it is preparing for the Independent Citizens Committee. Send photos you think could be used in such a show to the Photo League at 30 E. 29th St., New York 16.

WITH the statement that "the most effective method of promoting mutual confidence between the peoples of the US and the USSR is to give the Russian people English language classics that reflect America's heritage and way of life," the publisher Bennet Cerf, of Random House, opened the current Russian War Relief drive for books for the depleted foreign language libraries of the USSR. In cooperation with the drive the Stanley Theater of New York, which exhibits Soviet films, will accept three books as admission to its current feature, *We Accuse*.

THE American Negro Theater, which produced, among other important plays, the hit *Anna Lucasta*, is beginning a new season in a new and larger playhouse at 15 W. 126th Street, New York. It has set itself a goal of 5,000 sponsors in its current subscription drive.



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## IRWIN SHAW'S "THE ASSASSIN"

Reviewed by Matt Wayne

**I**N *The Assassin*, based on the death of Darlan, Irwin Shaw brought to Broadway his most ambitious play.

Mr. Shaw has often manifested a kind of pride in the workings of paradox, and in the Darlan episode contradictions abounded. For while the deepest hatred of the Vichyites was felt by the people of the Left, it was a young Royalist who fired the shot that killed the traitor Darlan. In the operations of the murder plot Shaw apparently thought he had found the significant fact of political progress in our time: namely, that political affiliation in its effect upon a man's social role is secondary, his personal quality as a human being being the crucial determinant.

In eight scenes, or episodes, *The Assassin* sketches Mr. Shaw's interpretation of what happened just before and after the American landing in North Africa—the hopes of the underground that Darlan will meet his just fate, their sabotage against Vichy's defenses, Darlan's mistrust of his high command and their machinations to make themselves acceptable to the Americans, the scandalous adoption of Darlan by the Americans, and his reign of terror against the underground. Shaw's contribution to history is an anti-Darlan general who manages the release from jail of a young Royalist underground worker whom he instigates to murder Darlan, on the promise that another man—a tubercular doomed to die in three months of his disease—will be substituted for him on the gallows. After the assassination, the substitution plan is discovered by Darlan's henchman and the Royalist goes to his death. At the last moment the henchman offers the Royalist freedom if he will tell who planned the murder; but this offer is refused on the ground that the henchman will put himself forward as the savior of law and order and thus succeed Darlan.

In the absence of other evidence one has no right to quarrel with Mr. Shaw's reconstruction of history. It is plausible enough and provides the counterplay of plot that a good historical melodrama requires. And yet, as it came across, *The*

*Assassin* was diffuse, mannered and lifeless.

At the core of the trouble would seem to be Mr. Shaw's attitude toward political beliefs. Throughout one is aware of the playwright's refusal to face political conviction as a fact of life. Thrown together in the underground is a group of people representing many shades of opinion, from Communist to Royalist. It is Mr. Shaw's thesis that what matters is not so much their political views but a uniting nobility of character—their "quality." One cannot deny that there are men in every party who possess this "quality," who are brave and self sacrificing. One must deny, however, that such qualities obliterate all differences between men of conflicting views. The main source of conflict in the play was certainly meant to be between the Underground and the Royalist, who is rather an anomaly amongst them. One had a right to expect then that this conflict find expression in their conflicting aims. Instead we have high-flown verbiage which substitutes for the real argument that must have taken place among these people. With their true conflicts bypassed, Shaw's "solutions," through common personal virtues, become unconvincing and unreal. Like much of current sophisticated anti-political writing about politics, which finds history's turns called almost wholly by personalities, the end product is sentiment, not the realism it pretends to. The play fails, in short, because it is not the truth about the people involved.

Aside from this serious thematic

weakness the play suffers from a double focus. The constant shifting of scene from the French high command to the Underground serves a narrative purpose, but adds little to the central issue of the play—the Underground versus the Royalist. Moreover, since the playwright has not squarely faced the problems he has raised between Royalist and the Left, nothing is really proved by the Royalist's final self-sacrifice, since it is first and foremost a political act and not a temperamental act. By neglecting the issue Mr. Shaw consigned the last half of his play to the bare melodrama of the execution of a political assassin. And since the conclusion was foregone and the Royalist's inner conflicts undeveloped, it offers neither suspense nor enlightenment.

Martin Gabel has directed the production, in the conspiratorial manner of the writing, and thus supported the play's values, such as they are. Harold Huber had the most interesting part—a plainclothesman—and kept it just this side of corn with much dexterity and ease. The Royalist was shakily done by Frank Sundstrom, who was too old for the part and seemed confused, his moments of repulsion and admiration for the Underground not being sharply defined. Too, the part required more blood than he seems to have. Boris Aronson made very beautiful sets whose colors were keyed to the action.

### Whose Bad Taste?

**B**OSLEY CROWTHER, movie critic of the *New York Times*, filled his column recently with speculations concerning the "adult film." He comes to the conclusion, after asking himself what he means by an adult film, that such films have limited appeal and die in the large mass-audience houses. As an example he points to *Love on the Dole*, whose "fidelity in exposing poverty and despair within a British working class family during the black depression fifteen years ago is not in the mass-favored spirit." The assumption then is that the movie audiences do

