



Drawn by Theodor Scheel.

V. I. LENIN -- APRIL 23, 1870-JAN. 21, 1924 --

"Art belongs to the people. Art must have its deepest roots in the vast creative masses. It must be understood and loved by the masses. Art must organize the feeling, thought and will of the masses . . . let us always have the workers and peasants in mind. For their sake let us learn economics and arithmetic; let us develop in the field of art and culture."

Notes of the Month

By MICHAEL GOLD

Dramatic Critics—My remarks about N. Y. dramatic critics in in this column last month brought a few pale drops of blood from some of those gentlemen. Their comments were typical. Mr. Busybody Winchell answered with an epigram: "Ah, nuts!" A writer in *Zit's Weekly* proved as brilliant. His comment was: "Hooley, Mr. Gold, hooley!" Robert Garland on the *Telegram*, a musical comedy scholar, demonstrated profoundly that I had praised J. Brooks Atkinson of the *Times* because Mr. Atkinson had said some friendly things about my play. These answers have convinced me that there is a burning need for someone to organize a League to Abolish Dramatic Critics.

They serve no useful purpose that I can see. The commercial managers certainly do not want them. When a man has sunk \$20,000 in a play, he can afford nothing but a favorable attitude in the press toward his gamble. The newspaper owners certainly want to give this to him in exchange for his advertising, but cannot always control their critics.

A solution would be if the publicity agents of the various plays were to write the dramatic criticisms for the newspapers to print. This reform could easily be effected by the commercial managers. Let them band together and threaten to withdraw their advertising if it is not done. It is sure to be done.

Serious and worth-while plays that occasionally risk a trip through the Broadway stockyards have never been helped by the dramatic critics, and will manage to exist without them.

New Playwrights—When we founded the New Playwrights' Theatre, I insisted from the start that no dramatic critics be permitted within our doors. I knew what they would do to any new, uncrystallized venture like ours. I was overruled by the other playwrights, with the result that for a year and a half we were submitted to a crossfire of banal, venomous, personal abuse. Each month we were forced to read banal irrelevances as to how uncomfortable our seats were, and how amateurish and unlike *Abie's Irish Rose* in structure and intent were our plays.

Never a word of mature blame, praise or advice. We were not Ibsens or Gorkys, God knows, but we were working in that tradition. The critics judged us in the tradition of George Jean Nathan and the musical comedies. Result: they wiped us out. They have recently wiped out the Provincetown Players and the Irish Players. Every other group of this kind that lifts its head will meet the same fate unless it locks its doors against the critics for the first three years of its experimentation. The Provincetown Players managed to build a Eugene O'Neill theatre only by refusing admission to the critics for years.

The Long View—None of these critics seem to have the creative eye. None of them seems to have retained enough his youth to understand that there is more enduring worth in a chaotic sketch by Sean O'Casey than in all the cream-puff perfections of a Noel Coward or Preston Sturges. They haven't the long view. They haven't any view but that of box-office. They are jaded, corrupt boulevardiers. The majority of them have never seen a play out of New York, or read a history of the theatre. They are ignorant, weary men. They hate their jobs; they hate the theatre. They have no courage. Noisy bell-wethers like the fat Alexander Woolcott or the chorus-girlish G. J. Nathan have always intimidated them. They have little individuality; read one, and you have read all. They are a shallow clique, but the beginning playwright must run their gauntlet.

It is better not to write plays in America.

Or the way out for a revolutionary playwright is to join in building up some kind of Workers' Theatre that will keep itself free of these Broadway critics, and their Broadway theatres, managers, and audiences.

This has been done in England, Germany, Japan, Czecho-Slovakia and other countries; it can be done here. The future belongs to the workers' theatres; the rest have begun to stink of the inevitable grave.

Hell on the Hudson—I was born and raised in New York, but hate the town. So does everyone else who has to live in it. We live here because we are fascinated by it in the way a coke-fiend is drawn to his poison. Or we have to make our living here. New York is a monstrosity born out of the capitalist system. It has no sound economic base for existence. One of the first acts of a workers revolution would be to de-centralize New York. The city would inevitably shrink to man-size under a co-operative social order. Those dreamy-eyed architects and Parisian futurists who gloat over skyscrapers and love to imagine a city of nothing but vast skyscrapers and five or six street levels, etc., are not only foolish but ignorant. They are fools because human beings cannot permanently live in this kind of artificial prison. They are ignorant because they do not see that skyscrapers are made necessary only by capitalist competition, and simply will not be useful in a real civilization; the workers' Republic.

As I write, I can hear the riveters clattering next door on a new skyscraper. The bedlam has been going on for weeks. It is the harsh, cruel song of New York. It poisons the sleep of thousands of people, pulls down their health. There are few healthy people in New York. It is almost impossible to bring up children here. The workers who must jam the subways twice a day certainly have no desire for a more futuristic New York. No one in hell longs for hotter flames. Yet New York remains the most interesting city in America. It has a revolutionary spirit. Its workers have always been the vanguard of the labor movement. Its intellectuals have been less provincial than the book-readers in the rest of America. Why must hell always be more interesting than heaven? Just the same, I would give all the skyscrapers in New York for a chance to be fishing now, or to be riding a good horse up the side of a Mexican mountain.



Solidarity—Stand by the seven men of Gastonia.

Drawn by Hugo Gellert.

The London Conference—The diplomats are meeting in London next month for another discussion on disarmament. Which means we are another step nearer the next world-war. Duellists always confer before battle, and choose their weapons. Battleships are outmoded; the international duellists are trying to effect an agreement to fight with airplanes and submarines. It is a means of modernizing their armaments, not abolishing them. It is a means of stabilizing capitalism by cutting down the tax-rate. There have been many such conferences. This time the chief comedian is Ramsay MacDonald. The British Empire is sinking. He is trying to save it by an alliance with America against Europe. The British imperial fleet is in the way. He is willing to sacrifice it and offers parity to America. How blind is the human race, not to hear under all the fine disarmament phrases the big guns of the next war! The old diplomacy is out of favor; the new diplomacy has learned to speak the pious vague Ramsayan rhetoric. It leads to mass-murder just the same. It is quite possible that the Christian bellwether of the next world war will be this same Ramsay. He is another Woodrow Wilson. He is being adored by the same people who killed Germans in the last war for such beautiful liberal reasons. Ramsay, whose government shoots down workers in India, Egypt, China, whose aviators bomb native villages in Mesopotamia and Africa! Ramsay, prince of peace, and king of an empire of slaves! Does anyone imagine England could hold its empire without guns, or that Ramsay wants give up that empire?

This is a conference, not to abolish armament, but to abolish obsolete armament. It is also a conference whose subtle, unexpressed object is to form new alliances for the next world war. Watch it.

Prohibition—The Volstead act is a joke, of course. No one respects it, no one obeys it. It will inevitably be modified. We will be drinking in public again, instead of from the hip. Good. But what of it? What makes the liberal journalists so emotional about Prohibition? It is this theme alone that snaps the hard-boiled Mr. Mencken out of his universal cynicism, and makes him write with the passion and pathos of a Danton. It is this subject that infuriates the mild, whimsical Heywood Broun so that he begins shouting of barricades and red flags. It is the one subject the liberal intellectuals of America feel most intensely and personally. We others are being constantly amazed by their antics. Can gin be so important to an intellectual? They call us fanatics when we protest against the suppression of Haiti, or the industrial barbarities in the south, or the corrupt leadership in the A. F. of L. But do we rant half as much about these serious matters as they do over gin? Really, it's enough to turn one into a Prohibitionist. There's something faintly silly about the man who can

remain Olympian when coal miners are being shot down by State troopers, but who suddenly bursts into flaming revolt because his gin is censored. Let's have the gin, if possible, but let's not mistake a bottle of Gordon Dry for the Holy Grail. The thing has become a burlesque. Imagine an army of idealists, marching as to war behind their shuffling, big-footed but noble-hearted General H. Broun. Their eyes shine with the spirit of sacrifice. Their throats are parched, but they sing their sacred battle-hymn as they go: "How Dry I Am." The drums beat, the brasses blow, and above the bristling ranks of bayonets floats a banner with a strange device: "We Want Our Gin!"

It's funny, that's all. If one must fight Prohibition, one ought to do it humorously. No solemn crusade can be arranged for such a cause. Even the kids would laugh.

The repeal of the Volstead act will not change America by a single fundamental. Hoover will still be in the White House, miners will still die of black-damp and government bullets, two million children will still be slaving in cotton mills and beet fields, forty million wage workers will still be earning yachts, pearls and Parke avenue apartments for their bosses.

Europe has no Volstead act, but the masses of common people suffer under the same economic slavery as they do here. One can drink gin in England at every streetcorner, but two million unemployed haven't had the price of a pint of bitters for over ten years.

Let's not be trivial.

Literature—Fiction and poetry are two forms of literature that are slowly dying to-day. One does not need to theorize; a glance at any publisher's list confirms the fact. With the growth of the scientific attitude, people are beginning to feel that reality is more miraculous and romantic than all the inventions of the novelists and poets.

It is not materialism that does it. The speculations of Einstein contain more of the sublime, certainly, than whole mountains of Love lyrics, with their feeble biological obsessions.

Facts are the new poetry. The proletarian writer will cut away from the stale plots, love stories, ecstasies and verbal heroisms of the fictionists of the past. He will work with facts. Facts are his strength. Facts are his passion. He will not worry too much about form. Facts create their own new form. Aeroplanes are beautiful, but not because some artist planned this beauty. Utility created it.

Utility, propaganda, will create a beauty of form in the proletarian poems, plays and novels of the future. In Soviet Russia this is already true. The great Russian films are all propaganda films built up on significant facts.