THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

THE LIVING NEWSPAPER : HISTORY, PRODUCTION AND FORM

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Hull

by

Stuart Cosgrove, B.A.

September 1982

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although academic dissertations are invariably presented as the work of an individual, paradoxically, they are quite the opposite. I would like to thank the numerous people who have helped with their time, memories, observations and perspectives. My most sincere thanks to Mike Walton and Ralph Willett for their supportive and demanding supervisory assistance. I am indebted to the academic and scholarly help of the following friends and colleagues: Steve Bamlett, Arnold Goldman, Teresa Grimes, Jenny Hargreaves, Jim Hillier, Pete Mathers, Tony Meech, John O'Connor, Tony Pearson, Don Watson and Peter Weston. In the course of my research work, many Living Newspaper practitioners were generous with their time in interviews and correspondence. I would like to thank John Allen, Mordecai Gorelik, Abram Hill, Harry Lessin, Herbert Marshall, John Randolph and Arnold Sundgaard for their useful contributions. The thesis could not have been completed without the support of Don Roy and the Drama Department of Hull University; the very special staff of the Federal Theatre Research Centre (particularly the late Elizabeth Walsh); the energetic assistance of the staff of New York Public Library's Theatre Collection; the financial support of the Scottish Education Authority, and the careful typing skills of Barbara Debney.

My sincere thanks to my closest friends and family who encouraged me over the years with their laughs, songs and commitment. I am indebted to Al, M, Tam, Mike, Rab, Stuart, Dave, Janette, Muz, Caesar, Simon and the troops of the tartan army - here, there, everywhere. Finally, my very special thanks and love go out to three women; Lorraine Brown who helped me in every way she could during my visits to the U.S.A.; Carol Cooper who was tolerant and supportive over years of living with the anxieties of incomplete work, and my mum who encouraged me in ways that words can never express.

I would like to dedicate my work to the memory of two great men - the late John McLean, and my dad Stuart Cosgrove - who both died working for the working-class of Scotland.

Stuart Cosgrove 1982.

C O N T E N T S

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.B.C.A.	-	Army Bureau of Current Affairs (U.K.).
B.U.P.	-	Bristol Unity Players.
C.C.C.	-	Civilian Conservation Corps.
C.P.(U.S.A.)	-	Communist Party of the United States of America.
C.I.O.	-	Congress of Industrial Organizations.
D.A.T.B.	-	Deutscher Arbeitertheater Bund/German Workers' Theatre League.
D.D.O.C.	-	Workers' Dramatic Society of Czechoslovakia.
FEKS	-	Factory of the Eccentric Actor.
F.T.P.	-	Federal Theatre Project.
G.W.T.G.	-	Glasgow Workers' Theatre Group.
H.U.A.C.	-	House Committee on Un-American Activities.
K.P.D.	-	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands/German Communist Party.
LEF	-	Left Front of Arts.
L.O.W.T.	-	League of Workers' Theatres (U.S.A.).
N.T.L.	-	New Theatre League (U.S.A.).
P.R.O.T.	-	The Union of Proletarian Theatres of Japan.
ROSTA	-	The Russian Telegraph Agency.
T.R.A.M.	-	Theatre of Working Youth (Russia).
T.V.A.	-	Tennessee Valley Authority.
W.A.A.	-	Workers Alliance of America.
W.I.R.	-	Workers' International Relief/Internationale Arbeiter Hilfe.
W.L.T.	-	Workers' Laboratory Theatre (U.S.A.).
W.P.A.	-	Works Progress Administration.
W.T.M.	-	Workers' Theatre Movement of Great Britain.

In keeping with common practice in the thirties, the Federal Theatre Project is variously referred to as the Federal Theatre, the F.T.P., and the Project.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Photographic plates from page 215 to page 224.

INTRODUCTION : DEFINITIONS AND DIRECTIONS

What is a Living Newspaper?

> *"Combine the newspaper and the theatre and to hell with the traditions of both."*[1]

> *"The script differs from a conventional play in that it is not 'written' as a play is written; it is reported .... The reporters of the Living Newspaper are not permitted to invent anything, or to arrange. They cannot choose a climax or a moral. They take the news exactly as it is and prepare it for the stage."* [2]

> *"The Living Newspaper was a social theatre and it did have a strong editorial point of view .... The point was to break into new forms .... and into a more direct communication with ideas."*[3]

In transgressing the boundaries that allegedly separate factual phenomena and fictional representation, the Living Newspaper has always been one of the most contentious forms of twentieth century theatre. By blurring the distinctions between politics and performance, in its commitment to making the news theatrically dynamic, the Living Newspaper has always resisted simple definition. Its methodologies have changed and developed over a period of more than sixty years; at times the Living Newspaper has been brazenly partisan in its representation of political identifications, and at other times it has been more objective and detached in its investigations. Perhaps more than any other cultural form, it thrives on the immediate demands of a major social crisis. The Living Newspaper is a drama of revolution, civil war and economic depression: a theatre of political flashpoints.

The Living Newspaper is invariably associated with the progressive aspects of New Deal culture, and particularly with the unique work of the Federal Theatre Project (1935-39). Throughout the period of the Depression in the U.S.A., the Living Newspaper occupied an important role at the vanguard of aesthetic innovation, consistently extending the limits of what was permissible and vehemently campaigning on behalf of the

disadvantaged members of society. In trying to rescue the suppressed history of the Living Newspaper in the post-war period, John Gassner, the prestigious theatre historian, reaffirmed its relationships with the Federal Theatre.

> *"Since people in the theatre are fickle and have short memories, the "living newspaper" has been all but forgotten in professional theatre circles. But it was surely the one original contribution to dramatic art to be made by our stridently modern life in America."*[4]

The American birthright of the Living Newspaper has virtually become a truism of theatre history. But its origins go back far beyond the years of the Depression in the U.S.A. to the seminal years of social and artistic revolution in Russia.

The practical and organizational origins of the Living Newspaper were located in the Bolshevik government's attempts to establish a vast apparatus of information, news, education and propaganda. From these early beginnings, the Living Newspaper had to be flexible in ways that the conventional play could not. It had to respond to the constant flow of information and propaganda, and find ways to disseminate that material to a geographically vast and culturally complex nation. Kirill Kachalov, one of the earliest exponents of the Living Newspaper, argued that it was precisely this flexibility and contemporaneity that distinguished the Living Newspaper from more traditional dramatic forms. *"A play has a smaller range of themes and is not sufficiently flexible to keep in step with the issues of the day."*[5] In developing alongside agitprop practices of every conceivable kind, the Living Newspaper began to assume the characteristics of revolutionary performance, and literally became a montage of scenic attractions. Its flexibility, brevity and mobility made the Living Newspaper the most appropriate dramatic form for the campaigning agit-trains of the revolution, and its responsiveness to all kinds of political subjects allowed issues such as collectivization,

personal hygiene and international affairs to be contained within one theatrical bulletin.

As the Living Newspaper spread throughout Central Europe, via the organizations of the international workers' theatre movement, it increasingly moved towards the dramatization of a single political subject. By the late thirties, the major Living Newspapers of the Depression stage in the U.S.A. had virtually abandoned theatrical eclecticism in favour of a more precise and detailed form of investigative theatre.

> *"The Living Newspaper is a dramatization of a problem - composed in greater or lesser extent of many news events, all bearing on the one subject and interlarded with typical but non-factual representations of the effect of these news events on the people to whom the problem is of great importance."* 6

To the audiences of the Depression, their own immediate economic and environmental problems provided the material for a campaigning theatre of social reform. The Living Newspaper passed into the long journalistic tradition of investigative reformism and extended the theatre's concerns into new and progressive territory.

By the time the Living Newspaper had established itself as the New Deal's most dynamic form of theatrical expression, its modes of presentation were already well developed. The time, date and location of dramatic action were established by the amplified Voice of the Living Newspaper, who interrupted and commented upon stage events, sometimes to offer a different perspective, at other times to take sides with the disadvantaged. The scenic action was a mixture of different theatrical strategies, in which projected films, maps and statistics illustrated the dramatic rendering of a factual news item. Within any production a whole series of different devices could be used to give dramatic impetus to the facts. Satire, puppetry, visual projection, shadowgraphic acting, crowd scenes, and a fluid style of space-staging, in

which characters were isolated by precise lighting plots, were all brought together within a single production.

The Living Newspaper has always had close associations with the developing apparatus of mass communication, and at certain moments has been directly compared to the cinema, radio and newsreel presentation. In Britain, where the Living Newspaper briefly developed alongside the Unity Theatre movement, these comparisons were made explicit.

> *"What is a Living Newspaper? As the name indicates it is a collection of facts, newspaper reports, statistics, extracts from books etc. produced in a living (i.e. theatrically dramatic) form. A Living Newspaper is a synthesis of newspaper (not the Daily Mail sort), play and film. Its technique is similar to that of film as it uses fade outs and runs from scene to scene."*[7]

The formal similarities between radical theatre and the cinema were by no means unique to the Living Newspaper. On the contrary, they were part of a general movement within political theatre, which V.E. Meyerhold referred to as *"the cinefication of the theatre"*,[8] and Erwin Piscator predicted would become *"the theatre of the future."*[9] At the ideological basis of these revolutionary attitudes was a general dissatisfaction with the political and analytical capabilities of illusionism. In the theatre of Meyerhold, Piscator, Brecht and the Living Newspaper dramatists, there was a shared commitment to working with new forms of stagecraft and a strong conviction that only anti-illusionist theatre practice could adequately dramatize the social causes of human experience.

The Living Newspaper irrefutably belongs to a materialist tradition within modern drama.

> *".... it is the job of modern theatre to break through the technological barriers of decadent stagecraft as well as the ideological barriers of decadent thought. Modern theatre has already broken through many of these barriers - both in the technical and ideological sense, but .... the theatre is still dominated by characters pitting "one psychological trait against another psychological trait", with each conflict taking place inside a more or less traditional atmospheric shell of wood, canvas and paint.*

> *The Living Newspaper, on the other hand, can confidently say that it has attempted - and more often than not succeeded - in transcending these limits. It has peopled its stage with interesting characters but they are the physical, human manifestation of forces that are larger and more important than individual psychology. They are individuals whose psychology is, in fact, the very product of these forces."*[10]

Like all other forms of materialist culture, the main purpose of the Living Newspaper is to convey to its audience an understanding of the causal workings of social reality by operating in the areas of pleasure, knowledge and political action. Throughout the history of the Living Newspaper, from the revolutionary theatre in Russia to the literacy campaigns of Latin America, the principles of pleasure, knowledge and political action have always been the most evident. The point at which the Living Newspaper surrenders any one of these principles, it calls its right to exist into question.

The contours of the Living Newspaper have been shaped by the motion of twentieth century history. This thesis traces and comments upon the major historical developments of the Living Newspaper and breaks with previous studies by seeing it as an international phenomenon, which emerged in the U.S.A. after a short but fundamental period of origin in Europe. In stressing these European antecedents, the thesis locates the Living Newspaper within anti-illusionist theatre and specifically within a materialist tradition that politically repudiated the forms and ideologies of dramatic naturalism. At no point is the thesis tempted to apologize for a dramatic form that has generally resided on the sociological perimeters of culture, in that grey area where political action and dramatic performance meet and overlap. Instead, the thesis sees this feature as one of the Living Newspaper's most enduring strengths. The dialectics of culture and society have opened up new and more democratic notions of creativity and performance, the Living Newspaper has contributed to and benefited from that progress.

The arrangement and organization of the thesis is broadly chronological, beginning with the Living Newspaper's emergence in revolutionary Russia, and culminating in a provisional examination of the most recent manifestations of newspaper theatre in Latin America. However, chronological order is not adhered to absolutely - at certain specific points the thesis compromises on the use of chronology in order to clarify its arguments. Chapter One examines the revolutionary origins of the Living Newspaper and traces its development alongside the major achievements of Russia's vigorous revolutionary culture. After establishing the Living Newspaper's emergence as a popular and political form of proletarian theatre, Chapter One goes on to examine the development of the Living Newspaper in Central Europe. It finishes at a critical stage in history, when the emerging threat of fascism forced the practitioners of the radical theatre either underground or into exile. At this crucial juncture the Living Newspaper became a form of clandestine theatre, confined to the dangers of secret performance.

The following chapter considers the emergence of the Living Newspaper in the U.S.A. and examines its further development within the context of severe economic depression. This chapter concentrates on the place of workers' theatre and immigrant culture in the development of the Living Newspaper, and documents its earliest associations with the Federal Theatre Project. Chapter Three concentrates on a specific moment in Living Newspaper history. It examines the immediate context of radical union activity and argues that the wave of strikes in the middle years of the thirties was a crucial factor in the development of the Living Newspaper. At this stage in the thesis, careful consideration is given to the tensions within the Federal Theatre and the ideological shifts that saw the Living Newspaper pass from being a militant form of workers' theatre, to becoming a mature form of social reformism. Chapter Four

examines the Living Newspaper as a form of New Deal culture and traces its extension into areas of regional theatre practice. The fifth chapter records and analyses the events leading up to the disbandment of the Federal Theatre Project, and considers the residual dispersal of the Living Newspaper in the U.S.A. In order to maintain a clear historical trajectory and an international perspective. Chapter Five culminates in an examination of the progressive theatre in Britain in the thirties, and particularly on the influence that the social theatre of the U.S.A. had on Britain's attempt to generate a new Living Newspaper movement.

The subsequent development of Living Newspaper dramaturgy in Latin America has given rise to a number of important formal variations, which highlight the complexities of researching and producing newspaper theatre. In recognition of the critical importance of authorship within cultural production, Chapter Six examines the ways in which the journalistic and pedagogic impulses within the Living Newspaper have shaped its production and form. The brief and selective consideration of the Literacy theatres in Latin America is therefore presented as part of a conceptual study, in which the three keywords of the title - history, production and form - come together, to illuminate the Living Newspaper's break with individual authorship. The final two chapters examine the Living Newspaper within a conceptual framework and recognize its place within the general movement against naturalism.

The thesis follows a straightforward developmental pattern, proceeding from historical and contextual examination to a more conceptual and theoretical study of Living Newspaper drama. It negotiates a balance between empirical research, which draws upon a recently discovered body of primary material and a retrospective interpretation that draws on recent debates within cultural studies.

In recognizing the Living Newspaper's place within the rich and complicated history of anti-illusionist theatre, the thesis acknowledges that it is probably the most ephemeral form within that tendency. In committing itself to the dramatization of the news, the Living Newspaper has to accept its humble status as disposable theatre, but paradoxically the infinite complexity of current affairs also gives the Living Newspaper a durability that few other dramatic forms can claim. In order to maintain a perspective on this strange paradox, the thesis favours the past tense (as if talking about yesterday's news) but realizes that the Living Newspaper is very much alive. It is a study of a dramatic form that is both trapped and liberated by its own contemporaneity.

> "*.... one important difference which may comfort you is the fact that it is not supposed to be thrown open to all eternity. It is meant only for our own day, precisely for our own day: which admittedly isn't a cheerful one.*"[11]

Notes to Introduction

1. M. Watson. "The Living Newspaper", New Theatre, June 1936, p. 8.

2. "Editing the Living Newspaper", Federal Theatre Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 16. Housed in the Federal Theatre Research Centre.

3. Joe Losey quoted in A. Goldman, "Life and Death of the Living Newspaper Unit", Theatre Quarterly, Vol. III, No. 9, January-March 1973, p. 76.

4. J. Gassner, The Theatre in Our Times, Crown Publishers, New York, 1954, p. 80.

5. P. Yershov, Comedy in the Soviet Theatre, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1956, p. 27.

6. A. Arent, "The Technique of the Living Newspaper", Theatre Arts, XXII, November 1938, p. 821.

7. The Unity Theatre Handbook, 1938, housed in the British Museum, London.

8. V. Meyerhold, "The Reconstruction of the Theatre", in Meyerhold on Theatre, ed. and trans. E. Braun, Methuen, London, 1969, p. 255.

9. E. Piscator, "The Theatre of the Future", Tomorrow, No. 1, 1942, pp. 1-6. Reprinted in Erwin Piscator, an Arts Council of Great Britain Exhibition Catalogue, London, 1970, pp. 54-58.

10. "Techniques Available to the Living Newspaper Dramatist", by the staff of the New York Living Newspaper Unit, housed in the Federal Theatre Research Centre (see appendix).

11. B. Brecht, The Messingkauf Dialogues, Methuen, London, 1965, p. 99.

CHAPTER ONE : ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Revolutionary Theatre and the Cultural Origins of the Living Newspaper

> *It was at the time when trainloads of freezing people in transit were drinking locomotives dry as if they were samovars.*
>
> *When people played skittles in front of the Hermitage...*
>
> *It was at the time when Petrograd was fluttering like a flag between memory and the hope that this memory held for the future.*
>
> *The flag was red... The air had been rarified by the Revolution. The whole city swam beneath the standard of October. The Revolution even caught the sails of those who had not understood it.*
>
> *The demand for a change in tradition was strengthened by the shabbiness of the old and its lasting connection with the old ways of thought.*[1]

The Russian Revolution still reverberates through the corridors of theatre history. Despite its immediate associations with the material austerity of famine, poverty and civil war, the revolution managed to unlock a surge of political and ideological energies that radically transformed the existing social order. The theatre, along with nearly every other social institution, was subjected to radical change. Its place within society, its internal hierarchies and its prevailing modes of organization were all challenged by the emerging ideas of the revolution. It was no longer possible for the theatre to sustain the values it had assumed in the 19th Century, for the reins of aesthetic creativity were now more firmly in the hands of a vanguard of theatre practitioners whose hostility to the culture of previous generations was often vehement and polemical.

In 1912, the Futurist declaration, "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste", ushered in a series of attacks on aesthetic orthodoxy.

> *"Only we are the face of our time. The horn of time trumpets through us in the art of the word. The past is crowded. The Academy and Pushkin are more incomprehensible than hieroglyphics. Throw Pushkin, Dosteovsky, Tolstoy, et al., et al., overboard from the Ship of Modernity."*[2]

Although the Futurists were always capable of this kind of excessiveness, their iconoclastic hostility to the art of the past also had a distinctly progressive dimension. In their public denouncement of *"the stigmas of... good taste"*,[3] the Futurists evinced an enthusiastic and partisan attitude to new forms of aesthetic creativity. This spirit found its expression in the poems of Vladimir Mayakovsky, in Alexander Rodchenko's posters, and even on the disposable packets of Kino cigarettes. Alongside the extravagant rhetoric of Futurism came 'the shock of the new' and the principles upon which revolutionary culture was based.

It was with the same sense of progressive creativity that V.E. Meyerhold broke with the established conventions of the Moscow Arts Theatre, to embark on years of theatrical experimentation. On 22nd November 1920, at an open debate on his production of The Dawn, Meyerhold encapsulated the essence of the new revolutionary culture in a single sentence.

"Perhaps we'll erect a trapeze and put our acrobats to work on it, to make their bodies express the very essence of our revolutionary theatre and remind us that we are enjoying the struggle we are engaged in."[4]

The theatre of the Russian Revolution was utopian in its aims and drew on an eclectic range of influences. The circus, gymnastics, sport, the new apparatus of cinema and the materiality of the construction industry, began to determine the style of performance in ways that would have been inconceivable in the previous century. The boundaries that separated theatre from other aesthetic and popular practices were disturbed and transgressed in what amounted to a new culture of formal fragmentation. As if challenging the very ontological basis of theatre, the new revolutionary movement systematically questioned the dominance of naturalist discourse. It was no longer possible to assume the primacy of text, or to be sure of formally consistent and logical narrative patterns. When Sergei Eisenstein and Sergei Tretyakov decided to stage a production of the play Gas Masks (1924) in a Moscow gas turbine plant,

it seemed as if the very institutional basis of theatre itself was being dismantled.[5] The revolution in the theatre was not simply a series of stylistic transformations but a radical renegotiation of forms, practices and ideologies. The Living Newspaper is irrefutably a product of those transformations.

The basic aesthetic and methodological principles of Living Newspaper are firmly grounded in the material realities of the revolution. Any attempt to make sense of this new dramatic form, must by necessity begin with the social and political contours of the revolution. It is impossible in such a restricted space to do justice to the complexities of revolutionary history, but in many respects the history of the Living Newspaper itself serves a useful metaphoric function.

In most socio-cultural histories of the revolution, the life of the poet and playwright Vladimir Mayakovsky is used as a convenient metaphor. The schema usually begins with the first anniversary of the October Revolution, when Meyerhold staged the premiere of Mayakovsky'srevolutionary satire Mystery Bouffe. The production took place on 7th November 1918 with Mayakovsky assuming an acting role. This historical collaboration is often seen as the first significant event within soviet revolutionary theatre, and Mystery Bouffe therefore becomes the first soviet revolutionary drama. Almost twelve years later, after his play The Bathhouse had been savagely criticised by the Leningrad press, Mayakovsky committed suicide. Ironically, the pistol he used to kill himself had previously been used as a prop in one of his few film ventures. His suicide, at least according to the biographical schema, signifies the tragic end of revolutionary culture and its suppression beneath the powerful dictates of 'socialist realism'. Although the schema offers itself as a neat, poignant and convenient metaphor, it tends to efface the complex ideological struggles that lay at the very foundations of the revolution. The shifting

history of the Living Newspaper (and Mayakovsky's place within it) is potentially a more adequate metaphor.[6]

First and foremost, the Living Newspaper emerged as a response to the political need and circumstances of the revolution. Its earliest manifestations came as part of the general enthusiasm for mass demonstrations and public spectacles. The demonstrations were generally public displays of support for the revolution, in which thousands of workers would march with placards and posters declaring their support. As the demonstrations became more centrally organised, they began to assume a theatrical dimension and became increasingly associated with mass revolutionary spectacles. The first soviet mass spectacle, The Overthrow of Autocracy, was performed by the dramaturgical workshop of The Red Army in Petrograd. Within a year, several other mass spectacles were staged in Moscow, either as events in themselves or as part of a mass demonstration. On 1st May 1920, the mass spectacle The Mystery of Freed Labour was staged in Moscow, and by then the theatrical dimension had begun to assume crucial importance. The spectacle was planned to celebrate the impending end to the civil war and the subsequent liberation of the workers. The participants carried posters and satirical figures; agit-wagons were drawn by horse through the streets, and simple forms of performance were discernible from the main demonstration.[7] The mass spectacles were in retrospect a means of celebration but also a cultural form that went beyond the 'spectacular':

> *"The festival is not something higher or lower than art. It was, and remains, a very important cultural form, building only on the living intercourse between human beings, unrestricted by objects or hierarchic structures... If history plays its part so to speak in a festival, it will develop by itself, surpass the dead past and the conservatism of the present, it will necessarily be directed towards the future. The ideal content of the festival is clear. But unlike art... the festival realises in a more active manner the aesthetic transformation of reality... it is situated at the junction of art and life."*[8]

On 7th November 1920 in Petrograd, over eight thousand people participated in The Storming of the Winter Palace, a mass re-enactment of history supervised by the established theatre director, Nickolai Evreinov. By the third anniversary of the October Revolution the priorities of mass culture and public demonstration were firmly established as part of a new theatrical landscape. The Living Newspaper clearly emerged out of the initiatives of this period, and was from the very beginning part of the strongest and most utilitarian tendency within Soviet Revolutionary practice; the culture of agitational-propaganda.[9]

The Living Newspaper and Agitational Propaganda

During the period of civil war, when the means of communication were relatively unsophisticated, the dissemination of propaganda and public information became fundamental to the revolution. The official journal of the Commissariat of Education and Enlightenment, Theatre Messenger, which was edited by Meyerhold, published a polemical essay by Anatol Lunacharsky, the Commissar of Education. It called for the urgent establishment and development of an entire network of theatres of revolutionary satire. In retrospect, Lunacharsky's essay, "Let us Laugh", was one of a series of official pronouncements between 1919-21 that encouraged the construction of a massive apparatus of propaganda and satire. This included agit-trains, agit-wagons, agit-ships and mobile theatre units whose major function was to take plays, films and demonstrations to the villages and Red Army encampments. Invariably, the work of these units had to contend with large scale illiteracy and had to devise means of communicating to an audience in ways that could be readily comprehended. *"In the theatre many new ways to stage propaganda were invented. Among these were "living newspapers" (staging news, diagrams, statistics), mass declamation, theatrical trials, mass spectacles (re-enacting recent historical events), and literary montages,*

combining documents, poetry, slogans and other texts."[10] The ROSTA (Russian Telegraph Agency) network was one of the primary means by which information could be relayed to outlying districts. The agency took responsibility for a poster campaign known as Window ROSTA which involved the activities of some of the Revolution's most able graphic artists, including Mayakovsky and Anton Lavinski in Moscow, and Vladimir Lebedev and Vladimir Kolzinski in Leningrad. The ROSTA artists designed and produced thousands of satirical and agitational posters which were displayed in department stores and in the stations of the major cities, and which decorated the agit-trains that travelled to the provinces and outlying peasant areas. The visual rhetoric of ROSTA art became almost synonymous with the satirical propaganda of the new forms of theatre. In its most partisan form the theatre of agitational propaganda was literally an animated poster with the same signifying features as a Mayakovsky sketch.

> *"Window ROSTA was a fantastic thing... It meant telegraphed news immediately translated into posters and decrees into slogans... It was a new form that spontaneously originated in life itself... It meant men of the Red Army looking at a poster before a battle and going to fight not with a prayer but a slogan on their lips."*[11]

The Window ROSTA and the Living Newspaper, quite apart from sharing similar systems of visual signification, were engendered by the same urgency and the same function. Throughout its history as a form of revolutionary theatre, the Living Newspaper maintains an urgent and utilitarian function. Quite categorically it served the necessary function of relaying news, information, propaganda and political pronouncements.

Although there can never be any precision about the exact circumstances that gave rise to the first public performance of a Living Newspaper, close attention has to be paid to official decrees and proclamations. In March 1919, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union issued a decree advocating a systematic dissemination of news and information as part of a national campaign against illiteracy.

It is undoubtedly one of a number of similar decrees issued during the early years of the revolution, but it categorically announces a simple and modest kind of Living Newspaper performance:

> *"For the illiterate, periodical readings must be arranged in the schools on the premises of the VOLOST SOVDEPA (small rural district Soviet of Deputies), in the reading huts, etc., for which purpose the departments of peoples (public) education with the assistance of the local party organization, create special circles of readers including the local teaching staff with obligatory readings by the literate elements (of society). The subjects of the readings should be the decrees and administrative decisions, together with specially published popular interpretations circulated by the centers (Party and Soviet), and articles from the nation's peasants which are being constantly revised. It is advisable to accompany such readings with visual aids by use of demonstrations assisted by cinematography (motion pictures), or magic lanterns (lantern slides), with the reading of fiction, and concert numbers for the purpose of attracting a large quantity of guests (audience)."*[12]

Almost all the defining features of Living Newspaper drama are present in this short and relatively unsophisticated extract from the decree. It advocates a range of important practices: the public demonstration and dissemination of news and information, a configuration of factual information with fictional inflections, the constant inclusion of new and updated information, the deployment of aesthetic approaches derived from the new apparatus of cinema, and an urgent theatre of social purpose. Although at this stage in its history the Living Newspaper was still raw and undeveloped, the guidelines laid down by this decree point towards a much more substantial form of theatre. As late as 1926, when Hallie Flanagan visited a peasant theatre outside Moscow, the remnants of this simple form of public dissemination were still in evidence:

> *"In a village hall near Moscow I watch a production entitled Finding Their Places, a play which I'm told was conceived by the peasants, though it suggests to me a crude version of Mayakovsky's Mystery Bouffe.*
>
> *We sit in the village hall, crowded to suffocation with stolid attentive peasants. The windows needless to say are hermetically sealed and the flickering oil lamps increase the aroma... The stage, at the end of the room, is separated from us by screens covered by wall newspapers so popular in Russia. These papers, written by hand in the schools, are the entr'acte diversion, some of the wits of the village reading portions aloud to the amusement of the rest."*[13]

But between the issue of the Central Committee decree in 1919 and Flanagan's trip to Russia, seven years later, the theatre witnessed a series of aesthetic and political transformations. It had literally gone through a period of profound re-examination.

By 1922 the revolution in the theatre was well under way. Meyerhold's production of The Magnificent Cuckold, in April of 1922, utilized constructivist stage setting and bio-mechanical systems of acting in a publicly declared attack on naturalist form. In the same year the FEKS group (Factory of the Eccentric Actor) published their first manifesto, Salvation in the Trousers of the Eccentric, and in the cinema Dziga Vertov completed his first kinopravda exercise. At least three tendencies within the revolutionary culture of this period find a point of intersection in the Living Newspaper. The productions Eisenstein staged at the Moscow Proletkult theatre, particularly The Wiseman (1923), demonstrated the appropriateness of montage as a formal approach to performance. The establishment of a network of clubs and studios provided an organizational framework within which proletarian culture could function, and within which the notion of 'production-art' could be sustained. These three tendencies, the formal, the organizational and the cultural are crucial to the history of the Living Newspaper in the revolutionary period. It was evidently a form of montage/production art performed by workers in specially constituted proletarian clubs.

The Living Newspaper and Proletarian Culture

> *"The self entertainment theatre has acquired the character of club performances... It should not be a surrogate for the theatre but a living poster, a living newspaper."*
>
> 14

The Living Newspaper had the explicit support of the revolutionary government's policies on proletarian culture and became the most popular form within amateur proletarian theatres in the period between 1923 and 1928. It was ideally suited to the modest surroundings of workers' clubs and was adaptable enough to dramatize local, national and international issues. The Living Newspaper was in fact a montage of attractions that could involve singing, projections, film clips, sketches, bulletins and statistical material. The problems of illiteracy, disease, hygiene, local agriculture, collectivisation and regional politics were common subjects. One of the most outrageous Living Newspapers to be performed in workers' clubs was The Most Energetic Workers Fight Against All Diseases, in which actors representing bacteria, diseases and boils of all shapes and sizes carried placards condemning insanitary conditions. The central dramatic action involved a struggle for supremacy between the energetic worker and a spirochete bug. This particular Living Newspaper was part of a national campaign to combat disease and was probably devised by one of the central agencies in Moscow, for performance in clubs and in the repertoire of agit-trains.[15]

By 1927 over seven thousand amateur clubs had been established throughout Soviet Russia. They formed an important function within proletarian culture as centres where workers and peasants could meet, converse and collaborate on artistic, poetical and theatrical projects. From its earliest beginnings as a heterogeneous gathering of intellectuals and cultural practitioners, the Lef (Left Front of Arts) group placed a strong emphasis on the necessary social function of workers' art.[16] They promoted the literature and theatre of fact by polemically demanding a culture of reportage and factography. The Living Newspaper clearly fulfilled Lef's criteria of factographic culture, and throughout the writings of leading Lef theorists, such as Sergei Tretyakov and Boris Arvatov, there are continual and quite explicit demands for factual forms

of production art:

> *"The Civil War was also a period of fierce struggle on the art front. The revolutionary Futurists and Com-Futs were not just a detachment of anti-traditionalists rushing in to conquer the tastes of the period. They flung art into the thick of revolutionary activity. They set the tone and held the hegemony in the field of aesthetic forms. Their innovations and projects, while not always fully realised, were significant and grandiose. Tatlin's Tower, Mayakovsky's Mystery Bouffe, the ROSTA posters and the RSFSR productions had in common ideas of the epoch as important and inspiring as those that gave rise to the worker's army and communist Saturday labour. The greatest achievement of left art in that period was the establishment of the principle of production art."*[17]

For Tretyakov, the principle of production art was not simply a utilitarian and materialist attitude towards cultural production, but a commitment to building a proletarian culture in which workers and peasants could participate. This ideal was only partially realised, and significantly it was in relationship to the amateur theatre movement. As several contemporary accounts of Russian theatre recorded, the Living Newspaper had begun as a simple recitation of news. In order to alleviate boredom it *"soon had recourse to music, singing, the chorus and above all to movement... Thus it became a true living newspaper which found its fullest expression in those little acts which utilized scenery and props. The development of this form was closely bound up with Blouse movements, travelling arts collectives,"* and with the consolidation of a stridently proletarian theatre movement in the major cities.[18] Most of the extant records of Soviet Living Newspapers (Zhivaya Gazeta)[19] make reference to either the Blue Blouse phenomenon or the pioneering productions directed by Meyerhold in Moscow. In June 1924, at the Fifth Congress of Comintern held in Leningrad, Meyerhold staged the political revue D.E. . It was an episodic montage of fifteen scenes, similar to the formal style of early Living Newspapers. The episodes all had their own declamatory subtitles - The Lackey of French Capital, The Fox-Trotting Europe and Comintern - but the revue resisted taking a single homogeneous subject as its framework. Each episode was interrupted by news items;

statistics and revolutionary slogans were projected on white screens, and excerpts from recent speeches by Lenin and Zinoviev were dispersed through the revue. The use of these various devices, the inclusion of factual news items, the overall methodology of episodic montage, and the deployment of megaphones places D.E. very firmly inside the perimeters of Living Newspaper drama.[20] The initial production of D.E., which moved to Moscow two weeks later, had a powerful impact on the progress of workers' theatre throughout Europe. Over and above the fact that the revue included Boris Zakhava (later to become director of the Vakhtangov Theatre) and Nickolai Okhlopkov in its cast, D.E. was attended by delegates from throughout Europe and the U.S.A. In an article written later in the decade and published in International Theatre, one of the delegates reflected on the importance of Meyerhold's work and its crucial role in spreading enthusiasm for proletarian cultural forms such as the Living Newspaper.

> *"The play D.E. ... goes far beyond the narrow limits of ordinary theatrical purposes. The influence of this play on a great number of mass amateur theatrical circles and theatres of Workers' Youth (TRAM) is still to be observed even at the present time. Living Newspapers presented in the various clubs are in most cases constructed on the principles of such revues."*[21]

The vigorous ideas that were so visible in Meyerhold's major revolutionary productions, were anxiously appropriated by a younger generation of practitioners. Among this generation was Sergei Yutkevitch who had been born in St. Petersburg in 1904 and was only fourteen at the time of the October Revolution. He became a founder member of FEKS at the age of eighteen, and along with several other young eccentricists set out to achieve the "*electrification of theatre*."[22] The term itself even conveyed the excessive energies of constructivism, satire and physical exuberance that were already woven into the very fabric of revolutionary culture. When Yutkevitch left FEKS to work with Eisenstein at the Moscow Proletkult, and to study under Meyerhold, he was unconsciously preparing

himself for a future in the partisan vanguard of the Soviet Blue Blouse movement. The eccentricism of FEKS and the utilitarianism of agitational propaganda were somehow brought together in a hyperbolic symphony of satire and information, which according to Yutkevitch *"did the can-can on the tightrope of logic"* and looked forward to a radically different social order.[23]

The Blue Blouse Movement and the Satirical Living Newspaper

It was in the context of this eclectic and satirical theatre culture that the first Blue Blouse group was formed in Moscow.[24] The initial impetus behind the group came from a class of student journalists at the Moscow Institute of Journalism, working under the direction of Boris Yuzhanin. From the very outset the Moscow Blue Blouses encouraged two particular tendencies within their work. Firstly, they consciously fostered the relationships between theatre and journalism that had initially given rise to their formation. Secondly, they set out to generate the cult of satirical excess that had been established by ROSTA and elsewhere in Soviet aesthetic practice. These two tendencies remained crucial to Living Newspaper drama from these early beginnings to its later history as a form of investigative theatre during the Depression in the United States.

By 1927 the Blue Blouse initiative had spread throughout Soviet Russia and at its height became a highly organised movement encompassing ten thousand people, mostly amateurs, but with a strong professional nucleus. Hallie Flanagan, who later became National Director of the Federal Theatre Project, witnessed several Blue Blouse presentations when she visited Russia on a Guggenheim fellowship. She remembered their *"powerful lithe and vibrant acting"* which had *"the precision of machines and the zeal of those who spread the faith."*[25] A typical Blue Blouse performance consisted of a parade through the audience followed by a series of sketches and

attractions. The presentation consisted of international and local news items arranged in a satirical style, utilizing speech, slogans, music, chants, acrobatics, eccentric dance, bio-mechanical gestures and a variety of visual devices drawn from the satirical repertoire of the ROSTA posters and agitational art. In keeping with the productions of Meyerhold in Moscow and Erwin Piscator in Berlin, Blue Blouse Living Newspapers consciously attacked the dominance of illusionism, and the conventions of naturalist presentation.

> *"These actor/acrobats take possession of Russia's free, high stage, they leap upon the bare boards or upon the machines. They need no curtain to separate them from the audience for they have no illusion to maintain. They never pretend to be imagined characters, they remain members of the society which they illustrate on the stage."*[26]

As early as 1924, the year that Eisenstein carried his Proletkult propositions on 'montage of attractions' into the cinema, the Blue Blouse movement published its major manifesto. Under the title, "The Methodology of Staging Living Newspapers," it set out three basic objectives or guidelines which established both the flexibility and the political purpose of what amounted to a new form of theatrical presentation. The guidelines are worth considering in their entirety.

> *"1. A Living Newspaper group can consist of between 7-8 to 20-30 people. The newspaper always begins with a parade entrance through the audience.*
>
> *2. A small curtain raiser highlights the main theme of the show. This prologue must be very powerful, comprehensive and full of slogans... The show should then underline the main points of the prologue, analyse them in specific scenes and bring them together in a unified whole.*
>
> *3. Humour and satire should take up a great deal of time in any Living Newspaper."*[27]

These early methodological principles stress both satirical activity and political analysis. Although the history of the Blue Blouse movement is likely to remain unsatisfactory and tentative, there are enough extant sources and observations to record the spirit, if not the detail, of their productions. The titles of some of the Blue Blouse Living Newspapers in themselves signal a particular kind of performance.

In 1925 performances of satirical Living Newspapers such as The International Circus and About the Priest Who Had a Dog were commonplace within the movement's extensive repertoire. The use of character types and masks that lampooned international leaders were integral to this style of theatre, and throughout the performances the actors deliberately cultivated a close and humorous rapport with the audience. When the opening parade had concluded, the actors would often sit quietly on the stage without moving. An actor would then run through the audience and make a public announcement:"the actors are on strike. They don't want to play alone. If you want to encourage them you will have to sing. The words are before you. The tune you all know." Only when the audience had joined in would the actors begin to perform. Throughout performances the Blue Blouse actor continually acknowledged the existence of the audience by teasing, consulting and generally advising them. At the end of particular sketches the audience were often asked to give their opinion on the possible outcomes of the Living Newspaper. It was common practice for the performers to plant an actor in the audience to act as either a disruptive element, who could then be unceremoniously ejected, or to take on the role of a vociferous community leader. Within each Living Newspaper performance, the Blue Blouses deployed a whole performance armoury of devices, tricks, routines and noises which disturbed any conventional use of illusionism, and which foreclosed any immediate and unproblematic identification between actor and role. The Blue Blouse actors even argued on stage about who should assume the unattractive role of the capitalist or NEP man, and often asked the audience to decide. Although these devices were never fully theorized, these descriptions imply that, even in its earliest manifestations, the Living Newspaper was a form that sought a simple but effective method of aesthetic distanciation.[28]

In 1926, probably the most adventurous and successful year in the short history of the Blue Blouse movement, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Osip Brik collaborated on the agitational playlet, Radio October, which they wrote and devised for the Blue Blouse movement. In a subsequent version, entitled Radio May, adapted by the editor of the Blue Blouse journal, it was prepared for extensive local presentations. This kind of adaptability was a crucial feature of agitational culture and made the Living Newspaper particularly vital as a form of utilitarian theatre. The Blue Blouse manifesto saw the utilitarianism and adaptability of the Living Newspaper as an essential part of their revolutionary practice.

> *"Now let us look at the particular elements of the methodology of the Living Newspaper. Above all dramatic theory. What are the main rules and the main techniques? It's got to be short, compact and ideologically sound, rich in satirical incidents and events. Every factory, every area has an abundance of unique problems. Experience has shown that this is the way to hold an audience. It therefore follows that the repertoire of the Living Newspaper cannot be prewritten and laid down from any central agency... On the contrary it must be the collective work of the local group."*[29]

The Living Newspaper in the hands of the Blue Blouse movement shifted initiative away from the metropolitan centres of Moscow and Leningrad towards localized and regional activity. This decentralization and democratization of theatre performance became a prominent feature of Living Newspaper when its influence spread from Russia to other European countries.

In the Autumn of 1927, the Moscow Blue Blouse group left Soviet Russia on what proved to be a significant and highly publicised tour of Germany. The international spread of workers' theatre was already under way by this time and had a complex network of cultural organizations to support its activities. Nonetheless, the Blue Blouse tour captured the revolutionary imagination with highly publicised demonstrations of jazz-gymnastics

and agitational theatre. The tour of Germany, more than any other event, stimulated a phenomenal growth in Living Newspaper production and presentation. It is ironic, therefore, that the year of the tour also signalled the beginnings of a cultural reaction in Russia which gathered momentum in the early thirties, and finally established a pervasive presence in the aesthetic dictates of 'socialist realism.'[30] The Blue Blouse returned to a quite different cultural climate than the one in which they had formed four years previously. Lenin had already died, Trotsky had been expelled from the Politburo and was soon to be exiled in Turkey, and the purges against certain forms of revolutionary theory and practices had already begun.

The Living Newspaper and its generic relation, the Living-Poster, were still popular as late as 1928, and were still common in the touring repertoire of Red Army theatre troupes and agit-trains. But within a very short time they had virtually disappeared to be displaced by new forms which enjoyed the support of the prodigious weight of orthodoxy. The official version of the decline of the .iving Newspaper in Soviet Russia claims that audiences *"soon became tired of its elementary and importune propaganda"*, but fails to convincingly explain a range of other contradictory factors.[31] Firstly, the decline of the Living Newspaper in Russia coincides with its proliferation and growth elsewhere in Europe, and in the United States. Secondly, the decline was not simply a formal displacement but part of a much greater and more systematic reaction that saw the virtual elimination of Russia's revolutionary avant-garde. Thirdly, the decline of the Living Newspaper coincided with the disappearance of the Blue Blouse movement whilst other similar organizations were going through significant and well publicised changes of direction. By the early thirties the Blue Blouse movement no longer

existed, whereas TRAM, the other major organization of young workers performing satirical Living Newspaper in the revolutionary period, had undergone a remarkable transformation. They advocated a style of theatre more appropriate to the period of five year plans and to the processes of industrialization. Although maintaining their organizational association with young communist groups, TRAM denounced their previous *"mistakes"* and became vociferous in their attacks on *"infantile left sickness"* and the *"undesirable points in the Meyerhold system."* The rhetorical language alone signifies not only an aesthetic denouncement of the formal practices of montage, deconstruction and defamiliarization, but a quite definite shift in official attitudes to culture. In 1933 a prominent member of the TRAM organisation anxiously apologized for their interest in the *"relics"* of formalism such as those *"theatricalized reports that tried to get in dozens of subjects at once."*[32]

By 1934 the Living Newspaper and the era of revolutionary theatrical experiment had all but ended in Soviet Russia. Mayakovsky had already committed suicide four years earlier, Tretyakov was accused of spying and shot, and eventually Meyerhold himself disappeared. The energies that gave rise to their work in the theatre continued elsewhere.

The Living Newspaper and the International Workers' Theatre Movement

The tour of major German cities by the Moscow Blue Blouse Group was a significant intervention in workers' theatre in Europe. It was by no means the first initiative in German proletarian theatre, but it served the very important function of galvanizing cultural interest around mobile agitational theatre, at a time when fascism was emerging as a serious political alternative in central Europe. As early as 1924 the German Communist Party (K.P.D.) had solicited the support of a number of sympathizers with an emerging reputation in radical culture. Erwin

Piscator, George Grosz and John Heartfield, who had shared similar interests within Berlin Dadaism, all moved closer to the demands and aspirations of workers' culture as the crisis within the German economy made revolution a distinct possibility. The most significant theatrical productions in the early twenties, as far as proletarian culture was concerned, were Piscator's revues in Berlin. In 1924 he staged Revue Roter Rummel, a production that used the same formal style as Meyerhold's D.E., on behalf of the K.P.D.'s winter election campaign. In the following year he staged another quasi-Living Newspaper pageant, Trotz Alledem, and in 1927 (only a month prior to the Blue Blouse tour) he staged an adaptation of Toller's Hoppla, wir Leben!, at the first Piscatorbühne in Berlin.

This crucial period in German workers' culture saw the K.P.D. displacing the socialists as the primary ideological force within the D.A.T.B. (Deutsches Arbeitertheater Bund/German Workers' Theatre League), and gaining a significant control over cultural politics. The International Communist movement established a network of organisations to channel and promote revolutionary cultural activity. Despite what one might imagine, these organizations were not necessarily rigid in their adherence to centrally issued policies. The Workers' International Relief (W.I.R.), which was organized by Willi Muenzenberg and had its base in Berlin, was highly de-centralized and permitted a great deal of local, democratic initiative.[33]

It was the W.I.R. which sponsored the Blue Blouse tour of Germany and arranged a return tour of Soviet Russia by the Berlin agitprop group Das Rote Sprachrohr (The Red Megaphones). Muenzenberg's organization was committed to the encouragement of proletarian culture in cinema, theatre and the arts. Its main role in growth of Living Newspaper drama was the financial and organizational support it gave to workers' groups such as

Proletkult Kassel. In March 1926, at the K.P.D.'s annual festival, Marzfeier, Proletkult Kassel staged a recruitment Living Newspaper entitled Yesterday and Tomorrow. The production was dedicated to "the unknown soldier of the Revolution", and was designed by Teo Otto.[34] It included twelve separate scenes celebrating the International Workers movement since 1848. A year later, Proletkult Kassel continued to present plays in the style of the Living Newspaper. At the 1927 Marzfeier they performed Hammer and Sickle over Asia, and additional scenes written by Ernst Toller, Bertolt Brecht and Mike Gold, who at that time was trying to establish workers' theatre in the U.S.A. Increasingly, the Living Newspaper became part of the K.P.D.'s election campaign strategies. The form was ideally suited to the dramatization of the issues on which any given campaign was being fought and ultimately, for the Communist Party, this meant anti-fascist policies.

Having won 150 seats in the 1930 elections, the Nazi Party was in a position to consolidate its power within City Councils (and in the streets) by working towards a national power base. The election of 1932 afforded the National Socialists the opportunity to make further advances in public office, and it was against the increasing threat of fascist hegemony that the K.P.D. conducted a virulently anti-Nazi election campaign. As election rallies and public demonstrations increasingly ended in outbreaks of violence and confrontation, the K.P.D. mobilized its entire political and cultural organization behind the campaign to combat fascist policies. In this urgent political context the Living Newspaper was a fundamental means of dramatizing and disseminating news, policies and statistical evidence. In the period immediately prior to the election, Die Roten Trommler (The Red Drummers) performed an anti-fascist Living Newspaper entitled Election Scene which invoked the audience to categorically reject fascism by voting for the K.P.D. candidates.

In Dresden, another workers' theatre group, Die Roten Ratten (The Red Rats), performed outdoor productions of a short Living Newspaper entitled Trotz Alledem in which local and national election issues were interrupted to allow for an on-the-spot interview with Adolf Hitler. This simple device of interruption, accommodating comic interviews, mock trials and 'cameo appearances' was a common feature of the satirical Living Newspaper.[35] The Dresden version of Trotz Alledem shared the same title as a Piscator revue, staged seven years earlier at the Grosses Schauspielhaus.[36] In fact they were different dramas altogether. The later version was a much shorter Living Newspaper which was more concerned with the immediate aims of exposing the National Socialists than in re-examining the events leading up to the Spartacist Rebellion. Despite their different historical contexts, the two versions of Trotz Alledem had distinct formal similarities which place them inside the generic categories of Living Newspaper drama. Piscator's own descriptions of his version of Trotz Alledem is in many respects a nascent manifesto for the Living Newspaper.

> *"The show was a collective effort. The separate tasks of writer, director, musical director, designer and actor constantly overlapped. The scenery was built and the music composed as we wrote the script, and the script itself emerged gradually as the director worked with the group. Different scenes were put together simultaneously in different parts of the theater, sometimes even before a definite script had been worked out. Film was to be combined organically with live action...*
>
> *The whole performance was a montage of authentic speeches, essays, newspaper cuttings, appeals, pamphlets, photographs, and film of the war and the Revolution, of historical persons and scenes...*
>
> *For the first time we were confronted with the absolute reality we knew from experience. And it had exactly the same moments of tension and dramatic climaxes as literary drama, and the same strong emotional impact."*[37]

But besides these formal and practical similarities, the anti-fascist version of Trotz Alledem performed at election rallies and at political demonstrations in 1932 had an urgent contemporaneity. Its subject matter was not the wider historical issues of revolutionary politics but the

precise, immediate and pressing issue of anti-fascism. This urgent need to dramatize the most immediate and contemporary problems is the dimension that distinguishes the Living Newspaper from other equally important variations of 'documentary' theatre practice. In broader cultural forms it is the same response to urgent political process that distinguishes the concerns of a daily newspaper from the concerns of a monthly journal.

Clearly, the formal and contextual relationships between the German Living Newspapers (Lebende Zeitung) and Piscator's early productions further extend the historical trajectory of this relatively new form of drama. From its earliest beginnings in workers' theatre clubs, the Living Newspaper used theatrical devices that have subsequently become associated with 'epic' theatre. The typical Blue Blouse performance was composed of short fragmentary scenes which were often interrupted by visual projection, songs or by simple devices of distanciation. Although the theory of 'epic' theatre had not yet been fully theorized, its main features were general cultural currency by 1930. For example, the work of the Stuttgart based Sudwest Truppe, which emerged out of the combination of two amateur Blue Blouse groups in Stuttgart and Mannheim, was an attempt to extend the repertoire and style of proletarian theatre into potentially more politically adequate cultural areas. The group advocated a more flexible form of political theatre using masks, documentary fragments, typification and music, in ways that extended workers' theatre and challenged what at times seemed to be a slavish commitment to the schematic style of agitprop.

In an article in International Theatre, the magazine of the International Union of Revolutionary Theatres, Friedrich Wolf outlined the policies of the Sudwest Truppe. His ideas reinforce the importance of the Living

Newspaper to the urgent politics of anti-fascism and the need to develop new forms of proletarian theatre.

> *"We knew that elementary agitprop plays were now insufficient to show the proletariat that they are deceived and sold by the fascist and social democratic leaders. It was insufficient to shout, "We are deceived, we are sold!" It was necessary to expose our enemies with concrete examples, to bring out their class essence, to make the workers realize the danger of compromise and so on. To put before workers who are under the influence of the National Socialists the concrete question of unemployment, we needed varied and definite forms of work. The present day political situation demanded the "epic" form of scenic art."*[38]

Between the spring of 1932 and the February of the following year, the period when the National Socialists made some of their most significant political gains, the Sudwest Truppe performed at countless election rallies. During that time they performed the Living Newspaper From New York to Shanghai nearly forty times, to audiences totalling over 50,000 people. The play was based on a true event in Southern Germany in which a factory was dismantled and literally transported to Shanghai where it was re-built to manufacture gas masks. Around the substance of this real event, the group dramatized news items and recent political material. From New York to Shanghai involved extensive use of masks and had close similarities to Brecht's contemporary Lehrstücke. Wolf even admitted that the final scene, in which Japanese soldiers ignore orders and turn their guns on the class enemy, was directly plagiarized from a Piscator production.[39] The scene anticipated real political events but fictionally resolved them in a Utopian and hopeful way. Within a year, Japanese soldiers had not turned on their class enemies but had acceded to the order of occupying Manchuria.

The Japanese expansion into parts of China, the Nazi seizure of state control and the increasing 'Stalinization' of the Revolution in Russia, although marked by complex and differing political processes, ushered in

a period of suppression that had a direct bearing on radical culture. In Germany, where the K.P.D. was outlawed and where public performances of radical plays were placed under very strict scrutiny, many theatre practitioners were forced into exile. Others chose to remain in the hope of working expediently or dangerously within the structures laid down by the new Government. This choice invariably meant either compromise or the fugitive existence of performing in underground theatre. In Japan, the workers' theatre continued despite systematic suppression and in Czechoslovakia, where the Living Newspaper was the subject of advanced theatrical experimentation, radical culture was ultimately silenced by the fascist expansion it sought to challenge. In the face of this repressive political context the Living Newspaper began to shed some of its stridency and become a more clandestine cultural form. From its origins in revolution, the theatre of Living Newspaper had developed in many interesting political directions but finally came into direct conflict with the political realities of repressive intolerance. In a short historical time span it had witnessed the cultural extremes of revolutionary libertarianism and reactionary suppression.

The Living Newspaper as Clandestine Theatre

The importance of Prague as a geographical and artistic centre is evident in the attitude that many prominent radicals adopted to its theatrical and literary community. Meyerhold and Alexander Tairov, the 'theatricalist' director, both visited Prague in the late twenties, and were allegedly impressed by the work of Osvobozené Divaldo (Liberated Theatre). At that time the Prague avant-garde included a range of interesting figures, including the structuralist director and theoretician, Jindřich Honzl, the experimental director Emil František Burian and the writer Jiri Frejka. Although little is known about Czechoslovakian theatre in Western

Europe, it clearly draws on a rich theoretical and practical tradition.[40] Significantly, most German practitioners considered a visit to Prague as a necessary stage on the journey from Berlin to Moscow. Both Brecht and Piscator visited the city before 1932, by which time over four hundred theatre groups had been organised under Svaz D.D.O.C. (The Workers' Dramatic Society), a national body funded directly by the Czechosovakian Communist Party.

When Brecht initially considered the possibility of founding a 'Society for Theatrical Science', he saw the theatre in Prague, and the work of E.F. Burian, as a source of collaboration and experiment.[41] In fact Burian and Brecht shared much in common. Although they generally supported the initiatives and intentions of Communist Party cultural practice, both insisted on maintaining a degree of autonomy from the shifting political strategies of party organization. Burian's work was frequently criticised on the pages of Delnické Divaldo (Workers' Theatre), which clearly wanted him to work in much closer association with the national Communist Party. However, throughout the thirties he experimented with a vast range of theatrical styles including Living Newspapers, satirical revues and 'epic' theatre productions, such as Brecht's Threepenny Opera. Despite Burian's insistence on maintaining a degree of relative autonomy from party politics, he was a consistent contributor to debates within The International Union of Revolutionary Theatres, which held its first congress in 1930, and which included Piscator and Tretyakov amongst its most active supporters. The contribution that Burian made to this international exchange usually included reports on the activities on his two ensemble theatre groups: the D-group and Voiceband.[42] According to Burian, the names of his two groups deliberately invoked aggressive titles for an aggressive form of theatre. It remained strident and uncompromising until 1940 when Burian and some of the members of D41

were arrested by the Gestapo and sent to a concentration camp. With the imprisonment of Burian, the Living Newspaper lost its most articulate supporter.

Between 1933 and 1940 the company had staged approximately seventy-five productions, the first of which was a Living Newspaper, Life in Our Times, an assemblage of scenes about contemporary political issues in Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately, the details of these productions, like the equally interesting Living Newspapers produced in Japan, remain buried in the silences and suppressions of history.

There seems to be a number of very obvious reasons why Japan had a flourishing Workers' Theatre, but it is less certain why Japanese workers favoured the Living Newspaper. No other government, until Hitler assumed power, repressed the apparatus of working class activity as violently as the Japanese. The Communist party and their various front organisations continually had to reorganise when leaders and activists were either executed or imprisoned. As a result, almost all political culture was underground. Most revolutionary theatre was conducted secretly and was endangered by restrictive laws and police harassment. Obviously this political reality ruled out fixed proscenium sets and the huge constructivist designs of Moscow and Berlin. However, the Living Newspaper was potentially a more adaptable, and economic form of theatre that could be modified to suit the requirements of clandestine culture. The repression in pre-war Japan and in Nazi Germany enforced the establishment of a network of underground theatre that saw its first priority as 'secret' performance disguised from the repressive apparatus of the state.

The origins of proletarian theatre in Japan dates as far back as 1920, but it was not until 1929 that P.R.O.T. (The Union of Proletarian Theatres of Japan) was set up in Tokyo. The main vanguard of P.R.O.T. were members

of the Left Theatre, which was established in 1928, and the New Tsukiji theatre group which joined in 1931. The repertoire of the Left Theatre acts as a convenient example of Japanese groups. In response to the decisions of the fourth congress of P.R.O.T. held in October 1931, the Left Theatre changed their repertoire to include Living Newspapers, revues and other minor forms already popular in Europe. During 1931, the Left Theatre played to 29,492 spectators and had a wide and varied repertoire.[43] Over and above proletarian plays, such as All Quiet on the Western Front and The Road to the Front, the Left Theatre performed sketches, revues and political satires. On one particular tour, the company, which consisted of fifty-four men and thirteen women members, performed a repertoire of Living Newspapers to workers and peasants. The performances included Hoover's Prosperity, An Owner's Plot, For the Armenian Brothers and The Fascist Marionettes, which were all directed by Seki Sano, a contributor to several international theatre journals, and a close associate of Hallie Flanagan when he eventually moved to the United States to escape arrest in Japan. Sano's main responsibility within Japanese workers' theatre was to organise the Red Megaphones, a mobile and clandestine faction associated with Left Theatre, who together with the Travelling Actors troupe were the caucus of Tokyo's underground theatre. By the early thirties most major countries in Europe had similar theatre groups. In most cases they worked openly and aggressively, but political circumstances generally meant that censorship and repression were distinct possibilities. Among the most prominent groups working within workers' culture in this period were the Alarm Group in Holland, Red Stage Brigade in Switzerland, the Workers' Theatre Movement (W.T.M.) in London, the 3.1 Troupe in Korea, and Le Groupe Octobre in Paris.[44]

Although the next stage in the history of the Living Newspaper was probably the most significant, the essential features of this new dramatic form were firmly grounded in the shifting political complexities of European socialism. The Living Newspaper's emergence as a specific style of theatre, invariably associated with the social theatre of the Depression in the United States, could not have taken place without its revolutionary heritage. It was a relatively short but important experience in which the theatre was pushed in a variety of different directions, towards revolutionary demonstration, towards industrial production, and eventually towards the most secret cellars of clandestine cultural activity.

Notes to Chapter One

1. V. Shklovsky, "Birth and Life of FEKS", trans. R. Taylor, in Futurism/Formalism/FEKS, eds. I. Christie and J. Gillett, B.F.I., London, 1978, p. 10.

2. D. Burliuk et al., "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste", trans. V. Markov, Ibid., p. 62.

3. Ibid., p. 63.

4. V.E. Meyerhold, "Open Debate on The Dawn", trans. E. Braun, Ibid., p. 66.

5. Sergei Tretyakov occupies an important role in the development of the proletarian production of Living Newspapers. He was originally a poet with the Vladivostok futurist group Tvorchestvo (Creation) before moving to Moscow in 1922. Tretyakov immediately established himself as a prominent critic and theoretician within the Lef group and was a regular contributor to revolutionary journals. He wrote several plays for Meyerhold and Eisenstein to direct, including Gasmasks (1924), Listen Moscow (1924) and Roar China (1930) which was subsequently performed in New York by Theatre Guild. After Mayakovsky's departure from the editorship of Novy Lef, he was replaced by Tretyakov who used his position to vehemently advocate the spread of proletarian cultural production. His close friendship with Bertolt Brecht and his interest in reportage and factual documentation precipitated a direct interest in the revolutionary potential of Living Newspaper drama. He was arrested in 1937 for allegedly spying against the Soviet Union and was subsequently shot. The exact date of Tretyakov's death is unknown.

6. Mayakovsky's various collaborations with Meyerhold and his polemical work at the ROSTA agency confirm his early commitment to proletarian cultural production. His declarations on the pages of Lef were unambiguous in their support for the revolution. *"We, who have worked for five years in a land of revolution know: That only October has given us new tremendous ideas that demand new artistic organization. That the October Revolution, which liberated art from bourgeois enslavement, has given real freedom to art. Down with the boundaries of countries and studios! ... Long live the art of the Proletarian Revolution."*

   V. Mayakovsky, "Comrades: Organisers of Life," in Mayakovsky: Twenty Years of Work, a catalogue of the Oxford Museum of Modern Art, 1982, p. 32.

7. The mass spectacle was a demonstration or celebration of support, in which thousands of workers participated in a quasi-theatrical event, normally held on the anniversary of a revolutionary occasion. Other mass spectacles included The Red Year (1919), Bloody Sunday, Sword of Peace, The Destruction of the Commune, The Fire of Prometheus, The Blockade of Russia and Towards a World Commune. Perhaps the most famous mass spectacle was directed by Nickolai Evreinov in 1920 and celebrated the revolutionary storming of the Winter Palace.

8. A. Mazaev, "Mass Spectacles of the 1920's", Dekorativnoe Isskustvo, No. 11, 1966. Reprinted in Transform the World, a catalogue of the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1969, p. 47.

9. The Living Newspaper clearly has the same cultural origins as agitprop which in the twenties and early thirties was the term used to describe the theatrical form favoured by mobile workers' theatre groups. Despite the closeness of their origins, it is evident that Living Newspaper drama and agitprop drama were separate and discrete forms, with their own techniques and modes of production.

10. F. Deak, "The AgitProp and Circus Plays of Vladimir Mayakovsky", The Drama Review, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 48.

11. Ibid., p. 48.

12. "On Political Propaganda and Cultural Enlightening Work in the Villages", (March 1919), in Communist Party of the Soviet Union: Resolutions and Decisions of Congresses, Conferences and Plenums of the Central Committee 1898-1970, eds. P.N. Fedoseyev and K.V. Cherneko, Izd-vo Politicheskey Literature, Moscow, 1970, pp. 80-83.

13. H. Flanagan, Shifting Scenes of the Modern European Theatre, George C. Harrap, London, 1929, p. 105.

14. L.H. Cohen, The Cultural-Political Traditions and Developments of the Soviet Cinema 1917-72, Arno Press, New York, 1974, p. 29. Anatoly Lunacharsky's support for Living Newspaper drama confirms that the form had the direct support of the revolutionary government, at least in the early years of the twenties. Lunacharsky was Commissar for Education between 1917-29 and was head of Narkompros, the commissariat dealing with education and the arts. The commissariat published a series of short explanatory pamphlets that encouraged the growth of Living Newspaper drama, including The Village Living Newspaper (Derevenskaya Zhivaya Gazeta), Moscow, 1926; B. Ivanter, The Living Newspaper in the Detachments and Schools (Zhivaya Gazeta v Otryade i Shkole), Moscow, 1927; and B. Yurtsev, The Pioneer Living Newspaper (Pionerskaya Zhivaya Gazeta), Leningrad, 1928.

15. It was commonplace for Living Newspapers to be politically propagandistic but also utilitarian and pragmatic. Many performances contained news bulletins on health, cleanliness and disease or presented empirical detailed information on crops, agrarian techniques and collective procedures. The campaigns were generally initiated on a national scale and were taken to villages by either agit-trains or touring Red Army dramatic groups. A typical Living Newspaper would borrow its slogans from already established campaigns such as the Soviet Hygienist's "Help the Revolution with a Tooth-brush". These early Living Newspapers were anticipating later initiatives in both the USA and Britain where public information propaganda was a crucial part of state reformism.

16. The Lef journal advocated a revolutionary culture in which the worker would occupy a central role in both material and cultural production. It brought together the various strands of futurism, formalism and constructivism into an alliance that inflected culture towards production and away from idealist aesthetics. *"The most skilful forms will remain black threads in blackest night, will evoke merely the annoyance and irritation of those who stumble over them if we do not apply them to the shaping of the present day, the day of revolution."* See for example "Whom is Lef Alerting", Lef, Vol. 1, pp. 10-11, reprinted in Screen Reader 1 : Cinema/Ideology/Politics, SEFT, London, 1977, pp. 266-8.

17. S. Tretyakov, "We Raise the Alarm", Novy Lef, No. 11-12, 1927, reprinted in Ibid., pp. 299-300.

18. N. Mologin, "The Revolutionary Theatre and Mass Amateur Art", International Theatre Bulletin (Moscow), No. 2, p. 32.

19. In Soviet Russia the Living Newspaper was known as Zhivaya Gazeta, in Germany as Lebende Zeitung and in France as Journaux Vivant. It was variously translated into English as Living Newspaper, Alive News, Walking Newspaper, Animated Paper and was used interchangeably with close generic relations such as the Living Poster. In Germany the term szenenmontage (literally a montage of scenic attractions) was often used to describe the Living Newspaper.

20. A detailed study of Meyerhold's major revolutionary productions would undoubtedly reveal many formal and stylistic similarities with early Living Newspapers. It is obviously outside the scope of this chapter to do justice to such a study but detailed analytical reconstructions of Meyerhold's production are to be found in E. Braun, The Theatre of Meyerhold, Methuen, London, 1979, L. Hedgbeth, "Meyerhold's D.E.", The Drama Review, Vol. 19, No. 2 and N. Worrall, "Meyerhold's Production of The Magnificent Cuckold", The Drama Review, Vol. 17, No. 1.

21. N. Mologin, p. 32.

22. G. Kozintsev et al., "AB: Parade of the Eccentric", in eds. I. Christie and J. Gillett, p. 12.

23. Ibid., p. 13.

24. The movement allegedly took its name from the blue overalls worn by industrial workers, although alternative viewpoints suggest that the blue overall was a common costume sign in productions directed by Meyerhold, Forreger and Eisenstein.

25. H. Flanagan, "The Soviet Theatrical Olympiad", Theatre Guild Magazine, September, 1930, p. 10.

26. Ibid., p. 10.

27. J. Matheika, "The Methodology of Staging the Living Newspaper", in Deutsches Arbeitertheater 1918-33, eds. L. Hoffman and D. Hoffman-Oswald, Verlag Rogner and Bernhard, Munchen, 1973, p. 249. Trans. C. Wall and S. Cosgrove.

28. The details of Blue Blouse performances are taken from several primary sources, particularly from extant copies of the Blue Blouse magazines held in the theatre collection of Harvard University Library and from fragmentary reviews of the Blue Blouse tour of Germany. Ibid.

29. J. Matheika, Ibid., p. 249.

30. For a fuller and more comprehensive account of the establishment of socialist realism as the official and orthodox aesthetic practice within the Soviet Union, see B. Brewster, "The Soviet State, the Communist Party and the Arts 1917-36", Red Letters, No. 3, Autumn 1976.

31. B. Beletsky, "A Child of the First Five Year Plan", International Theatre Bulletin, No. 5, p. 39.

32. Ibid., p. 39, and see also A. Fevalsky, "The Red Army Amateur Troupe", International Theatre Bulletin, No. 2, 1934, p. 43.

33. Willi Muenzenberg was one of the principal organizers and animateurs of radical working class culture. Through his work with Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (Workers International Relief, W.I.R.) he was responsible for sponsoring and supporting a vast proportion of radical films and theatre groups. The W.I.R. was the organization that financed the Soviet film venture Mezhrabpom and the German based Prometheus company which produced Brecht and Slatan Dudow's film Kuhle Wampe (1932). Although part of the international apparatus of the Communist Party, W.I.R. had a level of autonomy that allowed it to function in ways that were not strictly or systematically defined by Communist Party directives. For details of Muenzenberg's career see B. Gross, Willi Muenzenberg: A Political Biography, University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1974 and for a detailed study of W.I.R. activity in cinematic production see R. Campbell, "Radical Cinema in the 30's", Jump Cut, No. 40 (No Date), pp. 23-33.

34. Eds. L. Hoffman and D. Hoffman-Oswald, pp. 225-227.

35. Ibid., p. 362.

36. The title Trotz Alledem (Despite Everything) is taken from Karl Liebknecht's proclamation that despite everything that happened as a result of the Spartacist rebellions the social revolution would continue as an historical imperative. Piscator's version was staged in 1925.

37. E. Piscator, The Political Theatre, trans. H. Rorrison, Methuen, London, 1980, p. 92.

38. F. Wolf, "The Work of the Theatrical Troupe Sudwest", International Theatre Bulletin, No. 5, p. 24.

39. Ibid., p. 24. For details of Wolf's subsequent work in exile and his relationship to the American social theatre see S. Cosgrove, "Cabaret and Counterculture : the Anti-Fascist Theatre in New York", Theatre Quarterly, Vol. X, No. 40.

40. J. Rybar, "Personalities and Influences behind the success of the Czech Avant-Garde Drama in the Period Between the Wars", European Studies Review, Vol. 8, 1978, p. 193.

41. Emil František Burian was one of Prague's most prominent theatre directors between the wars. His style of direction and attitude to performance can be seen in retrospect as a configuration of 'epic' theatre and a practical application of the theories of Prague structuralism. His production of Spring Awakening (1936) used film projections as a comment and perspective on the main action, thus presenting the audience with two visual discourses. This attempt to present a theatre of multiple diegesis was a characteristic of Prague structuralist performance. See J.M. Burian, "E.F. Burian : D34-D41", The Drama Review, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1976, pp. 95-116.

42. The D-Group took its name from the initial letter of the Czechoslovakian words for worker, stage, drama and history which all begin with the letter D, and from the number of the following year. Thus the group changed its name annually to become D34, D35, D36, D37 ... etc.

43. "Niki", "The Proletarian Theatre of Japan", International Theatre Bulletin, No. 1, pp. 18-21.

44. The work of the Parisian workers' theatre group, Le Groupe Octobre, and the contribution of Jacques Prevert, one of the group's playwrights, is well documented in M. Faure, Le Groupe Octobre, Christian Bourgois, Editeur, Paris, 1977 and in S. Spitzer, "Agitprop à la Française : the Group Octobre, 1932-36", Theatre Quarterly, Vol. VIII, No. 30, pp. 42-52.

CHAPTER TWO : DEPRESSION AND DEMONSTRATIONS

The Workers' Theatre Movement in the United States

"Flying the old world's poverty and scorn;
These bring with them unknown gods and rites,
Those, tiger passions, here to stretch their claws
In streets and alley, what strange tongues are these,
Accents of menace alien to our own."[1]

It is virtually impossible to be precise about the ways in which cultural forms spread their influences. The Living Newspaper crossed the Atlantic to the U.S.A. via a number of different routes, and with the help of various channels of communication. The international organizations of the workers' theatre movement provided a network within which new ideas and policies could circulate; the constant flow of intellectuals visiting Europe from the U.S.A. brought back with them impressions and influences from the major cultural centres of Moscow, Berlin and Prague; a proliferation of small progressive theatre journals acted as a stock exchange of cultural initiatives, but above all, the international development of the Living Newspaper was precipitated by a generation of migrants, exiles and political émigrés.[2] The immigrant has always occupied a powerful place in the vanguard of North American political culture. Those tiger passions that escaped the old world's poverty and scorn, complicated and enriched the struggles of the working class in the United States, and brought with them new accents of menace, new forms of theatrical demonstration, and an entire language of representation.

Hans Bohn left Berlin in May 1928 at a time when political divisions were polarizing into the monumental struggle between fascism and its combatants on the left. Although there is no concrete evidence, it is generally assumed that Bohn was sent to New York by the W.I.R. to work within the local German-language community.[3] He was born in Germany in 1898,

the same year as Bertolt Brecht, and studied philosophy at Leipzig University. Bohn spent periods of time training at the Reicher Theatre School and with Erwin Piscator in Berlin, before working as a dramaturg at the Chamber Theatre in Leipzig.[4] As an active participant in the proletarian theatre movement, Bohn almost certainly saw the Moscow Blue Blouse tour prior to leaving Germany, and incorporated their vitality into his future work in the U.S.A. On his arrival in New York, Bohn anglicized his name to John Bonn and immediately settled in Yorkville, the predominantly German area of mid-Manhattan. His primary aim was to infuse the community with the same sense of anti-fascist urgency that he had left behind in Germany, by engendering a more activist attitude to theatre culture. Within weeks of arriving in the U.S.A. Bonn founded The Proletbuehne, a German-language theatre group, which became the first revolutionary, mobile agitprop troupe in the United States.[5] Ironically, and without consultation, another agitprop group, the Workers' Laboratory Theatre (W.L.T.), had also been established in the area around Union Square, in the heartlands of New York's radical community.

The two groups became the initial motivating force in what turned out to be an entire movement of workers' theatre. It was somehow appropriate that these two groups should co-exist. They seemed to encapsulate the most prominent forces in workers' culture, and carried with them a heredity that could be traced back to the most significant currents within European radical theatre. One group was immigrant based, the other was indigenous; one was most ardently motivated by the nascent epic theatre of Germany and the other by the powerful ideas of Soviet revolutionary culture. The Workers' Laboratory Theatre seemed in many respects an 'Americanization' of Soviet theatre, applying Eisenstein's ideas to the theatre, and taking on the image of a 'montage' group.

On the 29th of October 1929, the newly constituted workers' theatre movement was given the strongest possible reasons for immediate mobilization. The New York Times reported *"the most disastrous trading day in the stock market's history. Billions of dollars in open market value were wiped out as prices crumbled."*[6] As the Depression devastated the U.S.A., the workers' theatre movement grew in response to worsening levels of unemployment and the harsh realities of abject poverty. In 1930 four million people were registered as unemployed, within a year the number had doubled, and by 1933 the unemployment figures were in the region of thirteen million. The apparent inadequacies of the economic system and the Hoover administration's failure to contain the Depression led to deep rooted anxieties and a new level of political militancy.

By the onset of the Depression, the Proletbuehne's reputation had spread beyond the streets of Yorkville. They performed regularly at strike meetings, bread lines and hunger marches, and became much closer to the immediate political campaigns organized by the Communist Party of the U.S.A. (C.P.U.S.A.). In March of 1930 the Communists organized an unemployment demonstration in Union Square, which attracted thirty-five thousand people, and was typical of countless demonstrations against the effects of the Depression. When a riot broke out, over a thousand police were drafted in to control the event and in the ensuing confusion six Communist Party leaders were arrested and jailed. The early thirties were militant times in the history of international Communism. There was a policy commitment to direct political action assigned to expose and perpetrate class antagonism.[7] In the entire repertory of workers' theatre it was quite obvious that the most belligerent forms of agitprop best suited this period of direct demonstration. Politics and the theatre collaborated on the sidewalks and in the streets of depressed cities. The Communist Party recommended planned attacks on breadlines

and department stores in what became known as 'hunger attacks', in which the unemployed looted food supplies. Against this background of desperate political responses to a depressed economic situation, the Proletbuehne announced its fifth season of theatrical action.

The season opened in October 1930 at the Yorkville Casino, in front of an audience of seven hundred workers. The event was almost an exact replica of Piscator's proletarian revues. Posters surrounded the wall and the hall had been transformed into a workers' meeting. The evening's entertainment consisted of several short Living Newspapers and a main revue, Fest Der Nuen Massen.[8] *"The program was built of a review, specially made lantern slides in caricature with accompanying monologue... and led by 65 workers seated throughout the audience and in all parts of the hall."* The evening ended with a presentation of the mass recitation. Vote Communist, which was performed on numerous occasions at local elections and during the run up to the presidential elections of 1932.

In only three years of working in New York, John Bonn had become one of the most prominent figures in the radical theatre of the U.S.A. By 1932 he was an editor of Workers Theatre, a national organizer of the League of Workers' Theatres (L.O.W.T.), the director of The Proletbuehne and another German group, Die Natur Freunde, and was later to become a delegate to the International Theatre Olympiad in Moscow.[9] His role within the workers' theatre movement seemed to personify the place of the radical immigrant within popular ideology. Most immigrant communities already had their own cultural organizations, their own newspapers and perhaps even a more developed sense of collective history than the 'indigenous' working class. The Yiddish community of New York's lower east-side had a long theatrical tradition to draw upon, prior to the Depression, and prior to the formation of the radical Artef Theatre

(Arbeiter Theatre Verband) in 1928. The Hungarian community responded to the context of immigrant unemployment by forming two separate workers' theatre groups, The Uj Elöre Dramatic Club and the Bronx-Hungarian Workers' Club of New York. The latter group formed a special mobile shock-troupe of six men and four women who toured towns in New Jersey, Maryland and Virginia, to perform Living Newspapers and raise funds for the Hungarian poor.[10] Interestingly, the Hungarians were particularly critical of what they saw as the political and analytical limitations of agitprop performance. Their tour of the eastern towns was partly to experiment with alternative forms and extend the repertoire of workers' theatre culture. In Baltimore their programme consisted of "*recitations, chorus, a living newspaper about the elections and unemployment, a satire on prosperity, a one-act play ..., and a part from a dramatized version of Jack Reed's Ten Days That Shook the World.*"[11]

The Hungarian Shock Brigade's critique of agitprop was part of a general debate about the most appropriate forms of radical theatre. Was agitprop adequate to the tasks of political analysis? What place should full length plays occupy within the revolutionary theatre? In a period of direct political confrontation, was it viable to devote time and energies to the establishment of permanent companies? What role should the workers' theatre expect of trained professionals and intellectuals?[12] In the context of severe political crisis what should be the relationships between pleasure, entertainment and political knowledge within workers' theatre? All of these questions appeared and reappeared in letters, articles and in manifestos on the pages of New Masses, Workers' Theatre and the 'establishment' journal Theatre Arts Monthly. Obviously they were questions that could never be fully resolved, but in the activities of the Workers' Laboratory Theatre they found their most articulate and convincing expression. In the short montage play Newsboy, all the

vitality of Soviet-inspired formal fragmentation that had produced the Living Newspaper over ten years previously were surfacing again.

> *"There has been much discussion pro and con about form in the Workers' theatre. Which is the real revolutionary form? Is it satire, realism, symbolism etc? Must we laugh at the revolutionary theatre or should solemnity rule the day? In the Workers' Laboratory Theatre we have been producing various forms for the last four years ...*
>
> *Four years' work then have helped in the attempt at mastery of the old forms and, further, have already assisted in the development of a new form which to date shows great possibility for use in Workers' Theatre. One of the most pliable, dynamic theatre of action forms which has yet appeared is the technique utilised in Newsboy.*
>
> *What essentially makes Newsboy dynamic? It is the intensity, speed and conflict of present day industrialized America ... Conflict never leaves Newsboy ... Within the space of sixty seconds four completely separate conflicts take place. We will find consistent conflict through the entire play.*
>
> *Newsboy is built around a series of conflicting images to the ideology of the newsboy and the attempt to draw him to a higher level of understanding. Every scene drips with this clash ... Every available inch of space and time is taken up with the clash of two forces - the dialectical method is the manner of conceiving the things and beings of the universe ..."*[13]

Newsboy employed scenes and excerpts from a variety of different sources. Although it only lasted about twelve minutes in performance, it contained a scene from Claire and Paul Sifton's unemployment play 1931, excerpts from a Kurt Joos revolutionary ballet and documented facts in the tradition of Living Newspaper dramaturgy. The fragments were bound together by the dialectical principles that had underpinned the intellectual montage of Eisenstein's films in the twenties, which had almost cult status within New York radical circles. In 1934, at the National Spartakiade of Workers' Theatre in Chicago, Newsboy won awards, praise and impressive critical acclaim. Within a matter of weeks it had become the totem of the entire workers' theatre movement. By then there were over four hundred agitprop groups throughout the United States, many of whom were attached to permanent workers' theatre companies.

The Rebel Players of Los Angeles, the Vanguard Group of Philadelphia, the Jack London Group of Newark and the Solidarity Players of Boston, all performed versions of Newsboy, within a mixed repertoire of agitprop, revues, Living Newspapers and short revolutionary dramas.

For a few years there was even an attempt to emulate the Blue Blouse phenomenon. In Boston, Los Angeles and Chicago, Blue Blouse groups were formed in an attempt to bring the volatile styles of revolutionary gymnastic theatre to the United States. However, reports suggest that none of the North American groups ever achieved the exuberant satirical style of their Soviet counterparts. In Boston the workers were clearly aware of the enormity of their task and viewed Blue Blouse activity with a tentative shyness, in a letter to New Masses:

> *"The Workers International Relief of Boston .... has started a Workers Dramatic Group. Our aim is to do the same work that the "Blue Blouses" of Europe produce. Of course, at the beginning we will have to be much simpler. The "Blue Blouses" are already professional actors; we have to develop our talent ...*
>
> *We are beginning now with humorous skits and walking newspapers (sic). We also want to produce one humorous play Mr. God Is Not In."*[14]

Although a broken, but distinct, line can be drawn backwards from the Workers' Theatre of the U.S.A. to previous initiatives in Germany and Russia, by 1934 it was evident that North America had built its own specific political theatre. Many groups had formed in direct response to the social context of the Depression; others, such as the Group Theatre, had taken account of the changed political circumstances, and even Broadway, that bastion of commercial performance, had looked towards the social theatre for new material.[15] However, the really significant development came in the shape of The Federal Theatre Project (F.T.P.), a direct response to the depression in the theatre initiated by the policies of the newly elected Roosevelt Administration.

The Depression in the Theatre

In order to gain a meaningful perspective on the severity of the economic depression, it is worth reflecting on the direct effect it had on theatrical production. In 1929, prior to the Wall Street crash, Barret Clark (who subsequently joined the advisory board of the Federal Theatre) criticised the New York theatre's systems of organization and finance. His criticism - "As it is run today, the theatre business in New York seriously threatens the drama",[15] was not simply a recognition of the forthcoming recession but also an explicit attack on the financial cartels that controlled Broadway production. Clark's criticisms were part of a veiled campaign to demand a level of state subsidization within a theatrical formation that had become quite severely entrenched in its modes of operation. In order to guarantee a secure return on investments, Broadway producers tended to favour safe and well tried productions of either light comedies, musicals or 'drawing-room' dramas. In the main there was an unwillingness to experiment with new plays or with innovatory forms of presentation. This entrenchment was almost certainly worsened by the successful emergence of new forms of mass media entertainment.

By 1929 only a handful of major cities could guarantee an audience for touring companies. The popular price touring circuit, which had once been the backbone of regional theatre in the U.S.A., had virtually been displaced by the availability of domestic radio receivers and by the advent of cinema. As the older forms of popular entertainment, particularly vaudeville, conceded to the new attraction of the movies, numerous entertainers were confronted with unemployment. By 1932 over fourteen thousand cinemas had opened in the U.S.A. attracting in the region of seventeen million people per week.[17]

The 1931-32 season was a financial nadir in the history of the theatre in the U.S.A. Broadway producers closed down shows, and entire theatres, whenever there was a danger that they might lose money. Every Shubert-owned theatre in Chicago was closed for a week in March, 1932; of the two hundred and fifty three companies performing in New York in the January of that year, only forty were still active in the May, and by the end of July only six professional companies were open to Broadway audiences.[18] In Los Angeles over five thousand actors were out of work, and by 1933 unemployment in the acting profession had increased by sixty per cent. According to the estimates of Frank Gillmore, president of Actors Equity (U.S.A.), box-office receipts fell catastrophically during this period, which resulted in over six thousand theatres closing down across the United States.

Although some actors managed to find work by moving to the major studio lots in Hollywood, and others accepted work in non-theatrical occupations, the vast majority were forced to accept the capricious, degrading and undignified life of casual employment and charitable relief. Originally the problem of relief welfare for unemployed theatre workers was left to private organizations and ad hoc self-help groups. Between 1931-1934 several organizations provided small scale relief. The Stage Relief Fund offered small financial awards to extreme cases of poor actors with large families; the Actors' Club of New York performed regular benefit events at the Manhattan Theatre for needy actors, and the Actors' Dinner Club provided free food at specially arranged soup kitchens.[19] However, this unsystematic kind of charitable generosity was no basis on which to build an adequate relief system. Eventually the Government intervened and established 'rehabilitation' projects under the Civil Works Administration (C.W.A.) and the Federal Emergency Relief Act (F.E.R.A.), but neither were sufficient enough to confront

the phenomenal levels of unemployment.[20] It had become patently obvious that only a large scale and nationwide project could even begin to resolve the deep rooted problems of the theatre.

In March 1935 Roosevelt assigned a division of public work to be known as the Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.) with the intention of generating small scale, localised relief projects. The appointment of Harry Hopkins as National Director of the W.P.A. was at last a positive step for theatre workers. The principles which distinguished the W.P.A. from other projects had hopeful implications for unemployed theatre staff. Only 'employables' were to be taken off relief rolls, and subsequently employed "within their own skills and trades".[21] This meant that actors and technicians were to be spared the indignity of jobs they were untrained to do, and that 'unemployables' would be cared for by the state and not used in jobs they could not do. Obviously the principles of the W.P.A. implied that special projects designed to rehabilitate unemployed artists, would have to be established. The project formed to re-employ theatre workers became the Federal Theatre Project.

Three months later, in July 1935, Hallie Flanagan was officially appointed as National Director of the Federal Theatre Project. Although she had previously turned down the job, believing her experience of commercial theatre was inadequate, Flanagan ultimately agreed to draw up a plan encompassing the whole of North America. The original plan was largely the outcome of Flanagan's collaboration with the American playwright and producer, Elmer Rice. It provided employment for approximately thirty thousand people and involved a complicated organizational structure which involved regional centres, state and city units, colleges and universities. Unfortunately, the plan was too adventurous and beyond the financial resources of the W.P.A. It was not until

October of 1935 that a workable plan finally emerged. These proposals concentrated more directly on the unemployed theatre workers of the commercial theatre, and as such were biased towards New York City. However, the plan also made provision for theatre in smaller communities where theatre had rarely, if ever been seen, and provided opportunities to revitalise the regional theatre.

From the very beginning, the Federal Theatre Project aimed to be a national organization encompassing regional and state units. Within this national framework it was hoped that community theatre would flourish, and the prospect of a subsidized organization encouraging regional and ethnic drama was enough to attract numerous directors. Some of America's most experienced practitioners offered their services and subsequently the regional headquarters took shape. Meanwhile, at national level, the director and her associates were open to any suggestions from professional producers and directors, providing those ideas re-employed theatre workers. An emphasis was put on the number of people involved in the plan, its prospective contribution to the community, and its contribution to education, culture, innovation and experiment. No emphasis was placed on the need to show a profit. It was an unusual event in American theatre history - dramatic productions were to be judged by criteria other than financial ones. Flanagan's appointment as National Director was indicative of this aim. She had never worked in the commercial theatre and had established her reputation in the college and experimental theatre. Thus for two main reasons the F.T.P. had to be non-commercial:

> *"It was not intended to follow commercial methods because its job was not to duplicate the commercial theatre. In the first place it was not supposed to compete with such private industry as remained; in the second place its existence was due to the distressing failure of private industry to employ actors or give the public low-priced plays."*[22]

Having established and defined a non-commercial function, the Federal Theatre Project was in a genuine position to attempt experimental ideas. In its short history, from 1935 to 1939, some of the most progressive steps in the development of American theatre history took place. Advances which were inconceivable in the old commercial theatre, became the strength and basis of the F.T.P. Not only were new audiences found in the rural areas, the slums and the suburbs, but new material and new forms were found to suit the particular desires of an historically new audience.

The New York City Caravan Unit toured successful plays on the back of motor trailers, taking them to the streets, squares and parks of some of the most deprived metropolitan neighbourhoods. Circus and vaudeville units found audiences of children in the parks, in hospitals and in orphanages, whilst ethnic theatre groups were formed to perform for the immigrant poor of the major cities. The Children's Theatre Units experimented in educational and therapeutical drama, by performing plays and pantomimes that had been written or researched by unemployed psychologists and social workers. The Federal Theatre Project stretched the boundaries of traditional theatre activity by initiating projects for the disabled, including puppetry for crippled children, theatre for the deaf, and a vast range of entertainment for remedial school children. At no other stage in the history of the theatre of the United States has there been such a systematic attempt to produce socially useful and educationally advanced drama. In the urgency to generalise about the theatre of the Depression, this dimension is often submerged beneath the weight of a very active socio-political culture. But it needs to be permanently remembered that social theatre, by its very nature, harbours two impulses: one committed to the protection of the disadvantaged, and the other committed to social change.

On 27th October 1936, when the Federal Theatre staged an adaptation of Sinclair Lewis's novel, It Can't Happen Here, in twenty-one cities, the two impulses of social theatre met in a nationwide condemnation of fascism. On the night the play opened, the Federal Theatre briefly fulfilled one of its unwritten aims and became a national theatre. Ironically, none of the administrators who had agreed to the establishment of the project could have foreseen its short lived but phenomenal success. Hallie Flanagan, always a supporter of the theatre's social function, was probably one of the few people to fully grasp the potential that the theatre of the Depression could have.

> *"In an age of terrific implications as to wealth and poverty, as to the function of government, as to peace and war, as to the relation of the artist to all these forces, the theatre must grow up. The theatre must become conscious of the changing social order, or the changing social order will ignore, and rightly, the implications of the theare."*[23]

It was in the light of these remarks and in the spirit of genuine progressive enthusiasm that the New York Living Newspaper Unit was formed.

The Establishment of the New York Living Newspaper Unit

The Federal Theatre constituted a significant dilemma for the activists of the workers' theatre movement. What attitude should they adopt to a project directly subsidized by the Government? What place might revolutionaries occupy within a project that was very likely to remain loyal to the reformist ideologies of its benefactors? From the very outset it was obvious that the workers' theatre movement could not ignore the F.T.P. In certain respects, it was a move in the direction of state subsidization of culture, and was clearly an institutional space within which work of a truly progressive nature could take place. Although

there was never any declared or systematic policy of 'entryism', many workers' theatre stalwarts joined the new project,[24] whilst others remained within the ranks of a developing New Theatre movement. In the first few confusing weeks of F.T.P. recruitment it was almost impossible to ascertain who had the most pressing rights to relief work. Although only those who could show evidence of theatrical employment in the past were permitted to join the project, this became difficult, and at times impossible, to enforce. Since the project accepted members of Actors' Equity, the American Federation of Actors for Vaudeville and Variety, and the Interalliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, it was possible to establish claims from a variety of different directions. Almost certainly, a large body of amateur and student actors took the opportunity to insinuate themselves into a project that guaranteed them the minimum W.P.A. wage of $23.86 per week.[25]

The first few weeks of the Living Newspaper Unit were riddled with confusion and uncertainty. There has always been a certain amount of doubt about who originally decided that the F.T.P. should stage regular dramatizations of news items, and consequently there was doubt about the viability of the unit. Almost everyone who worked on the initial formation of the F.T.P. has claimed the Living Newspaper Unit as their idea. Perhaps the most plausible explanation is that Hallie Flanagan, who after all had seen original Living Newspapers in Russia, discussed a range of possibilities with Elmer Rice, who also had a very developed sense of the importance of new theatre forms. In the weeks immediately following Flanagan's appointment, she met with Rice on several occasions and discussed the most pressing problems confronting the project. One of the obvious dilemmas was how to use the maximum amount of people within a limited range of resources. The idea of dramatizing current events emerged as a strong possibility. The Living Newspaper could

clearly be adapted to meet the demands of a new theatrical context. It did not require the lavish decor of certain naturalist classics; it could operate efficiently and dramatically with a minimal, and even sparse, mise en scene, and could be adapted to accommodate large casts. The initial idea for Living Newspaper took greater shape when Elmer Rice invited the American Newspaper Guild to work with the unit. In these few short weeks the form of Living Newspaper developed in two dimensions. Firstly, it moved away from the small scale mobility that characterized Blue Blouse production, towards a more 'epic' large scale intention. Secondly, with the systematized input from the Newspaper Guild, the Living Newspaper became more 'investigative' in its approach.

The Newspaper Guild immediately responded to Rice's suggestions, seeing them as a way of creating employment opportunities for the thousands of unemployed journalists in New York. It was agreed that the Guild would sponsor and participate in the Unit's activities, which immediately set the Living Newspaper Unit apart from every other initiative within the F.T.P. The Newspaper Guild was an active trade union organization, committed to the progressive campaign for workers' rights, and in time this became a crucial factor in the development of Living Newspaper drama. The struggle for control over the Unit from its earliest beginnings, was between the Unit's radical faction, many of whom had come from the ranks of the workers' theatre, and the more moderate leadership of the Federal Theatre's administration.[26]

Throughout October 1935 there was some doubt as to what form the Living Newspapers would take. To begin with it was to be called the "animated newspaper" theatre with shows at 5.00 p.m., 6.00 p.m., 7.00 p.m., 11.00 p.m., midnight and 1.00 a.m. The performances, which were originally thought of as short news bulletins, were timed so as not to compete

with other shows. The intention was to reach an audience of theatre-goers, passers by and those returning home from work or an evening out. By the end of October this idea had been jettisoned; the Unit was now calling itself a living newstheatre. A staff of one hundred and thirty had been brought together, including journalists, researchers, playwrights and performers. Within the first two months of its existence, the Unit staff had trebled to three hundred and seventy-three, but a delay in being assigned a theatre with adequate facilities delayed the start of rehearsals.[27]

When the Living Newspaper Unit was eventually assigned a theatre it was only the beginning of its problems. For the vast majority of its first year of existence, the Unit was the centre of a series of censorship controversies which not only provoked disputes with the F.T.P., but tarnished the project's public reputation. The first Living Newspaper to be planned under the auspices of the W.P.A. was entitled Ethiopia, and took as its subject matter the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.[28] Although Ethiopia was a relatively innocuous Living Newspaper in comparison with those that followed, it managed to provoke a controversy that reverberated throughout the project. Ethiopia was a montage of direct quotations taken from newspapers, bulletins and press statements. The characters were all real historical figures including Mussolini and Haille Selassie, and the scenes were authenticated reconstructions of the events leading up to Italy's fascist expansion in North East Africa. Despite the authenticity of its material, and despite its basis in verifiable fact, Ethiopia was never publicly performed. Only a few days before its scheduled opening, on 29th January 1936, during a dress rehearsal, the Living Newspaper staff received a directive from Washington that effectively censored the production. The directive emanated from Jacob Baker, an assistant to Harry Hopkins, the W.P.A. national administrator

and expressly forbade the impersonation of any foreign minister or head of state. It was virtually impossible to do justice to the Ethiopian crisis without Mussolini, Selassie and the delegates to the League of Nations, and so the production was cancelled. The rehearsals had lasted four weeks, involved a cast of one hundred and fifty actors, including a group of African dancers who were stranded in New York, and cost over $30,000 to prepare. Despite the cost only a few journalists ever saw the production.[29]

Although the F.T.P. was conceived, somewhat idealistically, as a free, adult and uncensored theatre, Hallie Flanagan did not choose to contest the directive. She agreed with the decision and believed that the representation of foreign politicians *"might involve the United States in foreign complication."*[30] Only Elmer Rice, by then director of the New York region, took issue with the decision. When his reservations were ignored, Rice resigned from the project, no attempt was made by the W.P.A. to convince him to stay, and on tendering his resignation Rice was presented with an already typed acceptance. The letter criticised his past hostilities to W.P.A. officials and criticised his outspoken relationship with the Press.

The W.P.A. officials would probably have been glad if the issue had ended there. Rice had resigned and was soon to be replaced by Philip Barber, who was much less likely to cause trouble to Washington. After all, the real power within the Federal Theatre Project lay in the hands of the Government and it was the Government who the directors of the F.T.P. aimed to please, or at least placate.

The scandal caused by Ethiopia had in fact begun at the highest level. In order to present every opinion of the Italian invasion, Morris Watson, head of the Living Newspaper Unit, wrote to the White House for material.

He wanted permission to use a broadcast by President Roosevelt in the play, giving the American stance on the Ethiopian crisis.[31] It was this letter which began the controversy. Presumably the White House instructed the W.P.A. officials to look into the matter and report back to Washington. The investigations by Jacob Baker and another W.P.A. official, Aubrey Williams, soon proved that Ethiopia was not the only reservation Washington had about the Living Newspaper Unit.

Elmer Rice's statement to the Press on 24th January 1936 raised several issues which were central to the Ethiopia controversy. He believed the Government did not view Ethiopia in isolation, but in relation to a number of other Living Newspapers which could be more harmful to the Government and the Democratic Party. The statement is an open accusation of direct censorship which came to be the most fundamental problem confronting the New York Living Newspaper Unit. Throughout its entire history threats of covert and direct censorship hung over the production of Living Newspapers, but Rice's statement implied that this censorship was more invidious than it appeared. According to Rice the real problem was not Ethiopia, but a contentious and more radical script entitled The South.

> *"The final decision to censor the Living Newspaper and thereby force my resignation did not come until after I had outlined to Mr. Baker some of the other productions which were being planned. These include a play called Class of '29 which deals realistically with unemployment and the handling of relief; and a second issue of the Living Newspaper on the situation in the Southern States, touching on such vital subjects as lynching, discrimination against negroes and the plight of the sharecroppers (in other words, hitting the Democratic Party where it lives). Mr. Baker has already called off one Federal Theatre Project play in Chicago, because in the opinion of Mayor Kelly it was uncomplimentary to the Administration and the Democratic Party.*
>
> *In short, we are confronted here not only with an evidence of the growth of fascism which always uses censorship as one of its most effective weapons, but with the resolute determination of the Democratic Party to be re-elected at all costs."*[32]

Rice's accusations were almost totally ignored, and have been summarily dismissed as emotive and ill-conceived. His statement to the Press was undoubtedly polemical but the rhetoric of its accusations do not necessarily invalidate the points he made. If there is even a grain of truth in Rice's assertions, then it implied that the New Deal Government were already keeping a very close scrutiny on the radical elements within the Living Newspaper Unit. This view, which has tended to be effaced in past histories, is almost certainly supported by the content of a letter from the W.P.A. administrator to Eleanor Roosevelt:

> *"Mr. Baker is in New York today and it developed that with the presentation of Ethiopia, they have in mind producing Soviet Russia, the Scottsboro Case, Sharecroppers, etc. You can see from this that they intend to present only those things which are highly controversial and which immediately bring to the fore opponents and contra-opponents of this sort of activity on the part of the Federal Government."*[33]

The letter categorically suggests that the Unit was already causing official concern, and that the production of Ethiopia was not the only reason for administrative consternation. To the W.P.A. bureaucracy in Washington, the other three subjects referred to in the letter all appeared highly contentious. In 1935 they shared a common denominator; Soviet Russia, the Scottsboro Case and the Unionization of Sharecroppers were all issues that were high on the agenda of Communist Party policy, and liable to mobilize extensive radical support. As far as radical political consciousness was concerned, Soviet Russia was still available as the basis of an alternative system of social organization, since the more authoritarian extremes of Stalinism were not yet widely known in the U.S.A. The Scottsboro case was the Communist Party's major cause célèbre of the period.[34] In responding to their own wishes to recruit more black members, and in anticipating the injustices confronting a group of wrongly accused young blacks facing execution for a spurious charge of rape, the C.P.U.S.A. instructed their legal section (International Labor

Defence) to intervene. The case became a highly emotive and widely mediated public enactment of the tensions between southern 'lynch law' and the liberal intervention of northern radicals. For several years in the thirties, Scottsboro became synonymous with radical campaigning. Similarly, the efforts to secure rights, privileges and organizational democracy. for sharecroppers had taken on a militant dimension within the South, which also engendered the potentially decisive chemistry of racial and labour politics.[35] It is highly likely that the W.P.A. administration thought it imperative to keep such contentious issues off the Federal stage in the hope of minimising Congressional criticism of the New Deal Administration. Aubrey Williams' letter to Eleanor Roosevelt confirms this concern:

> *"Mr. Hopkins has decided that in view of this, it is not wise to go ahead with this project and instructed Mr. Baker so to inform Mr. Rice through Miss Flanagan (sic). Undoubtedly, this will result in the resignation of Mr. Rice, but it is our opinion that this would have to come inevitably and that it was best to have it occur in connection with a subject which involves neutrality as we would be stronger in this position."*36

The W.P.A. had clearly anticipated, perhaps even willed, Elmer Rice's resignation from the project and were anxious that it should happen in respect of "foreign heads of state", rather than the politically more contentious matters of domestic social and racial politics. Although Eleanor Roosevelt intervened on behalf of the F.T.P. she only managed to achieve a minor compromise. Jacob Baker, on direct orders from the President, sent out another directive that modified the previous one.

> *"No one impersonating a ruler or cabinet officer shall actually appear on the stage. If it is useful for you to do so, the words of such persons, may be quoted by the others. I very much hope that the script is susceptible of such modifications as to enable you to present it."*37

Obviously the script could have been modified but it is doubtful whether the Living Newspaper as a form could accept such a fundamental compromise.

Ironically, the directive worked in ways that had not clearly been foreseen by the W.P.A. administration. Having been deprived of their freedom to represent foreign politicians, the Unit was forced to think much more closely about domestic issues. From then on the Living Newspaper more or less abandoned their interest in foreign affairs and concentrated their activities on the most urgent domestic issues, the politics of the Depression. It may well be the case, in retrospect, that the directives from Washington concentrated the Unit's interest more directly. They ceased to be a vague news theatre and became instead a persistent voice in the political culture of the Depression.

The solitary performance of Ethiopia, viewed only by the Press, established a number of techniques which were to become standard devices in the formal grammar of the American Living Newspaper. Although these techniques had been used by the revolutionary theatre in Russia and Germany, and even by the American Workers' groups, it was the first time they had been used on the legitimate stage in New York. As Arthur Arent, the Living Newspaper Unit's most consistent dramatist pointed out, *"Ethiopia introduced the loudspeaker as a commentator - a kind of non-participating dateline which introduced the various scenes."*[38] Although the loudspeaker was by no means an innovation (it had been used by the Blue Blouses, Piscator and Brecht years before) it did signify a change in the original plans for the Living Newspaper in the U.S.A. The dates and characters of Ethiopia were originally meant to be projected by a teletype system. Arent claims that the teletype was impracticable and was discarded during rehearsals. The projected dates *"necessitated a constant shifting of the eyes and head from the scene on the stage to the moving ribbon of light above."*[39] The teletype was therefore replaced by a loudspeaker, or "Voice of the Living Newspaper", which appeared in every subsequent New York production. The final scene of Ethiopia, which

warned against the impending war, reached a crescendo with film of marching feet, the amplified sound of marching and the word "war". Although the scene was primitive, in comparison to later Living Newspapers, it did establish the basic techniques and methodologies: sound effects, projected film, crescendo, dates, sharp blackouts and an authentic montage of facts.

The same range of devices, including projected teletype, had been planned for the censored Living Newspaper on the southern states. It is generally assumed that the play capitulated under pressure from the W.P.A., and was never finished, but on the contrary, The South was scripted and ready for rehearsals as early as January 1936, and was a more convincing piece of theatre than the slightly pedestrian Ethiopia. With the play ready for rehearsal, the Unit chose to shelve it, or more likely were put under pressure to shelve it, leaving them with no show for two months. It seems highly unlikely that a relief unit, working under strict economic budgets, would choose to ignore a play that they had already prepared for rehearsal and leave their cast idle. The decision throws more doubt on the relationship between the Unit and the W.P.A. hierarchy, and perhaps lends more weight to Elmer Rice's claim that it was The South and not Ethiopia which posed the real political threat to Washington.

Undoubtedly The South was a much more militant play than Ethiopia and contained two persistent themes that were likely to generate controversy: the problems faced by Blacks in the deep south and the growing political organizations that were emerging to challenge racism. The South consisted of eleven scenes, of which eight dramatized the discrimination against, or victimization of, black workers and the support they received from socialist groups. The remaining three scenes were direct attacks on prominent politicians from southern states.

The South confronted southern politics at their most irrational and extreme. It concentrates on the horrific lynchings and beatings issued to Blacks and socialists throughout the thirties. The first two scenes report on the Scottsboro Trials, referring to the sentence as "legalized lynching"; the fourth scene shows a gang of vigilantes attacking a union meeting; scene six shows the Governor of Georgia defending chain gangs; scene seven compares educational allotments for Blacks and Whites; scene eight shows the abduction of Tampa socialists by the police and their subsequent flogging; scene nine analyses the Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill debate in which southern senators defend lynching; and the final scene shows the imprisonment and successful release of the black revolutionary, Angelo Herndon. The tenor of the whole play is summed up in one terse forceful scene, in which southern senators try to prevent the Anti-lynching Bill becoming law. As the debate continues, the teletype was to project facts above the stage in the direct dialectical style of theatrical counterpoint.

> *"LAWRENCE COUNTY, MISS., MARCH 22 ..... R.J. TYRONE SHOT TO DEATH BY LYNCH MOB ..... HERNANDO, MISS., MARCH 30 ..... REVEREND T.A. ALLEN DROWNED BY MOB ..... FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA, JULY 19 ..... RUBIN STACEY HANGED BY LYNCHERS ..... LOUISBERG, N.C., JULY 30 ..... GOVAN WARD SNATCHED FROM SHERRIF AND HANGED ..... VIENNA, GEORGIA, SEPT. 28 ..... LEWIS HARRIS HANGED BY MOB."*[40]

Bearing in mind the new and unique circumstances of the Federal Theatre Project, it is to some extent understandable that the W.P.A. and the project's own administrators would want to minimise controversy. In order to deflect criticism from unsympathetic politicians and the anti-New Deal elements in the Press, it was deemed necessary to underplay anything that appeared overtly radical or communistic. Hallie Flanagan was trapped in a profound contradiction between two admirable but competing imperatives. She genuinely saw the F.T.P. as a progressive theatre experiment and a space within which work of a radical nature

could take place, but she was also aware that the project employed well over ten thousand people and that their livelihoods had to be protected against any threat of closure or reduction in funds. The bureaucracy of the F.T.P. refracted this reality through its structures and built into its daily routine a system of 'gate-keeping', in which censorship was always the final option.[41] A production that posed any significant threat or seemed unduly problematic could be impeded at a number of different stages: the selection of suitable material, the allocation of a theatre, the shifting of deadlines, the allocation of personnel and finally, the censoring of the finished performance. It was not uncommon for impediments to be put in the way of Federal Theatre productions, but then against that, the project permitted a number of very progressive plays to be performed. It would be quite wrong to construct an image of consistent and unjustifiable censorship in a national project trying to negotiate a labyrinth of state subsidization, public scrutiny, media attention and party political opposition.

The direct way in which The South catalogued and graphically represented racial violence and its explicit suggestion that that violence was tolerated by certain southern senators, made the play an easy target for censorship. The opening and closing scenes exacerbated the problem by representing the Communist Party's campaigning role within two crucial cases in Black American history. Scene one was a report on the Scottsboro trials involving the communist lawyer, Samuel Liebowitz, as the principal character, and the final scene dramatized the role of the Communist Party in the campaign to free the imprisoned black radical, Angelo Herndon. The mass celebration of Herndon's release from jail was presented in the militant style of agitational theatre. Its language, its rhetoric and its ideology seemed to be a return to the demonstrative theatre of workers' culture, and could not have endeared the Unit to its administrative superiors.

"HERNDON: *I told them: You may do what you will with Angelo Herndon. You may convict him, you may put him in jail. But there will come thousands of Angelo Herndons. You can kill me but you cannot kill the working class.*

I am happy to be out. I can take my place once more in the ranks ... The demands of the workers are echoed in Union Square and re-echoed from the workers massed in the streets of Shanghai and Berlin! I'm glad to be back in the fight."[42]

With four months already gone, the Living Newspaper Unit had yet to perform in front of a public audience. The bureaucracy of the F.T.P. seemed a long way removed from the mobility and dynamism of the workers' theatre and the problems of censorship seemed almost insurmountable. With two 'unsuitable' scripts and only a few skeleton ideas, it was unlikely that the Unit could prepare a full length show to meet the prescribed deadline. The subjects for which the research staff had gathered the most material were on "science" and "agriculture". However, even these two projects were only in their infancy. Morris Watson and the Unit were left with a difficult choice; either to reconstruct The South or press on with one of the other topics.

"Rightly or wrongly we compromised. We offered to do the agricultural situation. With little in the way of facts to go on, several of the executive staff literally wrote like hell on a Sunday to have a script ready on the following day so that the acting company could be immediately put to work. We wrote and rewrote Triple A Plowed Under up to the day of its opening. The last scene, for instance, already revised five or six times, was completely rewritten the day before opening."[43]

The confusion surrounding Triple A Plowed Under worsened, as the script was being prepared. The production director became disenchanted with the farcical events that had so far characterized the work of the Living Newspaper Unit, and denounced the new script as "breakfast food".[44] He refused to proceed with the production and left the Unit at its lowest possible ebb, with no unanimous sense of what the next play should be; with no director, but with an immediate deadline to meet. Fortuitously,

the project had a number of highly competent young theatre practitioners to whom the Living Newspaper Unit could turn. Joseph Losey, a former activist within the workers' theatre movement, had recently returned to New York from Moscow, and at the time was working as an assistant with the Negro unit in Harlem. During his period of residency in Moscow, Losey had directed a production of Waiting for Lefty and had established working relationships with Brecht, Piscator and Nikolai Okhlopkov. His trip to Europe had been literally a late immersion in all of the most vital theatrical styles that had given rise to the revolutionary Living Newspapers.[45]

Triple A Plowed Under opened on the evening of 14th March 1936 at the Biltmore Theatre and remained open for eighty-five performances over a period of nearly two months. It was the Unit's first recognizable achievement but once again it provoked problems for the W.P.A. As a production, Triple A Plowed Under was shorter than subsequent Living Newspapers and was often performed twice nightly. Nonetheless, it did establish many of the formal characteristics of the Federal Theatre Living Newspapers, and achieved "an atmosphere of starkness and simplicity"[46] through short, episodic and highly emotive scenes. The hopelessness of dust-bowl farmers that was so sympathetically portrayed in the Farm Security Administration photographs, found the same sense of dramatic representation in Triple A Plowed Under. The following brief scene economically employs the major stylistic devices of North American Living Newspaper drama. It employs the ubiquitous voice of the Living Newspaper and an interchange of amplified voices that establish details of time, place and weather conditions. The overall effect is a staccato style of theatre that brings together imposing voice-overs with a simple but highly effective visual tableau of agrarian poverty.

SCENE SIXTEEN

(Drought)

CHARACTERS

VOICE OF LIVING NEWSPAPER

A FARMER

FIRST VOICE

SECOND VOICE

VOICE OF LIVING NEWSPAPER (over LOUDSPEAKER): Summer, 1934: Drought sears the Midwest, West, Southwest.

(Light up on tableau of a FARMER examining the soil; a sunbaked plain, stretching away to a burning horizon. From the LOUDSPEAKER two voices are heard, one crisp, sharp, staccato - the other sinister and foreboding. The VOICES are accompanied by a rhythmic musical procession that grows in intensity, and leaps to a climax of shrill despair.)

FIRST VOICE (over LOUDSPEAKER): May first, Midwest weather report.

SECOND VOICE (over LOUDSPEAKER): Fair and warmer.

FIRST VOICE : May second, Midwest weather report.

SECOND VOICE: Fair and warmer.

FIRST VOICE : May third, Midwest weather report.

SECOND VOICE: Fair and warmer.

FIRST VOICE : May fourth, Midwest weather report.

SECOND VOICE: Fair and warmer. Fair and warmer. Fair and warmer. Fair and warmer.

(The FARMER who is examining the soil straightens up and slowly lets a handful of dry dust sift through his fingers.)

FARMER : Dust! [47]

Although the problems of soil erosion and the devastation of rural economies may appear to be unusual subjects for a New York Theatre Unit, Triple A Plowed Under strived to forge connections between the rural depression and its effect on the metropolis. The play related agricultural problems to the wider context of the Depression, and at times was highly critical of the inadequacies of the Agricultural Adjustment Act (A.A.A.).

Once again the play contained scenes dramatizing the plight of black workers and the unionization of sharecroppers, but its central thesis was a critique of the middleman. Triple A Plowed Under demonstrated that price rises were being artificially and unnecessarily introduced to provide larger profit margins for dealers and middlemen. It advocated instead a direct commercial relationship between farmers and consumer-workers in the cities. After several scenes that set out the argument in the style of a dramatized lecture, using charts, statistics and maps, the play ended with a tableau of disadvantaged farmers meeting up with unemployed workers. The final scene was a direct demonstration of support for the Farmer-Labor Party, one of several contemporary groups committed to the socialization of economic relations.[48] The Living Newspaper had not yet severed its direct links with the radical workers' theatre movement and was still an outspoken threat to the gradual reformism of W.P.A. politics.

Throughout the run of Triple A Plowed Under, the Living Newspaper Unit's research staff were working on a major topic under the working title "Labor and the Law". Although this production was not ready until July 1936, by which time it had been renamed Injunction Granted, it threatened to be the most provocative and most problematic piece of drama in the entire history of the Federal Theatre Project.[49] During the short period of time between the end of Triple A Plowed Under's run at the Biltmore Theatre and the opening night of Injunction Granted, the Unit staged an interim production entitled Events of 1935. Whereas Triple A Plowed Under had been a *"living pamphlet"*[50], combining the style and intention of a political broadsheet, 1935 tried to appropriate the popular style of tabloid journalism and find a theatrical equivalent. Although the combination of politics, topical revue theatre, and the grammar of the

daily newspaper had some amount of success in the cabarets of Weimar Germany, 1935 was in fact the least successful Living Newspaper to be staged under the auspices of the W.P.A. Joe Losey began work on the production, but soon became disillusioned with its basis in trivia. He handed directorial responsibility to his assistant, Gordon Graham, and refused to continue to work on 1935 "as it was superficial and without editorial point of view."[51] Losey was disinterested in a production which clearly patronized its audience by implying their real interests lay in scandal, crime, society weddings and dangerous voyages. The production ran for only thirty-four performances which in itself suggests that the Depression audience was not simply on the lookout for escapism but had a developed interest in culture that generated pleasure through knowledge. The tabloid Living Newspaper was an abject failure; it was never tried again, and the Unit returned once more to political theatre.

Although 1935 was a failure by almost every possible criterion, it did contain some of the most memorable scenes in the history of the Unit's work. Among its eclectic items were scenes on the conditions in New Jersey sweatshops; another representation of the Angelo Herndon case, although in a much more diluted form than had been placed in The South; and an interesting critique of Nazi anti-semitism in sport within the context of the 1936 Olympic Games. By far the most critical scene was a dramatization of the southern demagogue, Huey Long, and his authoritarian control over the Louisiana state legislature. The actors were dressed and moved like marionettes with Huey Long as the ubiquitous puppet-master. Although the idea was by then quite common within the visual repertoire of the workers' theatre movement, it still preserved its capacity for clear political satire and comical routines.[52]

Despite those few isolated scenes, 1935 contained nothing that unduly troubled the W.P.A. administrators. But if they took that to mean the Unit had in any way compromised its politics, then the next production was to become a rude reminder of controversy. Injunction Granted, a Living Newspaper on the history of the North American labor movement's relationship with the judiciary, went to the very heart of political divisions, to the divisive territory of class politics. During the run of 1935, and only two weeks before the opening night of Injunction Granted, Morris Watson, the managing producer of the Unit, wrote a short polemical article which was published in the Marxist periodical New Theatre. It was a direct condemnation of censorship and of the past interventions of the W.P.A.

> *"If the Living Newspaper is to grow into a vital force of great worth to the community it must not only continue to be the work of a group but it must be free of every vestige of official censorship. Its editors and actors must be free to work out their own problems. A step towards this desirable state of affairs would be the divorce of the F.T.P. from the W.P.A. So long as it is part of the W.P.A. it will be subject to petty and unfair attacks from those who see red in every letter of relief.*
>
> *Is it too much to ask that the Government grant a straight subsidy for something for which the community is hungry?"*53

Watson's demands were not simply critical of the W.P.A., but tacit claims for a relatively autonomous national theatre. They were never granted. In many respects the W.P.A. secured a firmer hegemony over the work of the Unit, through a more systematic control over Federal Theatre affairs. But not before the Unit's most decisive struggle had been lost. It it fitting that the main flashpoint in the entire history of the New York Living Newspaper Unit should have been acted out against a landscape of increasing working-class militancy. The next chapter in that history somehow encapsulated in real and metaphoric terms the most profound tensions of the decade: the struggle between organized labour and the apparatuses of the state.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. T. Bailey Aldrich, "The Unguarded Gates", in M.A. Jones, Destination America, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1976, p. 222.

2. It is important to stress the contribution of those German cultural practitioners who took up either permanent or temporary exile in the U.S.A. during the Thirties. Among the many emigres who settled in the U.S.A. were the film director Fritz Lang, the cultural theorist T.W. Adorno, the musicians Kurt Weill and Hans Eisler, the artist Georg Grosz and the actor Peter Lorre. Many other Germans exerted an important influence on the theatre including Ernst Toller, Bertolt Brecht, Hans Bohn, Rudolf Wittenberg, Friedrich Wolf and Erwin Piscator, who established the Dramatic Workshop at New York's New School for Social Research.

3. It was commonplace for the W.I.R. to send cultural representatives to areas that appeared to lack a political direction, with the intention of stimulating and inducing grass roots cultural activity.

4. The precise details of Bonn's biography are taken from a Federal Theatre Project internal memorandum housed in the W.P.A. collection of the National Archives. The memorandum was written in the context of an acrimonious split within the Federal Theatre's German language Unit, which under Bonn's direction had come under attack from supporters of the Nazi Party operating inside the unit and with the encouragement of the fascist press. For a fuller elaboration of the work of this unit and its political problems see: S. Cosgrove, "Cabaret and Counterculture : The Anti-Fascist Theatre in New York", Theatre Quarterly, Vol. X, No. 40, 1981. The memorandum from H. Motherwell to A. Kutner dated 1st October 1936 is housed in the W.P.A. collection at the National Archives, Washington D.C.

5. For a detailed study of Bonn's work in the U.S.A. and for a more extensive history of The Proletbuehne see: D. McDermott, "The Odyssey of John Bonn", The German Quarterly, Vol. XXXVIII, 1965, pp. 325-334 and S. Cosgrove, "Proletbuehne : Agitprop in America", in Performance and Politics in Popular Drama, eds. D. Bradby et al., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980.

6. New York Times, October 30th 1939, p. 1.

7. The policies and strategies of International Communism during the period 1928-34 are generally referred to as 'third period' policies. The 'third period' was theorised as a direct response to the severe crisis within world capitalism, and was seen as a period of class antagonism in which the proletarian class marked out its opposition to the ruling classes and their collaborators. The 'third period' was eventually displaced by a 'popular-front' policy which recommended collaboration between communist organizations and bourgeois liberalism in a united front to combat fascism and war.

8. H. Bohn, "German Revolutionary Theatre", New Masses, December 1930, p. 20.

9. Die Natur Freunde (Nature's Friends) were the first anti-fascist cultural organization operating in New York. Although they were a theatre group, Die Natur Freunde also organized outdoor sporting events and rambling excursions. They presumably took their name from a German group of the same name and from the cult of proletarian sport and physical fitness that was such a prominent feature of German proletarian culture in the twenties.

10. W. Weinberg, "New York - First Shock Brigade", New Masses, December 1931, p. 26.

11. Ibid.

12. The workers' theatre in the U.S.A. received important encouragement and support from certain prominent intellectuals and theatre practitioners. The playwright John Howard Lawson, who had established a reputation in the twenties for his 'stylized' drama Processional (1925) was a regular supporter of L.O.W.T. events. The Communist Party cell within The Group Theatre (particularly Clifford Odets, Elia Kazan, Morris Carnovsky, Phoebe Brand, Art Smith and Ruth Nelson) offered acting classes and prepared scripts for New York based workers' theatre groups. Hallie Flanagan, working with a group of students at Vassav College, scripted a quasi-Living-Newspaper drama entitled Can You Hear Their Voices? which was based on a short story by Shittaker Chambers, and which became one of the most frequently performed plays between 1932-34. Ernst Toller, the German expressionist playwright, and a close friend of Flanagan, spoke at fund raising events on behalf of the workers' theatre movement.

13. A. Saxe, "Newsboy - From Script to Performance", New Theatre, July 1934, p. 12. By 1934 the magazine Workers' Theatre had become New Theatre; the League of Workers' Theatre had become The New Theatre League (N.T.L.) and the Workers' Laboratory Theatre had become Theatre of Action. All these changes were part of the general political shift away from the more sectarian impulses of 'third period' policy. See D. McDermott, "The Theatre Nobody Knows : Workers Theatre in America 1926-42", Theatre Survey, Vol. VI, May 1965, pp. 65-82.

14. B. Lewis, "Boston Blue Blouses", New Masses, March 1931, p. 22.

15. The social theatre of the Depression is most comprehensively discussed in M. Goldstein, The Political Stage, New York University Press, New York, 1974. Numerous different groups emerged in the early years of the thirties in a direct response to the changing political and cultural context. The Communist Party had its own permanent company in Theatre Union, but a whole range of other groups such as Labor Stage, Theatre Collective and The Hollywood Group Theatre were formed independently of any specific party. The conventional theatre groups such as the highly respectable Theatre Guild included many socially orientated plays in its repertoire, and even the more commercial theatres on Broadway responded to the social situation. The 1933-34 season indicates the extent to which Broadway recognized the need to incorporate social drama. In that season alone, it was possible to see Sidney Kingsley's Men in White, Jack Kirkland's Tobacco Road, John Wexley's They Shall Not Die and Stevedore by Paul Peters and George Sklar.

16. B. Clark, "Broadway Gambling", The Drama, February 1929, p. 41.

17. H. Flanagan, Arena, Benjamin Blom, New York, 1940, p. 26.

18. L. Brown, "Federal Theatre : Melodrama, Social Protest, and Genius", The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress, Vol. 36, No. 1, 1979, p. 18.
The number of full scale professional productions on Broadway declined from 239 in 1929-30 to 187 in 1930-31, 100 in 1938-39 and 72 in 1940-41.

19. "Unemployment Among Actors in the U.S.A.", International Theatre, No. 2, 1934, p. 59.

20. Ibid., p. 57.

21. The events which led to the formation of the Federal Theatre Project and the complexities that governed those early administrative and legislative decisions are outside the scope of this chapter. The national director's own account of the events is of primary importance: see Flanagan, op. cit. For an impressive historical account of the project see: J. De Hart Mathews, The Federal Theatre 1935-9, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1967. The specific details of the project's relationship to the W.P.A. can be located in W.F. McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, Ohio, 1969.

22. W. Whitman, Bread and Circuses, Oxford University Press, New York, 1937, p. 26.

23. Flanagan, p. 46.

24. Obviously it is difficult to substantiate any suggestion that the Communist Party advocated large scale entryism or participation in the affairs of the F.T.P. However, many activists including John Bonn and Anne Howe (Proletbuehne), Stephen Karnot, Harry Lessin, Al Saxe, Rhoda Rammelkamp (W.L.T.) and Nick Ray of Theatre Collective took the opportunities available to them and joined the project. I am conscious of the anachronistic use of the term 'entryism', a neologism used to describe the decision of the Militant Tendency to work inside the democratic structures of the British Parliamentary Labour Party in the late seventies.

25. At the time of the project's formation, the Equity minimum wage was $40.00 per week.

26. This central tension between the unit's radical faction and the administration has tended to be effaced in previous studies, or discussed purely in terms of significant personalities. Jane De Hart Mathews simply dismisses them as "Young Turks", De Hart Mathews, p. 110.

27. "Harrison to Stage News", Federal Theatre Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1935, p. 3.

28. For the most detailed discussion of Ethiopia see: D. Bowers, "Ethiopia: The First Living Newspaper", Phoebe (The Bi-Annual publication of George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia), Vol. 5, No. 2, 1976.

29. "How the Alphabet Government Laid a Million Dollar Broadway Egg", Sunday Mirror, 8th March 1936, p. 10.

30. Flanagan, p. 66.

31. Ibid., p. 65.

32. "Statement on Resignation", New Theatre, February 1936, p. 2.

33. W.P.A. Correspondence Aubrey Williams/Eleanor Roosevelt, Hallie Flanagan Collection, New York Public Library. Eleanor Roosevelt took an active interest in the F.T.P. and remained one of its major supporters until it was disbanded.

34. On 25th March 1931 a freight train travelling between Chatanooga and Memphis carried gangs of unemployed youths, who were on their way to find work in the industral towns of Tennessee. The Depression had brought about a bizarre movement of labour which forced thousands of people to seek refuge in the transient life-styles on the rails, in freight yards and in railway box-cars. As the train passed through Stevenson, Alabama, a fight broke out between two gangs of black and white youths. In the ensuing confusion most of the whites were thrown off the moving train and went straight to a nearby station office and reported assault. The message was relayed down the line and the train was halted near Scottsboro, by which time most of the black gang had jumped off. When the train was searched, nine blacks and three whites (two of them women) were taken off. In the confusion that followed, one of the women, Victoria Price, claimed she had been raped by the nine blacks. They were immediately taken to the local jail which was soon besieged by an angry lynch mob. Only the intervention of the National Guard prevented a mass lynching. Initially, the nine were convicted and sentenced to death despite inconsistencies in the testimonies of witnesses and contradictory medical evidence. The intervention of the Communist Party ensured new trials, an international campaign, and after years of wrangling a certain level of success. However, the last remaining Scottsboro Boy, Clarence Norris, was only pardoned by Governor George Wallace in 1976, after spending 15 years in prison, five on death row. "Last of Scottosboro 9 is Pardoned; He Draws a Lesson for Everybody", New York Times, 26 October 1976, p. 1.

    For a detailed study of the case, particularly the lengthy and acrimonious debates between the Communists and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.), see: D. Carter, Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1969.

35. D. Meister and A. Loftis, A Long Time Coming : The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers, Macmillan, New York, 1977.

36. W.P.A. Correspondence Aubrey Williams/Hallie Flanagan, New York Public Library.

37. "Rice Quits In Row Over W.P.A. Drama", New York Times, 24 January 1936, p. 31.

38. A. Arent, "The Technique of the Living Newspaper", Theatre Arts Monthly, November 1938, p. 821.

39. Ibid., p. 821.

40. The extant script of The South, collectively authored by members of the New York Living Newspaper Unit, is housed in The Research Centre for the Federal Theatre Project, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia.

41. The term 'gatekeeping' is used in this context to describe a system of cultural policing in which an organization maintains control over its various products. The term is generally applied to the practices of major television and media corporations, but the unique and complex infrastructure of the Federal Theatre makes it a particularly appropriate term.

42. The South, Scene 11. See footnote 40 above.

43. M. Watson, "The Living Newspaper", New Theatre, June 1936, p. 7.

44. Ibid.

45. J. Losey, "The Individual Eye", Encore, March 1961, p. 10. Losey's memories of his visit to Moscow are particularly illuminating.

> *"Theatre in Moscow that year was great, Okhlopkov was breaking down the proscenium and presenting theatre in the round and the rectangle and the hexagonal as it had never been dreamed of before or approached since. Long hours of forgotten talk with this wonderful actor - director - manager and man - forgotten the words, but the image and effect, never ... And then the already slightly decadent brilliance of Meyerhold ... I returned to New York to help create "The Living Newspaper" - a real breaking down and rebuilding."*

46. A. Goldman, "Life and Death of a Living Newspaper Unit", Theatre Quarterly, Vol. III, No. 9, p. 73.

47. Triple-A Plowed Under, "A Living Newspaper sponsored by The Newspaper Guild of America, written by the editorial staff of the Living Newspaper Unit under the supervision of Arthur Arent", Scene 16, in Federal Theatre Plays, ed. Pierre De Rohan, Da Capo, New York, 1973.

48. Ibid., p. 34.

49. Injunction Granted was originally referred to as a 'living cartoon' which gives some indication of its farcical style and its satirical intention. In this respect it is distinguishable from other later Living Newspapers which were more comparable with an open form of 'documentary' drama.

50. Watson, p. 7.

51. Goldman, p. 74.

52. Events of 1935, or as it was more commonly known 1935, is housed in The Research Centre for the Federal Theatre Project along with the extant script of Injunction Granted.

53. Watson, p. 7.

CHAPTER THREE : STRIKES, STRATEGIES AND SOLIDARITY

The Moment of Waiting for Lefty

> *"Here, in the heat and noise of these shops, a new kind of person was being moulded, a new kind of American, no longer alone, but working with others, working together ... They learn to work together, and therefore they had to learn to think together, to move together, to act together ... The word brother, the word co-operate, the word union. America took up stronger than ever the idea of community action..."*[1]
>
> (Native Land, 1942)

The premiere of Waiting for Lefty, on the evening of Sunday, 5th February 1935, occupies an important place within the theatre of the Depression. As members of the audience mobbed to the front of the stage at the Civic Repertory Theatre, it seemed as if the organized working class had at last secured a voice within the North American theatre. The play's final rhetorical lines - "Strike! Strike! Strike!" - became simultaneously a real political engagement and a mythical enactment of the decade's most pressing aspirations. Although it is easy with hindsight, to dismiss the triumphant ending as a short lived emotive response, it is much harder to deny the immediate political context that gave rise to Waiting for Lefty. The United States had become gripped by a period of ferocious and sustained union activity, in which the demands of the working class were being more militantly represented. Perhaps more than any other play in the history of the theatre in the U.S.A., Waiting for Lefty encapsulated the political moment and dramatized its most urgent tensions.

Waiting for Lefty was written towards the end of 1934. At the time of writing, Clifford Odets was still a member of the Communist Party and was trying to establish a reputation as an actor and dramatist with the New York Group Theatre. The play was based on the violent and lengthy taxi-drivers' strike that had taken place in New York earlier in the year, and was initially written for the small scale theatre of the workers' theatre

movement. Its modest requirements and energetic political style guaranteed its success within the movement. In less than nine months after its initial production, Waiting for Lefty had found its way into the repertoire of most amateur theatre groups in the U.S.A. By the end of 1935, it had been performed in Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and San Francisco, and was produced in several foreign capitals, including London and Moscow.[2] In a short period of time, Waiting for Lefty managed to achieve a remarkable set of accomplishments; it negotiated and sustained a relatively successful run on Broadway (seventy-eight performances), with a cast that included Odets in the role of Dr. Benjamin; it won a number of prestigious awards including the Yale University Drama Tournament, and received considerable critical acclaim. *"This short, dynamic drama ... has all the qualities of a dramatic machine-gun ... It veritably bombards you with emotions, arguments, grim humor, and sheer theatrical forcefulness."*[3] But for all its importance within the theatre world, Waiting for Lefty was never granted immunity from the powers of censorship.

Within the short space of seven days in April 1935, Waiting for Lefty was closed down in both Boston and New Haven. A month later the Boston police intervened again, and halted a production of the play due to be performed by the New Theatre Players at the Long Wharf Theatre. As a result of that particular controversy, yet another Boston production, scheduled to be performed at the Dudley Street Opera House, had to be cancelled. What was the nature of this seemingly systematic attack on Waiting for Lefty? According to the Boston authorities, the play was being censored on moral and not political grounds; it was not its militancy they objected to but its profane usage of the words "damn" and "hell". Despite the threat of criminal proceedings, fifteen members of The New Theatre Players decided to proceed with a public performance of the play. At the end of

the play they were immediately arrested and charged with profanity, not by ordinary officers of the law, but by members of Boston's elite 'Red Squad', a core of police officers trained to deal with political activism.[4] The events in Boston were not isolated, but part of a national pattern of censorship and arrests, in which the radical theatre was coerced into silence. It is only in moments of severe political crisis that mature ideologies have to resort to coercion. The most violent chapter in Waiting for Lefty's early history occurred near New York in an evening of violence that said more about the desperate state of the society than it did about the theatre.

In 1935, the Newark Collective Theatre planned to stage a double bill of Waiting for Lefty and the Scottsboro play, They Shall Not Die, but had their permit withdrawn by the local school board. The company were undeterred by the decision and arranged an alternative venue, only to have the performance stopped because the seats were not properly bolted to the floor. The Collective Theatre found a third venue, but once again the police intervened and tried to end the performance. The cast and several union radicals stood up to protest and a riot broke out during which nine arrests were made, including members of the cast, and Joe Gilbert, a representative of the Taxicab Drivers' Union.[5] Gilbert had been one of the prominent activists in the strike upon which Waiting for Lefty was based. It was a peculiar example of real life almost imitating artifice: a union radical arrested in the audience of a play based on events from his own recent political past. The radical theatre in the U.S.A. and the organized labour movement were clearly under threat from different forms of political reaction. In one of his periodic outbursts against the intolerant state, the dramatist John Howard Lawson spoke out vehemently against attacks on radical culture.

> *"Police terrorism: nightsticks, tear gas, riot calls, and jails. Municipal persecution: violation of non-existent fire regulations, condemnation of theatres used for years, trumped up charges of 'blasphemy' or 'obscenity', the threat of losing your regular job if you appear in an amateur production of a play of social protest. And the kidnapping and beating and robbing of actors and directors - such are the dangers that confront the vital, sincere theatres in America today! The soil becomes ripe for the foul seed of fascism."*[6]

Lawson's polemical statements almost certainly contained references to the savage beating of Will Ghere, director of the Hollywood Group Theatre, by a gang of German fascists for refusing to cancel a production of Clifford Odets' anti-Nazi play, Till the Day I die.[7] But his general anger was provoked by a climate in which the radical theatre was under systematic scrutiny by an officialdom that was genuinely anxious about the strength of working class activism. The theatre of the Depression found its voice not only in Waiting for Lefty but in its cultural relationships with a progressive tendency within society, during the period of new unionism. The theatre of the Depression was the theatre of direct industrial action.

Strike Marches On : The Living Newspaper and Industrial Action

The escalation of direct industrial action began in earnest in 1934. In Ohio a strike by electrical workers gathered momentum over a number of weeks, and after a series of demonstrations a riot erupted in the streets of Toledo. Over one thousand members of the National Guard were drafted into the town in what was the largest display of military force in the state of Ohio during peacetime.[8] Throughout 1934 a wave of strikes reverberated through the United States, from the waterfronts of San Francisco to the theatre district of Broadway. At the height of the taxi-drivers' strike, over forty thousand workers were involved in a highly

emotive labour dispute, in which one independent cab driver was found drowned in his taxi in East River. Ironically, in one of those peculiar concurrences of political reality and theatrical fiction, the taxi-drivers demonstrated in the areas around Times Square and police were summoned to clear the theatre district of protesters.[9] As Odets began work on Waiting for Lefty, it had become increasingly more difficult to determine the blurred boundaries between the drama of direct action and the stages of the political theatre. In recognition of the 'spectacular' nature of their action, organized workers began to implement a series of political strategies such as sit-down strikes, sleep-ins and lie-down demonstrations. Perhaps the most ostentatious display of solidarity was shown by members of the Central Trades and Labor Union of St. Louis in April 1935. When the captain of the St. Louis Cardinals' baseball team drove his wife to work across a picket line, it was the cue for a successful boycott of his team's home fixtures.[10]

This escalation in direct industrial action could not have happened in a political vacuum. Clearly it was a response to the Depression, but more immediately it coincided with a significant development in labour history in the U.S.A., the foundation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.) in 1935. When John L. Lewis and a faction within the Mineworkers' Union formed the C.I.O., as a radical alternative to the American Federation of Labor, it appeared at least for a time that the wave of industrial militancy had a focus and a national organization. In the theatre, these initiatives and aspirations led to the establishment of the Workers' Alliance, a major pressure group within the Federal Theatre, and an organization that had significant support within the Living Newspaper Unit.

The Workers' Alliance of America (W.A.A.) was established at a Socialist Party conference in Washington D.C. in March 1935, and David Lasser, a leading Socialist Party activist, was voted in as president. The major principle of the Workers' Alliance was to organize relief workers into a national alliance which could represent their interests and campaign on their behalf. The Alliance was not concerned with the elite ten per cent of Federal Theatre employees who, like Joe Losey, had been recruited to add professional expertise, but the vast majority of workers who had come from the dole queues and the unemployment registers. According to their president, the Workers' Alliance saw their purposes as follows:

> *"We organize unemployed and W.P.A. workers in each locality to settle their grievances at the relief bureau or on the W.P.A., jobs to prevent discrimination, to win higher relief standards and higher wages. We co-operate in each locality and nationally with all organizations who are willing to work with us for common aims ... We extend our hands to the labor movement prepared to do our part in assisting them in their struggles for clean, militant unionism and for a higher standard of living for the unemployed. And finally, we greet all workers in the desire to unite not only economically but also politically for independent working class political action."*11

Within a year of its foundation, the Workers' Alliance had made significant progress within most W.P.A. projects. By the end of 1935 it had members, affiliates and organizers in over thirty states, and by April 1936 had a national membership in excess of six hundred thousand relief workers. Although the membership was relatively small in relation to the nine million unemployed, it still represented a formidable pressure group within the W.P.A. The Alliance was particularly strong in New York City and had considerable support from inside Federal Theatre units in New York, Chicago, Ohio and Indiana. At its first annual convention, the Alliance voted to establish strong working relationships with several organizations for the unemployed, particularly the unemployed Councils and the National Unemployed League. This effectively brought the Workers' Alliance into closer ideological contact with the Communist Party, and almost immediately there was a discernible increase in its commitment

to direct action. In the summer of 1936, in what transpired to be a highly significant display of support, the Workers' Alliance organized a series of disputes culminating in an attack on the New Jersey State House by five thousand hunger marchers, when it became apparent that the state had run out of relief funds.[12] From that day onwards, the Alliance orchestrated a series of public demonstrations in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York to protest against inadequate relief payments, or to demonstrate against any threatened cut-backs in relief allocations.

This new wave of radicalism invariably had a direct effect on the theatre. The Alliance was only one of several new unions formed during the period. The American Federation of Actors had already been founded in 1933 as an alternative to Actors Equity, and attracted thousands of young actors who supported the federation's campaign for a more appropriate minimum wage.[13] It appeared as if a new political awareness had not only made its way on to the stage, but had percolated through the consciousness of the acting profession. In a series of lengthy and acrimonious disputes between actors and the Shubert management, five Broadway theatres were closed to the public, whilst in Hollywood the Screen Guild led a strike of six thousand film technicians against the major studios. Only hired strike breakers and attacks on the picket lines kept the studios in operation.[14]

As far as the Federal Theatre was concerned, the Workers' Alliance exerted powerful influence. Although it was one of the smallest organizations working within the domain of the W.P.A., and despite its questionable status as a fully constituted union of relief workers, it spearheaded numerous disruptive activities. During a week in October 1936, a few days prior to the nationwide opening of Sinclair Lewis's It Can't Happen Here, the Alliance organized a nationwide *"folded arms strike for a living*

wage."[15] The Federal Theatre and the Federal Music Project were the most severely affected W.P.A. projects and the F.T.P.'s costume department in New York City was brought to a standstill at a time when production schedules were at their most demanding. Although the Alliance's action did not delay the opening of It Can't Happen Here, which had sold enough advance tickets in New York to guarantee a run of at least three months, the week of action indicated that relief workers were not willingly going to accept any financial threat to their already precarious occupation. It is entirely predictable that the Living Newspaper Unit, by then the most radical group within the F.T.P., should have had strong bonds with the Workers' Alliance.[16] Although the Alliance never delayed the opening of a Living Newspaper, it did sanction several strikes by members of the Unit, and organized the distribution of leaflets to Living Newspaper audiences. The leaflets always contained references to the Alliance's three major concerns: discrimination against relief workers, the status of the minimum wage, and the threats to relief allocations from central Government.

The two Living Newspapers directed by Joe Losey, Triple-A Plowed Under and Injunction Granted, both reflected these radical tendencies within the labour movement. The final scene of Triple-A Plowed Under advocated the formation of a Farmer-Labor party, which in 1936 was the official policy of both the C.I.O. and the Communist Party. As a result of its militant ending, the play earned the dubious reputation of *"the flower of American Brain Trust Communism."*[17] Only four months later, Injunction Granted reiterated the Unit's commitment to labour activism in a Living Newspaper which advocated that all unions should unite behind the C.I.O. This unqualified demonstration of political engagement made Injunction Granted the most uncompromising production to date, and regenerated the hostilities between the Unit and its administrative superiors.

Injunction Granted, a chronicle of labour activity in the United States, opened on 24th July 1936 at the Biltmore Theatre. It was written by the Unit's research staff, under the supervision of Arthur Arent, who by then had established a reputation as a Living Newspaper dramatist. The finished production took the form of a twenty-eight scene revue which was closer to some of Mayakovsky's circus plays in Soviet Russia than it was to previous Living Newspapers such as Ethiopia. Throughout the twenty-eight scenes and two hundred year timespan of Injunction Granted, the actor Norman Lloyd assumed the role of a mute clown based on the character of Harpo Marx, and acted as a visual commentator on the scenic events.[18] Despite Lloyd's virtuoso performance, Joe Losey's multi-levelled staging, a barrage of visual devices, magic tricks and a cacophony of sound effects, which on one occasion brought the New York City police to the theatre, the production was not well liked by F.T.P. administrators.[19] A rehearsal of Injunction Granted was enough to worry the new Regional Director, Phillip Barber and his assistant Bill Farnsworth. They immediately advised Hallie Flanagan that the production was politically provocative and should be stopped to protect the Project from outside criticism. Flanagan chose to overrule their advice and decided to support Losey whom she had always respected as a director. In an attempt to find a compromise, Flanagan advised the Unit to *"clean up the script and make it more objective."*[20] Morris Watson and Joe Losey chose to ignore her advice and only made minor amendments. After driving home from the opening night, Hallie Flanagan was so enraged by the production that she immediately drafted a lengthy, critical letter.

> *"We have just driven back from New York after INJUNCTION GRANTED, and inspite of the fact that it is now 2.30 a.m., I would like to tell you what I think of the play.*
>
> *As you both know I am committed to the Living Newspaper. When I suggested it to Elmer Rice, before he came on the project, I did so not only because I saw in it a way to use man-power in which we were rich, but because I thought clear and factual presentation of the news done in simple, exciting terms, one of the most potent things that the stage can do today ..."*

> *I suggested you, Joe ... because I had discussed various such ideas with you in Washington and felt convinced you could do a good job. I still think highly of your imaginative facility, but I feel that perhaps you are allowing your own personal beliefs to endanger the idea of the living newspaper...*
>
> *... the production seems to me to be a special pleading, biased, an editorial not a news issue. (Witness the one-sided treatment of the C.I.O. rally; the voice reading Hoover; the scene showing judges asleep, etc. etc.).* "21

Flanagan's reservations with the production were borne out by the critical response in New York's daily newspapers. The Broadway critics were unanimous in their criticism of Injunction Granted, and even the Communist Party journal, New Masses, attacked it for putting too much faith in the trades union movement, and placing less emphasis on revolutionary organization. The most scathing criticism came from the direction of the weekly journals and other periodicals. The Commonweal, a magazine that was normally critical of W.P.A. initiatives, virulently attacked the play. Almost a month after the opening night, the critic Glanville Vernon denounced it in the most unambiguous manner. *"As propaganda it has no place in the taxpayers' theatre, and as art it has no place in the theatre at all."*[22] With Injunction Granted provoking the most negative kind of critical response in the press and the controversies of Ethiopia, The South and Triple-A Plowed Under still very much in the air, the Unit was living out its reputation as the bête noire of the Works Progress Administration. As if courting even more controversy, the managing producer of the Unit, Morris Watson, accepted an invitation to speak on behalf of striking automobile workers in Flint, Michigan. In the early weeks of 1937, the most significant industrial dispute of the thirties and the most dynamic cultural form of the Depression came together. The workers' Living Newspaper Strike Marches On, now almost unknown within the rich culture of the North American working-class, was written and performed by strikers in celebration of their solidarity.

The Flint strike had been in progress for well over six weeks before Watson arrived at the plant. On 11th January 1937 events took a direction that none of the striking workers had anticipated. The company police attempted to remove sit-down strikers from two of the assembly areas, and in the ensuing confusion a pitched battle between picketers and the local police broke out. The area of Chevrolet Avenue immediately outside the General Motors' Plant became a battleground as the state police and National Guard intervened with clubs and tear gas.[23] Within a matter of days, the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the C.I.O. declared their support for the strikers, and condemned the wanton violence of the National Guardsmen.

Watson arrived in Flint on the Monday before the strike ended. He had been invited to lecture on behalf of the League for Industrial Democracy in his capacity as vice-president of the Newspaper Guild, rather than in his capacity as managing producer of the Living Newspaper Unit. On his arrival at the plant he was met by two women activists, Mary Heaton Vorse and the novelist Josephine Herbst, who were reporting the events of the strike for New Masses and The Daily Worker. The two women had decided to write a short Living Newspaper to take into the plant as an entertainment for the sit-down strikers. They had entitled the play, Strike Marches On, taking the name from the cinema newsreels The March of Time,[24] and had received permission from the strike committee to enter the plant.[25] When Watson arrived to speak at the nearby town of Lansing, it seemed appropriate to draw on his experience. Although he had only two days before he was due back in New York, Watson accepted their invitation to direct the Living Newspaper. Strike Marches On was not the first theatre production the strikers had seen that week. The local Rialto Theatre had performed a variety show in Plant Number One and The Contemporary Theatre

of Detroit, a Communist Party group affiliated to the New Theatre League, performed a two-act play, Virtue Rewarded in both the occupied plants. But Strike Marches On was the only one that addressed the strike itself and the only production that had genuinely involved the local working-class community.

By the time Strike Marches On, which had a cast of over eighty car workers and their relatives, was ready for performance, the strike had almost come to a conclusion. It was agreed not to perform the Living Newspaper in the plant but to save it for the victory meeting to be held at the Union Hall in Flint. Ironically, many of the cast had near relatives who had been occupying the plants for several weeks, and Watson's major task was convincing them of the value of the Living Newspaper when their most pressing impulse was to be reunited with friends, relatives and lovers. Only Watson's insistence on the importance of cultural expression within working-class politics convinced the participants not to abandon the play, and to see it as a final celebration of their struggle.

The Union Hall was packed to capacity two hours before the production began. The strikers received a jubilant reception from their fellow workers and from families and friends. After a series of celebratory speeches the play began. Watson had resolved a late problem by convincing a well known activist to play the part of a stool-pigeon when most of the cast resisted the *"representation of such a low creature."*[26] The opening scene established the tedious routine of assembly work, dates and times were announced over a loudspeaker by a car-workers, and in a subsequent scene the company's decision to speed up the conveyor belts was seen to lead directly to a public demonstration. To the delight of the audience, a pantomimic policeman intervened on behalf of the company. Strike Marches On continued to dramatize the sit-down strike and the subsequent gas attack outside the plants. Its mood shifted dynamically

from the comic representation of the police and the management to the more sinister documentation of the National Guard and their attempt to suppress local protest. Strike Marches On was in many respects the most significant recognition of the Living Newspaper's place within cultural production. It emerged out of a direct and very urgent political struggle; it documented the perspective of working-class politics; it was performed by the people whose interests were being dramatized; and it celebrated the realities of a victory in which progress was made and in which lessons were learned. Unfortunately, like so much progressive working-class history, Strike Marches On is repressed in the complexities of the past. It was produced in such phenomenal haste that no full script ever existed and no adequate performance documentation was ever recorded.[27]

The Struggle For Control Over The Living Newspaper Unit

After the successful production of Strike Marches On, Josephine Herbst left Michigan for Spain to report on the Spanish Civil War. Morris Watson returned to the less dangerous terrain of New York City to take part in a series of exchanges which were virtually a power struggle for control over the affairs of the Living Newspaper Unit. His return coincided with the first anniversary of the Ethiopia controversy. In the twelve months of the Unit's existence it had established a reputation as the most radical group within the New Deal Theatre project, but had failed to systematically present successful productions. If the year could be reduced to a simple scenario, it was one of a struggle between the Unit's predominantly socialist members against the more conservative policies of a complex W.P.A. administration. Somewhere in the middle of this struggle Hallie Flanagan tried, but not always successfully, to negotiate agreements that would suit both factions and would protect

the interests of Federal Theatre workers, who by 1937 numbered over twelve thousand. As 1937 progressed, it became increasingly obvious that Flanagan was under more pressure to 'clean-up' the project, and contain its more radical elements. Although she genuinely tried to resist the most naked acts of censorship, Flanagan did go along with a series of decisions that effectively shifted the balance of power away from the radical faction within the Living Newspaper Unit. This shift never manifested itself as either an ultimatum or an act of repression but rather as ideology-in-action. The period between 1937-1939 saw the Living Newspaper shed some of its militancy and became the new dramatic form of state reformism: the drama of the New Deal.

In the eyes of some important F.T.P. administrators, the Living Newspaper Unit was an unnecessary embarrassment to the Project. In a letter to Watson and Losey in August 1936, Hallie Flanagan warned of growing hostility to their unit, *"the point now is that Bill Farnsworth, as well as Phil Barber, together with many of our advisers and friends in New York are unanimously against any continuance of the Living Newspaper."*[28] By agreeing to scrutinize scripts more carefully than had been the case in the past, Flanagan managed to contain the threat of closure. But in her attempts to placate bureaucratic criticism she invariably lost some of the respect that the Unit had for her long standing commitment to progressive theatre practice. The script of the Living Newspaper Money, written by Leon Alexander and Hoffman Hayes, which was never performed under the auspices of the F.T.P. was savagely criticized by Flanagan.[29] In an unambiguous condemnation of the script, she claimed, *"it is just an adolescent, anti-capitalist scream of hate, and I will not have such nonsense done on our stage."*[30] Her attitude to another Living Newspaper, Russia, which documented the role of Lenin within the revolution, was much the same. According to Arthur Arent, the script was abandoned before its completion *"on orders from above"*.[31]

Flanagan's eagerness to suppress any obvious associations between the Living Newspaper and revolutionary communism was not without foundation, and came in the context of increasing congressional criticism of the affairs of the Federal Theatre. She was severely critical of Injunction Granted for including a direct quote from Early Browder, the leader of the Communist Party in the United States, and denounced the production as *"old-fashioned Union Square shouting."*[32] Perhaps Flanagan was trying to reconstitute her own image in the eyes of public opinion by being rigorous in the demands she placed on the Unit. It had become evident over the first year of the Federal Theatre that her appointment as National Director was not unanimously supported, and was at times publicly contested by anti-New Deal senators. In March 1936 Harry Hopkins had been called before the House Committee in Charge of Deficiency Appropriations to answer questions on the spending policies of the W.P.A. A few days later, the hearing was raised in the Senate by Senator James J. Davis who publicly criticized the W.P.A. for allowing *"money meant for relief to be spent by a woman infatuated by the Russian Theatre and the U.S.S.R."*, and questioned *"the use of relief money, intended to feed the hungry, for such alien purposes."*[33] The senator's criticisms were not only a forecast of the climate of ideological reaction that would permeate the attitude of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (H.U.A.C.) in future decades, but a precise reminder that the F.T.P. and its National Director had to come to terms with formidable political criticism. The implications were obvious; critics of the New Deal had the easy option of associating the W.P.A.'s social policies with the radical theatre, and by highlighting the influence of Russian culture, could construct a spectacular fiction of communist conspiracy.

The repetition of rumours and half-truths in the press, in the streets and particularly in congressional hearings, invested the myth of the

Federal Theatre's communist bias with a grain of truth. The reality of the project's internal affairs were almost diametrically opposed to the fiction that had been construed by its critics. Only a tiny proportion of the F.T.P.'s productions had anything remotely to do with political issues, and they were almost certainly outnumbered by religious dramas and by local pageants which often had a distinctly patriotic undercurrent. Any influence that the Communist Party did exert was confined to isolated, albeit important and well known units, most of which were based in New York City. Perhaps predictably, the extent of radical influence within the Project was to be found in the 'political' theatre units and not in the hierarchies of administration where the significant decision-making took place.

Although the Living Newspaper Unit was exceptional in the way it persisted with contentious political subjects, it did receive considerable public attention, and generated enthusiasm throughout the United States and Europe. Although it was far from representative, the Unit somehow became inextricably associated with the F.T.P., and in the minds of many critics the two were synonymous. It was through the productions of the Living Newspaper Unit in particular that the F.T.P. established its international reputation for experimental stagecraft, but consequently it was also the reputation of the Living Newspaper that was partly responsible for the project's adverse image. The criticism of the F.T.P. had begun in earnest with the production of Triple-A Plowed Under, which most of the Hearst-owned papers had attacked. In the most insidious kind of theatre criticism, the New York Evening Journal openly sided with the policies of the Republican National Committee and denounced the production as *"the most outrageous misuse of taxpayers' money that the Roosevelt administration has yet been guilty of."*[34] However, even the criticisms

of Triple-A Plowed Under, which was dismissed as a 'pink play', paled into insignificance alongside the critical reception of Injunction Granted.[35]

The reviews of Injunction Granted were consistently critical of the production and frequently singled out Joe Losey's direction as a crucial factor. In responding to one of Brooks Atkinson's reviews in The New York Times; whilst on a short vacation in Connecticut, Losey wrote to Morris Watson:

> *"I was taken by surprise by Atkinson's review, the violence of which somewhat gives it away and invalidates it. Chaos etc. charges are undoubtedly true, but political charges seem to me fantastic - particularly the obvious bit of Losey - red baiting evident in the phrase "Moscow stylization". I'm all through writing letters to critics, but someday I hope someone will charge him with that and find out what he thought he meant.*[36]

Joe Losey's past associations with Communist Party theatre groups and his formative visit to Russia, made him an easy target for political criticism.[37] His friendship with Morris Watson, who was well established as a union militant, made their partnership at the helm of the Living Newspaper Unit a particular problem for the W.P.A. Both Losey and Watson supported the activities of the Workers' Alliance and allowed its members to petition in the lobby of the Biltmore Theatre during the run of Injunction Granted. Hallie Flanagan had cause to complain to them for allowing Communist Party literature to be hawked in the theatre and demanded that it end immediately.[38] *"Whatever my personal sympathies are"*, she wrote, *"I cannot as a custodian of federal funds, have such funds used as a party tool."*[39] In ending the letter, Flanagan told them she had resisted pressure from within the project and from the W.P.A. to make changes in the leadership of the Unit. *"I am willing, perhaps misguidedly, to take one more chance with you and Joe in charge"*, she addressed herself to Watson. *"If the next show is not better, both thematically and dramatically, I will have to support Barber in making a change of supervision."*[40] Ultimately, such a decision was unnecessary.

Injunction Granted was closed prematurely in October 1936 and receipts were returned to paying customers. Losey left the Project in protest against the decision, and from that period onwards Morris Watson's importance subsided. For nearly four months, until the next Living Newspaper Power opened at the Ritz Theatre, the New York Living Newspaper Unit did not attract paying customers, and had to turn down block bookings from trades unions wanting to see Injunction Granted. The transitional phase between Injunction Granted and Power turned out to be a crucial turning point in the history of the Living Newspaper as a dramatic form. The militant influence within the Unit waned and the form became more closely aligned with the politics of the New Deal. Whilst stressing the significance of this transition, it would be wrong to conclude that the Living Newspaper abandoned its progressive intentions. In fact the next two Living Newspapers, Power and One Third of a Nation, whilst ideologically closer to New Deal reformism than Injunction Granted, still advocated substantial social change. The Living Newspaper was still a politically progressive form of drama but had now forsaken its revolutionary heritage in favour of the political expediency of social reformism.

Over thirty years after his departure from the Federal Theatre Project, by which time he was an established film director, Losey looked back on his experiences with considerable bitterness.

> *"I broke with the Living Newspaper over the withdrawal of Injunction Granted. I was not fired and at no time was I under any pressure from Morris Watson. I was under considerable pressure from Flanagan and Barber, which was disagreeable ... Flanagan found my political militancy increasingly inconvenient."*[41]

Whether Losey resigned or was given an ultimatum is academic, but it does seem indisputable that he was the scapegoat in a public move to bring the Living Newspaper into a closer line with the project's national policies. Perhaps only his position as vice-president of the Newspaper Guild saved

Watson from a similar fate. From the beginning of 1937 the most significant decisions affecting the public image of the Unit were taken by Philip Barber, New York's Regional Director, and as if to confirm the ideological shift, they abandoned their policy of attributing authorship to the entire Unit, and subsequent Living Newspapers were attributed to Arthur Arent. This shift from collaboration to individual authorship, insignificant on the surface, conceals an entire network of values.

Losey's departure left a vacuum that was never satisfactorily filled. He had been the Unit's most able and most adventurous director, and had drawn up a number of plans to streamline the company and make its practices more systematic. Before he left the Project, Losey requested a meeting with Flanagan in Washington, partly to clear several misunderstandings, but also to present his plans for the future of the Unit. Unfortunately, due to Flanagan's demanding schedule and the W.P.A.'s unwillingness to grant Losey a travel permit to go to Washington, the meeting never took place.

Within Losey's plans were several propositions about the Project's acting standards which had been an apparently insurmountable problem from the outset. Perhaps because it was a relief project which had recruited its personnel in an unmethodical way, the F.T.P. had specific problems in maintaining acceptable acting standards. The Living Newspaper Unit had been allocated a number of old actors, many from vaudeville, who found it difficult to adapt to the new performance demands of the form. The problem was exacerbated by bureaucratic confusion that resulted in actors and technicians being allocated to jobs they could not perform. Whilst recognising the need to protect a relief worker's right to work, Losey advocated a system within which *"incompetence"* would *"not be penalized"* but which would protect standards of performance.[42] In a letter to Watson

he wrote, *"this is relief work - yes. Workers cannot and should not be fired for inefficiency, but they must be shifted about until they are in a position they can and will fill ..."*, and in a personal jibe against Watson he continued, *"There is a great deal too much sentimentality around, which ... is no help to a sound trade union point of view."*[43] His remarks were not delivered spitefully but with first hand awareness of the extent of the problem. The opening night of his production of Triple-A Plowed Under was almost cancelled, when veteran actors refused to accept the demands of the production style, which they felt minimized their role as performers.

However, Losey departed from the Project leaving the Unit's policies on acting in a disorderly state and was not able to work on the two Living Newspapers that were being prepared by the research staff. One of them had the working title War and Taxes and the other was a Living Newspaper on the socialization of medicine, which eventually reached the stage in an altered form in 1940. To the relief of the W.P.A. administration, neither of these potentially contentious subjects were performed on the Federal stage. On leaving the Living Newspaper Unit, Losey tried to interest several F.T.P. actors, including Norman Lloyd, in a projected *"social circus"* based on Mayakovsky's radical circus plays in Russia.[44] But the proposals came to nothing and Losey's next production was a more modest play, Who Fights the Battle?, which was organized by the Theatre Arts Committee as part of a fund raising event for the republican cause in the Spanish Civil War.

In June 1937, a further exodus from the F.T.P. saw Orson Welles, John Houseman, Will Ghere and Norman Lloyd leave the project as the result of a controversy over The Cradle Will Rock. The 891 unit had chosen to ignore a W.P.A. directive which forbade the opening of new productions in New York during a period when the project was under severe financial

pressure.[45] The members of the unit became more determined when W.P.A. administrators showed some resistance to the subject matter of The Cradle Will Rock, an operetta set in the fictitious Steeltown U.S.A., but commenting on a real political struggle between the C.I.O. and the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. On 15th June 1937, several uniformed W.P.A. guards positioned themselves in the lobby of the Maxine Elliot Theatre and tried to prevent the opening night of a production that The New York Times had already previewed as militantly pro-labour.[46] In an attempt to defy the threat of censorship, the director and cast hired another theatre and invited the audience to reconvene at the Venice Theatre. Despite apparently insurmountable problems - no scenery, a badly divided cast, problems with the actors and technician unions, and the likelihood of a show without proper music - the show opened with the composer, Marc Blitzstein, at the piano on stage and the cast in the audience.

> *"With Blitzstein on stage at a tinny piano, and the cast seated among the audience all over the house, the lights went down. Blitzstein set the scene in his speaking voice and began to play. Some of the performers had decided to defy the Equity ruling and sing from their positions in the auditorium; others had not. But as Blitzstein began the prostitute's opening song, Olive Stanton, who had the part, started to sing with him. Others rose up to perform their parts, with Blitzstein doing some eight roles... The performance went on without a hitch ... So successful was the method of presentation that most subsequent revivals have dispensed with the orchestral score, and almost never has the work been performed with scenery.*[47]

The production marked the end of Orson Welles and John Houseman's associations with the Federal Theatre, and the end of Project No. 891 as one of the F.T.P.'s most adventurous units. The Cradle Will Rock emphasized that the premature ending of Injunction Granted was not an isolated incident of W.P.A. censorship. Both productions offered up radical interpretations of unionization, and did so in experimental performance styles within a context in which the labour movement was continuing to make important demands. The nationwide campaigns to unionize the major steel towns had taken on a profound significance for the organized working-class.

It remains one of the major disappointments of Depression theatre that the Federal Theatre's subservience to W.P.A. directives prevented it from giving its categorical support to that struggle. The most consistent commitment to the dramatization of the labour movement existed elsewhere, on the independent stage, and in the work of the New Theatre League.

By 1937 the New Theatre League had shaken off the vestiges of sectarianism that had limited its perspectives earlier in the decade. The Communist Party's commitment to popular-front strategies had allowed the League to mobilize behind a range of anti-fascist causes whilst maintaining a strong foothold in working-class politics. Between 1935 and 1939, the League's affiliated groups tended to perform plays which either dramatized the domestic struggle for workers' rights or, alternatively, the events of the Spanish Civil War. Agitprop theatre no longer commanded the same immediate respect it had earlier in the thirties, and had largely been displaced by other theatrical forms such as the Living Newspaper, the cabaret revue and even full-length realist plays. The new theatre movement had moved away from mobile forms of theatre and placed a greater emphasis on the need to build permanent theatre companies. Predictably the controversies that surrounded the Federal Theatre's major Living Newspaper productions made them an ideal model for this new notion of oppositional theatre. The Depression had given rise to a range of 'documentary' expressions in photography, film, the theatre and in literature that would not have suited the agitational theatre of 1931, but seemed particularly appropriate to the later work of the New Theatre League.

It seemed as if nearly every new play was based on or directly documented a contemporary labour dispute. In January 1936, the Let Freedom Ring Theatre Company staged Albert Maltz's play Private Hicks, which recounted the story of a young National Guardsman, who in the course of his duty was expected to fire at strikers. The simple plot involved the soldier

remembering his own father striking for better conditions and refusing to obey orders. Although prone to melodrama, Private Hicks continued the tradition established by Waiting for Lefty in the previous year, and was awarded the New Theatre League's annual playwrighting prize. The cult for strike plays or labour issues gathered momentum in the second half of the decade with Mike Blankfort's The Crime (1936) directed by Elia Kazan and Alfred Saxe, John Howard Lawson's Marching Song (1937), and the Labor Stage's phenomenal musical revue Pins and Needles (1937-40) which was performed on Broadway over one thousand times.[48]

One of the New Theatre League's main functions was to distribute theatre scripts to its affiliated groups in support of nationwide political campaigns. In 1936, the League distributed Boycott Hearst, a short Living Newspaper purposely written to support a campaign to boycott Metrotone Newsreels which was owned by William Randolph Hearst. The newsreels had a reputation for reporting events in a fiercely reactionary manner, and were particularly biased in their coverage of union activities. In the course of the campaign, cinemas showing Metrotone newsreels were picketed by members of the Film and Photo League and the Young Communist League. At one demonstration outside the Balaban and Katz Paradise Theatre in Chicago, the police disrupted the picket line and several protesters were arrested for a crime that did not exist on the statute books. A performance of Boycott Hearst arranged to raise money for their defence was cancelled when the charges were dropped and the demonstrators released.[49]

It was largely through the efforts of the New Theatre League that the Living Newspaper became a democratized form of labour drama. Whereas the F.T.P. Living Newspapers were performed in major Broadway theatres and attracted their audience by low price seats and union block-bookings, the New Theatre League initiated a policy of locally produced Living

Newspapers. To support the strikes in the major steel towns the League circulated copies of What Can the Union Do For Me?, a Living Newspaper based on the policies of the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee. Included with each script was a booklet instructing members how to write and perform their own local Living Newspapers.[50] Although this policy could never have been as developed as the proletarian culture of Soviet Russia, it did re-emphasize one of the most crucial dimensions of Living Newspaper dramaturgy: the possibility of local and specific grass-roots productivity. The Living Newspaper in the period of new union activity in the United States extended the form into different areas of practice where it could not, unlike the original Living Newspapers, expect the support of the state. It had to adapt to the permanent threat of censorship and vary its approaches accordingly. But the Living Newspaper maintained its capacity for effective political satire. Injunction Granted may well have offended the political sensibilities of the W.P.A., but it attracted an audience that derived pleasure from its outrageous forms of political satire. A boxing match between the corpulent figure of William Randolph Hearst and the lithe Dean Jennings of the Newspaper Guild left the audience in no doubt about what perspective the production was offering. Its clown routines, exploding cigars and musical extravaganzas reconfirmed the Living Newspaper's roots in revolutionary satire. When the clown popped up from a gap in the stage to mockingly present the millionaire food magnate, H.J. Heinz, with a giant pickle, it was a gesture that had resonances back across history to the revolutionary eccentricism of the Blue Blouses. The W.P.A. was clearly willing and able to promote progressive theatre but it wanted, above all else, to tame the partisan energies of the Living Newspaper.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. Native Land was one of the most important films to be produced by Frontier Films, a progressive film group active in the United States between 1937 and 1942. It dramatized the mysterious and undemocratic attacks on union radicals by an entire network of illegal organizations. The film's visual style owes much to the Living Newspaper. It was directed by Leo Hurwitz, the photography was by Paul Strand, the narration was delivered by Paul Robeson and one of the main actors was Canada Lee, who had previously been an actor with one of the F.T.P.'s negro units. See W. Alexander, Film on the Left, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1981.

2. Joseph Losey staged an English-language version of the play in Moscow in 1935. An early British version of the play was staged by London's Unity Theatre (see Chapter Five), and was directed by Herbert Marshall who had been an actor in Soviet Living Newspapers whilst studying in Moscow. The Glasgow Workers' Theatre Group staged a production of Waiting for Lefty as late as 1940.

3. Richard Watts Jr., New York Herald Tribune, cited in Censorship, a pamphlet published by the National Committee Against Censorship of Theatre Arts, 1935, New York Public Library Theatre Collection.

4. "The Boston Censorship", Ibid., p. 19.

5. "Newsflash", Ibid., p. 29.

6. "For a Free Stage", Ibid., p. 5.

7. Will Ghere was director of the Hollywood Group Theatre before moving to New York and joining the Federal Theatre Project. Later in his career he gained international recognition as the amiable grandfather in the television soap-opera The Waltons.

8. B. Kash and P.L. Garman, "The Impact of the Political Left", in Labor and the New Deal, eds. M. Derber and E. Young, Da Capo, New York, 1972, p. 98.

9. "Violence Renewed by Taxi Drivers", New York Times, March 26th, 1934, p. 1.

10. Kash and Garman, Ibid., p. 93.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. In 1934 the Alliance of Theatre and Costume Technicians was formed as an alterantive to the more conservative Scenic Designers Union.

14. "Studios Operate as Actors Cross Picket Line", New York Times, May 4th 1937, p. 1.

15. Kash and Garman, Ibid., p. 94.

16. In subsequent investigations into the internal affairs of the F.T.P. it was alleged that membership of the Workers' Alliance was a prerequisite before any actor, researcher or technician could work within the Living Newspaper Unit (see appendix). This allegation has never been substantiated. However, it is evident from extant documents, from oral history tapes and from various W.P.A. records that the Alliance was a powerful pressure group within the Unit.

17. "Triple-A Plowed Under", New York Times, March 15th 1936, p. 27.

18. Norman Lloyd was one of the most successful actors working on the Federal Theatre Project. He also appeared as "the littleman" in Power, performed in Labiche's farce Horse Eats Hat with Project No. 891 under Orson Welles' direction, and subsequently left the F.T.P. to work with the Mercury Theatre. Lloyd appeared in several Mercury Theatre productions, most notably in Welles' adaptation of Julius Caesar (1937).

19. Oral History Interview - Norman Lloyd/John O'Connor, The Federal Theatre Research Centre.

20. Letter from Hallie Flanagan to Morris Watson and Joseph Losey dated July 24th 1936. Hallie Flanagan Collection, New York Public Library.

21. Ibid.

22. V. Granville, "Injunction Granted: Latest Edition of the Living Newspaper is Out and Out Propaganda of the Left", The Commonweal, XXIV, August 1936, p. 407.

23. S. Fine, Sitdown : The General Motor's Strike 1936-7, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1969, p. 84.

24. The newsreel series The March of Time, which was a form of filmic documentary utilizing fictional reconstruction, has often been compared to the Living Newspaper. The catchphrase of The March of Time was "Time Marches On", hence the title of the Flint Living Newspaper. The March of Time was pioneered by the film-maker Louis de Rochemont, and the first issue was screened at the Capitol Theatre on Broadway, on 1st February 1935. It was an interpretative and discursive form of news cinematography that used archival footage, documentary material and dramatic reconstruction to discuss several topical issues. A year after its foundation The March of Time was screened in five thousand theates throughout the U.S.A. and over seven hundred in Britain reaching a total monthly audience of fifteen million people. Although it had similar problems of censorship, The March of Time was politically safer than the Living Newspapers.

See R. Fielding, "Time Flickers Out : The Passing of The March of Time", The Quarterly of Film, Radio and T.V., Vol. XI, 1956-7, and R. Fielding, "Mirror of Discontent : The March of Time and its Politically Controversial Film Issues", Western Political Quarterly, Vol. 12, 1959.

25. M. Watson, "Sitdown Theatre", Morris Watson Collection, University of Oregon.

26. Ibid.

27. Although there is no extant script of Strike Marches On, the Morris Watson Collection at Oregon University contains many fragments and synopses of the major scenes. Working from these fragments, I have reconstructed a version of the script (see appendix) which is as close to the original as the primary material will allow. However, this script can only be seen as an approximation and is not presented as a fully authenticated historical document.

28. Flanagan to Watson and Losey, 20th August 1936, Hallie Flanagan Collection, New York Public Library. Phil Barber had replaced Elmer Rice as the Regional Director for New York in 1936, his assistant was Bill Farnsworth.

29. Hoffman Hayes was a script writer for the Living Newspaper Unit but also did translation work for the F.T.P. Play Bureau. He was a friend of Bertolt Brecht and translated several works by the German playwright including The Trial of Lucullus and Mother Courage and her Children.

30. Mathews, p. 117.

31. Goldman, p. 81.

32. Flanagan to Watson and Losey, 20th August 1936.

33. Mathews, p. 78.

34. New York Evening Journal, 24th October 1936, p. 32, in Mathews, p. 73.

35. Mathews, p. 73.

36. Letter from Joe Losey to Morris Watson, 27th July 1936, Morris Watson Collection, University of Oregon Library. All subsequent reference to correspondence between Losey and Watson are from the same collection.

37. Joe Losey was born in Wisconsin in 1909, educated at Dartmouth and Harvard, and moved to New York in the early thirties. He worked with Charles Laughton at the Theatre Guild and directed his first Broadway production, Little Old Boy, in 1932. After his visit to Moscow to study theatre at the age of 24, Losey joined the Federal Theatre. His most significant stage production on leaving the Living Newspaper Unit was the now famous production of Galileo with Charles Laughton in the leading role (1947). After a short period working in radio, Losey moved to Hollywood where he directed several shorts for M.G.M. When Dore Schary moved from M.G.M. to R.K.O., he encouraged Losey to direct The Boy with the Green Hair (1948) In the early fifties he was blacklisted, since then he has lived and directed films in Europe. See for example Coming to Terms with Hollywood, eds. J. Cook and A. Lovell, B.F.I., London, 1981.

38. Flanagan to Watson, 20th August 1936.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Goldmann, p. 76.

42. Losey to Watson, 27th July 1936.

43. Losey to Watson, 12th August 1936.

44. Goldmann, p. 72.

45. A preview of The Cradle Will Rock had been scheduled for 16th June 1937 by which time Orson Welles and John Houseman had established a formidable reputation for their work with Project No. 891 and with one of the Negro Units in Harlem. Such was their reputation in New York that fourteen thousand tickets had already been sold for the projected run of The Cradle Will Rock. On 12th June all the Federal Arts Project's directors received instructions that no new theatrical performance, music concert or art gallery could open before 1st July because of cut-backs. Hallie Flanagan strongly suspected that this instruction was a form of censorship designed to prevent the performance of The Cradle Will Rock under W.P.A. auspices. Despite numerous requests the directive was not reversed. M. Goldstein, The Political Stage, Oxford University Press, New York, 1974, p. 263.

46. Blitzstein's ideas were strongly influenced by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's collaborative operas, particularly The Three-penny Opera. At the time in question Kurt Weill was an active composer in the New York Theatre. He worked with Blitzstein and attended the Federal Theatre Summer School in 1938.

47. Goldstein, p. 264.

48. Pins and Needles opened at the Labor Stage on 27th November 1937. It had emerged out of the initiatives of the amateur theatre group of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (I.L.G.W.U.) and was a musical revue with sketches by Harold Rome, Marc Blitzstein, Daniel Gregory, Charles Friedman, Emanuel Eisenberg and the Living Newspaper dramatist Arthur Arent. At first the revue was performed only at weekends but as its reputation grew, it was transferred to the Windsor Theatre. Its Broadway run lasted until 22nd June 1940 and 1108 performances, which at the time was only bettered by one other musical (Helzapoppin!).

49. The Daily Worker, 29th June 1936, p. 3.

50. The New Theatre League generated a series of labour Living Newspapers including Labor Marches On, a series of twelve short pieces on the history of the labour movement including The Hay-market Riots of 1886, the emergence of labor spys, the Sit Down strikes and a dramatized report on the contemporary steel strikes. The Haymarket Riots were also dramatized in Injunction Granted.

(continues)

50. (cont'd) The Brookwood Labor College staged a Living Newspaper entitled Sit-Down which was performed twice in 1937; Ben Irwin and Dorothy Rosenbaum wrote another entitled C.I.O. On the March which was distributed by the League and radio station W.V.E.D. broadcast Labor Marches On in the spring of 1938. See: "Plays for a People's Theatre", New Theatre League Catalogue 1940-41, and the undated file clippings of the League's activities in New York Public Library.

CHAPTER FOUR : DOCUMENTS AND REFORMS

The Living Newspaper as New Deal Drama

"My name is William Edwards,
I live down Cove Creek Way;
I'm working on the project
They call the T.V.A.

The Government begun it
When I was but a child,
And now they are in earnest
And Tennessee's gone wild.

All up and down the valley
Theu heard the glad alarm:
The Government means business -
It's working like a charm." [1]

(Power 1937)

At the end of Act 1 of the Federal Theatre Living Newspaper Power, a film of water flowing over the Norris Dam was projected on a white scrim, a group of men and women paraded across the stage carrying lanterns and singing the play's dramatic anthem, the T.V.A. song. The scene and the interlude that followed, in which a map of T.V.A. territories was projected on the house curtain, were a visual and theatrical celebration of state interventionism. For the first time in the short but controversial history of the New York Living Newspaper Unit, one of their productions unambiguously supported the principles and ideologies of New Deal politics. From the beginning of Roosevelt's first term of office, his administration had managed to generate an enthusiasm for state subsidized projects that re-employed redundant workers to perform socially useful tasks. By August 1933, less than a year after Roosevelt's election to the presidency, the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.) had placed over 250,000 young people in a network of camps throughout the United States, which became the centres for a nationwide project of social labour. The C.C.C. Workers undertook a variety of jobs as diverse as planting trees in eroded soil, to resurfacing harbour walls and building an open-air amphitheatre in Arizona. The Tennessee Valley Authority (T.V.A.) was also established

in the first full year of Roosevelt's presidency, with the intention of developing the natural resources of the Tennessee Valley States, by controlling floods, maintaining navigation, providing electric power and developing forestation. The political initiatives that underpinned both the C.C.C. and the T.V.A. were central to the ideological texture of New Deal policy, and are evident in the organizational fabric of the Federal Theatre Project. In some respects the F.T.P., with its commitment to large-scale re-employment, locally generated initiatives and socially useful production, was a microcosm of the New Deal. By 1937 the measurable success of the New Deal could be represented by the achievements of the Federal Theatre.

After only fifteen months, the F.T.P. had established an international reputation and could marshal impressive statistical evidence to support its existence. The number of people employed by the W.P.A. to work on the theatre project varied seasonally and annually, but rarely dropped below eleven thousand people and was often more than thirteen thousand. A large proportion of these theatre workers were based in New York City, but many more were involved with over one hundred and fifty different theatre companies based in towns and cities throughout the United States.[2]

The fact is that the F.T.P. had considerably more success in fulfilling its objectives than its critics in the press and in the Republican Party were ever willing to concede. It made significant advances in combating unemployment in the performing arts, although such is the precariousness of theatre work that not even a non-profit making project could guarantee full employment. The Federal Theatre genuinely cultivated a new audience and socially extended the place of theatre within communities by performing for workers, immigrant groups, small town audiences and the disadvantaged in parks, institutions and in variety theatres. By April 1937 the F.T.P.

had premiered well over one hundred new plays, extending an awareness of innovative drama beyond the metropolitan confines of New York City and had realised its intention of offering the Depression audience an extensive repertoire of free performances. When admission prices were charged, it was Federal Theatre policy to keep them as low as possible and not to restrict the size or social composition of audiences by prohibitive entrance fees. But despite these policies the Project still managed to gross over half a million dollars in box office receipts in its first full year of operation.[3] The Federal Theatre, like the New Deal in general, had managed to initiate a level of social security on a reasonable budget by creating employment opportunities on socially relevant schemes of work.

The vast majority of Broadway producers were antagonistic to the idea of a state subsidized theatre project offering free and low price entertainment. But to see the F.T.P. as a deliberate and consistent threat to the commercial theatre was to entirely misunderstand its function. Whilst the F.T.P. did compete at the level of Broadway production, its primary function was to generate labour-intensive dramatic programmes at every level of cultural practice. It was as much the concern of the F.T.P. to sponsor two hundred drama teachers to organize theatre events in hospitals in the New York area, as it was to prepare the plays of George Bernard Shaw for full-scale commercial production.[4] By 1937 the F.T.P. had established a network of drama groups who performed in resettlement homes, in C.C.C. youth camps and in children's homes; it had made funds available to over forty thousand amateurs to work on theatre ventures in the most disadvantaged areas, and subsidized projects on dance, mime, puppetry and vaudeville. Unfortunately, theatre critics in New York were (and to some extent still are) locked into particularly narrow notions of what constitutes effective and valuable theatre. The major criteria

by which the F.T.P. was judged were entirely inappropriate to the work it was doing. The vast majority of reviews carried with them a set of ideological assumptions that were more appropriate to the commercial theatre of the Depression. Except for minority coverage in the alternative press, the F.T.P. had to contend with reviews that were an amalgam of vague subjective evaluations and speculations on the production's future prospects. Only on very rare occasions did an established Broadway critic alter the grounds of his analysis to take into account the theatre's shifting social function. The Living Newspaper Unit's productions were almost invariably judged according to a code of theatrical values that failed to take any significant account of their basis in re-employment, relief work, low budget productivity and campaigning social consciousness.

The Living Newspaper Unit made a small but significant contribution to the W.P.A.'s national statistics. It employed over two hundred people in a variety of different posts, including actors, stage-hands, research workers and journalists, and besides its own staff, the Unit created work for the Federal Music Project and the Federal Arts Project.[5] The Unit had a particularly good reputation for returning personnel to full-time employment in the commercial theatre, but often fell foul of a W.P.A. ruling that forbade relief workers the right to turn down employment offers from the private sector. Norman Lloyd, one of the Unit's most competent actors, was disciplined for turning down commercial contracts because he wanted to continue to work within the more experimental atmosphere of the F.T.P.; but in the main relief workers gratefully accepted private contracts which paid more money and were free from the stigmas of W.P.A. employment.[6]

The Living Newspaper Unit's relatively good employment record did not protect it from sustained criticism from inside the F.T.P. A number of very influential administrators felt that the Unit was a threat to the

entire project, and were willing to sacrifice Living Newspapers in order to protect the F.T.P. from growing political criticism. Fortunately, Hallie Flanagan resisted pressure to abandon the Unit but had to concede that past controversies were detrimental to the Federal Theatre's public image. It was in the light of these pressures, and in the context of growing political opposition to the New Deal, that Flanagan agreed to a series of monitoring measures which effectively brought the Living Newspaper Unit under closer official scrutiny.

> *i. A planned supervision of all Living Newspaper research topics.*
>
> *ii. A closer system of vetting scripts due to be put into rehearsal.*
>
> *iii. The abandonment of provocative and 'unfair' scripts.*
>
> *iv. A prerogative that allowed unsuitable scripts to be returned to a playwright to be re-written.* [7]

These measures came into effect immediately after the premature end of Injunction Granted's run, and became the official policy governing Living Newspaper production during the period of the Unit's two major successes, Power and One Third of a Nation. This internal power shift coincided with a conscious effort to publicly define the rules and conventions of Living Newspaper drama. In a series of speeches and newspaper articles from the summer of 1936 to the spring of 1937, Hallie Flanagan persistently outlined two basic principles of Living Newspaper production. Firstly, it was argued that the Living Newspaper was a uniquely American cultural form born out of the needs of the Depression, and secondly it was insisted that the Living Newspaper was an objective form without bias or favouritism, which presented its audience with verifiable facts. The roots of these two principles can be traced back to a peculiar internal memorandum circulated to Living Newspaper staff, sometime during the controversies that surrounded Injunction Granted. The memorandum was unsigned, undated but was clearly a summary of official positions in the event of public or

press inquiries. It was vaguely entitled "On Injunction Granted in the event of ...." and contained the following clarifications:

> *"All political parties have their solution to offer to the electorate; and probably each member of the audience has his own solution. But - the Federal Theatre has none and offers none."*
>
> *".... The Living Newspaper under the supervision of Hallie Flanagan, director of the Federal Theatre Project, has brought a new vitality to the theatre. In fact the whole Federal Theatre Project has brought America a new conception of the theatre as belonging to the people."*
>
> *".... This current presentation of the Living Newspaper - Injunction Granted - had one basic creative motive - to be good theatre. The Federal Theatre reported facts and incidents, giving them dramatic form and interest. It offers no propaganda of its own; is concerned with none; the implications may fall where they will.*
>
> *The speeches of the characters are direct, accurate quotations authenticated by painstaking research, and in the case of Injunction Granted, were taken from law reports .... The result is an unbiased account of all sides of the problem."* 8

The two consistent ideological imperatives of New Deal Living Newspaper dramaturgy found their expression in the document. The notion of authenticated factual objectivity rose to displace the Living Newspaper's long history of partisan political campaigning, and the new claims of an American birthright served to efface the influences of Soviet revolutionary culture. Before the Living Newspaper could effectively become a form of New Deal theatre it had to pass through an ideological transition in which the values of revolutionary partisanship were displaced by the ideologies of American social reform. This change helps make sense of the most common and most misunderstood comment on the Living Newspaper:

> *"Like all so-called new forms the Living Newspaper borrows with find impartiality from many sources: from Aristophanes, from the Commedia dell' Arte, from Shakespearean soliloquy, from the pantomime of Mei Lan Fang. Being a flexible technique and only in its beginning, it still has much to learn from the chorus, the camera, the cartoon. Although it has occasional reference to the Volksbuhne and the Blue Blouses, to Bragaglia and Meierhold and Eisenstein, it is as American as Walt Disney, the March of Time, and the Congressional Record, to all of which American institutions it is indebted."* 9

In a masterful moment of balanced references, Flanagan conceded the revolutionary origins and European antecedents of Living Newspaper drama, but managed to win for posterity the 'unique' and 'American' qualities of the form. The real history of the Living Newspaper is conveyed not through the words of this familiar quote, but through the words of the gaps, the silences and the fissures that ultimately betray its ideological suppressions and bring its political expedience to the fore.

Power for the People : The Social Ownership of Energy

As the Unit researched material for its next Living Newspaper, Power, the official policies on neutrality, objectivity and authentic facts were being outlined almost daily. In a public speech given to supporters of the F.T.P. in Birmingham, Alabama, Hallie Flanagan diverted from the main body of the speech to pass some timely comments on the Living Newspaper, which by late 1936 was attracting considerable public interest outside New York. Her comments on the Living Newspaper included the following observations.

> *"Perhaps the most characteristically American form of theatre thus far on our program is the Living Newspaper which will afford this year increased experimentation with factual material made dramatically effective by light, sound, acrobatics and cinematics. We have found that the strength of this form of theatre lies in its objectivity. When the personal political bias of writers and directors come in, the script suffers. Here, as elsewhere, we must be sure that the F.T.P. is not used for political purposes. The W.P.A. is outside of party lines. It is not to be used to further any political party - Republican, Democratic, or Communist."*[10]

Despite Flanagan's idealistic pronouncements, the next Living Newspaper did convey a clear political purpose. When Power opened on 23rd February 1937 at the Ritz Theatre on 48th Street, it carried with it a savage indictment of the private ownership of electrical power, and advocated support for public ownership and for a more socially responsible energy

policy. Power may not have been direct support for the Democratic Party, but it was explicit in its support for the Tennessee Valley initiatives and for the energy policies of the New Deal administration. As Hallie Flanagan succinctly remarked, *"critics, who had hitherto accused us of biting the hand that fed us, now accused us of licking that hand."*[11] But Power was never a slavish attempt to canvass the favour of the W.P.A. or the President. It still maintained a progressive and campaigning dimension that was always likely to provoke opposition and criticism. Like the New Deal itself, Power was a complexity of progressive ideas that advocated significant social change in the face of political opposition, and within its complexity lay a number of important formal innovations.

The Unit's reputation within the New York theatre and the F.T.P.'s policy of block bookings, guaranteed Power an advance audience of over sixty thousand and a relatively long run. The cast of eighty-eight actors allowed the director, Bret Warren, to organize the production around several visually impressive crowd scenes, including the torchlight procession of T.V.A. workers. But unlike the collective spirit conveyed in Injunction Granted, Power introduced a new dimension, a new character and a new ideology in the persona of the Consumer. The play presented to its Depression audience, *"the struggle of the average citizen to understand the natural, social and economic forces around him, and to achieve through these forces, a better life for more people."*[12] In replacing the irreverent clown of Injunction Granted with the average citizen, Power moved much closer to the 'little man' iconography of political populism that was already prevalent in the films of Frank Capra.[13] It replaced the collective with a representative character and expressed political knowledge through the experiences of a 'typical' individual, rather than through the broader experiences of a union, a

movement or a class. But within this ideological shift, Power maintained a strong element of community purpose by insisting throughout that the consumer was not simply 'typical', but a personification of the people.[14]

Unlike any of its predecessors, Power gained the public respect of the W.P.A.'s most senior administrators. Harry Hopkins was sufficiently interested in the production to attend the first night and to meet with the cast at a backstage reception. In congratulating the cast on the vitality of their performance, Hopkins momentarily allowed the mask of neutrality and objectivity to slip, and revealed the W.P.A.'s delight at a production that seemed to sanction and celebrate the policies of the New Deal.

> *"I want to tell you this is a great show. It's fast and funny, it makes you laugh and it makes you cry and it makes you think - I don't know what more anyone can ask of a show. I want this play and plays like it done from one end of the country to the other .... People will say it's propaganda. Well, I say what of it? It's propaganda to educate the consumer who's paying for the power. It's about time someone had propaganda for him. The big power companies have spent millions on propaganda for the utilities. It's about time the consumer had a mouthpiece. I say more plays like Power and more power to you."*15

Perhaps Hopkins' positive support for Power was precipitated as much by a sense of relief than by its theatrical qualities. He had already had dealings with the script of Power before its public performance, as the result of an incident that briefly suggested the radical faction had not entirely conceded its power within the Unit.

In January 1937 two Living Newspaper research workers attended a meeting with Robert Barclay, the Federal Power Commission's regional director for New York. The purpose of the meeting was to gather statistics on the use and consumption of electricity in New York City, which were to be used by Living Newspaper dramatists in one of the scenes of Power before it went into rehearsal in the following week. During the interview the researchers allegedly told Barclay that they were only interested in

statistics that would support allegations being made by the play. In the course of the meeting it was also alleged that if the facts and statistics could not be located then *"there would be no play."*[16] Barclay immediately contacted his superiors in Washington, who in turn contacted Hallie Flanagan. She was questioned by the Power Commission's officials on the affiliations of the Unit, and the politics of its research workers. The National Commissioner refused to allow the Federal Power Commission to *"be quoted in any way, shape or form by people who are conducting a newspaper on power which will be as unfair as the script of Injunction Granted."*[17] At the mention of Injunction Granted, Flanagan was forced on to the defensive and promised that the play would not be performed until she and the W.P.A. were convinced of its fairness. In an apologetic letter to Barclay, she reassured him that *"the twisting of facts to prove a certain point is exactly the opposite from the premise of the Living Newspaper"*, and then reiterated official policy in saying, *"we wish these productions to be as authentic and objective as we can make them."*[18] To offset the possibility of another public controversy, Flanagan instructed Morris Watson to send a copy of the script to herself and Harry Hopkins, together with a bibliography of sources the Unit were using. With painstaking scrutiny, Flanagan checked the authenticity of quotes and ensured that the script contained nothing tendentious enough to provoke political outrage.

On 15th January 1937, more than a month before Power was due to open, Flanagan attended a rehearsal of the production on the bare stage of the Ritz Theatre and was pleased to find it *"clear cut and exciting."*[19] However, a lengthy and protracted wrangle over theatre space disrupted subsequent rehearsals. The Unit demanded that another F.T.P. production, Bassa Moona, be removed from the Ritz to give the Living Newspaper unrestricted access to the stage. Despite escalating rental costs, the

F.T.P. found the cast of Bassa Moona another theatre, but the disorganized cast of Power deliberated over their rehearsal schedules, allowing costs to escalate well beyond the agreed budget. The rental for the Ritz Theatre alone came to nearly $11,000 a month, which was enough to pay the wages of a hundred relief workers during that period. The Unit's belligerent attitude to other casts and its lack of internal organization once again provoked Flanagan's anger. *"In spite of these gigantic expenses the project is, in my opinion, the bungling and most inept piece of work the Federal Theatre has yet produced."*[20] These words were soon forgotten when Power opened to full houses and ran for one hundred and forty performances.

Power was the first unanimously successful Living Newspaper produced by the Federal Theatre. It seemed to please audiences, critics and benefactors alike. Many individual contributions were singled out for critical praise: Brett Warren's direction, Howard Bay's imaginative two-dimensional cut out settings, Lee Rainer's musical score, and once again Norman Lloyd's comical performance as the average consumer. In Injunction Granted, Lloyd had drawn on Harpo Marx for the comic style of the ubiquitous clown; in Power he turned to Groucho Marx to find a bizarre personality for the consumer Angus K. Buttonkooper. Although the Unit had been forced to compromise on its politics, the style of performance maintained a satirical exuberance that finally made an impression on the major New York critics. Brooks Atkinson's review was by far the most enthusiastic he had given to any F.T.P. production.

> *"If a lecture on the history, business methods and politics of electric light seem to you a dull subject, you have only to see what the versatile lads of the Living Newspaper can do when they have a regiment of actors and a battalion of theatre technicians. They have turned "Power" into one of the most exuberant shows in town. Minsky has nothing quite so hot to offer in this jejune vicinity....*

> *As a Bowery thriller under Mr. Watson's supervision it might carry as its subtitle, "Buck Watson Rides Again" with a sound of cracking whips and a dramatic rattle of hoof-beats for the most indignant and militant proletarian drama of the season has been staged with government funds."*[21]

Power continued to play to full houses until 3rd July 1937, easily overtaking the previous attendance figures of Injunction Granted, which was seen by over thirty-six thousand people. The summer season of 1937 brought increased success to Power and gave Brooks Atkinson's somewhat curious metaphor - "Buck Watson Rides Again" - a semblance of credibility. The Federal Theatre had by then fully instigated regular outdoor performances in New York City parks and decided that an adapted version of Power would be an ideal production for the Caravan Unit. The play was subsequently performed to audiences in Central Park, in Crotona Park in the Bronx, in Astoria Park, Queens and in public places throughout the five boroughs of the city.[22]

One Third of a Nation : The Saga of the Slums

Whilst Power was still being performed at the Ritz Theatre, the F.T.P. embarked on a project to bring together some of its most prominent workers from units throughout the United States. The Federal Theatre's Summer Theatre School opened on 21st June 1937 at the Vassar Experimental Theatre, which was situated on the campus of Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, where Hallie Flanagan had worked previously as a drama lecturer. A group of forty people including actors, technicians, designers, directors and playwrights were invited to the school for *"a short period of intensive study and experimentation."*[23] Hallie Flanagan opened the proceedings with one of her frequent inspirational speeches:

> *"Great social forces interpenetrate our theatre and our theatre to be worth its salt must interpenetrate the social and economic scene. The Federal Theatre can become an art form only as it fulfills its function as a life force."*[24]

After five weeks of collaboration, discussion and rehearsals, the company responded to her words and performed several scenes which subsequently formed part of the first act of the Federal Theatre's most successful Living Newspaper, One Third of a Nation. Its initial audience at the summer school consisted of a small number of invited guests, but by the time One Third of a Nation opened to the general public in New York, it had generated considerable public attention and attracted a massive audience brought from the city's most disadvantaged slum communities, by trades unions and community groups.

The Federal Theatre Summer School was seen more as a training venture than a theatrical event.[25] The culmination of the five weeks was to be a short experimental production, drawing together the main ideas and initiatives of the school. Towards the end of the proceedings, the delegates decided to stage Housing, a short one-act Living Newspaper with a massive cast of ninety-nine people. The day after casting began it was decided to assign a director, Harold Bolton, and to rename the production. A few ideas were suggested, and eventually the company agreed to take the title from President Rossevelt's second inaugural address, in which he spoke of one third of a nation being ill-housed, ill-clothed and ill-fed. The production was renamed One Third of a Nation, and at least nominally a bond was established between the Living Newspaper and the political figurehead of the New Deal.[26]

Only two performances of the pilot version of One Third of a Nation were ever staged. Apparently, the production remained faithful to the experimental theatrical strategies of Living Newspaper drama and used visual projections, short episodic scenes and fragments of authentic speeches and documents. This anti-naturalist aesthetic was carried over into Howard Bay's stage design for the pilot version. No attempt was made to recreate the surface appearance of slum dwellings on stage, instead a

series of objects such as old beds, fire escapes, dustbins and broken toilets were suspended above the stage to convey the impression of a slum community. According to the director Harold Bolton, the production tried *"to discard conventional scenery and props and substitute an object background equivalent to the subjective, psychological material used by surrealist painters."*[27] By the time One Third of a Nation opened in New York, these areas of formal experiment had virtually disappeared from the production.

On 17th January 1938 the curtains rose on the first of One Third of a Nation's two hundred and thirty seven performances, to reveal a set that was virtually a masterpiece of stage illusionism. The structure of a slum tenement engulfed in flames had all the pyrotechnical splendour of a Victorian spectacle, and all the specific details of a mature naturalistic drama.[28] The Living Newspaper had not abandoned its investigative and oppositional campaign to change social conditions, but it had compromised on its role at the formal and political vanguard of the Depression stage. It had moved a step back towards the safer terrain of naturalism.

One Third of a Nation's critique of slum housing conditions sent a wave of moral indignation through Depression America. Its most appalling images of urban squalor were as graphic and explicit in their pitiful expression as any of the photographs of the Farm Security Administration, but in comparison with previous Living Newspapers One Third of a Nation had made two fundamental compromises. The young critic, Mary McCarthy, whose theatre criticism for The Partisan Review was among the most stimulating and undervalued critical writing of the thirties, traced these compromises to the ideological currents of New Deal reformism. In the production's formal compromises she detected a move back towards naturalism and back towards the drama of the family:

> *"The set of <u>One Third of a Nation</u> is a four-storey, old-law tenement house, with the front wall partly torn away to afford both an inside and an outside view of tenement accommodation. It is a masterpiece of grisly realism, and, as such, completely defensible, for what stylisation of a tenement could demonstrate the horrors of modern housing as well as a tenement itself? Likewise, it is natural and right that this Living Newspaper should tell the stories of some of the people who lived in the tenement, should make plain how these cramped, dark, unhygienic, inflammable quarters affected the lives of those who occupied them. The two tenement fires, which begin and end the play, the cholera epidemic, the premature enlightenment of the little boy who watches a prostitute in her room across the area-way - all these episodes, all realistically presented, are the high spots of the play.*
>
> *Yet these scenes, however affecting, seem like excerpts from a conventional play. They are, in fact, like excerpts from <u>Dead End</u>, which, with more sensationalism and less social and economic awareness, was saying the same thing. What is there in <u>One Third of a Nation</u>, then, to justify its not being written and staged in the traditional manner? Why that movie screen, that amplified Voice of the Living Newspaper, that ubiquitous, intrusive figure of the Consumer, the Little Man who Wants to be Housed? The answer is plain. Each Living Newspaper is intended to be a large, socio-economic document which has the power of summary and generalisation to go behind case histories to origins, and beyond case histories to cures.*
>
> *.... Everything that in <u>Power</u> was abstract has here become personalised. An anthropomorphising mania has pervaded the script. In the study of the development of land values, instead of the blocks of wood which so well demonstrated their efficiency in the earlier play, the lesson is acted out by people with well-marked characteristics, in full period dress. The Consumer appears again, but now he is outfitted with a great many more homely crotchets of behaviour, and, as if he were not human enough by himself, he has been endowed with a wife ... ".* 29

In the same review she criticized <u>One Third of a Nation</u> for another more fundamental compromise; a failure to recommend political changes that were in any sense adequate to the task of transforming the squalor and degradation of slum housing. Her criticisms came from a broad socialist perspective, and managed to combine an interest in the possibilities of the Living Newspaper as a form,with a demanding interrogation of its contextual place within the culture of the W.P.A. Of all the various critics writing in the latter years of the Depression, only McCarthy indicated any real understanding of the ways that cultural forms might operate in the constitution of the spectator's political ideas.

> *"... The Housing problem is far knottier than the power problem. It is, in fact, impossible of solution under capitalism, even the liberal capitalism of the New Deal. The Government can expropriate the power plants without upsetting the system; and, as was pointed out in Power, many municipalities have already done so. It cannot, however, take over housing, for to do that would be to expropriate the land. One Third of a Nation, as a W.P.A. play, is therefore in no position to offer the one effectual remedy for the evil it pictures. It can demonstrate, with many playful and distracting flourishes, that the origin of the housing problem lay in the private ownership and exploitation of the land; it dare not suggest that the cure lies in public ownership and public planning. It must plead, instead, for palliative legislation. The spectator, having been intermittently harrowed by scenes of slum life, scenes which cry for revolutionary action, is blandly invited to write to his congressman."*[30]

The compromises that won One Third of a Nation unqualified respect from the W.P.A. also helped to redefine the stylistic contours of Living Newspaper drama. From 1938 onwards, it became a particular kind of 'documentary-drama'[31], in which two different dramatic styles co-existed. The main dimension was still the factual rhetoric of maps, statistics, visual projections and authentic quotations, but another kind of dramatic style had become increasingly evident. The character of the little man (the Average Consumer, Angus K. Buttonkooper) had brought with him a kind of humanist realism, which at its most effective gave the Living Newspaper a sense of emotional pathos, but at its worst degenerated into a patronizing populism in which the little man was presented as an incompetent dupe. The co-existence of factual rhetoric and this brand of humanist realism helped to guarantee the Living Newspaper's passage into the domain of the New Deal's campaigning reformism. It was more readily identifiable as an investigative and critical mode of drama, and had shed enough of its revolutionary belligerence to be fully embraced by the agencies of social reform. Only one further dimension stood between the Living Newspaper and its acceptance as the New Deal's most powerful mode of cultural expression: its acceptability outside New York in the cultural heterogeneity of the United States.

The Living Newspaper as Regional Drama

One of the strongest advantages of the W.P.A. as a national relief organization was its genuine attempts to decentralize power and decision making. Although the W.P.A.'s federal and bureaucratic power resided in Washington, its many projects and initiatives functioned through state administration. The W.P.A. was a national organization with a strong investment in local and regional activity. For several reasons the Federal Theatre had a quite different mode of operation. The nature of theatre in the United States meant that the F.T.P. always had its largest interests in New York City, but as a branch of the Federal government, it also had to acknowledge and operate through the administrative structures of Washington. The vast majority of unemployed theatre workers were based in and around New York, and it therefore made more sense to locate the F.T.P.'s central bureau there and draw on the local pool of unemployed personnel.[32] This institutional complexity meant that from the very outset the F.T.P. had to contend with an uneasy internal structure that was always likely to obstruct any systematic attempts to build a national theatre policy. It also meant that the F.T.P. had to work with a confusing, and at times unsatisfactory, relationship between two competing cities: the cosmopolitan theatre land of New York and the formidable federal centre of Washington D.C. The movement to devolve cultural power to the regions and establish a progressive regional theatre was always a problem for the F.T.P.[33]

The Living Newspapers produced outside New York were diverse testimonies to the problems of regional performance. Within the parameters of regional culture it is always possible to detect two general tendencies pulling in opposite political directions. The first tendency represents a progressive notion of regional culture, in which values and identities

are shaped by shared experiences in the historical motions of a changing community. The other tendency looks backwards to a more conservative notion of regional culture, in which values and identities are fixed by the permanent ideologies of the region. The tensions provoked by these two tendencies oscillate between a progressive cultural identity and a parochial regionalism. Precisely the same tensions can be seen in the Living Newspaper's excursion into regional drama; the first tendency tried to regenerate the form and give it a new political purpose, whilst the second tendency pulled in another direction, and eventually reduced the Living Newspaper to a residual form of regional pageantry.

The Federal Theatre in California had neither the resources nor the research facilities to produce Living Newspapers with the same regularity as the New York Unit. However, several individual theatre practitioners working in the F.T.P.'s Southwest Unit had considerable knowledge of small-scale political theatre in Europe, and had been active in the new theatre movement prior to joining the Federal Theatre. Among the most prominent members of the Southwest Unit were Mary Virginia Farmer, who had previously worked with the Group Theatre in New York; T.C. Robinson, who had a formidable knowledge of Piscator's work in Berlin; and Rena Vale, who had previously been an activist with several Los Angeles based workers' theatre groups.[34] The Southwest Unit was organized as an acting ensemble, and its main work involved producing and performing plays directly related to Californian political issues by improvising from a written scenario. The unit had serious plans to stage its own Living Newspaper, Spanish Grant, which had been researched by three of the unit's members, Eugene Daederlick, Cyrilla Lindner and Max Mansbach. Spanish Grant was a dramatization of a suppressed area of Californian history, in which families and communities were disinherited of their

land by a series of speculative land-grant deals. Although Virginia Farmer and Hallie Flanagan exchanged several friendly letters which spoke positively of a future production of Spanish Grant, it was never publicly performed, nor was a similar play Land Grant by T.C. Robinson and Rena Vale. Land Grantdocumented the ruthless ways in which Indian, Spanish and Mexican landowners had been cheated out of their land, and the events which led to California being ceded to the U.S.A. in 1848. Although the script was ready for production, Land Grant was never performed and it may well be the case that the unwieldy bureaucracy of the F.T.P. prevented its easy access to performance. Whatever the reasons, the Southwest Unit was never able to fulfil one of the most progressive functions that a regional theatre can serve: the presentation of an area of suppressed regional history.[35]

Power Week in Seattle

The F.T.P. units in Washington state had a reputation for presenting challenging and innovative productions long before the Seattle version of Power was performed in the summer of 1937. Among the most successful plays staged under the auspices of the W.P.A. were two black dramas, Natural Man, by a young relief worker Theodore Brown, and a version of the proletarian drama Stevedore, which had previously been staged by Theatre Union in New York in 1934.[36] It was unsurprising that Seattle was one of the first cities to contact the New York Living Newspaper Unit when Power opened to supportive reviews. The theatre in Seattle had already proved it had enough capable theatre practitioners to work on a regional adaptation of a New York Living Newspaper.

In order to establish a company that was large enough and sufficiently flexible to stage a large-scale Living Newspaper, the regional director merged two units from Seattle and Tacoma, and decided from the very

beginning of the venture to completely integrate black and white theatre workers. The company willingly recruited assistance from New York in the form of visiting advisors, technical reports and even copies of the slide transparencies used in the original production. The vast majority of the company had never seen a Living Newspaper before and had to rely on second hand descriptions. Predictably the cast were dubious about the demands that the play made on their skills and some were openly hostile to playing a variety of characters. The director's report outlined some of the problems he confronted in the early rehearsal period.

> *"Rehearsals of "POWER" developed interesting clashes of opinion. To manage a cast from so small a project, Vaudevillians, Repertory actors, costumers, janitors - in fact nearly the entire white personnel were drafted... This curious conglomeration of talent, tradition and prejudice responded with a certain scepticism to the first play reading. General response: "This isn't a play at all - Lord knows what it is." But by the fifth rehearsal, the conservative bloc was saying, "This is great stuff, and anyone who doesn't think so is old fashioned."*[37]

Despite those initial reservations, Power opened at the Metropolitan Theatre in Seattle on 6th July 1937 to a receptive audience and encouraging press reviews. The adaptation made many modifications to the New York Unit's original production, and by all accounts, the Seattle version of Power resolved many of the problems of the original. The technical staff had apparently decided in rehearsal that the opening of the second act was tedious and lacked the dynamism of the previous scenes. They decided to replace the uninteresting portion with a film, which they referred to as the show's *"Eisenstein Montage"*.[38] The film was projected on to the scrim at the back of the stage, and had been borrowed from the film library of a local private power company. As the film presented a montage of turbines, electrical pylons, power plants and cascading rivets, the loudspeaker provided a commentary that could not have endeared the production to the benevolent power company.

"Mountains - Snow - Ice - Glaciers
Nature's reservoir of potential power
Who put it there?
Who rightfully owns its resources?
Who is most entitled to its benefits?
You - the public.
Streams - Rivers - Waterfalls
Ideal energy
Energy that is the property of every man.
Who guides its course?
Who governs its destiny?
Man can
Man has
Water power - the property of every man."[39]

Although most critics were impressed with the production's forthright presentation, two local newspapers took the opportunity to challenge the theatre's right to spend taxpayers' money on political subjects. The Seattle Times accused the production of having the subtlety of a sledge-hammer, and Hearst's Seattle Post-Intelligencer questioned its right to be categorized as theatre at all.

> *"According to the program, "Power", ... put on by Works Progress Administration cast, is a living newspaper play. It is a play only to the extent that it has numerous characters who speak lines, but there is no plot except that in the author's mind against private ownership....*
>
> *Above all it is propaganda for public ownership. The private companies are assailed, satirized, ridiculed, exposed, attacked, flayed and condemned... A campaign has been waged industriously to assure a big turnout of public ownership advocates ... every time the economic royalist (sic) were verbally hit on the head there was a howl of delight out in front."*[40]

The members of the audience who outraged the Post-Intelligencer's critic were mostly trade unionists attracted to the production by the very generous reductions that the theatre offered to union members. The most expensive ticket was as low as 25 cents, and the theatre had no trouble in filling the house for the entire run of Power.[41]

The production was a testament to the strengths of New Deal politics. It employed over a hundred relief workers on a locally organized project, producing regionally significant work within the context of a wider social campaign. Power was produced as part of a civic celebration of Seattle's achievements as a modern industrial city. A week before the play was due to open, Seattle's mayor declared a "Power Week", which was to involve several W.P.A. projects and the financial support of the City Light Company of Seattle. The theatre unit contributed to the celebrations by running an imaginative publicity campaign. The company produced over five thousand small newspaper facsimiles entitled "The Living Newspaper", which advertised the forthcoming production, and which were available free of charge from newstands. The leaflet that the unit sent out through its mailing list was a mock electricity bill demand note which advised the bearer to attend the theatre under threat of prosecution.[42] Posters throughout the city showed a worker's hand clutching a bolt of lightning and in the foyer of the theatre the sponsoring company erected generators which powered huge sodium lights outside the theatre. The State, the city, local public officers and relief workers combined in a venture that had all the appearances of social responsibility.[43] It was a week that was surpassed by only one other W.P.A. production, Spirochete, the focal point of a national campaign to combat syphilis.

The Living Newspaper and Campaigns for Social Reform

Between 1936 and 1939 the Surgeon General's office ran a nationwide campaign to inform the citizens of the United States about the problems and extent of venereal diseases. The campaign generated enough legislative support to pressurize thirty-two States into amending laws on health and welfare. As a result of the Surgeon General's campaign it ultimately became law in many parts of the U.S.A. that young couples had to submit to a medical examination prior to marriage. The city of Chicago, under

Mayor Kelly's Irish-Catholic administration, took an active part in the national campaign, and held a referendum on the viability of a city-wide blood test programme. The referendum registered a massive majority in favour of the tests and the W.P.A. provided ancillary staff to help out with the demand. It was in the context of this nationwide public concern that a young Federal Theatre writer began work on a Living Newspaper drama originally entitled Dark Harvest.[44]

Arnold Sungaard was one of a number of young aspiring writers who took the opportunities that the F.T.P. provided. The Project encouraged new playwrights by offering them work in areas that would benefit their writing and by programming productions of new plays by American authors.[45] Sumgaard had never seen a Living Newspaper before and had no previous experience with Chicago's new theatre groups, but he had a strong interest in writing a *"fictionalized documentary that would distil history and capture the truth."*[46] After having read the script of the New York version of Power, Sungaard began to think more clearly in terms of a drama written in the style of a Living Newspaper. His chronicle play, Dark Harvest, passed through several revision stages, was renamed Spirochete, and was subsequently accepted for production by the Federal Theatre in Chicago.

Spirochete opened at the Blackstone Theatre in Chicago on 29th April 1938 and ran throughout the summer season. The local health authorities set up a clinic in the foyer of the theatre and members of the audience were invited to undergo a series of blood tests. The entrance to the theatre was more like a hospital with doctors, nurses, auxiliary workers and every kind of medical paraphernalia, including test-tubes, syringes and swabs. Among the first volunteers for syphilis tests were two local Catholic priests and the daughter of the local health commissioners. All three must have been fairly sure of themselves and of the status of their health, but another eminent Chicago citizen was conspicuous by his absence.

Alphonso Capone was in jail serving an eleven year sentence for tax evasion, and must have rued missing Spirochete when he died from venereal disease in 1947.

Within twelve months the F.T.P. had staged Spirochete in four other cities: Boston, Cincinnati, Philadelphia and Seattle. The fiercest objections to the play were raised in Philadelphia, where a conservative branch of the Knights of St. Columbus objected to their mentor being represented and accused the production of constituting *"a Communist plot to overthrow the Government by insidiously destroying American faith in its popular heroes."*[47] Fortunately, the Knights failed to activate popular support, and the production proceeded with only one major change, the name of Christopher Columbus was changed to a more vague reference to *"a sea captain in 1493."*[48] Alongside the main character, Columbus was only of marginal importance. The persona of the little man was replaced by a transhistoric figure known as the eternal sufferer, who throughout the play sought a cure for his syphilitic condition. He remains one of the truly tragic characters in the annals of theatre history.[49]

After the preliminary success of the pilot version of One Third of a Nation at the Federal Theatre Summer School, and with the impetus of a lengthy run in New York already guaranteed, the F.T.P. decided to encourage its regional units to stage the "Saga of the Slums". The Living Newspaper on slum housing was considered to be ideally suited to regional adaptation. All the major cities had areas of substandard housing and had local poverty problems that could form the basis of a piece of regional theatre. One Third of a Nation was subsequently staged throughout the United States and achieved a national prominence that was equalled by very few other plays. Under the auspices of the W.P.A. it was staged in most major cities, including Detroit, Cincinnati, Portland, Philadelphia, Hartford, New Orleans, Seattle and San Fancisco.[50]

The Seattle version of One Third of a Nation was in keeping with the city's reputation for staging innovative theatre. The publicity handouts were far from modest in the claims they made on behalf of the production.

> *"For one of the first times in theatrical history, a current Broadway success will be shown in Seattle whilst it is still playing to SRO houses in New York...*
>
> *Every available resource of the W.P.A. Federal Theatre has gone into this production, utilizing one of the largest casts ever assembled, with a small army of technicians to handle all the special lighting and sound effects embodied in the play.*
>
> *"One Third of a Nation" IS SEATTLE'S SHOW OF THE YEAR. HERE IS AN INNOVATION IN THE THEATRE YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO MISS. HERE IS A PLAY THAT HAS NO HERO, OR HEROINE, THAT HAS NO GREAT FIGURE OR FANCIFUL CHARACTERS ... HERE IS A PLAY ABOUT YOU."*[51]

One Third of a Nation opened at the Federal Theatre on Rainer Avenue in Seattle on 24th May 1938. It was directed by a triumvirate of project workers, Edwin O'Connor, David Carrol and Esther Porter. The publicity included the circulation of thousands of facsimile newspapers advertising the production; posters were displayed in every taxi cab in Seattle and the taxi-drivers acted as mobile ticket agencies. At the theatre the unit had arranged for a slide lecture display on local slum conditions to be projected throughout the day, which tied in directly with the local emphasis of the production. The Seattle version of One Third of a Nation was considerably different from the New York production and experimented with much more imaginative staging forms. The dominant relationships that govern the spectator's perspective on proscenium arch spectacles were disturbed and transgressed. The boxes at the side of the auditorium were painted white and virtually turned into elevated booth stages. All of the factual quotations from real political characters were delivered from the booths, entrances were made through the audience, and lines were delivered from the stalls and the circle. The Seattle production of One Third of a Nation posed a question that was never fully answered by the Federal Theatre: what staging conditions are most appropriate to the Living Newspaper? [52]

The Philadelphia version of One Third of a Nation was a triumph for the adaptability of the Living Newspaper, but its interest lay in regional reference rather than complex stagecraft. Harold Berman of the New York Playwriting Bureau had been sent to Philadelphia to work on the adaptation and to involve a small group of local unemployed journalists. To begin with they were only interested in locating regional statistics that would support the script, but as their research developed, the journalists provided enough material on housing violations in old-law tenements in Philadelphia that the unit virtually rewrote the entire Living Newspaper. The new script was ready to go into rehearsal when a dispute with the stagehands' union prevented the company gaining access to the Walnut Theatre. With only a week's rehearsal time, the production was still resolving many of its problems on the opening night. The director's report indicated a familiar problem:

> *"Experienced actors complained of the lack of continuity of their parts. They were unused to the newspaper-telegraphic style, but lent themselves to the experimentation. With some of their worst faults was a tendency to 'help out' the simplicity of their line by depending on the vaudeville tricks with which they were familiar. In addition to this they were a little frightened of so large a production.*[53]

By all accounts the company's fears were not unfounded. The Philadelphia version of One Third of a Nation had one hundred and ninety-five characters and only sixty-seven actors, including forty whites, fifteen blacks and twelve dancers on loan from the local F.T.P. dance unit. The vast majority of the actors were old and redundant vaudeville performers who had great difficulty in adapting to the demands of the Living Newspaper. When the curtains opened on the production, once again fire raged in an old tenement, but this time a direct reference was made to the deaths of a Polish immigrant family who had died in a Philadelphian slum three weeks earlier. The publicity notes contained a palliative quote from the President.

> *"I see One Third of a Nation ill housed, ill clad and ill nourished. It is not in despair that I paint this picture. I paint it for you in hope - because the nation seeing and understanding the justice of it, proposes to paint it out."*[54]

The old vaudeville performers had every reason to look down from the stage of the Walnut Theatre with a feeling of satisfaction that they had found work in the theatre. But as they scanned the social landscape more closely, they had every right to feel despair. On the opening night of their production the unemployment figures in Philadelphia were at their highest point since 1931. The New Deal had not effectively reversed the Depression.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. Power, Act 1, Scene 15, in Federal Theatre Plays, ed. P. DeRohan, Da Capo Press, New York, 1973, p. 68.

2. W. Pell, "Which Way the Federal Theatre?", New Theatre, April 1937, p. 7.

3. Ibid.

4. The plays of George Bernard Shaw were among the most performed plays in the entire F.T.P. repertoire. Shaw was particularly generous to the Project and released the copyright restrictions on his work to allow them to be performed more easily, and at a cheaper cost. In several letters to Hallie Flanagan, he reiterated his admiration for the Project and recognized its pioneering work in attempting to democratize the theatre. Eugene O'Neill was initially generous in his attitude to the F.T.P. but after agreeing to relax copyright restrictions, he became disenchanted with the Project's organization.

5. The major Living Newspapers had orchestral scores that required highly competent musicians from the Federal Music Project. For example Injunction Granted had over one hundred and fifty musical cues, including full orchestral numbers, drum rolls, satirical noises from the brass section etc. The musical director was Virgil Thomson, who subsequently established a reputation as one of North America's foremost classical musicians. The posters for Living Newspaper performances were designed and produced by members of the Federal Arts Project. The posters are interesting social documents in their own right and utilize a range of artistic styles including art deco, social realism and abstract graphics.

6. Oral History Interview, Norman Lloyd/John O'Connor, The Federal Theatre Research Centre.

7. The measures which came to govern the daily practices of the Living Newspaper Unit were never systematically presented in a single document, but appeared in a variety of ways in circulars, memoranda and in the minutes of production meetings.

8. Federal Theatre internal memorandum "On Injunction Granted in the event of ..." housed in the Works Progress Administration Collection, National Archives, Washington D.C.

9. H. Flanagan, "Introduction to Federal Theatre Plays", in Federal Theatre Plays, ed. P. De Rohan, 1973, p. xi.

10. Speech delivered by Hallie Flanagan in Birmingham, Alabama (undated). Hallie Flanagan Collection, New York Public Library.

11. H. Flanagan, "Introduction to Federal Theatre Plays", p. xi.

12. H. Flanagan, p. x.

13. The Italian-American director, Frank Capra, is best known for a series of light comical films of the late thirties, which convey an attachment to the native intelligence of the common man when set against the restrictive practices of bureaucracy, big business and uncaring state administrations. Capra's most famous films, Mr. Deeds Goes to Town (1936), You Can't Take It With You (1938), Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939) and Meet John Doe (1941), are filmic representations of a particular strand of political populism founded on the values of small town honesty, integrity, charity and fidelity. It was an outlook that placed the ordinary citizen (Mr. Deeds, Mr. Smith, John Doe) at the centre of the renaissance of 'old' moral values in a new 'corrupt' society. Although the populism embodied in the later Living Newspapers is by no means as conservative as that embodied in Capra's films, they both place crucial significance on the role of the ordinary citizen.

14. In using the word 'typical', I am conscious of its variability as a semantic and political term. In reference to the 'typical' consumer of Power, the emphasis is very firmly towards abstracted notions of the average citizen. At no stage did the consumer or the Little Man assume the status of the 'typical' in Lukacsian terms. In his analysis of the 19th Century realist novel, the Hungarian marxist critic, Georg Lukacs, ascribed the term 'typical' to a character around whom the conflicting social forces of the historical moment gathered and met. See G. Lukacs, The Historical Novel, Penguin, London, 1976.

15. H. Hopkins as quoted in H. Flanagan, Arena, p. 59.

16. Hallie Flanagan to Morris Watson, 8th January 1937, Hallie Flanagan Collection, New York Public Library.

17. Ibid.

18. Hallie Flanagan to Robert Barclay, 8th January 1937, Hallie Flanagan Collection, New York Public Library.

19. Memorandum from H. Flanagan to W. Hart, 1st February 1937, National Archives, Washington D.C.

20. Ibid.

21. B. Atkinson, "The Play", New York Times, 24th February 1937, p. 19.

22. When Power was reproduced for outdoor performance, several scenes had to be drastically altered. The opening scene in which an entire city was thrown into confusion by a total power failure had to be excluded. The Caravan Unit could not adequately present the visual and vocal montage of voices, instructions, pleas for help as torches and candles flashed in the blacked out rooms of hospital operating theatres, restaurants, police control rooms and in the home of a destitute Irish immigrant family.

23. The First Federal Summer Theatre, a report published by The Federal Theatre's National Publication Bureau, p. 5. The report appeared in the same format as the F.T.P.'s magazine Federal Theatre and is housed in The Federal Theatre Research Centre.

24. Ibid.

25. Among the delegates to the summer school were Harold Bolton who had previously been an activist within the workers' theatre movement, Howard Bay the Federal Theatre's most competent stage designer, the lighting designer Abe Feder, and the eminent dancer Helen Tamiris. The playwright Paul Green and the German émigré musician Kurt Weill also visited the school.

26. Roosevelt's second inaugural address was paraphrased by Hallie Flanagan in an article that appeared in Federal Theatre:

> *"In the attack on injustice, poverty and despair, so graphically described by President Roosevelt in his Second Inaugural, what part can the Federal Theatre play?*
>
> *It can make it part of its theatre business to show what is happening to people, all sorts of people in American today. Not that our plays should be restricted to a study of the one third of our nation which is ill-housed, ill-clad, and ill-nourished, though these millions are so inescapably a part of America today that they are subjects for drama, drama with the militant ring of the Second Inaugural".*
>
> Goldstein, p. 251.

27. The First Federal Summer Theatre, p. 12.

28. A technical report submitted at the production's conference meeting on 27th November 1937 included plans for a smoke machine designed to simulate fire by pumping smoke through a mechanical system. The smoke was drawn back through a trapdoor and pumped into the alley-way at the side of the theatre. Lighting effects simulated the appearance of flames and selected actors dropped small smoke bombs. The audience was protected by a mixture of glycerine and rose water which, when sprinkled around the stage area, contained the worst excesses of smoke, dust and smells.

29. M. McCarthy, Sights and Spectacles 1937-58, Heinemann, London, 1959, pp. 32-33.

30. Ibid., pp. 34-35. Mary McCarthy's criticism of One Third of a Nation are in many respects similar to the criticisms often levelled against the work of the British film and television practitioners Kenneth Loach and Tony Garnett. Ironically, one of Garnett and Loach's early successes, Cathy Come Home (1966), generated the same kind of moral indignation that surrounded One Third of a Nation. The similarities between the two plays go further still; both were critical of abject housing conditions and used a mixture of 'dramatic' and 'documentary' styles to agitate for comprehensive legal changes. As a result of the F.T.P.'s production of One Third of a Nation, the city of New York initiated new legislation on housing; a similar series of legislative actions followed the B.B.C.'s broadcasting of Cathy Come Home. The nature of the criticism posed by McCarthy and similarly posed against the work of Loach and Garnett hinges on the adequacy of realist discourse to present substantial political analysis. It is a critical debate that is central to the Living Newspaper and which is confronted more directly in Chapter Seven.

31. For an illuminating discussion of documentary drama in theatre, in film and in television, see J. Caughie "Progressive Television and Documentary Drama", Screen, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1980.

32. In the early days of the Federal Theatre's existence over five thousand unemployed theatre workers signed up for relief work in the New York area. The number of relief workers based in New York was normally about 35% of the project's entire work force. The Federal Theatre headquarters were located in a converted bank on Eighth Avenue in New York City.

33. Although the F.T.P. did not have units in every state, it had a complex regional structure in which regional and state directors overviewed activities in their area. Elmer Rice was the director of New York City and was replaced by Philip Barber on his resignation; the actor and director Charles Coburn was in charge of New England; the Director of the state of Pennsylvania was the Hedgerow Theatre's artistic director Jasper Deeter; the Director of the Mid-West region was E.C. Mabie of the University of Iowa Theatre; Frederick H. Koch and John McGhee shared directorial responsibilities for the South region; Gilmor Brown of the Pasadena Playhouse was in charge of the West, and Thomas Wood Stevens was the Director of the Chicago units.

34. Mary Virginia Farmer is not to be confused with Frances Farmer, the enigmatic Hollywood actress who was seen as a possible successor to Greta Garbo, before a combination of ill-health, psychological disturbance, alcoholism and the bad press that followed years of political radicalism eventually destroyed her career. Both Mary Virginia Farmer and Frances Farmer were members of the Group Theatre. T.C. Robinson was the author of several essays on political theatre including T.C. Robinson, "Fascism and the Political Theatre", Sewanee Review, Vol. 44, January 1936.

35. Several other Living Newspapers were planned and written in California; one documented a history of the city of San Francisco and another, entitled The Bridge, was a record of the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge which had been planned to coincide with the Golden Gate Trades Exposition. Neither of these Living Newspapers were ever performed.

36. Unfortunately, it is not possible to do justice to the Federal Theatre's important role in helping to break down the barriers of discrimination in the theatre of the United States. Unlike many other theatre organizations, the F.T.P. did not operate policies of discrimination or segregation in its audiences. In instituting units for black actors and providing training programmes for black technicians, the F.T.P. went to considerable lengths to improve racial conditions in the theatre. The work of the black units is recorded and analysed in E. Quita Craig, Black Drama of the Federal Theatre Era : Beyond the Formal Horizons, The University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1980.

37. The Director's Technical Report for the Seattle production of Power housed in the Federal Theatre Research Centre.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. The Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 7th July 1937, p. 15.

41. Flanagan, Arena, p. 306.

42. The labour intensiveness of the Federal Theatre Project meant that areas such as publicity and front of house duties were thoroughly worked out. Many F.T.P. productions had ingenious publicity campaigns or extensive displays in the theatre entrance.

43. Power was staged in three other cities: San Francisco, Chicago and Portland. The San Francisco production was a failure and was hampered throughout by a conservative faction in the cast. The Chicago version was unimpressive and received undistinguished reviews from the local press. In Portland, where Power opened on 25th March 1938, even the director had massive reservations about the production. His report suggested that he had little faith in the Living Newspaper as a dramatic form. *"In this play there were no parts to interest the actors, nor to stir up the emotions of the audience.... If the Federal Theatre thinks it is vital .... to propagandize modern ideas ...., the form of the Living Newspaper is very appropriate ...., but under one condition: that the living newspaper plays are written by an artist, which means a man who knows how to interest his audiences through their emotions and sentimental responses."* The Director's Report for the Portland production of Power housed in the Federal Theatre Research Centre.

44. Details of the Living Newspaper Spirochete are compiled from conversations with the author, Arnold Sungaard. See also J. O'Connor, "Spirochete and the War on Syphilis", The Drama Review, Vol. 21, No. 1, March 1972.

45. Arthur Miller joined the F.T.P. after graduating from the University of Michigan in 1938. He worked as a project play reader, a person assigned to read plays and comment on their potential audiences, their qualities and their prospects of production. Whilst working as a play reader, Miller was also writing They Too Arise, a play that won the Theatre Guild National Award and bore many similarities to his later play Death of a Salesman (1949).

46. A. Sungaard quoted in J. O'Connor, p. 46.

47. O'Connor, p. 96.

48. Ibid.

49. Another Living Newspaper on social security and old age entitled Townsend Goes to Town, was written by the Chicago Federal Theatre but was never produced.

50. By 1938, One Third of a Nation was also known to the progressive theatre community in Britain. The author, Arthur Arent, visited England when the play was in the middle of its New York run, and one of Britain's major documentary film-makers, Paul Rotha, reviewed the production for World Film News. *"The style is bitingly satirical and openly Left Wing and has no respect for persons either dead of living .... It is real documentary theatre."* P. Rotha, "Living Newspaper", World Film News, Vol. III, 1938, p. 65.

51. "Saga of the Slums", a publicity handout for the Seattle production of One Third of a Nation, housed in the Federal Theatre Research Centre.

52. The New York productions all set out to be innovative and intended with varying degrees of success, to break with the traditional relationships that govern the spectator's experience within a proscenium arch playhouse. Ethiopia used a teletype above the audience's eyeline which effectively gave the spectator two separate areas to focus attention upon. Injunction Granted used a form of staging that Joe Losey related back to the pioneering work of Nickolai Okhlopkov in Moscow, which involved a system of ramps, runways and platforms. See Goldman, p. 74. The productions of Power and One Third of a Nation, by allowing entrances through the audience, were clearly trying to realize one of the Unit's declared intentions: *"The Living Newspaper dramatist should, whenever possible, conceive of his stage as a mobile area .... Furthermore, he should often conceive of the entire theatre as a single unit, as opposed to the concept of a stage separated from its audience by that invisible fourth wall which is arched by the proscenium."* Techniques Available to the Living Newspaper Dramatist", see appendix.

53. The Director's Report for the Philadelphia production of One Third of a Nation, housed in the Federal Theatre Research Centre.

54. "Saga of the Slums", a publicity handout for the Philadelphia production of One Third of a Nation, housed in the Federal Theatre Research Centre.

CHAPTER FIVE : DISBANDMENT AND DISPERSAL

The End of the Living Newspaper Unit

> *"There have been various publications in the newspapers that receipts from the theater operations .... were put in trust funds for the benefit of certain communistic groups."*
>
> (Representative Taber, 1st May 1939)

> *"I ask the attention of every colleague .... to weigh the tripe being served across the footlights by the W.P.A."*
>
> *"The difficulty about the Theater Project is that real actors are not employed. Most of them are 'hams'."*
>
> (Senator Reynolds, 28th June 1939)

> *"The committee has rightly eliminated the objectionable Theater Project."*
>
> (Representative Johnson, 15th June 1939)[1]

In the eyes of anti-New Deal politicians, the Federal Theatre Project was incompetent, amateurish and frivolous, but its greatest culpability was its associations with progressive ideas. When the New York Daily News carried the headline, "W.P.A. Theatre Faces a Probe as Hotbed of Reds", on 20th August 1938, it signalled the beginnings of a concerted period of ideological reaction in which every area of culture was subjected to the most repellent scrutiny. The investigations of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (H.U.A.C.) are now more familiarly associated with the fifties, but their roots were strongly planted in the crisis of the Depression.[2] In the Autumn of 1938 when Martin Dies became the first chairman of H.U.A.C., the New Deal administration still commanded wide scale popular support, but looked increasingly more vulnerable to criticism from the right wing of the Republican Party. In announcing his intentions to set up committee investigations into the affairs of Federal Writers Project and the F.T.P., Dies was consciously isolating the most contentious areas of the W.P.A.'s activities. It could always be convincingly argued that activities such as bridge building and road repairs were essential

community projects, but the less tangible activities of cultural production were another matter altogether. The cultural projects were less easy to defend for two simple reasons. Firstly, the work's value to the community was difficult to assess and secondly, cultural practices invariably operated in the contentious territory of aesthetics and politics. It became commonplace for critics of the New Deal to sieze upon the work of the Federal Theatre and make a series of elisions that connected the F.T.P. with the W.P.A., the New Deal administration and with revolutionary communism. Strange as these elisions may seem with hindsight, they had the seductive appeal of political frankness that allowed Senator J. Parnell Thomas of New Jersey to represent the Federal Theatre as a national threat.

> *"It is apparent from the startling evidence .... that the Federal Theatre Project not only is serving as a branch of the communistic organization but is also one more link in the vast and unparalleled New Deal propaganda machine."*[3]

In times of changing social structures the language of conspiracy theories always finds a way of expressing itself.

The accusations levelled against the Federal Theatre Project by members of the investigating committee, and by 'friendly' witnesses, were an amalgam of misrepresentations, half-truths and ambiguities. It was ironic that much of the damage done to the F.T.P.'s public image was manufactured by people who had been employed by the project as relief workers. Between 19th August and 5th December 1938 an array of 'friendly' witnesses agreed to testify before the committee. The group included Hazel Huffman, who had formerly been employed in the mail division of the W.P.A.; an actor named William Harrison Humphrey, who had ironically played the part of the Communist Party leader Earl Browder in Triple-A Plowed Under; a stage manager named Charles Walton, and several other relief workers including Francis Verdi, Garland Kerr and Seymour Revzin.[4] In making their testimonies these witnesses returned with uncanny regularity to five specific allegations.

Firstly, that the National Director had known past associations with revolutionary Russia; secondly, that the Project was under the control of Workers' Alliance and therefore a front for the Communist Party; thirdly, that the sale of Communist Party literature was commonplace at Federal Theatre events; fourthly, it was alleged that the F.T.P. favoured plays that espoused communist ideology; and finally, several witnesses implied that the Project regularly hired and fired personnel on the grounds of their political opinions. It would be easy to dismiss these allegations as the reactionary hearsay of minor relief workers, but their forcefulness seems to demand closer consideration.

Flanagan's much publicized visit to Soviet Russia in the twenties was the sum total of her associations with revolutionary communism. Throughout her tenure as National Director of the F.T.P., she had carefully negotiated a public image of tolerance and broadmindedness which was unambiguously rooted in a democratic faith in constitutional freedoms. Flanagan had often criticized the activities of the Workers' Alliance within the affairs of the Federal Theatre Project, but ultimately realized that the Alliance, whilst an important pressure group, only had minority support. If her opinions on the Alliance were publicly recorded, they would have accorded with the mildly sarcastic opinions of the drama critic Walter Winchell who referred to the Living Newspaper Unit as *"the revolution by Wednesday boys."*[5] It is irrefutably the case that the Federal Theatre had one or two units that specialized in staging radical drama, but in the main the Project was comprised of units who had no declared political intentions. The Living Newspaper may well have been one of the Project's most notorious units, but it was not necessarily the most representative. The irregular collections for the Spanish Civil War held in the auditoria of Federal houses were neither sanctioned nor supported by the W.P.A. They were genuine attempts to raise the consciousness of audiences, but were initiated by individuals

within the Project and not by the official policy of the F.T.P. Throughout its history the F.T.P. was careful never to authorize or recommend political work that might be misconstrued by the public, but in following those principles it also wanted to preserve the political rights of individual relief workers. At times these liberal imperatives were in contradiction and opponents of the Project readily exploited the circumstances.

The welter of insinuation and accusation that was allowed to circulate during the early days of the investigations found its way into the headlines of the daily press. The image of the F.T.P. was being reconstructed on a daily basis - *"Flanagan a W.P.A. Red"*, *"Reds Rule W.P.A. Writers"*, *"Aggregation of Crackpots .... Has Promoted Class Hatred"*[6] - and promoted the impression of a subversive organization, which became assimilated into everyday commonsense, filtered through that twilight zone of insinuation and uncorroborated evidence.

It was not until the November of 1938 that the F.T.P. was given the opportunity to respond to press coverage of the testimonies. Hallie Flanagan worked on a lengthy press release, which recorded the principles and achievements of the Federal Theatre over the previous three years. But when set against the more attractive news-worthiness of the investigating committee members, the press release was virtually insignificant. Radio Station WQXR was more interested in granting air time to J. Parnell Thomas, who accused the F.T.P. of being *"a veritable hotbed of un-American activity"*,[7] and the New York Journal American was more anxious to report the claims of Martin Dies that the W.P.A. projects were *"doing more to spread communist propaganda than the Communist Party itself."*[8] It was four months after Hazel Huffman's damaging testimonies before the W.P.A. were able to offer the committee a more positive appraisal of the Federal Theatre's record.[9]

Ellen Woodward, the W.P.A.'s Assistant Administrator, appeared in front of the investigating committee only to be subjected to an intimidating cross-examination. It was left to Hallie Flanagan to continue what increasingly appeared to be a hopeless encounter. She appeared before the committee on 6th December 1938.

The vast majority of questions thrown out towards Hallie Flanagan centred on the propagandistic function of the F.T.P., and on the political status of the Living Newspapers. In steering a subtle path through the cross-examination, Hallie Flanagan argued for a broad minded definition of theatre and vigorously defended the social function of art. Her testimony even managed to incorporate a subtle re-definition of propaganda and its place within democractic theatre.

> *"Propaganda, after all, is education. It is education focused on certain things. For example, some of you gentlemen have doubtless seen <u>One Third of a Nation</u>; and I certainly would not sit here and say that that was not a propaganda play .... I should like to say very truthfully that to the best of my knowledge we have never done a play which was propaganda for communism, but we have done plays which were propaganda for democracy, propaganda for better housing...."*[10]

The eloquence of Flanagan's replies, and the stubborn resistance with which she presented her testimony, failed to have any significant influence on the committee. The weight of months of hostile press coverage and dubious personal testimonies had already condemned the F.T.P. The inevitable outcome of the hearings was obvious even before Flanagan appeared. The F.T.P. was deemed to be an extravagant and badly managed breeding ground for subversive activities and it was only a matter of time before the pressure to close the Project would succeed.

The Theatre Arts Committee immediately organized a series of marches and protest demonstrations in what turned out to be a worthy, but inconsequential campaign to save the F.T.P. The campaign gathered momentum during the early months of 1939, and managed to petition the support of Claudette Colbert,

Melvyn Douglas, Henry Fonda, James Cagney, Dick Powell, Al Jolson and Orson Welles. In the last few weeks of July the campaign became increasingly more anxious. The film star, Tallulah Bankhead, led a deputation of F.T.P. supporters to Washington, where they demonstrated outside the White House. On 26th July 1939, Bankhead and the newspaper columnist Heywood Broun, spoke passionately on behalf of the F.T.P. from the stage of the Majestic Theatre in New York. It turned out to be the campaign's last effort. Only four days later an amendment to Resolution 326 of the Relief Bill ended the Federal Theatre Project. The amendment stated categorically that *"none of the funds available by this title shall be available ... for the operation of any theatre project."*[11] The F.T.P. ended where it had begun, in the legislative lobbies of the Federal Government.

President Roosevelt opposed the decision to abolish the Federal Theatre and was quick to point to the hypocrisy of the decision.

> *"The Federal Theatre is abolished. This singles out a special group of professional people for a denial of work in their own profession. It is discrimination of the worst type."*12

However, the President's power did not extend to overturning the decision and the consequences of unemployment once again faced nearly eight thousand theatre workers.[13] The worst hit area was invariably New York City whose Mayor, Fiorello La Guardia, underlined the hopelessness of the situation by saying, *"I have three thousand of those people, and I can't shoot them. They have to eat."*[14] The Depression had ushered in a series of profound social changes, and a massive programme of public expenditure, but as the decade moved to an end it seemed as if the progressiveness that had carried those changes forward was being gradually eroded. The Living Newspaper Unit, perhaps more than any other agency of New Deal culture, occupied an influential position at the vanguard of that progressive movement, but ultimately its abolition served to highlight a pressing

contradiction. The depressed social formation was being pulled in two opposite directions. One way pointed forward to a responsible social order, and the other pointed towards a quite different, and much more restrictive political future. When Senator Robert R. Reynolds of North Carolina claimed that the Federal Theatre specialized in plays that had been *"spewed from the gutters of the Kremlin"*,[15] he was employing a prescient style of speech that would become more common as the climate of ideological reaction grew colder.

The Living Newspaper : Suppressed By Congress?

In order to measure the effect that the end of the F.T.P. had on the subsequent production of Living Newspaper drama, it is essential to reflect upon the growing importance of Black Drama. Although the F.T.P. had in some respects reproduced the structures of racial segregation by instituting separate 'negro units', it had also worked against discrimination by encouraging multi-racial companies, by supporting black productions of classic plays and by refusing to operate policies of segregation in the auditorium. When the American Negro Theatre was founded in Harlem at the close of the F.T.P., its manifesto catalogued the debt that the Black Theatre owed to the Project. In running training programmes for black actors and technicians, and by giving young black directors their first regular opportunity to work in the professional theatre, the Federal Theatre had encouraged black theatre workers to build on their own rich culture and bring it to new levels of aesthetic development. On 9th April 1936, at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem, the Federal Theatre presented a black version of Shakespeare's Macbeth, which attracted a full house and an overspill audience of over three thousand people.[16] An emergency police squad had to be summoned to Harlem to control the crowd. At the end of Macbeth's very successful run, the director Orson Welles left to form Project No. 891

and handed control of the unit over to J.A. Smith and Carlton Moss. The Lafayette Theatre subsequently became one of New York's major venues and established a local reputation in Harlem, that reached its climax with a production of the William De Bois play Haiti. The currents of racial experience, cultural energy and a growing political consciousness found their fullest expression in an amalgamation of jazz music, dance and an emergent theatre movement. According to the black dramatist, Loften Mitchell, *"The Federal Theatre dominated the Harlem area"* and its influence percolated through New York's black cultural community.[17]

When the Federal Theatre ended it became evident that the Living Newspaper Unit and a number of young emerging playwrights had inestimable plans to produce new Living Newspaper scripts. A whole range of social subjects was either fully developed as scripts or was in various stages of development. Living Newspapers on War, Medicine, Food and Drugs, Flood Control, Tuberculosis, Money and Youth were all in the process of being prepared, and the records suggest that a vast programme of investigative social theatre was under way. In the midst of this programme were at least four Living Newspapers on racial politics. If Congress suppressed the evolution of the Living Newspaper as a form of social theatre, then it also prevented its diversification into a crucial area of politics. The Living Newspaper hovered on the perimeters of Black Theatre, but was never able to fully explore the potential of that new territory.

The Federal Theatre unit in Norwalk, Connecticut, staged regional Living Newspapers on local community affairs as early as the summer of 1936. Since the unit was comprised of black and white relief workers, some of whom had previously been activists in the workers' theatre movement, it is reasonable to assume that First Edition, and Second Edition, contained scenes that dramatized local racial issues. However, the Living Newspaper

Stars and Bars by Ward Courtney, which also emanated from the Connecticut area, was unambiguously a play for multi-racial audiences. It documented local incidents of racism and contained a moment of stunning self-reflexive theatre in which the moderate voice of the Living Newspaper was deposed of his position by a younger and more militant black voice. The most provocative scenes from Stars and Bars are almost the equal of Liberty Deferred, a Living Newspaper that documented the struggle for black liberation.

The New York Living Newspaper Unit had three scripts by black dramatists at varying stages of development when the Project closed. One documented slum conditions in Harlem, and may well have been spawned from the research on One Third of a Nation; another recorded the history of slavery, and the third was a radical critique of white racism, which had been written by two young black playwrights, Abram Hill and John Silvera.

Liberty Deferred was not simply a victim of congressional suppression. It had also been hampered by the stricter codes of practice that governed the Unit's activities after Injunction Granted. Although Liberty Deferred had attracted the favourable attention of the New York drama critic, John Anderson, and despite the fact that it was highly thought of within the Unit, it was never performed. The play was revised, scenes were re-drafted, some scenes were even rehearsed, but Liberty Deferred was never seen on the Federal stage. The Negro Arts Council intervened in the F.T.P.'s affairs and accused the Project of discriminating against the authors, but their intervention came to nothing.[18] Although it is possible that the F.T.P. administrators were only anxious that the play be refined prior to performance, it seems more likely that they were delaying a production that would certainly have offended the Southern senators on the Dies Committee. Whether their reasons were innocent, expedient or

motivated by straightforward censorship remains unanswered.

The style of Liberty Deferred brought together devices drawn from vaudeville, minstrelsy, agitprop and even surrealism. The play documented the ways in which racial equality had been impeded over years of discrimination. The opening scene tried to combat dominant stereotypical images of the black by subverting the minstrel show format into a grotesque parody of racism. In an inverted celebration of negative imagery, the scene introduced Stepin Fetchit, Uncle Tom, cotton-pickers, Big Apple dancers and even the Black Crows vaudeville team. The minstrel-show was to be interrupted by actors planted in the audience, and their demands for more positive images were designed to trap the real audience in one of those uneasy theatrical moments in which attitudes are openly being challenged. The following scenes documented the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, the horrors of lynching and the institutionalized racism of the deep South. The most spectacular scene in the entire script was entitled "Lynchotopia" (a mythical place in the hereafter where lynch victims go to compare their injuries), which ended with a factual account of a black who had been tortured with a blow-lamp before being lynched to death. The final scene adhered rigidly to the conventions of agitational drama and had blacks uniting in solidarity with the white working-class. Although the ending lacked some of the imagination of previous scenes, it sustained the play's uncompromising politics. Liberty Deferred was in many respects a microcosm of the entire Federal Theatre Project. It was liberal, campaigning, imaginative and innovative, but held back by the permanent threat of political scrutiny.[19]

The Dispersal of the Living Newspaper

The period between the Federal Theatre's closure and the U.S.A.'s involvement in the Second World War, was a period of dispersal in the history of the

Living Newspaper. The New Theatre League had continued its commitment to radical forms of instructive theatre throughout the decade, but its organizational support was badly weakened by defections from the Communist Party, in the wake of Stalin's Non-Aggression Treaty with the Nazis. For North America's radical Communists, the treaty signalled a major crisis of conscience which provoked many of them to join other organizations, or drift into non-aligned political activity. The New Theatre League no longer exerted the kind of cultural influence it had done earlier in the decade and was disbanded in the early forties. With its major institutional frameworks in disarray, the Living Newspaper was trapped between a radical past and the prospects of a bleak future. It hovered precariously between an unsatisfactory future as a politically sterile form of commercial theatre and the threat of an exiled future in the ghettos of a declining radical theatre.[20] At least in the United States, the Living Newspaper had entered a residual phase.

In November 1939, when the Federal Theatre's assets were made available to public and commercial bodies, the director of the Actors Repertory Company, John O'Shaughnessy, tried to secure the rights to perform Medicine Show. The script of this Living Newspaper on the socialization of health services had been written by Hoffman Hays, and would have ideally suited the liberalism of the Actors Repertory Company. However, the script and its performing rights had already been sold to a Broadway production company, and it was already scheduled for commercial production.

The opening night of Medicine Show seemed to confirm the viability of turning Living Newspaper into commercial theatre. A full house warmly applauded the opening scene which was an array of different devices, including a projected film of a research laboratory, close-ups of a heart operation, and the sounds of an amplified heartbeat coming from the loud-speakers. The musical score, by the radical German musician, Hans Eisler,

was singled out for special praise by some of New York's more influential critics.[21] Richard Watts Jr. of the New York Herald-Tribune was generally supportive but preserved an indignant wariness of the style of production.

> *"This Medicine Show is the newest theatrical offering in the technique of the Living Newspaper, that cantankerous offspring of the Federal Theatre Project. When the lively Federal Theatre was done to death by Congress the Living Newspaper perished with it, but now it has been revived under commercial auspices, and it emerges more belligerently than ever. This time it is advocating socialized medicine and assailing the American Medical Association, and it does both with gusto, invective and abandon....*
>
> *You probably know about the technique of the Living Newspaper. More illustrated soap-box than conventional play.... its viewpoint has always been progressive to radical, and its manner is to dramatize its subject by means of illustrated lecture, caricature, case history, a lantern slide or two, perhaps an occasional graph, a touch of symbolism, a bit of tub thumping and a little savage irony."*[22]

The idea of a commercial Broadway theatre permitting "a bit of tub thumping" on socialized medicine is in itself savagely ironic. It seems to imply that the Living Newspaper had entered a final phase of political recuperation, and had completed the transformational journey from revolutionary culture to commercial culture. But Medicine Show was the exception that proved the Living Newspaper's unsuitability for the Broadway stage. In an illuminating review-essay, Burns Mantle, the drama critic of the New York Daily News, outlined the differences between Federal production and the commercial demands of Broadway. Whereas the F.T.P. could guarantee an extensive period of rehearsal, in which the problems of working with large casts could be resolved, the commercial theatre was burdened with prohibitive rehearsal costs. The producers of Medicine Show, Carly Wharton and Martin Gabel, were limited to four weeks of rehearsal, paying the Equity minimum rate to actors. The overall cost of producing the play was estimed at about $6,500 per week, which in 1939 meant that a large and regular audience had to be guaranteed. Unlike Federal Theatre productions such as One Third of a Nation, which grossed $80,000 in advance box-office receipts, the commercial Living Newspaper had to accept the rigours of competition.

Medicine Show could not sustain a large enough audience and closed after a few weeks. The Living Newspaper's experience as a form of commercial theatre was short lived, and confirmed the opinions of those who believed that only a radical restructuring of the theatre in the United States could guarantee drama of social significance.

Whilst Medicine Show was struggling to find an audience in New York, another Living Newspaper on the same subject was being produced in Philadelphia. The New Theatre of Philadelphia, a company with a long history in progressive theatre, had already begun to rehearse Medicine, and had invited the New York Living Newspaper Unit stalwart, Lem Ward, to direct the production.[23] Although neither Medicine Show nor Medicine were particularly memorable events, they somehow encapsulated the dilemma of the Living Newspaper, perched between the commercial and the radical. As if mourning the passing of the thirties, the New Theatre League held one of its last conventions, and invited the Philadelphia company to perform Medicine. In reviewing the performance, Ralph Warner of the Daily Worker reflected nostalgically on the past decade.

> *"Everyone loves the theatre. But it takes more than love to build a theatre for the American people, a theatre that will express their desires and their will. ....it has been a great season for the New Theatre League, plumb in the midst of war, with snipers shooting at progressives from every tree limb, the organized progressive theatre groups of America have expanded....*
>
> *What was remarkable about the New Theatre League convention was its spirit. On Friday evening the Living Newspaper group of Philadelphia presented their version of the health problem Medicine, directed by Lem Ward.... Here was work well worth while, a theatre that creates a sense of pride in achievement."*[24]

The reviewer's image of pride, expansion and achievement was either wishful thinking or the product of a sentimental glance back across history. The reality of the situation was quite different. The progressive theatre was in a period of rapid decline and had only the memories of past vistories to reflect upon.

In both the United States and Great Britain, the outbreak of war led to the establishment of a complex apparatus of information and propaganda. Although it would be impossible to catalogue the complexity and range of wartime propaganda, it is significant that many practitioners who had previously worked in Living Newspaper production were recruited by Government agencies. Both Arthur Arent and Richard Pack, who had been dramatists with the Federal Theatre and the New Theatre League respectively, were invited to continue to work in aid of the war effort. In 1944 a production of the Living Newspaper Figure It Out was taken on tour to most of the major cities in the U.S.A. It demonstrated the patriotic importance of buying war bonds and instructed audiences about the financial securities available through the Government's War-Stamp Tax. This kind of informational propaganda was typical of the uses that the United States war effort found for Living Newspaper drama and newsreel cinema. However, in the immediate post-war period even these admirable national interests were jettisoned, and the Living Newspaper degenerated even further.

In 1947 when Hallie Flanagan wrote a polemical essay entitled "The Living Newspaper Lives", she too was guilty of trying to regenerate a lost past.[25] The social forces that had once shaped the theatre of the Depression now seemed to be suppressed by the weight of confused ideologies. Ironically, in the period when Broadway discovered the liberal dramas of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, the Living Newspaper staggered under the burden of its own reputation. A drama written by a New York financier entitled One Hundred Years, which documented the history of the Mutual Benefit Life Association, was only surpassed in its innocuousness by a series of Living Newspapers on papal encyclicals. At the funeral of the newspaper columnist Heywood Broun, held at St. Patrick's Cathedral, a mass Living Newspaper commemoration was presented by some of his friends. The revolutionary theatre had taken some strange roads on its journey from the steps of the

Winter Palace to the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral.[26]

The Living Newspaper and Cultural Exchange

In Great Britain the Workers' Theatre Movement (W.T.M.) bore some remarkable similarities to its counterpart in the United States.[27] The W.T.M. drew on the experiences of independent labour politics and the traditions of co-operative socialism that had characterized British left-wing political culture in the twenties, but assumed its own militant identity in the early thirties, when the world Depression increased material austerity. The Communist Party invariably had a profound determination on the policies of the W.T.M.[28] In 1931 the nucleus of the W.T.M. visited Germany where they became enamoured with the possibilities of radical theatre. Tom Thomas, one of the most prominent members of the W.T.M. in London, remembered the profound effect the visit had on the movement.

> *"We could not hope to emulate the brilliance of the German performances. But by adopting the revue style - which we had already been working towards - we could, almost at once achieve the freedom of the streets, however crude our initial material and performances might be.*
>
> *.... We rejected the idea of playing to friends and relatives, or of asking people to come and pay money, which was the basis of the commercial theatre. We didn't call ourselves Agit-Prop, but we adopted the same basic idea. Instead of a theatre of illusion ours was to be a theatre of ideas, with people dressed up in ordinary working clothes. No costumes, no props, no special stage. 'A propertyless theatre for a propertyless class' we called it."*[29]

As the thirties progressed and the German workers' theatre was suppressed by Fascism, the social theatre of the U.S.A. began to exert considerable influence on British theatre culture. American plays became increasingly more evident in the radical repertory in London. In 1934 the Left Theatre presented John Wexley's Scottsboro drama They Shall Not Die at the Phoenix Theatre, and the cast included a young actor, André van Gyseghem, who subsequently became a director with London's Unity Theatre.[30] Perhaps

more than any other cultural initiative, it was the Unity Theatre movement that characterized the political climate of the second half of the decade. In precisely the same ways that mobile agitational theatre was subsumed by new forms of 'theatre in action' in the latter years of the thirties in the United States, so the British W.T.M. was replaced by the New Theatre League and by the Unity movement. The London Unity Theatre was established in 1936 and emerged alongside the Left Book Club Theatre Guild, an organization that stimulated political and cultural activities through its branches throughout the United Kingdom. After a short residency at St. Jude's Hall in King's Cross, the Unity Theatre established itself in a theatre situated in Goldington Crescent, near London's St. Pancras station. It was at this new site that the Unity Theatre company secured its progressive reputation with a production of Waiting for Lefty.[31] In April 1937, when the company staged another American play, Irwin Shaw's anti-war drama Bury the Dead, it was evident that a system of cultural exchange had been established between London and New York.

The London bus strike of 1937 not only marked a significant resurgence in the industrial strength of the British Labour movement, but also provided an immediate issue around which the radical theatre could mobilize. The strike was essentially a dispute over manning agreements and time schedules, but as it progressed it came to assume a greater significance: the enactment of rank and file solidarity against the conciliatory executive of the transport workers' Union. Throughout the period of what became Britain's most protracted industrial dispute for over five years, the Unity Theatre performed their production of Waiting for Lefty at garages and depots throughout London. Although Waiting for Lefty was an appropriate piece of theatre, it lacked the immediate specificity to be able to deal with the complexities of the dispute. It was almost inevitable that the Unity Theatre looked to New York once again, and began to work in the area of Living Newspaper drama.

> *"To those British producers working with Unit, such as Herbert Marshall and Andre´ van Gyseghem, who had been excited by Living Newspapers in America, these productions seemed a vindication of the Popular Front strategy in art: an innovative theatrical technique which had made politics possible on the commercial stage and had made them acceptable to audiences wider than the left alone. Thus there was no hesitation in accepting the direct suggestion of the Federal Theatre Project that Unity attempt a Living Newspaper, and in the busmen's strike it had ready material."*[32]

A group of Unity Theatre activists collectively researched Living Newspaper No. 1 : Busmen, which was to be the first in a series on contemporary political events. The researchers used information from newspapers, strike bulletins, the minutes of union meetings, testimonies and even the conversations of bus passengers. When the statistical and informational facts were drawn together, music was added by Alan Bush and Montague Slater. The production was produced by John Allen and André van Gyseghem, and like its predecessor at the sit-down strikes in Michigan, Busmen involved strikers and their families as actors. The Unity Theatre's first Living Newspaper ran for three months in repertory with a comedy, The Case of the Baffled Boss, and played to a sizeable working class audience including many striking transport workers.[33]

Along with every other British theatre company, the London Unity Theatre had to work within the strict boundaries laid down by the Lord Chamberlain's Office. In order to negotiate the major problems of censorship, Unity Theatre operated under a club licence, but this severely restricted its potential as a community theatre, and prevented the easy circulation of Living Newspapers such as Busmen and Crisis in Czechoslovakia. Even when the codes of practice were at their most stringent within the Federal Theatre, there was never an official and institutional body scrutinizing scripts and demanding alterations. Whilst the Lord Chamberlain's Office cannot be singled out as the sole reason that the Living Newspaper failed to establish itself to the same extent in Britain as it had done in the U.S.A., the problem of having scripts passed for public performance

clearly worked against the contemporaneity of the form. The Lord Chamberlain's very existence served as a constant reminder of the state's hegemony over British theatre, and predictably the radical theatre was a contentious area for state concern.

Towards the end of September 1938, when war in Europe seemed imminent, the London Unity Theatre Committee met to discuss the possibilities of writing a Living Newspaper that could respond to the rapidly changing political situation. The committee's statement to the public reflected the sense of political urgency and also Unity's commitment to democratic approaches to their work.

> *"At this critical time, with the whole future of civilization at stake, we feel the theatre can make a powerful contribution to peace. Accordingly, we have appealed to our friends, who are dramatists, to write a play about the present world situation which will give a true presentation of the facts, and make a plea for a firm stand by democratic countries to save peace. As a democratic theatre we are appealing to the theatrical profession to co-operate with us and volunteer help."*[34]

Within less than forty-eight hours, the script of Crisis in Czechoslovakia had been researched, outlined and written. Numerous London based journalists, including a Czechoslovakian correspondent, had responded to the Unity statement and turned up at the theatre to work collaboratively on the Living Newspaper. The production ominously opened on the evening that Neville Chamberlain flew to Munich to meet Hitler to discuss the political annexation of the Sudetenland and the possibilities of world peace.

The urgency with which the Unity Theatre staged Crisis in Czechoslovakia had two immediate repercussions. It generated a genuine interest in the Living Newspaper's adaptability to every conceivable political issue, which spread throughout Britain. But that adaptability invariably worked against the institutional principles of the Lord Chamberlain's office. The Left Book Club Theatre Guild immediately set about the task of encouraging groups elsewhere in Britain to stage their own productions.

> *"We at headquarters will try to bring out regular Crisis Living Newspapers, in collaboration with Unity Theatre. They will be short and easy to produce; you will be able to do them wherever you are, in halls, at meetings, in the parks and on street corners. We hope to send out the first Crisis Living Newspaper very soon, so do prepare for them and discuss it with your local groups and political parties so that you will be able to arrange mass performances all over your locality."*[35]

However, the Lord Chamberlain's regulations included a clause, not dissimilar to the directives that censored Ethiopia, which forbade the impersonation of public personalities. The attempt to activate a British Living Newspaper movement was thwarted almost at its conception, and there is every suggestion that the offices of the Lord Chamberlain made such a movement virtually impossible. For the Living Newspaper to have developed fully in Britain in the thirties, the form would have had to compromise on its major defining feature: the contemporaneity of its subject matter. Once again a Living Newspaper company was confronted with an almost insurmountable problem - how to dramatize the news without dramatizing political figureheads.

The Manchester based Theatre Union, which had emerged indirectly out of the early agitprop initiatives of the Salford Red Megaphones, and which eventually formed the nucleus of Theatre Workshop, was one of several progressive companies that fell foul of the Lord Chamberlain's office.[36] In March 1940, Theatre Union staged an ambitious Living Newspaper entitled Last Edition, at the Round House in Manchester. It dramatized social and political events between 1934-1940 including the Gresford pit disaster, the Spanish Civil War, Anglo-German naval agreements, and finally Neville Chamberlain's ill-fated meeting with Adolf Hitler in Munich. The representation of domestic and foreign statesmen once again presented a problem to the company. When Ewan McColl and Joan Littlewood, the directors of Theatre Union, decided to represent Chamberlain and Hitler as two Chicago gangsters, it was evident that the play would not be passed by the Lord Chamberlain's office.

> *"Play censorship still existed at this time, and all scripts had to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office for approval. It was all too obvious that they would object to most of Last Edition, not least to our portrayal of Neville Chamberlain, and many other establishment figures. It was decided to form a club which anyone could join for a nominal sixpence. The response was good, and Last Edition played to enthusiastic audiences. Despite the club membership, Joan and Ewan were taken to court, where they were bound over for two years, with a surety of twenty pounds each. The real object of the prosecution, which was to have the show taken off, succeeded, but not before it had played to several thousand people in Manchester and some of the small surrounding towns."*[37]

The co-existence of progressive theatre companies such as the London Unity Theatre, Manchester's Theatre Union, and the provincial Unity Theatre Movement, was indicative of the extent of anti-fascist theatre culture in Western Europe and the U.S.A. The Living Newspaper was firmly established as one of the most flexible forms within the cultural armoury of progressive theatre, but despite a general awareness of its roots in Soviet revolutionary society, the Living Newspaper was now identified as a predominantly American innovation.

The extensive reputation that the Federal Theatre managed to establish for itself circulated to every area of Britain. In the west of England, the Bristol Unity Players, a theatre company that existed for a decade from 1935 until after the end of the war, had close and very productive relationships with the F.T.P. The Bristol group drew on the enthusiastic organization of two sisters who formed associations with the progressive theatre movement in the U.S.A. Joan and Angela Tuckett worked for the Bristol Unity Players in almost every conceivable capacity, between them they wrote, acted, directed and produced a range of shows that included the obligatory production of Waiting for Lefty, On Guard for Spain and the group's own unemployment play, The Bull Sees Red. In 1937 Angela Tuckett moved to New York when her husband accepted a post at Columbia University.[38] For over a year she seized the opportunity to immerse herself in the activities of the social theatre in New York, and sent weekly packages to her sister

in Bristol. Angela Tuckett's retrospective description of a Bristol Unity Players' production of their own extravaganza Variety emphasizes the importance of cultural exchange.

> *"All sorts of cultural projects had been started in the U.S. freed from the need to attract commercial backing.... They ranged from "unprofitable" historical research of all kinds, from collecting folk lore and music to teaching modelling in children's hospitals. Dramatic and dance groups indeed blossomed; the Federal Theatre Project began in the Autumn of 1935. Much of the finest work of the most promising writers was blotted out from public knowledge and memory by McCarthyism in the late 1940's and 1950's. Even Hitler did not succeed in getting away with a crime like that; their rehabilitation is long overdue. I collected, sent and brought back to Bristol everything of this kind in America that I could lay my hands on.*
>
> *.... Much of this American material .... was adapted or entirely re-written in British - not to say Bristolian - terms. But perhaps their most important contribution was to widen horizons."*[39]

The widened horizons of 1937 coincided with a general expansion of popular front culture. In that year alone, set against the horrific background of the fascists' devastation of Guernica, British progressive culture burgeoned in every direction. Christopher Caudwell's Illusion and Reality was published prior to his death in the Spanish Civil War; Waiting for Lefty was made generally available through the channels of the Left Book Club; Unity Theatre members were already working on their first Living Newspaper; George Orwell was documenting his Homage to Catalonia; Auden and Isherwood were engaged with The Group Theatre enterprise in London; whilst in Glasgow, one of Britain's least known, but most interesting, Living Newspaper groups had been formed.

The Glasgow Workers' Theatre Group (G.W.T.G.) encapsulated the most important defining features of militant Living Newspaper drama. Through close links with the New Theatre League in New York, the Glasgow group persisted with a localized dramatic output, which was indigenously written and researched by its own members. Before the Glasgow Workers' Theatre Group disbanded in 1940 it had produced three Living Newspapers: one on behalf of Indian

students based in Glasgow; another on Irish politics which had been written with Glasgow's massive Irish-Catholic community in mind, and a third entitled U.A.B. Scotland.[40] The group's interest in Living Newspaper work dated back to 1937 when they were visited by the American radical Will Lee, who had previously been an actor with Theatre of Action and the New York Living Newspaper Unit. Lee allegedly encouraged the group to abandon their interest in adapting plays from the United States and to begin writing their own material.[41] In responding directly to this challenge, one of the Glasgow Workers' Theatre Group's members, Harry Trott, set about researching the problems of unemployment and poverty. U.A.B. Scotland takes its name from the establishment of unemployment assistance boards in Britain and dramatized the chronic effects of unemployment in industrial Scotland. Using an amalgam of agitprop and Living Newspaper techniques, U.A.B. Scotland raged against the indignities of the boards, the problems of living by hire purchase and the inadequacies of government training camps. Although it was a modest and comparatively straightforward production, U.A.B. Scotland re-emphasized the values of locally generated political culture. However, the promising work that the Glasgow Workers' Theatre Group had started was prematurely ended when most of its members were recruited into Scottish regiments in 1940. The outbreak of war devastated the British progressive theatre. Although London's Unity Theatre continued through the war years and Theatre Workshop emerged out of the experiences of Manchester's Theatre Union, the vast majority of people's theatre companies went into decline.

The war years in Britain, whilst radically different from the experiences in the United States, generated similar cultural responses. The Living Newspaper declined as a form of oppositional theatre and its instructive styles were appropriated by the agencies of wartime propaganda. The Army Bureau of Current Affairs, which was based in London, used Living Newspapers,

"for elementary, graphic exposition of problems that were interesting or irritant to the personnel of the armed forces."[42] It predictably recruited a number of people who had previously worked in progressive theatre, including Bridget Boland, Ted Willis and Jack Lindsay, and set about establishing a repertory of filmic and dramatic documentaries.

The immediate post-war period, galvanized by the aspirations of a new Labour Government committed to the establishment of a Welfare State, witnessed a brief regeneration of Living Newspaper drama. Unlike the residual post-war productions in the U.S.A., which were often either politically vague or undeveloped, the British Living Newspapers were hopeful, optimistic and liberal. The Reunion Theatre, a short lived venture which brought wartime entertainers together again after the war, staged a Living Newspaper entitled Exercise Bowler. The subject matter was timely enough to encourage a West End management to transfer the production to a commercial theatre, where it found a sizeable audience of civilians, who were attracted by its documentation of the problems of readjusting to civilian lifestyles.[43] The London Unity Theatre continued to present innovative productions throughout the forties; the Minister of Fuel and Power sponsored performances of Unity's Living Newspaper Black Magic, which had been specially written to support a campaign to recruit workers to the newly nationalized coal mines.[44] Both Unity Theatre and Theatre Workshop, which became a touring company in 1945 and subsequently settled in London's East End, continued to stage Living Newspapers in the post-war context. But new forms of documentary theatre and new forms of media technology emerged to displace the Living Newspaper. Although Unity Theatre performed news items on the Suez crisis, the Russian invasion of Hungary, and several national issues, its policies became increasingly less clear and its importance waned. On the other hand, Theatre Workshop

continued to expand and included the occasional Living Newspaper, such as Uranium 235, in its repertoire. By the time Theatre Workshop established its base at the Theatre Royal in Stratford, East London, it had already begun to pioneer a specifically British form of drama that drew eclectically on pantomimes, the Victorian music-hall, popular stand-up comedy, and of course, the Living Newspaper.

The work of Theatre Workshop and the documentary theatre movements in Britain and Germany have their roots in an awareness of Living Newspaper theatre. But they also have their own very rich specificity. It would be immensely valuable, but the beginnings of an entirely new project, to follow those tracks. The most productive way forward is to examine those areas in which the Living Newspaper is still prevalent as a significant cultural force, and re-examine those areas of history that might inform current theatre practice. These two tasks are in fact not separate, they come together at a conceptual level and illuminate the dialectical relationships between authorship and production.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. The prefatory quotes are taken from What Was Federal Theatre?, a pamphlet prepared by Hallie Flanagan and published by the American Council on Public Affairs. The pamphlet was published as part of a national campaign to save the Federal Theatre, and although it is undated, it was clearly published soon after the date of its final entry, 30th June 1939.

2. On 7th June 1938, the senator for Texas, Martin Dies, proposed that a committee to investigate Un-American Activities should be established. The House of Representatives passed the resolution by 181 votes to 147 and for a brief period the committee was unofficially named The Dies Committee after its incumbent chairman. Although its notoriety was greatest during the McCarthyite period, H.U.A.C. actually existed for thirty years and was only disbanded in 1968. The committee hearings with most relevance to theatre and cinema are collected in an abbreviated form in E. Bentley, Thirty Years of Treason, Viking Press, New York, 1971.

3. New York Times, 27th July 1938, p. 19.

4. In using the term 'friendly' witness, it should be remembered that the term did not become common until H.U.A.C. investigated the affairs of the motion picture industry. It passed into regular usage after 1947. For a more detailed account of the F.T.P.'s investigation by H.U.A.C. see Mathews, pp. 198-288.

5. Mathews, p. 231.

6. New York Times, 20th August 1938; New York Times, 19th July 1937; New York Times, 25th November 1938.

7. Mathews, p. 209.

8. New York Journal American, 19th October 1938, p. 33.

9. Hazel Huffman made a series of outrageous allegations against the F.T.P. Her most preposterous suggestion was that recruitment to the project had been so haphazard that a Bowery peddlar had been employed simply because he sported long sideburns. Huffman's allegations were surpassed only by the testimony of her husband, Seymour Revzin, who accused F.T.P. employees of befriending black relief workers as part of a Communist policy of *"social equality and race merging."* See Mathews, p. 205.

10. Bentley, p. 18.
An edited version of Flanagan's testimony is presented as an appendix.

11. H. Flanagan, What Was the Federal Theatre?, Ibid., p. 23.

12. New York Times, 1st July 1939, p. 1.

13. By 1939 the number of people employed by the F.T.P. had dropped to approximately eight thousand people as the result of a series of financial cut-backs.

14. New York Times, 23rd June 1939, p. 3.

15. H. Flanagan, What Was the Federal Theatre?, Ibid., p. 22.

16. The black version of Macbeth was set in Haiti, and the thematic imagery of witchcraft was substituted by voodoo imagery. The part of Macbeth was played by Jack Carter and the part of Lady Macbeth by Edna Thomas.

17. L. Mitchell, Black Drama, Hawthorn Books, New York, 1967, p. 103.

18. The details on Liberty Deferred were supplied by one of its authors, Abram Hill, who was a prominent figure in Harlem dramatic circles in the forties. He is the author of the black social comedy, Striver's Row. See Mitchell, Ibid.

19. The script of Liberty Deferred is housed in the Federal Theatre Research Centre and of all the extant Living Newspapers is the one which most lends itself to production today. Another Living Newspaper, written by Betty Smith and entitled King Cotton, was working its way through the bureaucracy of the F.T.P. when the project closed.

20. Several other theatre organizations had emerged in the second half of the thirties but none of them generated anything like the waves of enthusiasm that either the New Theatre League or the Federal Theatre Project had done. The Theatre Arts Committee Cabaret Nights in New York were an interesting but short lived attempt to bring European political cabaret to the U.S.A.

21. Hans Eisler (1898-1962) was one of Germany's most respected radical musicians. His sister, Ruth Fischer, and his brother, Gerhard Eisler, were both prominent officials in the German Communist Party. After composing for several workers' theatre groups in Germany, Hans Eisler collaborated with Bertolt Brecht on Die Massnahame (1930) and Die Mutter (1932). He visited the U.S.A. for the first time in 1935 when he travelled with Brecht to work on Theatre Union's notorious production of The Mother. Eisler subsequently visited Spain and composed revolutionary songs for the International Brigades before returning to the U.S.A. His musical score for Medicine Show once again forges connections between the Living Newspaper and the principles of epic theatre. Eisler appeared before H.U.A.C. and was cross-examined on his past relations with his brother and his work in the musical field. He was subsequently deported from the U.S.A. in 1948, and returned to the German Democratic Republic.

22. R. Watts Jr., "Medicine Show Has Opinions and Expresses Them", New York Herald Tribune, 21st April 1940, p. 15.

23. Lem Ward had previously directed the New York version of One Third of a Nation.

24. R. Warner, "Strong Anti-War Stand Adopted at N.T.L. Convention", Daily Worker, 20th June 1950, p. 9.

25. H. Flanagan, "The Living Newspaper Lives", an unpublished essay housed in the Hallie Flanagan Collection, New York Public Library.

26. The following Living Newspapers were also written or performed in the period after 1940: Song About America (1940), We Go Forward (1940) which were both by Hoffman Hays; Who Rides White Horses which was staged at Fordham University, and $E = MC^2$, a Living Newspaper on Atomic power which was written by Hallie Flanagan and students from Smith College. The script of a short agitational Living Newspaper, also entitled One Hundred Years, is housed in the Morris Watson Collection. It includes a comical diatribe by a worker, who refuses to be represented by the Little Man persona. The script is handwritten and presumably came to nothing.

27. Although a lengthy and more detailed analysis of the Workers' Theatre Movement would undoubtedly give rise to fruitful cultural comparisons, it is outside the scope of this study to be anything other than selective and indicative. However, academic work over the last few years has usefully recorded and commented upon workers' theatre culture in the thirties. The following references are worthy of fuller examination.

(i) R. Samuel, "Workers' Theatre Movement: An Editorial Introduction", History Workshop Journal, No. 4, Autumn, 1977.

(ii) T. Thomas, "Workers' Theatre Movement: Memoir and Documents", Ibid.

(iii) K. McCreery, "Prolet:Yiddish Theatre in the 1930's", Race and Class, Vol. XX, No. 3, Winter 1979.

(iv) J. Clarke and D. Margolies, "The Workers' Theatre Movement: A Propertyless Theatre for the Propertyless Class", Red Letters, No. 10.

(v) D. Watson, "Busmen : Documentary and Political Theatre in the 1930's", Media, Culture and Society, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1981.

(vi) D. Allen, "The Glasgow Workers' Theatre Group", New Edinburgh Review, No. 40, 1978.

(vii) V. Flynn, "Looking Back", Ibid.

(viii) J. Hill, "Glasgow Unity Theatre", Ibid.

(ix) André van Gyseghem, "British Theatre in the Thirties : An Autobiographic Record", in Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties, eds. John Clark et al., Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1979.

(x) John Clark, "Agitprop and Unity Theatre : Socialist Theatre in the Thirties", Ibid.

28. The W.T.M. emerged out of a partnership between the Hackney People's Players and the Caxton Hall Workers' Theatre, who joined forces in 1928. Although the vanguard of the movement was based in London, it subsequently spread northwards to the major industrial cities of Northern England and Scotland.

29. T. Thomas, Ibid., p. 121.

30. London Unity Theatre's foremost directors were André van Gyseghem and Herbert Marshall, both of whom had studied revolutionary theatre in Moscow. Marshall had been a student under Eisenstein and worked

with several revolutionary Living Newspaper groups during his spell in Russia. André van Gyseghem established his reputation as a director at London's Embassy Theatre, where he directed a production of Miracle at Verdun by Hans Chlumberg, which had previously been popularized by the Theatre Guild in New York. Although the internecine politics of Unity Theatre make generalizations difficult to sustain, the company had close but problematic relationships with the British Communist Party, but managed to secure a degree of autonomy from party determinations. The problems of reconstructing the history of the London Unity Theatre is compounded by the paucity of extant source material. The British Library's holdings were destroyed during the Blitz. Herbert Marshall is not to be confused with the British born actor of the same name, who became a well known Hollywood actor in the early thirties by specializing in 'gentleman' roles, and remained a popular character actor for over thirty years.

31. The Unity Theatre's production of Waiting for Lefty was the third production recorded in Britain. It had previously been performed by The Rebel Players in October 1935, after the members had returned from the Workers' Theatre Olympiade in Moscow. See M. Page, "The Early Years at Unity", Theatre Quarterly, Vol. 1, No. 4, October-December 1971.

32. D. Watson, Ibid., p. 341.

33. Conversations with John Allen suggest that Busmen was very consciously influenced by the Unity Theatre's knowledge of Federal Theatre Living Newspapers.

34. From a Unity Theatre statement quoted in M. Page, Ibid., p. 64.

35. Left News, February 1938, p. 710. See also D. Watson, Ibid., p. 348.

36. The Salford based Red Megaphones were a mobile agitprop group who performed declamations on the back of a lorry at venues in and around Lancashire's major cotton towns. Their name was a conscious borrowing from the German group, Das Rote Sprachröhr. Red Megaphones subsequently became the Manchester Theatre of Action and ultimately formed the nucleus of Theatre Workshop. Although it has never been verified, the name Theatre Workshop may well have been taken from the name of the radical theatre journal Theatre Workshop, which appeared in the U.S.A. in the latter years of the thirties. The British folk singer, Ewan McColl, was a prominent member of these various groups, from their agitprop beginnings to Theatre Workshop's subsequent eminence as one of Britain's most important popular theatre ventures. See E. McColl, "Grassroots of Theatre Workshop", Theatre Quarterly, Vol. III, No. 9, 1973; H. Goorney, The Theatre Workshop Story, Methuen, London, 1981, and R. Samuel, Workers' Theatre in Britain and the U.S.A., Routledge and Kegan Paul, London (forthcoming).

37. H. Goorney, Ibid., p. 23.

38. Angela Tuckett subsequently became a social historian and is the author of The Scottish Carter, a history of the Scottish Horse and Motormen's Association. Her social history of the Bristol

Unity Players, The People's Theatre in Bristol 1930-45, has been published by the History Group of the British Communist Party and appears in their Our History Series as pamphlet No. 72.

39. A. Tuckett, The People's Theatre in Bristol 1930-45, p. 13. Among the material Tuckett located in New York were copies of Air Raid by Archibald McLeish, a transcript of Blitzstein's The Cradle Will Rock, and a copy of One Third of a Nation. Although the Bristol Unity Players did not perform One Third of a Nation it was presented as a club rehearsed-reading.

40. D. Allen, "The Glasgow Workers' Theatre Group", p. 13.

41. The G.W.T.G. had previously performed productions of two Clifford Odets' plays, Waiting for Lefty and Till the Day I Die, and Ben Bengal's Plant in the Sun.

42. J. Collier, "Theatre Documentary", Theatre Arts Monthly, Vol. 31, July 1947, p. 65.

43. Ibid., p. 66. See also A. Davies, "A Theatre for a People's Army? The Story of the ABCA Play Unit", Red Letters, No. 13, Spring 1982.

44. Collier, p. 65.

CHAPTER SIX : AUTHORSHIP AND PRODUCTION

The Anonymity of Authorship?

> *"The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'. It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author. The author still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines.... The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions.... The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us.*[1]
>
> **(Roland Barthes 1968)**

Living Newspaper drama resists the powerful ideological sway of individual authorship, not simply because it is a form of public theatre that relies on social intercourse, but because its modes of production are firmly grounded in a kind of collaborative cultural practice that works against the critical grain of individual creativity. When the word 'play' is used in everyday discourse, it carries with it a multiplicity of possible meanings; when the word is used in relationship to the theatre, its meaning, whilst still variable, has a much clearer set of definitions. The weight of western aesthetics always moves us towards an understanding of the word 'play', which associates it with a single dramatic text ordered by a clear narrative and usually written by an individual playwright. The play only becomes a performance when it has been liberated from its textuality and has passed through a process of rehearsal, in which the text's linguistic conventions are substituted by the conventions of theatrical performance. An audience may then differ radically amongst itself about the play's probable meanings

and its affective value, but the audience is rarely allowed to stray from dominant aesthetic understandings of the play's production as a text and as a performance. Always lurking beneath the audience's consciousness is the assumption that the play text is *"a personal production which may well vary in the ways it can be received but which always maintains a coherent identity of its own and which displays the personal imprint that makes it a specific, vital and significant act of communication."*[2] In the Living Newspaper, that personal imprint - the authorial subject as playwright - is largely subsumed into alternative modes of production. It is significant that the most prominent Living Newspapers are not the product of particular individuals but of groups: the Blue Blouses, the Living Newspaper Unit, Unity Theatre and the People's Theatre of Peru. Of course individuals are always present, wrestling with their own ideas and with the ideas of others, but in Living Newspaper production their authorship is largely anonymous and finds its public expression through shared political ideas rather than through the individual imprint of the playwright.

In looking back across the history of Living Newspaper dramaturgy, it becomes evident that it is the unique nature of script writing rather than stylistic innovations which separates the Living Newspaper from other forms of theatre. But it is not simply a matter of individual authorship being replaced by collaborative approaches. The Living Newspaper differentiates itself by using an alternative system of script writing which has been derived from a quite different cultural practice outside the theatre. When we talk about Living Newspaper production, we are in fact acknowledging the existence of a newspaper theatre which draws its conventions from the theatre and also from organized journalism. It was Brecht who believed that the real measure of revolutionary culture was not simply that a drama should incorporate a political content or subject matter, but that it

should attempt to functionally transform the methods and instruments of dramatic production. It was Jean-Luc Godard who suggested that it was not sufficient to make political films, the revolutionary artist had to strive to make films politically.[3] The Living Newspaper fulfils the demands of these two adages. In challenging the centrality of individual authorship, it attempts to transform the methods of dramatic production and make theatre politically.

Once again the origins of the Living Newspaper's alternative practices can be traced back to the Blue Blouse movement in revolutionary Russia. In disseminating news and information as part of a nationwide campaign to combat illiteracy, disease and political ignorance, the Blue Blouse movement was not simply a theatrical project but also a journalistic and an educational project. In retrospect it could be argued that the Blue Blouse movement harboured two related functions which have always existed either explicitly or beneath the surface of Living Newspaper production. It would be appropriate at this point to define these functions as the journalistic and the pedagogical and to see them as relatively constant features of the Living Newspaper. The Blue Blouse movement pioneered a form of theatre in which the place of the playwright was not more important than the role of the journalist and the teacher. In working in the area of instructive propaganda, the Blue Blouses eroded the distinctions between creativity and production and performed Living Newspapers in which news and political education co-existed. The author ceased to be defined in terms of individual categorization and became a producer.

The Author as Producer in the Theatre of Journalism

In his seminal essay "The Author as Producer", Walter Benjamin outlined a lengthy example of the ways in which certain kinds of cultural practice intersect with politics, writing and the press. Significantly, his example

takes us back to the work of Sergei Tretyakov and his particular kind of operative authorship.

> *"I should like to guide your attention to Sergey Tretyakov and to the type of 'operative' writer he defines and personifies. This operative writer offers the most palpable example of the functional dependency which always and in all circumstances exists between the correct political tendency and a progressive literary technique. ....When, in 1928, in the period of total collectivization of Russian agriculture, the slogan 'Writers to the Collective Farm!' was issued, Tretyakov went to the 'Communist Lighthouse' commune and, in the course of two prolonged visits, understood the following activities: calling mass meetings; collecting funds for down-payments on tractors; persuading private farmers to join the collective farm; inspecting reading rooms; launching wall newspapers and directing the collective farm newspaper; reporting to Moscow nespapers; introducing radio, travelling film shows, etc.*
>
> *You may admire Tretyakov and yet think that his example is not particularly meaningful in this connection. The tasks he undertook you may object are those of a journalist or propagandist; all this has not much to do with literary creation. Yet I quoted Tretyakov's example deliberately in order to point out to you how wide the horizon has to be .... if we are to find forms appropriate to the literary energy of our time....*
>
> *I hope to have shown by the foregoing that the view of the author as producer must go all the way back to the press.... The press is the most decisive point of reference for this process, and that is why any consideration of the author as producer must extend to and include the press.*[4]

By 1928 the Moscow Blue Blouse company was already actively exploring the limits and possibilities of the interaction of theatre and journalism. Although originally an amateur group, the Moscow Blue Blouses eventually assumed a professional status under the organizational structures of the Moscow City Council of Trade Unions, when the Blue Blouse movement spread throughout revolutionary Russia. The Moscow Blue Blouses drew consciously on the earliest Living Newspaper demonstrations, in which an editor persona with a megaphone announced and crudely illustrated news information. As the form developed in workers' clubs, the relationships between the theatre and journalism took on a more complex dimension. Performances made use of the 'feuilleton', a regular column in a newspaper which comments upon the major news items of the day.[5] The 'feuilleton' works by juxtaposing two unrelated and disparate news items in an unexpected way, in order to

demonstrate to the reader their appropriate political lessons or their strange similarities. It therefore functions through two simple, yet important cultural strategies: firstly, an elementary form of montage (the bringing together of disparate elements), and secondly, a kind of defamiliarization in which the unexpected works to make political connections. As the Living Newspaper developed its relationships with news journalism, these two strategies were developed in increasingly more sophisticated ways.

The work of the Moscow Blue Blouses established a firm basis for a theatre of journalism. Their sketches and declamations were often written by journalist collectives based at the Moscow School of Journalism and in a self-reflexive way, often dramatized the problems of newspaper propaganda. On their tour of Germany in 1928, the Moscow Blue Blouses performed a typical programme of events which included a short agitational Living Newspaper entitled The Parade of the Press. The performers paraded through the audience prior to the production and each represented a journal or newspaper from the revolutionary press. Factual speeches and live readings from contemporary news reports were interrupted by actors holding visual placards and announcing headlines through megaphones. As the sketch developed, the performers constructed the image of a printing press through a constructivist system of bio-mechanical acting, in what was literally a dance of machinery.[6] The sketch ended with the performers forming a Roman chariot surrounded by centurion guards, who were holding shields made from daily newspapers. The Parade of the Press was a metaphoric defence of the role of the revolutionary press in disseminating political information which reflected, in both its form and content, the importance of the newspaper as the methodological basis of performance. In an aggressive way it was newspaper theatre at its most basic.

As the Living Newspaper developed throughout central Europe, the journalistic dimension was less pronounced but resurfaced in a prominent way in the work of the New York Living Newspaper Unit. Although the F.T.P.'s major Living Newspapers were attributed to a single author (Arthur Arent), they were generally recognized as the collaborative effort of the Unit's unique internal organization.[7] The fortuitous involvement of the Newspaper Guild of America and the important part that unemployed journalists played in research and writing, helped to establish an organizational framework that was more comparable to a newspaper than a theatre group. From the managing producer, who assigned topics for research, down to the rank and file journalists who searched out the raw dramatic facts, the motive force of the Unit was organized newspaper theatre. Out of a total staff of two hundred and forty relief workers of whom eighty-seven were actors, the New York Living Newspaper had seventy research workers, most of whom were unemployed journalists.[8]

Through the foresight of its President, Heywood Broun, a radical columnist who subsequently became a leading figure in the Socialist Party of the U.S.A., the Guild managed to negotiate a strong position for itself within the affairs of the Federal Theatre Project.[9] Perhaps one of the main reasons that the Living Newspaper Unit generated so much controversy and had such a strong radical element, can be related to the involvement of the Newspaper Guild. Throughout the period of new unionism in the latter years of the thirties, the Guild conducted a concerted campaign for journalists' rights against an industry that was notoriously resistant to change. As if to underline its campaigning policies, the Guild appointed Morris Watson, who had recently been sacked by Associated Press for union activities, to represent its interests within the Federal Theatre.[10]

As late as 1938, only months before the Federal Theatre closed, the Newspaper Guild's influence was still substantial enough for its representatives

to suggest full-scale changes in the organization of the Living Newspaper Unit. In an attempt to create even more work for redundant journalists, the Guild suggested that Living Newspapers should place less emphasis on historical survey and become much more topical in their approach. In an interesting set of proposals, the Guild suggested that the F.T.P. should establish a network of small portable theatre companies that could exclusively perform short Living Newspapers. However, the Guild made the political error of suggesting that these changes could best be facilitated if the F.T.P. conceded more decision-making power to the Guild and more autonomy to the Living Newspaper Unit. In the light of previous controversies it was not surprising that the proposals were shelved and the Guild had to accept its not inconsiderable role as advisory sponsor.[11]

For the first time in the history of the theatre in the U.S.A., a professional company was operating under the sponsorship of a campaigning union, and within the organizational structures of journalism. As Hallie Flanagan later pointed out, *"the staff of the Living Newspaper (was) set up like a city daily with editor-in-chief, managing editor, city editor, reporters and copy readers."*[12] Her description confirms that a clear division of labour existed and that certain skills were associated with particular trades and occupations. At no stage was the Unit ever organized as a collective in which distinct areas of individual responsibility were eroded, but it did work through a collaborative effort that was quite different from conventional playwrighting practices. The New York Living Newspaper Unit was in some respects a theatre of artisanal collaboration. It was headed by Morris Watson, the managing supervisor, who was in charge of four separate divisional supervisors. These supervisors were responsible for ensuring that their divisions - personnel, stage direction, technical production and editorial staff - were aware of long term projects and daily work schedules. It was the editorial staff which clearly distinguished

the Unit from all other Federal Theatre companies and which gave it the distinctiveness of journalistic theatre. Within the editorial division there were fifteen dramatists, seventy research workers, nine librarians, several copy-readers and several editors. It soon became evident that their responsibility was not script writing but script production.[13]

The Living Newspaper as Cultural Production

> *"From the epoch of a privileged literate culture we have derived a stereotype of the cultural producer as an individual; characteristically an author.... We may know that authors work within determinate social and cultural conditions, but we still emphasize the fact of individual production....*
>
> *What is eventually clear, however, is that a much more formal and regular division of labour, based not only on professionalization but also on conscious management, corresponds to an effectively new stage in the means of production. In the case of theatre this is especially clear."*[14]

Raymond Williams' words could not be more appropriate to the Living Newspaper. The subject matter of most Living Newspapers was generally decided upon by the Regional Director of the F.T.P. and Morris Watson, after collaboration with research workers. In its earliest stages the subject would usually be a broad conceptual area or theme: imperialism, war, housing, the Southern States, labour relations, fascism etc. Only when the initial research had been undertaken would the subject be more clearly defined, and at a later stage still a title would emerge. Most members of the research staff were given daily assignments, usually to locate relevant material and statistics in libraries and through interviews. In normal circumstances, about twenty journalists would be assigned to a specific topic and would remain on that project until they had identified and collated sufficient material. In the last few months of 1938, the Unit was working on a Living Newspaper on unemployment. Although it was never performed, the work that went into the project exemplifies the

unusual production processes that governed script writing and highlights the influence that the journalistic staff could have on a finished production. Each day the research workers were given a specific area of work to perform: one was sent to find historical statistics on unemployment; another was sent to research the history of working class resistance to unemployment, and another was given the job of locating suitable solidarity songs. At the end of a defined period, the researchers were to present their findings and make recommendations to the Unit. Rose Cook, a woman journalist and the researcher who was sent to locate material on the past history of resistance, was in the unusual position of being able to influence the final script in at least one area of content. Her recommendations included a suggestion that the final script should concentrate on the Federal Government's antagonism to organized resistance and should forge connections between the thirties and the Depression of 1857.[15] To support her recommendations, she included a report that detailed sporadic riots, the police's inability to control the resistances and the use of Marines to impose martial law. Although the script was never finished, precisely the same modes of production applied to Triple-A Plowed Under, Injunction Granted, Power and One Third of a Nation.

The Newspaper Guild's journalists kept a comprehensive 'morgue' similar to those in normal newspaper enterprises. The records and clippings, which came from both the traditional New York daily papers and the alternative press, covered almost every conceivable socio-political subject from racism to international affairs. The 'morgue' took on almost symbolic significance within the Unit and was seen as a sign of its journalistic credentials. Although the Unit was over-staffed in comparison with almost every other theatre company, it protected the interests of its members not only for social reasons but because the Unit strongly supported the occupational principles of journalistic theatre.

On a number of occasions the Unit was criticized for having an exaggerated and unwieldy research structure. In particular, many opponents of the New Deal argued that the 'morgue' was a typical representation of the wastefulness of relief work and simply the creation of an unnecessary level of fruitless work. Fortunately, the Regional Director of New York, Phil Barber, who was generally critical of the Living Newspaper Unit, recognized that the 'morgue' was part of a necessary process and not an indulgence.[16]

> *"The importance and exact place of research work in the development of the Living Newspapers is, I think, a point which has puzzled all of us. I have come to the conclusion that the research department is essential to the presentation of the Living Newspapers. Spirochete is sometimes brought forward as an example of a script prepared without formal research. I do not consider this a Living Newspaper nor does the author. The difference (between normal plays) and Triple A Plowed Under, Power, One Third of a Nation and Medicine Show is in the fact that Living Newspapers are written out of fact. The author may arrange, underline or give original treatment to his material, but he is not, as in the case of a play, simply expressing the workings of his personal imagination and communicating to an audience the direction of his own ego. There must be a vast amount of careful, well planned research behind a real Living Newspaper. If the research and morgue (which I consider simply as one aspect of the research) are wiped out, you may be sure that the end of the Living Newspaper will shortly follow."*[17]

Barber's defence of the collaborative process of Living Newspaper dramaturgy raises further questions; in what ways were raw facts transformed into dramatic scripts and what relationships existed between research staff and dramatists?

Before the raw material could be converted into draft scenes, the production process passed through two more distinct stages. The city editor gathered all the research material together, assembled it into a working order and passed it on to the rewrite staff, at which point dispensable and duplicated material was removed. Only then was the research material handed over to the dramatists. The entire process, from the initial idea to the point at which dramatists received research material, could vary enormously from

a matter of days to several months.[18] No limitations were placed on the amount of material sent to the dramatists, and at times they were presented with an onerous task. For One Third of a Nation the research staff provided over fifteen thousand pages of material, which included over one thousand newspaper clippings on slum housing conditions. Editorial meetings were called at regular stages in the production of the script and it was common for objections to be raised, suggestions to be proferred and alternatives presented.[19] As a result of these editorial meetings, it was often agreed that scenes or fragments of dialogue should be given to different dramatists, to be worked on in new ways. On completion, the 'finished' script was sent to the Federal Theatre's lawyer, who ensured that it did not breach the laws of libel or slander. However, when the script was handed to the stage division, it was still the subject of modification. One of the most successful scenes in Power, which is generally attributed to Arthur Arent, involved a short comical scene in which a father tried to explain the complexities of the holding-company system to his infant daughter using alphabet blocks. The daughter's simple questioning cuts to the heart of the apparent absurdity of big business organization and the scene ends with the bricks collapsing. Although Arent was the main dramatist on the Power project, he admits the scene was written by someone else when he was off ill with suspected pneumonia.

As the F.T.P. extended and developed its policies on encouraging young dramatists, it became possible for an individual to suggest their own area of social interest, but even then the dramatist was assigned a research staff and had to make the script available to scrutiny and criticism. When a Living Newspaper script was ready for public performance and had gone through lengthy rehearsal processes, one would imagine that the connections between theatre and journalism would have ended. On the contrary, even during the run of the major Living Newspapers, the journalists

reported back with relevant and contemporary news.

> *"The Living Newspaper's office is a city room and it is in a building several blocks away from the theatre. The city room and theatre are connected by teletype (several of our staff went to school with the phone company to learn its operation). An assistant city editor is on duty from six p.m. until midnight, while several reporters during these hours cover such strategic points as police headquarters and the principal mid-town police stations. We have press cards like any newspaper and can send people out on short notice to cover any occurrence. Thus, the city night editor can teletype immediately to the theatre...."*[20]

When new material was located it could either be incorporated as an announcement over the loudspeaker, incorporated into the lines of an on stage character or held over to be converted into an entirely new scene which would be rehearsed the following day.

On 6th May 1936, when 1935 opened in New York, the programme carried an excited description of the system and proclaimed the values of a journalistic theatre.

> *"Up-to-the-minute news, as well as the review of front page highlights of last year, is provided to the audiences of 1935.*
>
> *Two members of the staff of the LIVING NEWSPAPER, experienced newsmen, are assigned to gathering and preparing the material. They scan the newspapers and keep in touch with news sources that will have some relation to the events portrayed on the stage. These news bulletins are announced to the audience at each performance over the loud-speaker."*[21]

This theatrical dramatization of 'hot news' gave the journalists an important power within the Unit and obviously made the output of political ideas difficult to monitor and control. After Injunction Granted, the free access to announcing 'hot news' occurred less frequently. The point at which journalism and theatre spilled over into political commentary, on a sensitive issue that the Newspaper Guild itself had a vested interest in, was the point at which the Living Newspaper stretched the W.P.A. beyond the bounds of institutional tolerance. Injunction Granted was not only about the labour movement and the law, it was about organized journalism and its struggle to gain advantages from the intransigent barons of the newspaper industry.

In order to become a truly political venture, the theatre of journalism had to reflect upon the role of the journalist within society. Morris Watson was adamant, in his own personal impressions, about what role the journalistic theatre should occupy within political practice.

> "*.... trade unions should use the theatre as a major instrument in achieving their gains .... a small start has been made. It was made by the Living Newspaper. The Living Newspaper was a government enterprise, but it was started at the insistence of the Newspaper Guild of New York and it was sponsored by the Newspaper Guild. Its ideology was that of the trade union.*"[22]

By 1936 the Newspaper Guild's struggle for national recognition had crystallized into a protracted dispute with one particular employer: the obdurate press baron, William Randolph Hearst. Throughout the run of Injunction Granted, the Guild was committed to a lengthy campaign to unionize Hearst's empire. In Milwaukee, the union managed to halt publication of the Wisconsin News for over six months and in one incident outside the newspaper's offices, many prominent Guild activists, including its president, were arrested. Similarly, the Guild managed to halt publication of Hearst's Seattle Post-Intelligencer by organizing a massive picket line of six hundred workers, including teamsters and longshoremen, and in spite of intimidation from hired gunmen.[23] The contempt that the Newspaper Guild had for Hearst's anti-union activities invariably found its way into the script of Injunction Granted, a production that had originally been inspired by Morris Watson's own experiences with the law. In Scene 25, the Voice of the Living Newspaper announced a boxing match between Dean Jennings of the Guild's San Francisco branch and the corpulent figure of William Randolph Hearst. The bout was waged in classic agitational style and to the delight of the audience, Hearst was humiliated and soundly beaten by the union representative. As the undignified figure of Hearst lay sprawled on the canvas, the referee - a personification of the law - awarded the victory to Hearst. The pleasures of the scene resided in the energies of its farcical style. It made no pretentions to subtlety and did not purport

to be objective. The audience was left with the pleasures of political recognition, yet another injunction had been granted in favour of the management.

What knowledge emerges from the experiences of journalistic theatre? The theatrical text is shown to be the product of extensive collaboration and the imprint of individual authorship virtually disappears. Creativity is shown to be a process of production which continues even when dramatists have suspected pneumonia, and is revealed as work with all the effort, energy and disenchantment that work implies. The dramatic text is seen to be *"a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture"*. The performance, like the text from which it emanates, is shown to be *"an active space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash."*[25] When the Living Newspaper is examined in this new light, its real potential as a mode of democratic cultural activity can be seen. Stripped of the worst excesses of dramatic mystification, it becomes a liberated theatre. It is in the context of this demystified theatre that much of the recent Living Newspaper activity has taken place. In what ways can the pedagogical current within the Living Newspaper unsettle the relationships between authorship and production?

The Living Newspaper and Operative Authorship

The analytical basis of Walter Benjamin's re-examination of authorship hinges on the notion of the operative writer: the cultural practitioner who takes an active and functional role in his or her community. *"The operative writer's mission is not to report but to fight; not to assume the spectator's role but to intervene actively."*[26] In the history of the Living Newspaper, the function of the operative author has been manifold: to disseminate news and information to outlying communities;

to provide empirical data on politics, health and welfare; to propagandize for improved social conditions and to intervene within politically divided social formations. The operative author of the Living Newspaper has literally been a herald, a messenger, a propagandizer, a journalist and a teacher. It is that latter function - the pedagogical function - that has seen the Living Newspaper spread from the old world to the new world, and more recently to the Third World.

The materialist theatre has always operated in the areas of instruction, knowledge and political culture. The writings of Bertolt Brecht present an ambitious and formidable theory of politics, social pleasure and knowledge. In one of his most important essays, "Theatre for Pleasure and Theatre for Instruction", Brecht outlined the instructive and pedagogical possibilities of theatre, in ways that appear to be a manifesto for Living Newspaper drama.

> *"The stage began to be instructive. Oil, inflation, war, social struggles, the family, religion, wheat, the meat market, all became subjects for theatrical representation. Choruses enlightened the spectator about facts unknown to him. Films showed a montage of events from all over the world. Projections added statistical material. And as the 'background' came to the front of the stage so people's activity was subjected to criticism. Right and wrong courses of action were shown. People were shown who knew what they were doing, and others who did not. The theatre became an affair for philosophers, but only for such philosophers as wished not just to explain the world but to change it .... the pleasure of learning depends on all sorts of things; but nonetheless there is such a thing as pleasurable learning, cheerful and militant learning...*
>
> *Theatre remains theatre even when it is instructive theatre and in so far as it is good theatre it will amuse."*[27]

Brecht's essay, written in 1935, possibly during his visit to New York, encapsulates both the formal and functional properties of the Living Newspapers of the period but also looks forward to future initiatives. The work of the People's Theatre of Peru carried on the materialist tradition of instructive theatre in situations in which the role of the author incorporated a range of other functions. The operative author of

Latin American literacy programmes exemplifies the pedagogical dimension of authorship and personifies the instructive foundations of Living Newspaper practice.

In 1973, the Peruvian government began a national literacy campaign entitled Operación Alfabetización Integral, with the intention of eradicating illiteracy within a period of four years.[28] The Integral Literacy Operation enunciated two principal objectives:

> "*i. to teach literacy in both the first language and in Spanish without forcing the abandonment of the former in favour of the latter.*
>
> *ii. to teach literacy in all possible languages, especially the artistic ones, such as theater, photography, puppetry, films, journalism, etc.*"[29]

in order to combat alarming rates of illiteracy amongst Peru's population of fourteen million people. The educational methods used by the Integral Literacy Operation were derived from the work of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, and were designed to meet the special social needs of Peru's three million illiterates, the majority of whom were peasants. The uniqueness of the campaign was to see language and literacy in the broadest possible terms and to formulate teaching practices that were aimed to encourage visual literacy as well as linguistic literacy. In August 1973, the People's Theatre of Peru conducted a Living Newspaper campaign in the barrios of Lima and Chiclayo. Augusto Boal, previously the director of The Arena Theatre of Brazil based in Sao Paulo, had joined the literacy scheme during a period of political exile from Brazil and became one of its most articulate members.[30] His experiences within the theatrical sector of the Integral Literacy Operation developed from his previous experiments in Brazil and centred on the availability of theatre as a language of communication.

> "*There are many languages besides those that are written or spoken. By learning a new language, a person acquires a new way of knowing reality and of passing that knowledge on to others. Each language is absolutely irreplaceable. All*

> *languages complement each other in achieving the widest, most complete knowledge of what is real .... We tried to show in practice how the theater can be placed at the service of the oppressed, so that they can express themselves and so that, by using this new language, they can also discover new concepts."*[31]

The work of the nucleus group of The People's Theatre of Peru was designed to extend the notion of production by minimizing the distinctions between author, performer and spectator. In other words, the company's theatrical and pedagogical practices aimed to instruct through participation, and aimed to transform the means of theatrical production by effacing the presence of a determining author. Boal's own summary of The People's Theatre literacy work was quite categorical. *"I believe that all truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer to the people the means of production in the theater so that the people themselves may utilize them."*[32] The Arena Theatre's programme was structured around four stages of theatrical communication, which progressed from physical expression to linguistic expression. The four stages - knowing the body, making the body expressive, the theatre as language and the theatre as discourse - involved knowledge and expression of the body through exercises in non-verbal communication, understandings of the power of visual signification through dramatic imagery and finally, the tentative exploration of literary discourse. It was at this final stage, alongside other kinds of literacy training, that the Living Newspaper was employed. The ultimate intention was to instruct the participants in literary and linguistic discourses, in such a way that they themselves became teachers, public speakers and even authors.

Although the Peruvian literacy theatre was largely concerned with forms of rehearsal theatre in which the participants learned from each other, from their mentors and from their own dramatic experiences, the inclusion of the Living Newspaper allowed for dramatic presentation. Boal's experiments record a series of simple newspaper exercises, which

theatrically transform daily news items into performances.

> "a) *Simple reading: the news item is read detaching it from the context of the newspaper, from the format which makes it false or tendentious.*
> b) *Crossed reading: two news items are read in crossed (alternating) form, one throwing light on the other, explaining it, giving it a new dimension.*
> c) *Complementary reading: data and information generally omitted by the newspapers of the ruling classes are added to the news.*
> d) *Rhythmical reading: as a musical commentary, the news is read to the rhythm of the samba, tango, Gregorian chant, etc., so that the rhythm functions as a critical "filter" of the news, revealing its true content, which is obscured in the newspaper.*
> e) *Parallel action: the actors mime parallel actions while the news is read, showing the context in which the reported event really occurred; one hears the news and sees something else that complements it visually.*
> f) *Improvisation: the news is improvised on stage to exploit all its variants and possibilities.*
> g) *Historical: data or scenes showing the same event in other historical moments, in other countries, or in other social systems, are added to the news.*
> h) *Reinforcement: the news is read or sung with the aid or accompaniment of slides, jingles, songs, or publicity materials.*
> i) *Concretion of the abstract: that which the news often hides in its purely abstract information is made concrete on the stage: torture, hunger, unemployment, etc., are shown concretely, using graphic images, real or symbolic.*
> j) *Text out of context: the news is presented out of the context in which it was published; for example, an actor gives the speech about austerity previously delivered by the Minister of Economics while he devours an enormous dinner: the real truth behind the minister's words becomes demystified - he wants austerity for the people but not for himself."*[33]

From initial readings, the participants eventually progressed to short but relatively sophisticated forms of Living Newspaper theatre, in which they themselves became the performers. In combining the activities of performance and learning, the participants assumed the confidence and language to organize their own cultural activities. The originating authors of the literacy programme, those operative writers and theatre practitioners who developed its texts and methodologies, had become dispensable. The once illiterate participants, having entered the rich domain of language, had become their own performers and the authors of

their own cultural heritage. The literacy campaigns in Peru were not offered as neutral education, purged of all ideology, they were in fact presented as progressive political education. If the distinctions between author, educator, performer and participant were not confusing enough, this political dimension extends the notion of instructive theatre even further. The Living Newspaper had literally witnessed the progressive development of the spectator from being a critical onlooker to becoming, in certain specific circumstances, an active participant. Writing in a quite different context, the cultural theorist and documentary dramatist, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, recognized the central importance of this political engagement.

> *"For the old fashioned "artist" - let us call him the author - it follows from these reflections that he must see it as his goal to make himself redundant as a specialist in much the same way as a teacher of literacy only fulfills his task when he is no longer necessary. Like every learning process, this process too is reciprocal. The specialist will learn as much or more from the non-specialists as the other way round. Only then can he contrive to make himself dispensable.*
>
> *.... The author has to work as the agent of the masses. He can lose himself in them only when they themselves become authors, the authors of history."*[34]

When the urgent politics of a literacy programme take charge of instructive theatre, it is invariably propelled into new and engaging territory. The spectator ceases to be an onlooker and becomes the participant in a spectacle which draws on the raw facts of history. In this new variation of newspaper theatre, the operative author has entirely jettisoned the ideology of individual recognition and is invariably acting on history itself. This is the most significant kind of authorial imprint. It is the moment when the author ceases to be an individual creator and becomes a <u>brigidista</u>: an author of history.

Notes to Chapter Six

1. R. Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in Image-Music-Text, ed. and trans. S. Heath, Fontana, London, 1977, pp. 142-3.

2. U. Eco, The Role of the Reader : Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London, 1979, p. 63.

3. See for example W. Benjamin, Understanding Brecht, trans. A. Bostock, New Left Books, London, 1973, p. 93.

4. W. Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", Ibid., pp. 88-90.

5. The 'feuilleton' had a period of rapid development in Russia after the revolution, although traditionally it is a style of journalism most commonly associated with the French press. Both Sergei Tretyakov and Victor Shklovsky used the 'feuilleton' as a model for their own writing.

6. The "Dance of the Machines" and early notions of constructivist performance was pioneered by Nikolai Forreger at his MASTFOR Laboratory. Forreger had an important influence on the Blue Blouse Movement.

7. Although there is no absolute consistency to the way in which the New York Living Newspaper Unit attributed authorship, the name of Arthur Arent is more commonly represented towards the end of the F.T.P., and the collaborative authorship of the entire Unit was more common in the earlier years. I have implied previously that this ascription was part of the general ideological recuperation of the Unit.

8. W.P.A. correspondence from Morris Watson to Hallie Flanagan, 4th February 1936, National Archives, Washington D.C.

9. H. Goldberg, "Heywood Broun - Radical Journalist", Monthly Review, Vol. 7, No. 9, 1956, p. 357.

10. Morris Watson was one of six reporters who, together with Heywood Broun, formed the Newspaper Guild of America in 1933. Watson served as treasurer (1933-34) and subsequently as vice-president (1934-41). Associated Press dismissed Watson in 1935 and his dismissal became a test case for the new National Labour Relations Act (Wagner Act). In 1937 the Supreme Court ruled that freedom of the press was not violated by the Wagner Act, unions were legitimated by the decision and Watson was reinstated. He remained with Associated Press for a gestural two week period and resigned. In the early 1940's, Morris Watson ran for Congress as the American Labor Party candidate for New York's 17th District. He worked as Director of Publicity for the Longshoremen's Union in San Francisco until his death in 1972.

11. Carl Randau (Newspaper Guild of America) to Hallie Flanagan, 3rd November 1938, National Archives, Washington D.C.

12. Flanagan, Arena, p. 65.

13. M. Watson, "The Organization and Functions of the Living Newspaper", an unpublished manuscript, Morris Watson Collection, University of Oregon.

14. R. Williams, Culture, Fontana, Glasgow and London, 1981, pp. 112-114.

15. Daily Assignments and Reports, Living Newspaper Unit, National Archives, Washington D.C.

16. Philip Barber had been involved with the F.T.P. from its earliest planning meetings as Elmer Rice's assistant. He was a graduate of the prestigious Harvard 47 Workshop, had worked with Theatre Collective in the early years of the thirties and was a member of the Group Theatre. His play, The Klein-Ohrbach Strike, dramatized a labour dispute in one of New York's major department stores, and was produced by Theatre Collective in 1933. Barber became the Regional Director of the Federal Theatre in New York City in January 1936.

17. W.P.A. correspondence, Philip Barber to George Kondolf, 5th May 1939, National Archives, Washington D.C.

18. M. Watson, "The Organization and Functions of the Living Newspaper", Ibid., p. 2.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., p. 3.

21. "The Living Newspaper", Vol. 1, No. 2, Federal Theatre Research Centre.

22. M. Watson, "The Trade Unions and the Theatre", an unpublished manuscript circa 1941, Morris Watson Collection, University of Oregon.

23. "Guild Strike in 26th Week", New York Times, 14th August 1936, p. 1.

24. Dean Jennings had been sacked by the Hearst press for his union activities in the San Francisco area. The script of this scene is presented as an appendix to A. Goldman, "Life and Death of a Living Newspaper Unit", Theatre Quarterly, Vol. III, No. 9, 1973.

25. R. Barthes, "The Death of the Author", p. 146.

26. W. Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", p. 88.

27. B. Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, Methuen, London, 1964, pp. 71-3.

28. After the revolution of 1968, a new Peruvian Government was formed under the leadership of General Juan Velasco Alverado. The new government immediately instated a sweeping series of reforms, particularly in the agrarian and industrial sectors. Within six days of his inauguration, Alverado seized the assets of the American owned multi-national corporation I.P.C. (International Petroleum Corporation) and placed them under state ownership. The Peruvian reform was severely restricted by long periods of economic destabilization (much of it initiated with C.I.A. co-operation), a devastating earthquake in May 1970, and the

continual threat of political insurrection. The Velasco Alvarez Government was deposed in 1975 by the forces of General Francisco Morales.

29. A. Boal, Theater of the Oppressed, trans. C.A. and M. McBride, Pluto Press, London, 1979, p. 121.

30. Boal has an international reputation in the theatre. He originally directed The Arena Theatre of Brazil in its early phases of dramatic development. His work is based on theatrical practices in which the spectator's role is liberated through structured experiences, to the point at which distinctions between spectator and performer are blurred and unnecessary. Boal's ideas are returned to in the final chapter and are already well documented in his own book, Teatro de Oprimido (1974), translated as Theater of the Oppressed.

31. Boal, p. 121.

32. Ibid., p. 122.

33. Ibid., p. 143.

34. H. Enzensberger, "Constituents of a Theory of the Media", trans. S. Hood, in Raids and Reconstructions, Pluto Press, London, 1976, p. 53.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger is one of Germany's most prominent cultural theorists. His writing follows from the work of Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin, in that it works within materialist theories of media and communications. Enzensberger is also a playwright within the post-war documentary movement in Germany. His play, The Havana Hearings, documents the events around the Cuban Revolution, and uses techniques which are consciously derived from the Living Newspaper, but which also use video and televisual images to convey a sense of multiple dramatic diegesis.

35. The brigidista is an operative literacy worker in Nicaragua. Encouraged by Paulo Freire's belief that "it is only possible for literacy to have real meaning in a country which is going through a revolutionary process", the brigidistas carry out their work against formidable odds. The People's Literacy Army of Nicaragua monitors the work of over eighty thousand brigidistas, who have embarked on a nationwide campaign to bring literacy and the ideologies of the new Sandanista revolution to the peasantry. The brigidistas use picture books, short films, elementary forms of news theatre and photography to support their work. The brigidista, like the literacy worker of the Cuban Revolution, is expected to perform agricultural and industrial tasks in the community, to break down prejudices between intellectual and physical labour. It is the function of the brigidista to spread knowledge about hygiene and health, by initiating preventative medical programmes. Besides their other responsibilities, the brigidistas compile records of regional culture, including folk songs, poems and legends and have set about orally recording eye witness records of the struggle for national liberation. See G. Black, Triumph of the People, Zed Press, London, 1981.

CHAPTER SEVEN : PROGRESSIVE FORM AND OPEN DRAMATURGY

The Politics of Form

> *"There is only one ally against growing barbarism - the people who suffer so greatly from it. It is only from them that one can expect anything. Therefore it is obvious that one must turn to the people, and now more necessary than ever to speak their language. Thus the terms popular art and realism become natural allies.*[1]
>
> (Bertolt Brecht, 1938)

> *"You thus cannot determine the realism of a text merely by inspecting its intrinsic properties. On the contrary, you can never know whether a text is realist or not until you have established its effects - and since those effects belong to a particular conjuncture, a text may be realist in June and anti-realist in December."*[2]
>
> (Terry Eagleton, 1978)

> *"I am not interested in talking to thirty-eight university graduates in a cellar in Soho. It's my guess that we still have to handle realism. One of the things about realistic modes is .... that you can offer through them demystifying, undistorted, more accurate, counter descriptions of political processes and social reality than people get through other uses of naturalism.*[3]
>
> (Trevor Griffiths, 1978)

The Living Newspaper cuts obliquely across the general categories of realism and modernism, and presents itself as a particularly rich model for theoretical consideration. However, any attempt to examine the Living Newspaper's relationships to the aesthetic problems of politics and form must begin by admitting the complexity of such a task. As the above quotations testify, realism is a notoriously ambiguous and highly variable critical term. Its usage has been confused over the years by its immediate associations with dramatic naturalism and by the powerful contexts in which different kinds of realism have emerged. One of the major purposes of this chapter is to see the Living Newspaper as a form of twentieth-century drama which broke categorically with the conventions

of dramatic naturalism, but remained within a particular tradition of realism.

The most appropriate starting point for any study of twentieth-century theatre is undoubtedly the rise of dramatic naturalism in Europe. Both as a theatrical movement and as a general aesthetic category, naturalism has exerted a phenomenal influence on the contemporary stage. However, its origins are more commonly associated with the progressive and critical elements within the culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The whole history of dramatic naturalism *"was determined by its origins in bourgeois class consciousness"* and by the tensions inherent in the social movements of Europe.[4] In locating the origins of naturalism in the historical rise of the bourgeoisie, Arnold Hauser was not implying that naturalist form should be immediately and naively rejected as a politically retrograde phenomenon. On the contrary, in recognizing the bourgeois origins of dramatic naturalism, he was also acknowledging the progressive place that naturalism occupied at the cultural vanguard of liberal change.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the major features of bourgeois drama were in evidence throughout Western Europe.[5] The subject matter of most new dramas on the European stage had become contemporary in their usage of character, time, place and dramatic action. When Tom Robertson's Caste was first performed at the Prince of Wales Theatre in London on 6th April 1867, the audience probably expected, and were certainly presented with, a general congruity of dramatic action. The play was written with a very detailed concentration on the plausibility of the characters, on the credibility of their dialogue and on the authenticity of accents and speech patterns. Denis Diderot, the French philosopher, had already formulated the principles of a dramatic form that required *"not merely the natural, psychologically accurate motivation of spiritual processes but also*

exactness in the description of the milieu and the fidelity to nature in the scenery."[6] Dramatic naturalism fulfilled all of the requirements of psychological and material verity in theatrical representation.

The narrative structure of Tom Robertson's Caste, as the name itself suggests, derives from the problems and consequences of social mobility within the strictly defined social conventions of matrimony. An aristocratic officer called D'Alroy courts and then marries an actress, who is the daughter of an unemployed drunk named Eccles. As the nomenclature of its major characters suggests, Caste goes on to explore the problems of marrying someone from a distinctly different class background. Although Caste develops considerably from this initial conflict, D'Alroy's conservative mother is outraged by her son's relationship and pours scorn on their prospects. Even in this simple description of the play another prominent feature of bourgeois dramaturgy is evidence.[7] Unlike many previous forms of theatre, bourgeois drama, in general and dramatic naturalism in particular, was instrumental in socially extending the possible areas of dramatic concern. Irrespective of questions of rank, a wide spectrum of social characters became the subject of serious dramatic representation. It would be impossible to conceive of many modern plays without registering the importance that naturalism played in making the lower and disadvantaged classes the subject of serious and sympathetic depiction.

Towards the end of Caste, D'Alroy, who has been reported dead on military duty in India, returns to reconcile the problems of his wife and child, who by then have slipped back into a life of poverty. In a play which sets up a whole series of comparative problems about breeding, class and social values, D'Alroy's unexpected return works in such a way that a level of reconciliation is possible. In some respects his return is a secular version of the dramatic convention of deus ex machina. Significantly, it is D'Alroy and not some supernatural force that brings about the

reconciliation. Raymond Williams sees in plays like Caste, *"a process of steadily excluding from the dramatic action any supernatural intervention or agency, so that human action, however judged, is played in exclusively human terms."*[8] In opposing supernaturalistic solutions, the ideology of dramatic naturalism was breaking with most previous drama and was proposing that human action was determined by material and social factors. In its most mature form, naturalism became a mode which accurately represented the appearance of human drama in ways that were congruous with the contemporary, secular and material experiences of its audience. In complex ways, dramatic naturalism refracted the emergent materialism of European thought into the very fabric of theatrical signification.[9]

By 1867 the European stage had matured in a number of significant ways. The first production of Tom Robertson's Caste, at the Prince of Wales Theatre, exemplified some of the more important developments. Audiences had changed demographically over the previous fifty years and were largely comprised of theatregoers from the metropolitan bourgeoisie. In keeping with the social preferences of its audience, the theatre increasingly came to see evening performances as the most appropriate way to arrange repertoires and schedules. With the social aristocracy now occupying a more residual role, the interior architectural design of the major theatres increasingly reflected the new social constitution of the audience. The pit benches that had been such a characteristic feature of the Restoration stage were generally replaced by stalls and in many cases, an orchestra pit. Most theatres were either built or modified to accommodate proscenium-arch stages and to cater for more elaborate and authentic stage settings. All of these various features worked towards a relatively new system of stage signification which was based on a developed aesthetic awareness of mathematical perspective, an increasing commitment to detailed dramatic imagery and the use of authentic stage properties. The conventions of

illusionism which sustained and underpinned dramatic naturalism, were quite different from the iconic and emblematic traditions that had been evident in certain previous theatres. The audience's experiences were now generated in quite different ways from the experiences of an audience attending a medieval miracle cycle, or the spectators who experienced simultaneous stagecraft. Improvements in gas lighting meant that the qualitatively different stage image was now illuminated and set apart from the audience who now sat in semi-darkness. The stage was now situated in such a way that the audience had a relatively fixed and unilinear view of the stage action. A clear and unimpeded eyeline guided the spectator's gaze towards the theatrical event, where the dramatic fiction was exclusively played out in a clearly defined and delineated space.[10] The forestage, which had been such an important feature of mid-seventeenth-century theatre, had now virtually receded, and a distinct demarcation line separated the performer from the spectator.

The Crisis of Naturalist Form

The proscenium-arch interior, the emergence of gas lighting, the detailed verisimilitude of decor and the framing of dramatic action within a clearly defined playing space, all combined to make the domestic room the major arena of dramatic representation. Of course, it was not only the interaction of stage conventions that made the room the material location of most naturalist drama. The theatre also responded to strong ideological currents that were permeating the contemporary society.

> "*.... the major naturalist dramatists did not prescribe a new kind of dramatic scene, the detailed physical realization of a room or some other physical environment on the then qualitatively altered stage for technical reasons, or because new techniques of stage carpentry and lighting made this more feasible. They put on these rooms .... because such immediate physical environments were, in their view, necessary elements of the dramatic action.*
>
> *.... What in almost all earlier drama had been primarily a playing space, with a few simple signals of immediate location*

> *or at most the represented outline of a location, became, in this general movement, first a more fully represented 'real place' and finally, in high naturalism, a tangible presence: the 'stage as room': the room soaking into the lives of the persons as their lives had soaked into it."*[11]

Naturalism was ultimately torn between two competing and irresolvable imperatives. The very fabric of dramatic naturalism harboured the contradictory and uneven relations that could be seen elsewhere in the culture and society of the bourgeoisie.[12] In rejecting supernaturalism in favour of material and secular explanations, naturalism placed an important emphasis on social environment. However, like all other bourgeois forms, it wanted to view social environment in terms of individual human action. This invariably led the dramatists of the naturalist stage to construct dramatic tension around the action and behaviour of a clearly defined group of fictional protagonists. The primacy of the room on stage and the tendency to construct dramatic action around a small collection of protagonists, led naturalism to place its greatest emphasis on the family more than any other social category. Although naturalism varied considerably over the years, there was always a relatively consistent tendency to see dramatic tension in terms of the catastrophes and conflicts of the family. By choosing to locate these conflicts in the room on stage, the naturalist dramatist was often forced to unify that action in a single location, and was thus confronted with a major dilemma. In order to sustain the plausibility upon which naturalism is founded, the dramatist was literally forced to relegate the outside social environment to reports, descriptions and conversational references. Having 'chosen' to accept the limitations of a unified location, and in many cases this meant a single-set location, the dramatist could not adequately represent that real and tangible social world without stretching or completely disturbing the conventions of naturalism.

> *"The form thus expressed a precise contradiction in bourgeois social relationships: that the centre of values was the individual and the family, but the mode of production which sustained them - the world they went out to and returned from - was in a quite different social range, much wider, more complex and more arbitrary."*[13]

In a brief but illuminating analysis of D.H. Lawrence's three act naturalist drama, The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd (1914), Raymond Williams detects this contradiction acting as a formal limitation in the work of a skilled and competent dramatic writer. The indignity of Mrs. Holroyd's existence, trapped in a poor and patriarchal society, is exclusively played out in the kitchen of a miner's cottage. Lawrence may well have been extending naturalism into an examination of English working class experience but *"... stuck in a room, as the only modern drama he knew then was, he had to check the flow of action and of feeling at the door and window, with that shaping social landscape of mine railway and farm left outside, for description or report."*[14]

It was precisely the same range of problems that had encouraged Ibsen to modify his use of naturalist form to incorporate symbolic systems of representation that made cognitive references to ideas not absolutely contained within the room.[15] Similarly, it was these limitations that encouraged Strindberg to experiment with more abstract styles, derived from the mechanisms of dreams and the imaginary.[16] In the twentieth century it was these limitations, and a realization of their restrictiveness, that led materialist theatre practitioners to reject the stricter manifestations of naturalism. When Erwin Piscator wrote one of his many polemical critiques of naturalism in 1920, he isolated these formal limitations and stressed their political dimension.

> *"... the products of Naturalism seem like bad photographs taken indiscriminately by bourgeois amateurs. Their effect is like when a spotlight picks out a tree or a church tower in the night and then sweeps on leaving behind a darkness more impenetrable*

> *than before. There are descriptions of milieu. But no attempt is made to understand the social implication of events, no attempt to evaluate, no attempt to settle the account ....*[17]

The point that Piscator was making bordered on a criticism that has been levelled against dramatic naturalism on many subsequent occasions. In concentrating on detailed surface depiction and in trying to sustain plausible representations throughout a dramatic narrative, naturalism has difficulty in permitting any analysis that does not derive from the world of its own fictional diegesis. Its commitment to a coherent fictional world precludes any interruption or commentary that cannot be explained and justified by the fiction. The Living Newspaper belongs to the political tradition that recognized these inherent limitations and rose to challenge their hermetic restrictions. As early as 1920 it was possible to identify a consciously political repudiation of naturalism.

The movement against naturalism emerged alongside a general transformation of the institutions and practices of European theatre. Predictably, the first indications of this transformation are to be found in the theatres of Russia, Germany and Czechoslovakia, rather than in the more formally conservative theatre of early twentieth-century Britain. From the 1890's onwards, the crisis and contradictions of naturalism could no longer contain the interests of a new generation of dramatists nor the libertarian potential of the free theatre movement. Although dissatisfactions with naturalism could be traced back to the plays of Georg Büchner in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, anti-naturalism gathered its fullest momentum in the diverse work of a later generation of Germans, including Frank Wedekind, Max Reinhardt, Carl Sternheim and Oscar Kokoschka. Although no simple generalization can summarize the eclectic range of their work, their influence permeated through German culture to influence Expressionism, the epic theatre and Neue Sachlichkeit. Reinhardt's productions in

particular were conscious of the need to challenge the central tenets of illusionism.

> *"Moreover, Reinhardt's use of stage machinery in this production (A Midsummer Night's Dream, 1905) introduced a revolutionary concept into the theatre. Machinery had been used in the theatre for centuries but nearly always to create spectacular illusory effects, remarkable imitations of real events. But a real forest does not turn; by placing his set on a revolve, Reinhardt drew attention to its artificiality. Thus, although part of the delighted response of the spectator was to the realistic illusion of a forest, at the same time the audience derived pleasure from seeing this 'real' forest put on display as a work of art. So, despite the realism of the woodland scene, the aesthetic enjoyment of it as an autonomous artefact in fact anticipated the imaginative use of stage machinery in the abstractionist theatre."*[18]

In openly demonstrating the mechanisms of the production, Reinhardt was challenging one of the central premises of naturalist stagecraft. His theatre of conscious artifice openly resisted the illusionistic notion that theatre should efface and naturalize the means of its own construction. With naturalism being challenged from every possible direction: formal, ideological, theatrical and institutional, it was evident that theatre would fracture into new forms and new movements.

> *".... From the 1890's a sense of total crisis developed very rapidly, and as in the somewhat comparable crisis in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries there was a remarkable efflorescence both of drama generally and new forms. This is an exceptionally complex process to analyse whether sociologically or formally. But we can make a preliminary working distinction of three kinds of form, each increasingly sustained by a distinctive ideology, which can be seen (of course with some confusion and overlapping) as corresponding to three discernible formations within the crisis of late bourgeois society....*
>
> *.... Thus, though many kinds of variation would have to be added, we can begin a social analysis of twentieth-century dramatic forms by distinguishing three main kinds, which we can provisionally call subjective expressionism, social expressionism and symbolic abstraction."* [19]

The Living Newspaper undoubtedly belongs to the second of Raymond Williams' provisional categories: it is clearly a drama of social expressionism. But what forces gave rise to such a category? In what ways did it differentiate itself from dramatic naturalism and what relationships did

it have with the aesthetics and politics of materialism?

The Culture of Formal Fragmentation

The European theatre at the turn of the century was the site of significant changes in dramatic practice. Between 1890 and the establishment of the Weimar Republic after the end of World War I, the institutions of theatre were transformed in important ways. Firstly, the live theatre rediscovered its own discrete systems of signification and established a degree of freedom from the controlling influence of literature. Secondly, this implied a new creative attitude to theatre production which precipitated the emergence of a generation of theatre practitioners who were neither dramatists nor actors. For all their differences, Adolph Appia, Edward Gordon Craig, Max Reinhardt and V.E. Meyerhold shared an interest in the visual organization of the theatrical mise en scène: they were part of a new interest in the theatricality of performance.

The period of transformation from dramatic naturalism to the eclectic forms of twentieth century theatre coincided with an effusion of different artistic movements. Dadaism, Expressionism, Constructivism, Cubism, Futurism and Symbolism all had aesthetic influence on European theatre. In the cultural centres of Paris, Zurich, Berlin and Moscow, these influences had their greatest bearing on the small-scale café theatres and cabaret clubs of Bohemian life. It was through the work of these alternative venues that new kinds of revue performance grew to prominence. By using a loose assembly of sketches, songs, comic dialogue and acrobatics, the revue broke categorically the formal homogeneity of illusionist drama.

The modernist break with naturalism was not only a move away from detailed surface depiction, but also an attempt to introduce new aesthetic principles. At the very basis of modernism (in the most general sense of the term) is

a developed interest in non-naturalist forms of representation, particularly the fragmentary forms of montage, collage and assemblage. It would be impossible to chart the precise history of these developments but it can simply be recognized that the various strategies of aesthetic fragmentation were adopted by a vast range of very different aesthetic movements: the Dadaists, the major Soviet film-makers, early Living Newspaper collectives, the Futurists and the major pioneers of Cubism. Within what can tentatively be defined as the materialist strand within modernism, there were significant disagreements about the ways in which montage should operate. In the cinema Kuleshov, Eisenstein, Pudovkhin and Vertov all proposed different approaches to the material construction of film, whereas in the theatre Brecht and Piscator disagreed on the ways in which montage should activate the spectator. However, all of these cultural practitioners shared a general theory of formal fragmentation which recognized the importance of challenging the mimetic conventions of illusionism. At the basis of their rejection of the cognitive principles of illusionism was a belief that the new methodologies of formal fragmentation placed the spectator at the centre of the dramatic event.

In the work of the German artist, John Heartfield, one of the foremost exponents of photomontage, the spectator was afforded a position that derived directly from the theoretical substance of materialism. His work emerged out of the same political and aesthetic concerns as the anti-fascist Living Newspapers of central Europe.

> *"Heartfield was part of a movement which helped develop the technique of photomontage .... a signifying practice which, in his case, emphasized the social and economic nature of the world through a sign system of images and words gathered from diverse sources. By using these culturally coded elements, ... Heartfield was able to construct visual scenarios in which easily recognizable (and previously apparently disparate) elements could take on ambiguous or new meanings by being juxtaposed in non-naturalistic ways.... In this way Heartfield could eventually cause the viewer to contemplate the reality*

which lay outside the text, in the light of their own (often repressed) class knowledge...."[20]

By 1930 the aesthetic principles of marshalling political meaning through the practices of formal fragmentation were common currency in European culture. Eisenstein's theories of dialectical montage, the Blue Blouses' interest in the montage of theatrical attractions, and Brecht's belief in *"the radical separation of the elements"* of production all congregated around the same ideological pole.[21] The radical rejection of naturalism was inextricably associated with the aesthetic realization of dialectical-materialism.[22]

The Living Newspaper and Theories of Realism

Although the materialist critique of naturalism seems on the surface to have been largely a matter of technique and formal approach, in fact it was inextricably bound up in the fugitive workings of ideology. It would be impossible in such a short space to enter into a protraced discussion of the ways in which dramatic forms theoretically position the spectator, but the Living Newspaper and Brecht's theatre, for all their structural differences, shared many similarities. In the main, Living Newspapers dispensed with fictional narrative in the strictest sense and worked through an instructive dramatic discourse that juxtaposed fictional elements with factual evidence, documentation and analysis. Brecht's plays, even those in the early thirties that were the most didactic, employed an obvious narrative pattern (often in the form of a parable), in which a clear trajectory of fictional action could be perceived. However, both examples permitted political analysis that could not have easily been sustained within illusionist drama. The use of placards, projections, statistics, episodic scenes and musical interruptions, which disturbed the fictional diegesis and which allowed a level of commentary and analytical reflection, were identifiable features in both.

The disturbance of illusionism evident in the Living Newspapers, in Brecht's dramaturgy and in Piscator's earlier productions, has been most convincingly recorded in the writings of Brecht's close friend, Walter Benjamin.[23] His analysis of Brecht's theatre took into account the relationships between formal disturbance and the cinematic practices of montage.

> *"Brecht went back to the most fundamental and original elements of theatre. He confined himself as it were to a podium, a platform .... he succeeded in altering the functional relationship between stage and audience, text and production, producer and actor. Epic theatre, he declared, must not develop actions but represent conditions .... by allowing the actions to be interrupted. Let me remind you of the 'songs', whose personal function consists in interrupting the action. Here .... the epic theatre adopts a technique which has become familiar to you in recent years through film and radio, photography and the press. I speak of the technique of montage, for montage interrupts the context into which it is inserted."*[24]

To theoretically elaborate his analysis, Benjamin went on to complicate the notion of formal disturbance by seeing it as part of a materialist critique of naturalism.

> *"The interrupting of the action, the technique which entitles Brecht to describe his theatre as epic, always works against creating an illusion among the audience. Such illusion is of no use to a theatre which proposes to treat elements of reality as if they were elements of an experimental set-up. Yet the conditions stand at the end, not at the beginning of the test. These conditions are, in one form or another, the conditions of our life. Yet they are not brought close to the spectator; they are distanced from him. He recognizes them as real - not, as in the theatre of naturalism, with complacency, but with astonishment. Epic theatre does not reproduce conditions; rather, it discloses, it uncovers them.*[25]

In outlining his ideas, Benjamin cogently argued that whilst breaking with naturalism, the epic theatre remained inside a particular tradition of realism. It would be quite justifiable, and theoretically tenable, to make precisely the same claims for the Living Newspaper. But in registering those claims, it has to be borne in mind that what lies behind the notion of realism in Brecht and Benjamin's writings, derives from a politically radical perspective, and is intentionally quite different from the conventions of dramatic naturalism that rose to prominence in the

nineteenth century.

The confusion that surrounds the usage, and in some cases the interchangeability, of the terms realism and naturalism, remains a major semantic problem within modern aesthetics. The manner in which the terms were employed by Brecht was the subject of a cultural debate between himself and the Hungarian Marxist critic Georg Lukács, which has subsequently come to occupy an important place within recent re-examinations of aesthetics and politics.[26] Although the debate drew on a range of cultural references, Lukács forwarded a position which was predominantly based on his formidable understandings of the classic realist novels of the nineteenth century. Brecht drew more eclectically on literature and the theatre, and tried to resist seeing realism as an aesthetic classification modelled on already established literary conventions.

> *"We must not derive realism as such from particular existing works, but we shall use every means, old and new, tried and untried, derived from art and derived from other sources, to render reality to men in a form they can master.... Reality changes; in order to represent its modes of representation must also change."*[27]

In recognizing the dialectical nature of social reality, and in perceiving the need to represent that reality by establishing different and changing aesthetic strategies, Brecht was moving away from a definition of realism based on fixed conventions. His theoretical writings increasingly insisted on a qualitatively different definition that was based on political intentions rather than literary or theatrical conventions. To paraphrase Brecht's position, he believed that the materialist definition of realism should abandon any search for the pristine realist form, and should take cognizance of the most important realist objective: to show things as they really are.[28] Brecht's position opens up a range of interesting theoretical possibilities. It implies that those methods of montage and formal fragmentation which emerged to challenge naturalism, can in certain historical and contextual circumstances be considered realist. It also

permits, what to some critics would still be incongrous, namely the suggestion that the dynamic realism of Living Newspaper drama is engendered in its historical rejection of naturalist form.

It was Erwin Piscator rather than Brecht that directly associated the Living Newspaper with the dialectical theatre of social reality.

> *"In contrast to the old type of conventional problem play, epic theatre was not content just to hint at situations, delicately to imply a moral and leave the audience to draw its own conclusions. This theatre portrayed a dramatic situation, involved the audience in the development of the conflict by means of various theatrical devices, leading up to the political solution as the natural dramatic dénouement .... Some people may feel that this is nothing but propaganda, that art is being abused for political purposes. I can only point to the extremely moving and dramatic performances of the so-called Living Newspapers by the Federal Theatre, which were staged all over the country."*[29]

Perhaps it is restating the obvious to stress the many similarities between the epic theatre and the Living Newspaper, but it would be useful to reflect on the reasons why episodic scenes, cinematic projection, analytic interruptions and loudspeaker commentary became identifiable devices within the materialist theatre. In elaborating upon his own definition of realism Brecht suggested that *"realistic means: discovering the causal complexes of society."*[30] It was precisely this desire to go beneath the surface appearance of reality that led so many materialists to reject dramatic naturalism, in favour of forms that could more adequately lay bare social causation. In what ways did the epic theatre and the Living Newspaper share this realistic commitment to going beyond surface description? Through what mechanisms did they hope to reveal social causes and their effects?

According to Roland Barthes in "The Diseases of Costume", *"every dramatic work can and must reduce itself to what Brecht calls its social gestus."*[31] Even in its earliest manifestations in revolutionary Russia, and certainly

by the time it had matured into the full length dramas of the Depression stage, the Living Newspaper could be described as a theatre form that unfolded through a series of social gests. The New York Living Newspaper Unit was well aware of its need to go beyond the surface depiction of social problems. In describing their own activities, the Unit's staff outlined their reservations with dramatic naturalism or what they themselves referred to as the school of *"stark realism."*[32]

> *"When we present a scene in a Living Newspaper of an individual committing suicide because of poverty and hunger are we putting before the audience a study of that individual's morbid psychology? Rather, we tell of the even more malign nature of the forces that motivated the act: unemployment, lack of proper relief, etc. And, back to the technical aspect, do we present the character in a setting of stark realism: a wretched room, miserably furnished, in all its detailed ugliness? Usually we do not, he is most likely presented in a single shaft of dim light which was swiftly blacked out and then counter-pointed upstage with a projected chart giving all the vital statistics showing the factors which made the character seek that escape."*33

In this short extract from their 'manifesto', "Techniques Available to the Living Newspaper Dramatist", the Unit's members were clearly working towards their own particular understanding of the dramatic concept of social gest.

The social gest is in fact a structural feature of all materialist theatres. It has passed into immediate association with the work of Bertolt Brecht largely because of his formidable reputation as a theoretician of political drama. In the film Kuhle Wampe (1932), which Brecht worked on in collaboration with Slatan Dudow, the process of revealing social causation through the social gest was at its most pronounced. An unemployed Berlin youth, disturbed and defeated by his daily failure to find work that does not exist, decides to commit suicide. The film represents his death as a rational and premeditated event. After a family meal at which his unemployment had been the subject of an argument, the youth waits until he is alone, goes to the window of the family apartment and climbs on to the window ledge. On the point of jumping, he stops, removes a watch from his

wrist and then carefully places it on a nearby table. Only after this strange delay does he jump to his death. The camera does not dwell on the suicide itself, it signifies the death by focusing on a plant-pot shaking on the window-sill, then pans over to the table and closes in on the watch. The film makes the watch, rather than the fall to the ground, the main object of the viewer's attention. This short episode in Kuhle Wampe is characteristic of the social gest in dramatic operation. It concentrates on the youth's final act, which was to save a materially valuable object for the family he has just argued with, rather than risk it being damaged as he falls to his death. By ordering the viewer's attention to the watch and the youth's rational behaviour, the film presents its meaning in material terms. It implies that the suicide is a direct response to social conditions and at no point allows the viewer to assume that the youth's actions were generated by his own specific psychological problems. The action of the suicide had been 'interrupted' by the removal of the watch and through this gesture, social meaning was made evident. The social gest is therefore a significant, and dramatically marked caesura in a play's action which offers the spectator a social perspective on the action.

In the major Federal Theatre Living Newspaper productions, the omniscient Voice of the Living Newspaper often provided the kind of interruptions that permitted a level of social analysis. In Triple-A Plowed Under there were many incidents of this kind. One short and very sparse scene documented a real incident in New York in which a distraught woman murdered her own infant son. By interrupting the action, the Voice of the Living Newspaper invoked a level of analysis that might not otherwise have been possible within the scene. In a simple and effective way the case of Mrs. Dorothy Sherwood was presented as a social tragedy.

"VOICE OF LIVING NEWSPAPER (*over* LOUDSPEAKER): Newburgh, New York: August 20th, 1935. Mrs. Dorothy Sherwood.

(Police desk on right. Light on desk, with POLICE LIEUTENANT *behind it. Enter* MRS. SHERWOOD, *left with dead infant in her arms. She walks towards desk.)*

MRS. SHERWOOD: He's dead. I drowned him.

LIEUTENANT: You what?

MRS. SHERWOOD: I just drowned my son. I couldn't feed him, and I couldn't bear to see him hungry... I let him wade in the creek until he got tired. Then I led him out into the middle, and held him there until he stopped moving.

LIEUTENANT *(calling, not loudly)*: John! (POLICEMAN *approaches*) Take the body. Book this woman for murder. (POLICEMAN *takes child from her.)*

(Blackout on everything except MRS. SHERWOOD. *She is picked out by the solitary overhead light. Off stage* VOICE *comes through the* LOUDSPEAKER).

VOICE: Why did you do it?

MRS. SHERWOOD: I couldn't feed him. I had only five cents.

VOICE: Your own child. Did you think you were doing the right thing?

MRS. SHERWOOD: I just thought it had to be done, that's all. It was the best thing to do.

VOICE: How could a mother kill her own child.

MRS. SHERWOOD: He was hungry, I tell you. Hungry, hungry, hungry, hungry, <u>hungry</u>! *(As her voice mounts it is blended with that of another which commences a progression of nine voices crying "Guilty!" These come over the* LOUDSPEAKER *and are varied in color, but increasing in fervor until -*

Dim-out "[34]

The fictional world of a New York police station is disturbed by the intrusion of an inquisitive voice from outside the fictional world. By this simple break with illusionist conventions, the scene was able to comment upon the event and locate its social causes. What soon became apparent in the rise of anti-illusionism was a changing attitude to the spectator's role in the theatre. The social gest assumes a critically and intellectually active spectator.

The Active Spectator and Open Dramaturgy

It should be clear from the very outset that the purpose of Living Newspapers was not to teach (or preach) to an audience in a simple or mechanical way. On the contrary, they intended to provide the material and cultural conditions within which the audience could learn. Although this may seem to be a pedantic distinction, it is in fact an important clarification that has a strong bearing on the role of the spectator. Brecht gave careful thought to the generic name of the short plays he wrote in the early thirties. In conceiving of them as learning plays rather than teaching plays, he emphasized that dramas such as The Exception and the Rule encapsulated political problems that had to be resolved by the spectators in their own lives. Brecht's learning plays were in fact dramas of rational discourse that differed radically from contemporary forms of agitprop. They assumed a critically inquisitive spectatorship. In many respects the Living Newspaper had the same expectations. One Third of a Nation continually posed alternative perspectives on slum housing and demanded that the spectator assume an inquisitive and enquiring role. In some Living Newspaper productions the inquisitive spectator became a tangible presence in the form of the Little Man. Although the persona of the average citizen was always in danger of going over the precipice into a world of vague political populism, the Little Man who rose uninvited from the audience to 'stop' the action and seek clarification, was often one of the Living Newspaper's most effective conventions. The Little Man enabled a whole range of anti-illusionistic events to take place. It became possible to return to a previous issue and clarify its major points. It allowed the Living Newspaper to take the form of a guided historical tour in which the Little Man was the inquisitive tourist, and above all else, it allowed the production to reveal the artifice of its own construction. Often the Little Man's inquisitiveness was so

convincingly represented that other members of the audience shouted out and demanded clarification. Although this was largely unplanned and often took the actors by surprise, it was something that would have been virtually inconceivable in a more hermetically arranged illusionist narrative. In trying to break down *"the invisible barrier between stage and spectators .... during strategic points of the play"*,[35] the Living Newspaper acknowledged the complex relationships that governed the spectator's attitude to events on stage. In attempting to encourage critically active spectatorship, the Living Newspaper invariably drew on its own unique flexibility as a dramatic form.

Umberto Eco's essay "The Poetics of the Open Work" has gone a considerable way in exploring the relationships between spectatorship, the open work and flexible performance. In a reconsideration of Brecht's plays, he identifies one particular kind of openness.

> *"In Brecht's theatrical work on drama, we shall see that dramatic action is conceived as the problematic exposition of specific points of tension. Having presented these tension points .... Brecht's plays do not, in the strictest sense, devise solutions at all. It is up to the audience to draw its own conclusions from what it has seen on stage. Brecht's plays also end in a situation of ambiguity (typically and more than any other, his Galileo), although it is no longer the morbid ambiguousness of a half-perceived infinitude or an anguish-laden mystery, but the specific concreteness of an ambiguity in social intercourse, a conflict of unresolved problems taxing the ingenuity of playwright, actors and audience alike. Here the work is 'open' in the same sense that a debate is 'open'. A solution is seen as desirable and is actually anticipated, but it must come from the collective enterprise of the audience. In this case the 'openness' is converted into an instrument of revolutionary pedagogics."*[36]

Injunction Granted was rightly criticized for its exhortative ending, which resorted to the worst excesses of agitational drama. The entire cast flocked on to the stage carrying banners representing the major trade unions. The next Living Newspaper, Power, was much more enigmatic and conceded more critical responsibility to the audience. It ended at the

point of the Supreme Court's decision on the future of the Tennessee Valley Authority, after a lengthy investigation of the social value of the public ownership of energy. The ensemble on stage presented the audience with a final rhetorical question - *"What will the Supreme Court Do?"* - and a question mark was projected on the screen at the back of the stage.[37] The spectators were left with the most obvious sign of their own importance to the issues raised by the play.

In dwelling on the notion of critical spectatorship, it should not be assumed that open dramaturgy is confined to a play's open presentation of social action. The whole question of open dramaturgy has another significant dimension that relates to the production of drama and has a direct relevance to the Living Newspaper. In an analysis of recent avant-garde music, Umberto Eco has detected a changing attitude to musical composition which has an equivalent in recent developments in political theatre. In the work of Pierre Boulez, for example, the notion of an open text operates in a much more tangible sense than in those works that attempt to stimulate the spectator's intellectual engagement. The first section of Boulez's Third Sonato for Piano is comprised of ten different pieces on ten corresponding sheets of music, which can be arranged in different sequences like playing cards. A level of openness gives the performer a significant say in the way the piece is presented. A range of performance permutations are possible, *"in primitive terms we can say that they are quite literally 'unfinished': the author seems to hand them on to the performer more or less like the components of a construction kit."*[38] In an elementary sense all plays have this level of openness, they are literally handed over by the dramatist for dramatic interpretation. But the Living Newspaper is open in quite a different sense. The scenes can be presented in a permutation of different ways, there is no narrative necessity to arrange the drama in a particular

order. The Living Newspaper, in the strictest sense, is always an unfinished form of theatre. Its inextricable relationship to current affairs means it must always be updated and regenerated. One Third of a Nation was regularly updated to incorporate new statistics, contemporary events and the most recent political developments. The extant scripts of Federal Theatre Living Newspapers are in fact not definitive records, but frozen moments in a process that changed on a daily basis. In the fugitive journey from text to performance, many interpretations and variations take place. The Living Newspaper text is always a poor substitute for the performance. By virtue of its inescapable relationship with the news and with daily events, the Living Newspaper is unfinished in a much more fundamental way than the innovations of musical formalism. Pierre Boulez and the Living Newspaper are incongrous bedfellows, but their association highlights an important cultural consideration. The Living Newspaper is unfinished not through choice but through its permanent relationship with social events that go on ad infinitum.[39]

All of the Living Newspaper's major characteristics have found a point of intersection in Augusto Boal's recent work in Brazil. The rejection of naturalism, the attempts to find a language of representation that can dramatize social reality, the theatre of critical spectatorship, and the drama of unfinished discourse, are all prominent in Boal's work. Before his period of exile in Peru when he worked with the Integral Literacy Operation, Augusto Boal directed the Arena Theatre of Brazil. Over a period of more than ten years, the Arena Theatre experimented with many different forms of dramatic and musical performance. Eventually the company arrived at a hybrid form of drama which incorporated elements of musical drama, Living Newspaper and ritual. The Arena Theatre used this new form to recount a series of experiences in Brazilian history. The series was entitled "The Arena Tells ...." and included a production

which resurrected many elements of Brazilian mythology, represented suppressed areas of black history, and dramatized contemporary political issues. The production was entitled The Arena Tells About Zumbi and drew together the Arena Theatre's most successful experiences.

> *"We were ready to utilize the tools of any .... style, as long as they met the esthetic and social needs of our organization as an activist theater, that is, a theater that attempts to influence reality and not merely reflect it ....*
>
> *Reality was and is in transition; stylistic tools, on the other hand are perfect and finished. We want to examine a reality in the process of modification, and we only had available for our use styles that were unmodifiable or unmodified. These structures clamored for their own destruction, in order that, in theater, the process could be captured. And we wanted to capture it almost daily - newspaper theater."*[40]

In abandoning the "*existing conventions .... of the traditional naturalistic theater*", The Arena Tells About Zumbi extended newspaper theatre into new areas of dramatic practice.[41] Although Boal was well aware of the work of the Federal Theatre Project and used it as a source of reference, he wanted The Arena Theatre of Sao Paulo to develop a specifically Brazilian form of theatre. The production was a tapestry of myths, legends, folk tales and contemporary political material that made ideological connections through the juxtaposition of facts and fables. This amalgamation of political speeches, fragments from the news and historical myths was presented within a new system of performance, which the Arena company called the joker system. It was through the joker system, which was in effect a technique of acting which defamiliarized daily rituals, that the Arena Theatre hoped to simultaneously stage a play and its analysis. A scene in which a radical was being tortured would be presented rather like the television viewer's experiences of a goal being scored in a televised football match. The torture would be shown in three ways, from different angles, whilst factual commentary contextualized the scene.

As the Arena Theatre's work developed in exile, particularly through Boal's own experimentation with literacy programmes in Peru, these ideas became increasingly more adventurous. The specific cicumstances of working within a national literacy campaign allowed Boal, and the nucleus of the People's Theatre of Peru, to formulate an entirely new body of ideas. In experimenting with the different ways in which news-paper theatre could be employed, Boal worked on a Third World poetics of theatrical performance: *"the poetics of the oppressed."*[42] His ideas learned from, but ultimately rejected, the previous experiences of both classical dramaturgy and European materialist theatre. Almost by necessity, the poetics of the oppressed had to go beyond critical spectatorship and find a form of theatre in which the spectator could participate. The newspaper theatre of the Latin American literacy programmes was, after all, a means by which the oppressed could find a language of their own.

> *"Aristotle proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the dramatic character so that the latter may act and think for him. Brecht proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the character who thus acts in his place but the spectator reserves the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character. In the first case a "catharsis" occurs; in the second an awakening of critical consciousness. But the poetics of the oppressed focuses on the action itself: the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change - in short trains himself for real action."*[43]

Augusto Boal's theatre is neither a simple repetition of the short Living Newspapers used in the campaigns to combat illiteracy and disease in revolutionary Russia, nor is it a re-enactment of the campaigning social theatre of the Depression in the U.S.A. It has its own specificity. In repudiating any form of theatre that takes power away from the spec-tator, Boal's newspaper theatre has the substance to point forward to new initiatives.

"All these experiments of a people's theater have the same objective - the liberation of the spectator, on whom the theater has imposed finished visions of the world ....

The poetics of the oppressed is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself: he thinks and acts for himself! Theater is Action!

Perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal for revolution."[44]

Like the historical process it seeks to dramatize, the Living Newspaper is not finished. It is a rehearsal for social change.

Notes to Chapter Seven

1. B. Brecht, "Against Georg Lukacs", in Aesthetics and Politics, E. Bloch et al., New Left Books, London, 1977, p. 80.

2. T. Eagleton, "Aesthetics and Politics", New Left Review, No. 107, January 1978, p. 28.

3. J. Woolf, "Bill Brand, Trevor Griffiths, and the Debate About Political Theatre", Red Letters, No. 8, p. 57.

4. A. Hauser, "The Origins of Domestic Drama", in Theory of the Modern Stage, ed. E. Bentley, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1968, p. 403.

5. R. Williams, Culture, Fontana, London and Glasgow, 1981, p. 166.

6. A. Hauser, p. 408.

7. See R. Williams, Drama in Performance, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1968, pp. 92-96.

8. R. Williams, Culture, p. 167.

9. For a more detailed study of the philosophical background to naturalism see, R.D. Boyer, Realism in European Theatre and Drama 1870-1920, Greenwood Press, Westport and London, 1979.

10. The word 'gaze' is used deliberately here, to provoke associations with recent debates within film theory, in which close consideration has been given to the constitution of the viewing subject. See for example, R. Coward and J. Ellis, Language and Materialism, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977.

11. R. Williams, Culture, p. 169.

12. See L. Althusser, For Marx, New Left Books, London, 1977.

13. R. Williams, Culture, p. 171.

14. R. Williams, "Introduction", in D.H. Lawrence, Three Plays, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1969, p. 14.

15. See for example, Ibsen's The Wild Duck (1884) and Hedda Gabler (1890).

16. See for example, Strindberg's The Dream Play (1902) and The Ghost Sonata (1907).

17. E. Piscator, "The Proletarian Theatre : its Fundamental Principles and its Tasks", in Erwin Piscator, a British Arts Council catalogue for a photographic exhibition from the German Democractic Republic, 1970, p. 42.

18. M. Patterson, The Revolution in the German Theatre 1900-1933, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981, p. 35.

19. R. Williams, Culture, pp. 171-172. The cultural emphasis placed on Raymond Williams' writing is neither accidental nor narrow, but an admission of his formidable place within British criticism, and a recognition of the importance that the 'culture and society' debates have for theatre studies in the twentieth century.

20. J. Spence, "The Sign as a Site for Class Struggle : Reflections on the work of John Heartfield", Block, No. 5, 1981, p. 7.

21. B. Brecht, "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre", in Brecht on Theatre, Methuen, London, 1964, p. 37.

22. It should be remembered that as Brecht's theories developed, he increasingly favoured the term dialectical theatre, rather than the more commonly employed term 'epic' theatre.

23. Walter Benjamin first met Brecht in 1924, they remained close friends throughout the thirties during Brecht's period of exile in Denmark. Benjamin committed suicide in September 1940, on the Franco-Spanish frontier on learning that he was about to be handed over to the Gestapo. On hearing of Benjamin's death, Brecht implied that it was the greatest loss to German culture that the Nazi dictatorship had caused.

24. W. Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", in Understanding Brecht, trans. A. Bostock, New Left Books, London, 1973, p. 99.

25. Ibid., pp. 99-100.

26. The Brecht/Lukács debate is extensively represented and analysed in the following references: E. Bloch et al., Aesthetics and Politics, New Left Books, London, 1977; T. Lovell, Pictures of Reality, B.F.I., London, 1980, and E. Lunn, "Marxism and Art in the Era of Stalin and Hitler : A Comparison of Brecht and Lukács", New German Critique, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1974.

27. B. Brecht, "Against Georg Lukacs", Aesthetics and Politics, pp. 81-82.

28. See T. Lovell, pp. 64-87.

29. E. Piscator, "The Theatre of the Future", in Erwin Piscator, p. 56.

30. B. Brecht, "Against George Lukacs", Ibid., p. 82.

31. See R. Barthes, "The Diseases of Costume", in Critical Essays, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1972.

32. From "Techniques Available to the Living Newspaper", an essay written by members of the New York Living Newspaper Unit. The essay is unpublished but is presented in an abbreviated form as an appendix.

33. Ibid., p. 3.

34. Triple-A Plowed Under in Federal Theatre Plays, ed. P. De Rohan, Da Capo Press, New York, 1973.

35. "Techniques Available to the Living Newspaper", p. 4.

36. U. Eco, The Role of the Reader : Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London, 1979, p. 55.

37. Power, Scene 6, p. 91.

38. U. Eco, p. 48.

39. The recent work of the Italian playwright, Dario Fo, whilst not strictly within the traditions of Living Newspaper, has some remarkable similarities. Firstly, Fo's plays often remain unfinished in the sense that he leaves a space for the performer to either improvize a series of commentaries through political jokes, or to provide up to the minute political news. His own production of Accidental Death of an Anarchist was structured in such a way that the court proceedings which followed the murder of Giuseppi Pinelli by the Milanese police were incorporated into the performance. Allegedly, Fo had a contact in court who provided new factual material for the production every evening.

40. A. Boal, Theater of the Oppressed, Pluto Press, London, 1979, p. 168.

41. Ibid., p. 167.

42. Ibid., pp. 119-197.

43. Ibid., p. 122.

44. Ibid., p. 155.

CONCLUSION : RESPONSES AND REFLECTIONS

Towards a Theatre of Cultural Liberation

> *"At this time in Latin America there is room for neither passivity nor innocence. The intellectual's commitment is measured in terms of risks as well as words and ideas; what he does to further the cause of liberation is what counts. The worker who goes on strike and thus risks losing his job or even his life, the student who jeopardizes his career, the militant who keeps silent under torture: each by his or her action commits us to something much more important than a vague gesture of solidarity."*[1]

The Living Newspaper has always provoked political controversy and periodically it has been a theatre of the highest possible risks. When Augusto Boal was imprisoned and tortured by the Brazilian government's secret police in 1971, over thirty years had elapsed since the Czechoslovakian director, E.F. Burian, was arrested and imprisoned by the Gestapo. In two different continents, and in two quite separate political contexts, the theatre had pushed beyond the fragile bounds of political tolerance. The Living Newspaper's resolute refusal to be a vapid and politically safe form of culture invariably meant that it periodically strayed into the dangerous territory of political repression. Any historical retrospective of twentieth century political theatre gives rise to one persistent historical fact: the Living Newspaper is a theatre of political flashpoints that directly comments on contemporary affairs. It has thrived during periods when the political and social order is in crisis. The Living Newspaper has been a theatre of revolution, a theatre of civil war, a theatre of economic depression, and more recently it has re-emerged as a theatre of national liberation.

In searching to find a new theatrical language adequate to the tasks of representing the complexities of contemporary politics, the Living Newspaper turned to the technology of the mass media. It has drawn upon a wealth of different theatrical conventions, many of which have their

roots in previous forms of theatre, but the Living Newspaper's major stylistic techniques are borrowed from the cinema and radio broadcasting. By using cinematic projection, loudspeakers and space staging, the Living Newspaper was not simply appropriating the apparatus of other media, it was associating itself with the technical revolution in the theatre and the general movement against illusionism. In 1929, V.E. Meyerhold characterized the major principles of the new cinefication of the theatre at a lecture in Leningrad.

> *"In taking advantage of every possible technical advance, the theatre cannot afford to ignore the cinematograph; the action of the actor on stage can be juxtaposed with his filmed image on a screen.*
>
> *Alternatively, we might see the dramatic theatre transformed into a kind of revue in which the actor appears now as a dramatic artist, now as an opera singer, now as a dancer, now as an equilibrist, now as a gymnast, now as a clown. Thus, by employing elements of other arts the theatre can make the performance more diverting and deepen the spectator's comprehension of it.*
>
> *The tedious division of a play into acts leads to a static drama which is no longer acceptable .... We who are building a theatre which must compete with the cinema say: let us carry through the 'cinefication' of the theatre to its logical conclusion, let us equip the theatre with all the technical refinements of the cinema."*[2]

Meyerhold's polemical demands for a new technological theatre were equally important to Brecht, Piscator and Burian, and probably found their most consistent expression in the Living Newspaper. It became evident as the century progressed that the cinema was not, as many people imagined, a threatening rival to the theatre but in many respects a means of dramatic revivification. As we live through yet another period of phenomenal technological advance, it would not be too optimistic to expect many more variations in theatre practice. The Living Newspaper may well be on the edge of a renaissance that will extend the theatre into new relationships with the media. In strange but intriguing ways the Living Newspaper has many similarities with the most recent forms of video communication. *"The new media are orientated*

towards action, not contemplation; towards the present not tradition."[3]

The Living Newspaper has always been at its most effective when its appropriation of new media technology has coincided with a major social commitment. In revolutionary Russia it assumed a role in the cultural attempts to improve and transform the social order; in central Europe it was used by the workers' theatre movement to combat fascism but had to accept the fugitive existence of underground political resistance; and in the U.S.A. it became a major form of social documentation. More than any other form of cultural expression, the Living Newspaper permanently tested the climate of political opinion and stretched the boundaries of what was permissible. In retrospect it was the progressive cutting edge of New Deal culture. Even in the face of censorship, the Living Newspaper maintained a campaigning social perspective that in the final outcome was too libertarian for the retrograde ideologies of congressional investigation. After a residual period in which the Living Newspaper strayed into commercial theatre, commemorative theatre and war-time propaganda, it entered a period of decline in Europe and the U.S.A., only to emerge with a new kind of political urgency in the Third World. It would be quite wrong to assume that the Living Newspaper has outlived its social usefulness in the developed nations, but if it does re-emerge in a significant way it will undoubtedly be during a period of severe social crisis and in relationship to new modes of cultural communication. As yet it is too early to speculate on what kinds of newspaper theatre the liberation movements of the Third World will produce.

The Argentinian film-makers, Fernando Solanas and Octavia Gettino, have already pointed in a general direction.

> *"The anti-imperialist struggle of the peoples of the Third World and of their equivalents inside the imperialist countries constitutes today the axis of world revolution.*

> *Third Cinema is, in our opinion, the cinema that recognizes in that struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point - in a word, the decolonization of culture."*[4]

The Living Newspaper will undoubtedly remain in existence until liberation becomes a reality in the Third World. It will take its place in the political movement to decolonize culture and will be at its most energetic during the dangerous years of ideological confrontation. The Living Newspaper will continue to reside in the midst of its own peculiar contradiction: the most ephemeral and durable form of modern theatre.

Notes to Conclusion

1. The film La Hora de los Hornos (The Hour of the Furnaces) was made by the Argentinian film-makers Fernando Solanas and Octavia Gettino in 1968. They are also the authors of a seminal essay on Third World cinema entitled "Towards a Third Cinema" which first appeared in English in Afterimage No. 3, 1971, and is reprinted in B. Nicols ed., Movies and Methods, University of California Press, Berkeley and London, 1976.

   In "Towards a Third Cinema", the authors argue for a provisional categorization of world cinema in which the commercial cinema of Hollywood ("The First Cinema") is differentiated from national art cinemas ("The Second Cinema"). In opposing previous practices and advocating new modes of representation and distribution, Solanas and Gettino see their own work within a third category, the third cinema of the essay's title. The Third Cinema is remarkable in its similarities to Augusto Boal's work in the theatre.

2. V.E. Meyerhold, "The Reconstruction of the Theatre", in E. Braun ed., Meyerhold on Theatre, Methuen, London, 1979, pp. 254-255.

3. H.M. Enzensburger, Raids and Reconstructions, Pluto Press, London, 1976, p. 31.

4. F. Solanas and O. Gettino, "Towards a Third Cinema", in B. Nichols ed., Movies and Methods, p. 47.

ЛЕНИНГРАДСКАЯ ЖИВАЯ ГАЗЕТА „СТРОЙКА"

1


1
LEBENDE
ZEITUNG
Inhalt:
Unser Gruppenlied
Traktorenlied
Unser Schattenspiel.

2


Lebende
ZEITUNG
Aus dem Inhalt.
1) WAHLSZENE:
Alte Arbeitereltern
zählen LISTE 3
4) 19 Jahre
ROTER Oktober
Wählt
Kommunisten LISTE 3

3


WPA FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT'S
SPONSORED BY
NEWSPAPER
GUILD OF N.Y.
Injunction
Granted
BILTMORE THEATRE
47TH ST. EAST OF 8TH AVE.
PRICES
25¢ & 40¢

4


W.P.A. FEDERAL
THEATRE PROJECT
LIVING NEWSPAPER
PRESENTS
POWER
BY ARTHUR ARENT
RITZ
THEATRE
48th STREET
West of Broadway

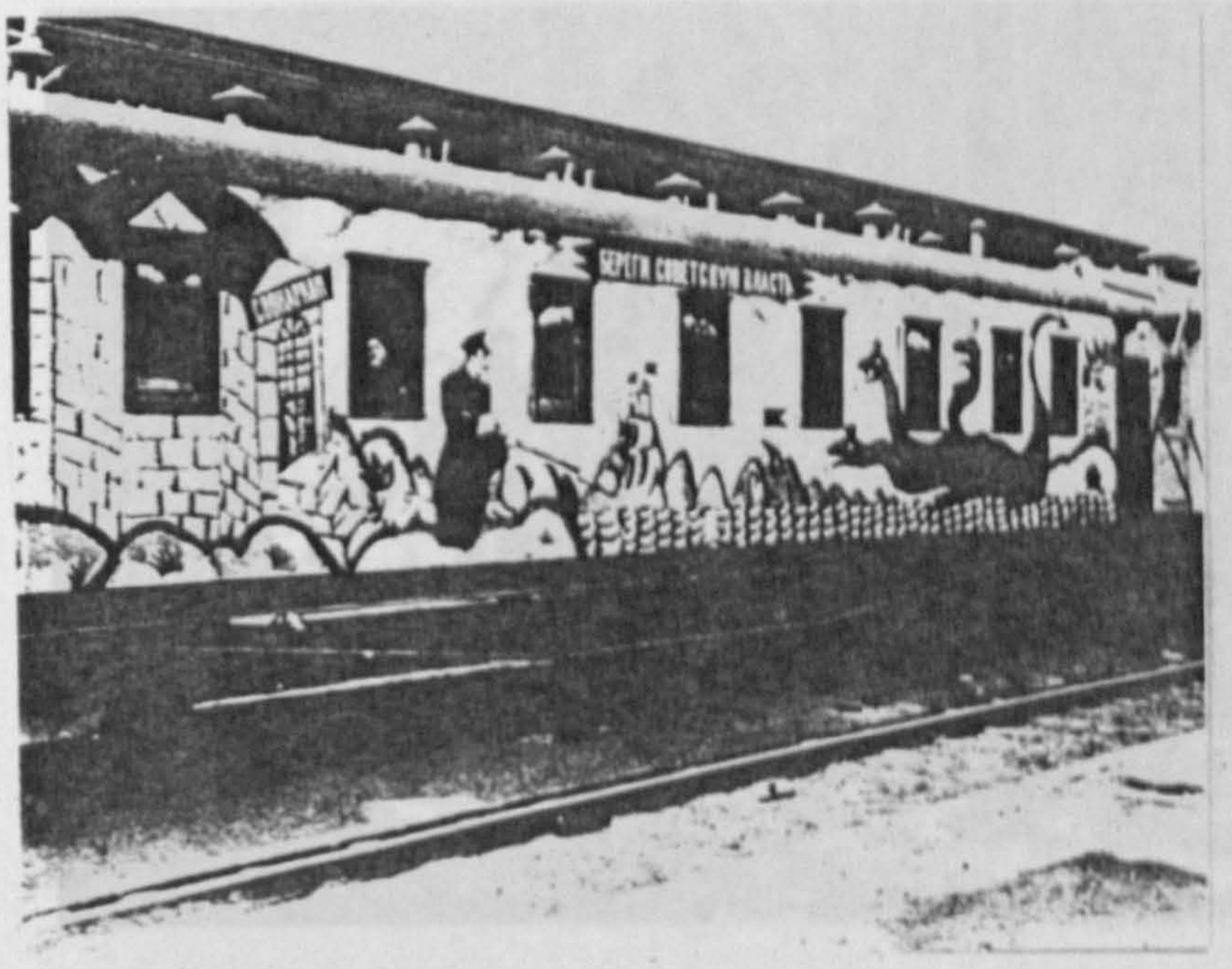
5


FEDERAL THEATRE
USA WORK WPA
presents
one third of a nation
A LIVING NEWSPAPER ABOUT HOUSING
ADELPHI THEATRE
54TH STREET EAST OF 7TH AVENUE

6

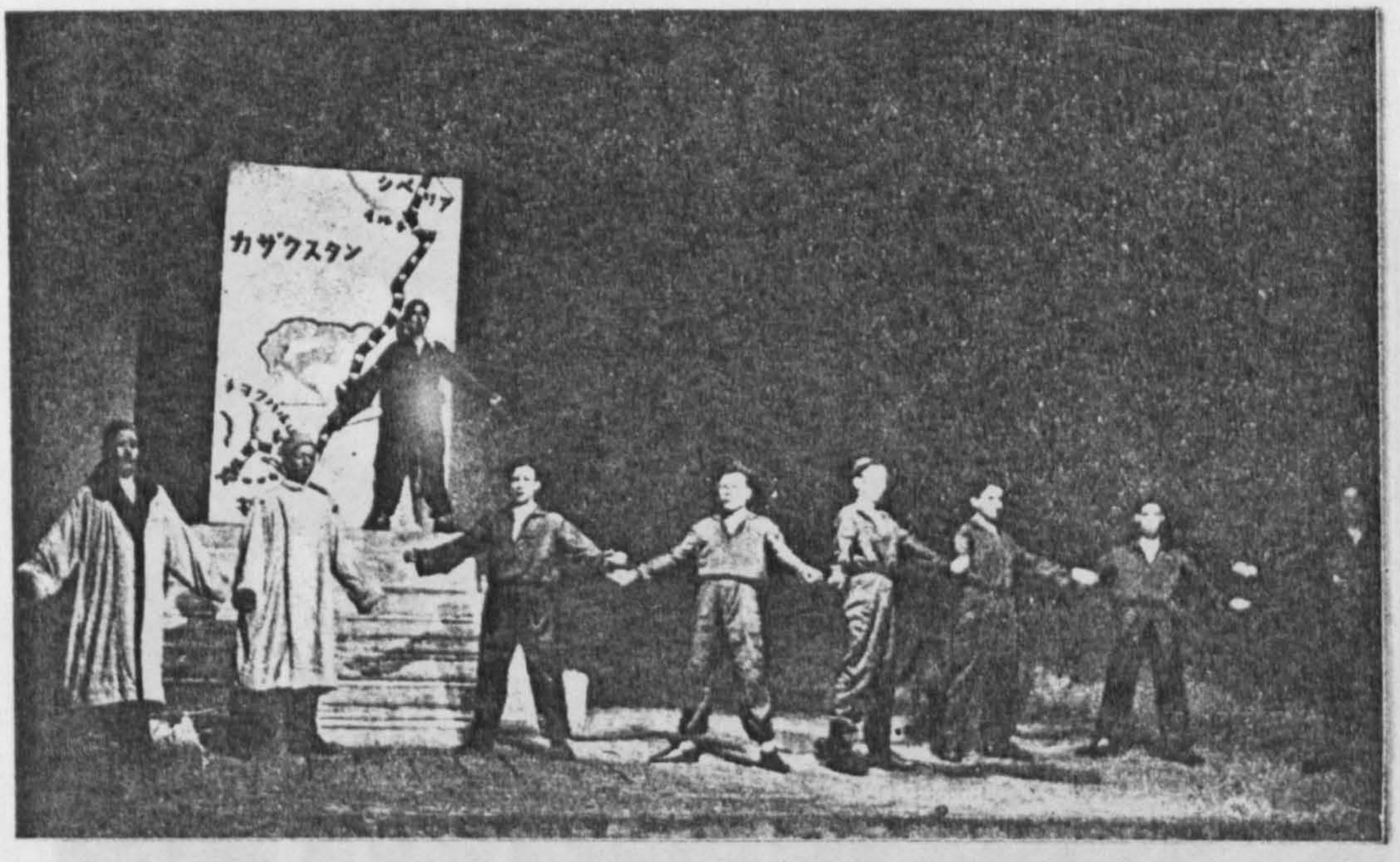

DETROIT FEDERAL THEATRE
PRESENTS
A Living Newspaper
"...one third of a nation..."
WPA
NOW PLAYING
LAFAYETTE THEATRE
NIGHTLY-8:30 SAT MAT-2:30
PRICES - 1.10 - 55 - 25

7



8

9

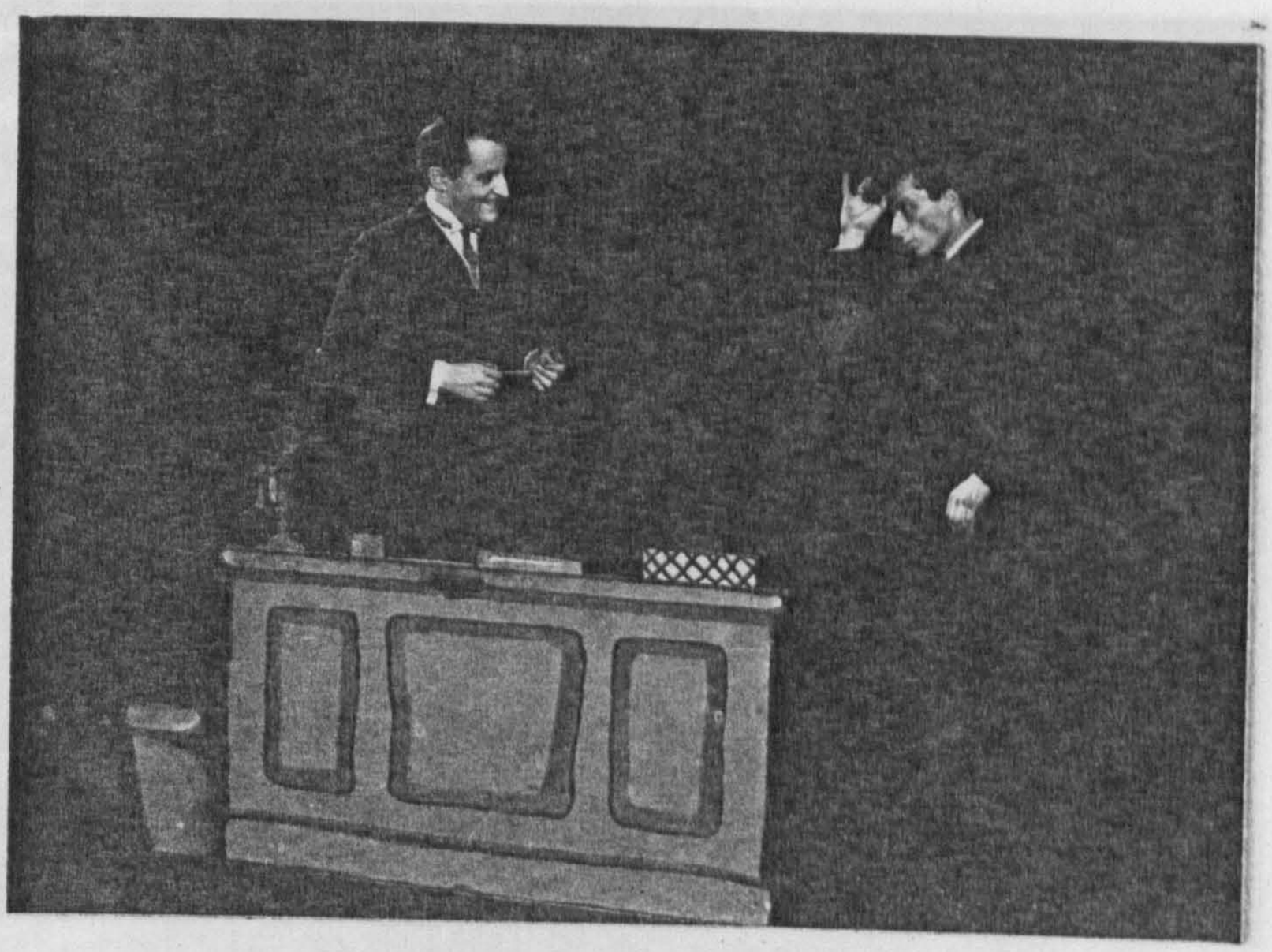


10

11

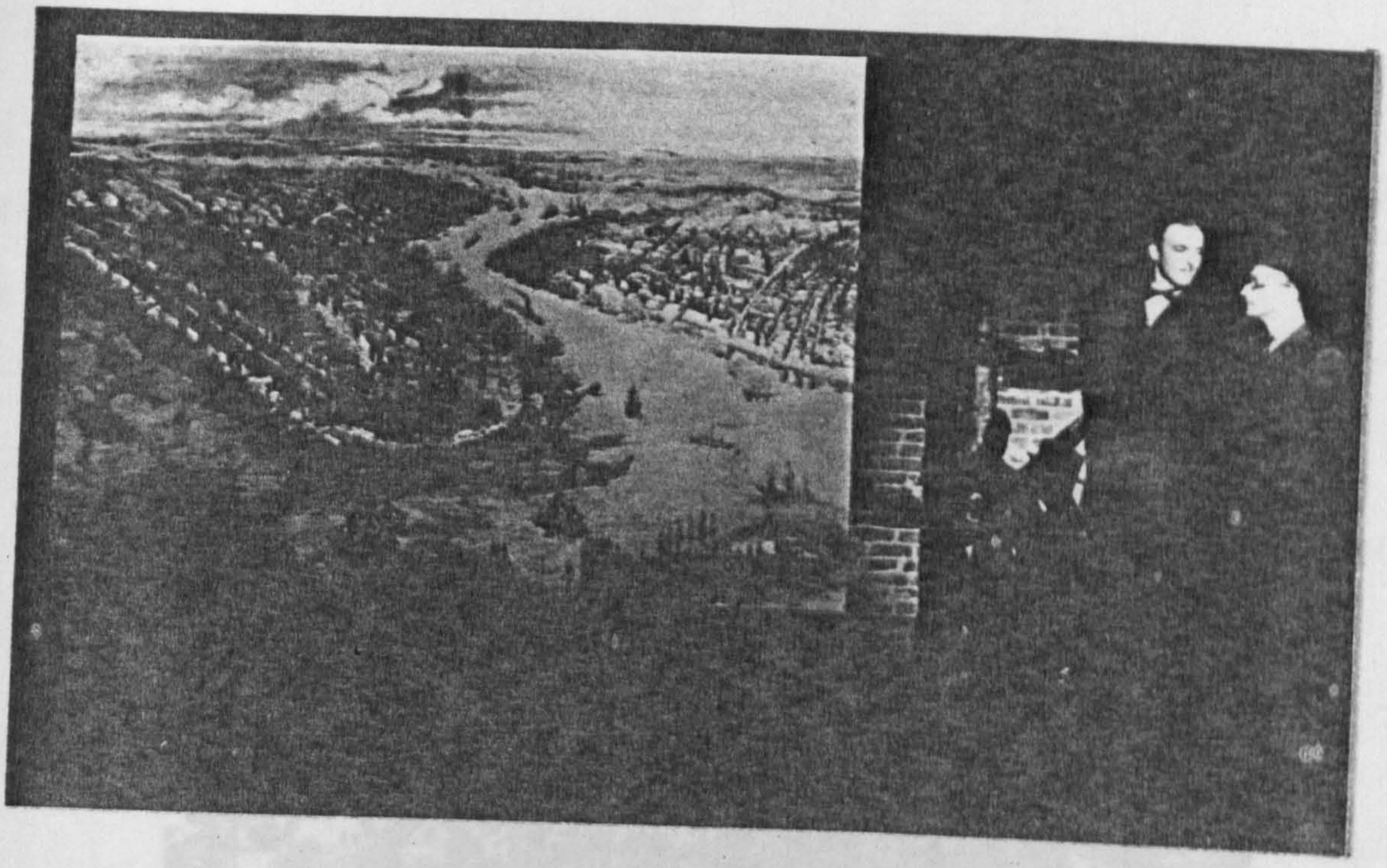
12

12

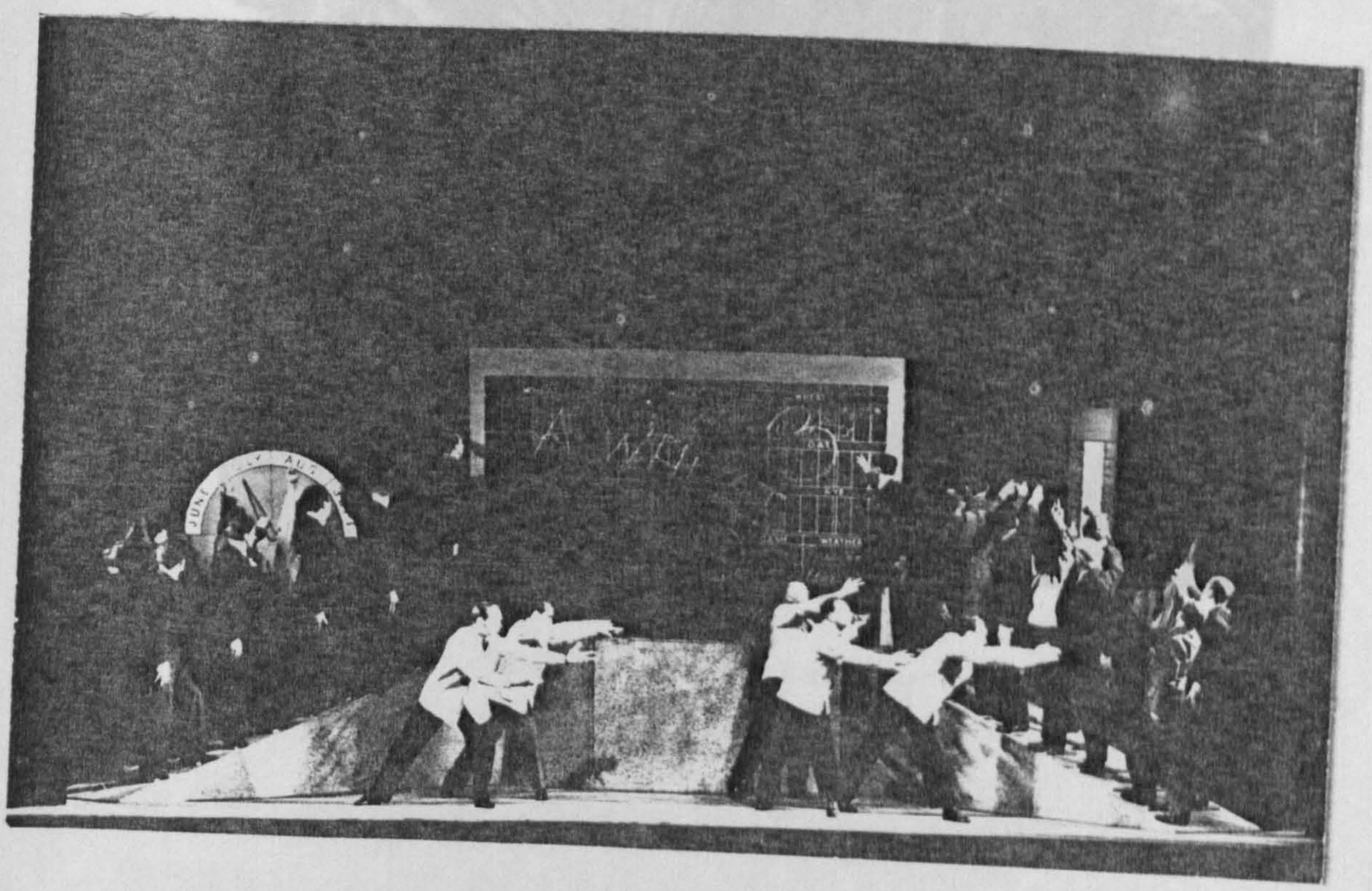


13

14



15



16

17

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary and Unpublished Sources

In the interests of brevity and clarity, the unpublished primary sources referred to in the text, some of which are letters and memoranda, are comprehensively documented as footnotes. They are drawn from the following research locations, which are also cited in the footnotes.

(i) The Federal Theatre Research (The Institute on the Federal Theatre Project and New Deal Culture), 4400 University Drive, Fairfax, Virginia, U.S.A. 22030. The research centre houses an extensive range of materials including play scripts, production reports, production documentation, playreaders' reports, playbills, costume-design sketches, posters, publicity material and statistical documents on the work of the Federal Theatre Project.

(ii) The National Archives of the United States of America, Washington D.C., particularly the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69, which houses material on the W.P.A.'s theatre projects. This material includes extant communications between the F.T.P. and W.P.A. including memoranda, letters and directives, and also some production material.

(iii) The New York Public Library Theatre Collection, which houses a wealth of material on the history and productions of the theatre of New York. Included in this collection are file clippings on major productions and personalities; the entire records of Theatre Union; the Hallie Flanagan Collection, and the major publications of the League of Workers' Theatres and the New Theatre League (Workers Theatre, New Theatre, New Theatre and Film and Theatre Workshop).

(iv) The Morris Watson Collection, University of Oregon Library, which houses material on the life and work of Morris Watson (1901-1972), with a particular emphasis on his association with the New York Living Newspaper Unit. The collection contains letters, unpublished manuscripts and material on trade union history.

Although many Living Newspapers are now lost, those that have been preserved or managed to survive, indicate the variability of the form and its adaptability to different political subjects. The following Living Newspapers are held in the Federal Theatre Research Centre: Dirt, Ethiopia, The High Walls, Injunction Granted, Just Politics, King Cotton, Land Grant, Liberty Deferred, Living Newspaper Follies, Medicine Show, Men at Work, 1935, One Third of a Nation, Poor Little Consumer, Power, The South, Spanish Grant, Spirochete, Stars and Bars, Tapestry in Linen, The Ten Million, Timber, Townsend Goes to Town and Triple-A Plowed Under. A number of other Living Newspapers exist in scenario form, they include Flood Control, Hookworm, Living Newspaper Lives, Milk, Pure Food and Drugs, Pension Plans, Russia, War and War and Taxes. A number of other Living Newspapers, particularly those circulated by the New Theatre League, are either lost or held in private collections.

Books

Aaron, Daniel. Writers on the Left, Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1961.

Agee James and Evans, Walker. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Peter Owen, London, 1965.

Alexander, William. Film on the Left, Princeton University Press, Princeton N.J., 1981.

Althusser, Louis. For Marx, New Left Books, London, 1977.

Althusser, Louis. Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, New Left Books, London, 1977.

Andrew, J. Dudley. The Major Film Theories, Oxford University Press, London, 1976.

Barret, Michele et al., (eds.), Ideology and Cultural Production, Croom Helm, London, 1979.

Barthes, Roland. Critical Essays, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1972.

Barthes, Roland. Mythologies, Paladin, London, 1973.

Barthes, Roland. Image, Music, Text, Fontana, London, 1977.

Baxandall, Lee. Radical Perspectives in the Arts, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972.

Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations, Jonathan Cape, London, 1970.

Benjamin, Walter. Understanding Brecht, New Left Books, London, 1973.

Bennett,. Tony. Formalism and Marxism, Methuen, London, 1979.

Bentley, Eric. The Theatre of Commitment, Columbia University Press, New York, 1936.

Bentley, Eric (ed.). The Theory of the Modern Stage, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1968.

Bentley, Eric. Thirty Years of Treason : Excerpts from Hearings Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-68, Thames and Hudson, London, 1971.

Bentley, Eric. Theatre of War, Eyre Methuen, London, 1972.

Billings, Alan Gailey. Design in the Works Progress Administration's Federal Theatre Project, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois, 1967.

Black, George. Triumph of the People, Zed Press, London, 1981.

Blake, Ben. The Awakening of the American Theatre, Tomorrow Publishers, New York, 1935.

Bloch, Ernst et al. Aesthetics and Politics, New Left Books, London, 1977.

Boal, Augusto. Theater of the Oppressed, Pluto Press, London, 1979.

Boyer, Robert D. Realism in European Theatre and Drama 1870-1920, Greenwood Press, Westport and London, 1979.

Bradby, David et al., (eds.). Performance and Politics in Popular Drama, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980.

Braun, Edward (ed.). Meyerhold on Theatre, Eyre Methuen, London, 1969.

Braun, Edward. The Theatre of Meyerhold, Eyre Methuen, London, 1979.

Brecht, Bertolt. Brecht on Theatre, edited by John Willett, Eyre Methuen, London, 1964.

Brecht, Bertolt. The Messingkauf Dialogues, Eyre Methuen, London, 1965.

Carter, Dan. Scottsboro : A Tragedy of the American South, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1969.

Carter, Huntley. The New Spirit in the European Theatre 1914-24, Doran, New York and London, 1925.

Carter, Huntley. The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia, Arno Press, New York, 1970.

Caughie, John (ed.). Theories of Authorship, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981.

Chaney, David. Fictions and Ceremonies, Edward Arnold, London, 1979.

Charles, S.F. Minister of Relief : Harry Hopkins and the Depression, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1963.

Christie, Ian and Gillett, John (eds.). Futurism/Formalism/FEKS, B.F.I., London, 1978.

Ciment, Michael. Kazan on Kazan, Cinema One and B.F.I., London, 1973.

Clark, Jon et al., (eds.). Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1979.

Claudon-Urando, C. Lenin and the Cultural Revolution, Harvester Press, Hassocks, 1977.

Clurman, Harold. The Fervent Years, Dennis Dobson, London, 1946.

Cohen, Louis H. The Cultural-Political Traditions and Developments of the Soviet Cinema 1917-1972, Arno Press, New York, 1974.

Cook, Jim and Lovell, Alan (eds.). Coming to Terms with Hollywood, B.F.I., London, 1981.

Coward, Rosalind and Ellis, John. Language and Materialism, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977.

Craig, E. Quita. Black Drama of the Federal Theatre Era, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1980.

Davydov, Yuri. The October Revolution and the Arts, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1967.

De Rohan, Pierre. Three Federal Plays, Random House, New York, 1938 (includes One Third of a Nation).

De Rohan, Pierre (ed.). Federal Theatre Plays, De Capo Press, New York, 1973 (includes Triple-A Plowed Under and Spirochete).

Derber, M. and Young, E. (eds.). Labor and the New Deal, Da Capo Press, New York, 1972.

Downer, Alan (ed.). The American Theatre Today, Basic Books, New York, 1967.

Eagleton, Terry. Marxism and Literary Criticism, Eyre Methuen, London, 1976.

Eagleton, Terry. Criticism and Ideology, New Left Books, London, 1976.

Eco, Umberto. The Role of the Reader : Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London, 1979.

Eisenstein, Sergei. The Film Sense, Faber and Faber, London, 1943.

Eisenstein, Sergei. Film Form, Dennis Dobson, London, 1963.

Elam, Keir. The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama, Methuen New Accents, London, 1980.

Enzensberger, Hans Magnus. Raids and Reconstructions, Pluto Press, London, 1976.

Erlich, Victor. Russian Formalism, Mouton, The Hague, 1955.

Ewen, Frederic. Bertolt Brecht : His Life, His Art and His Times, Calder and Boyars, London, 1970.

Faure, Michel. Le Groupe Octobre, Christian Bourgois Editeur, Paris, 1977.

Fine, Sidney. Sitdown : The General Motor's Strike 1936-7, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1969.

Fitzpatrick, Sheila. The Commissariat of Enlightenment : Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky : October 1917-21, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970.

Flanagan, Hallie. Shifting Scenes of the Modern European Theatre, George C. Harrap, London, 1929.

Flanagan, Hallie. Arena : The History of the Federal Theatre, Benjamin Blom, New York, 1940.

Flanagan, Hallie and Clifford, M.E. Can You Hear their Voices?, Vassar Experimental Plays, 1931.

Flanagan, Hallie. Dynamo, Duel Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1943.

Gassner, John. The Theatre in Our Times, Crown Publishers, New York, 1954.

Goldstein, Malcolm. The Political Stage : American Drama and Theater of the Great Depression, Oxford University Press, London & New York, 1974.

Goorney, Howard. The Theatre Workshop Story, Eyre Methuen, London, 1981.

Gorchakov, Nickolai. The Theater in Soviet Russia, Columbia University Press, New York, 1957.

Gorelik, Mordecai. New Theatres for Old, Dobson, New York, 1947.

Gross, Babette. Willi Muenzenberg : A Political Biography, University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1974.

Harvey, Sylvia. May '68 and Film Culture, B.F.I., London, 1978.

Himelstein, Morgan Y. Drama as a Weapon, Rutgers University Press, Brunswick N.J., 1963.

Hoffman, Ludwig and Hoffman-Ostwald, Daniel. Deutsches Arbeitertheater 1918-33, Verlag Rogner and Bernhard, München, 1973.

Hogenkamp, Bert. Workers' Newsreels in the 1920's and 1930's, Our History Pamphlet No. 68. Published by the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Hoover, Marjorie L. Meyerhold : The Art of Conscious Theatre, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1974.

Houghton, Morris. Moscow Rehearsals, Allen and Unwin, London, 1938.

Houseman, John. Run Through, Allen Lane, London, 1972.

Howe, I. and Coser, L. The American Communist Party : A Critical History, Beacon Press, Boston, 1957.

Innes, Christopher D. Piscator's Political Theatre, Cambridge University Press, London, 1972.

Jameson, Frederic. Marxism and Form, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1972.

Ley-Piscator, Maria. The Piscator Experiment, Southern Illinois University Press, New York, 1967.

Lovell, Terry. Pictures of Reality, B.F.I., London, 1980.

Lukacs, Georg. The Historical Novel, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976.

Lukacs, Georg. Realism in Our Time, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1971.

McCarthy, Mary. Sights and Spectacles 1937-1958, Heinemann, London, 1959.

McDonald, William F. Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1969.

McKinzie, Richard. The New Deal for Artists, Princeton University Press, Princeton N.J., 1973.

McPherson, Don (ed.). Traditions of Independence, B.F.I., London, 1980.

Macherey, Pierre. A Theory of Literary Production, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978.

Marshall, H. (ed.). Mayakovsky, Dobson Books, Bristol, 1965.

Mathews, Jane De Hart. The Federal Theatre 1935-9, Princeton University Press, Princeton N.J., 1967.

Mayakovsky, Vladimir. Mayakovsky : Twenty Years of Work, A catalogue of the Oxford Museum of Modern Art, 1982.

Meister, Dick and Loftis, Ann. The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers, Macmillan, New York and London, 1977.

Miller, Alex (trans.). Vladimir Mayakovsky : Innovator, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976.

Miller, Arthur. Collected Plays, Cresset Press, London, 1958.

Mitchell, Loften. Black Drama, Hawthorn Books, New York, 1967.

Nichols, Bill (ed.). Movies and Methods, University of California Press, Berkeley and London, 1976.

Odets, Clifford. Six Plays, introduction by Harold Clurman, Grove Press, New York, 1979.

Patterson, Michael. The Revolution in German Theatre 1900-33, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981.

Piscator, Erwin. Erwin Piscator, An Arts Council of Great Britain Exhibition Catalogue, London, 1970.

Piscator Erwin. The Political Stage, Eyre Methuen, London, 1980.

Rabkin, Gerald. Drama and Commitment, Haskell House, New York, 1964.

Ridge, Patricia Lin. The Contributions of Hallie Flanagan to the American Theatre, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Colorado, 1971.

Roose-Evans, James. Experimental Theatre, Studio Vista, London, 1970.

Schechner, Richard. Essays on Performance Theory 1970-6, Drama Book Specialists, New York, 1977.

Scholes, Robert. Structuralism in Literature, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1974.

Screen Reader 1. Cinema/Ideology/Politics, S.E.F.T., London, 1977.

Shapiro, David (ed.). Social Realism : Art as a Weapon, Frederick Ungar, New York, 1973.

Smiley, Sam. The Drama of Attack, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1972.

Smith, Gary L. The International Ladies Garment Workers' Union's Labor Stage, A Propagandistic Venture, Ph.D. Dissertation, Kent State University, 1975.

Stott, William. Documentary Expression and Thirties America, Oxford University Press, London, 1973.

Styan, J.L. Drama, Stage and Audience, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975.

Szanto, George H. Theater and Propaganda, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1978.

Taylor, Karen Malpede. Peoples Theatre in Amerika, Drama Book Specialists, New York, 1972.

Terkel, Studs. Hard Times : An Oral History of the Great Depression, Pantheon Books, New York, 1970.

Tuckett, Angela. The People's Theatre in Bristol 1930-45, Our History Pamphlet No. 72. Published by the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Vaughn, Robert. Only Victims, Putnams, New York, 1972.

Weales, Gerald. Clifford Odets:Playwright, Pegasus, New York, 1971.

Weber, Betty and Heinen, Hubert. Bertolt Brecht : Political Theory and Literary Practice, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1981.

Willett, John. The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht, Eyre Methuen, London, 1959.

Willett, John. Expressionism, Weidenfield and Nicolson, London, 1970.

Willett, John. The New Sobriety 1917-1933 : Art and Politics in the Weimar Period, Thames and Hudson, London, 1978.

Williams, Christopher (ed.). Realism and the Cinema : A Reader, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980.

Williams, Jay. Stage Left, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1974.

Williams, Raymond. Culture and Society, Chatto and Windus, London, 1958.

Williams, Raymond. The Long Revolution, Chatto and Windus, London, 1961.

Williams, Raymond. Communications, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1962.

Williams, Raymond. Drama in Performance, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968.

Williams, Raymond. Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1973.

Williams, Raymond. Marxism and Literature, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977.

Williams, Raymond. Problems in Materialism and Culture, New Left Books, London, 1980.

Williams, Raymond. Politics and Letters, New Left Books, London, 1980.

Williams, Raymond. Culture, Fontana, Glasgow and London, 1981.

Wollen, Peter. Signs and Meaning in the Cinema, Secker and Warburg, London, 1969.

Yershov, P. Comedy in the Soviet Theatre, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1956.

Periodical Articles

The following periodicals were important to the empirical critical and theoretical development of the dissertation: International Theatre (Moscow), Workers Theatre (U.S.A.), New Theatre (U.S.A.), New Theatre (U.K.), Theatre Workshop (U.S.A.), The Drama Review, Theatre Quarterly, Screen, Screen Education and Performing Arts Journal.

Allen, Douglas. "The Glasgow Workers' Theatre Group", New Edinburgh Review No. 40, 1978.

Allen, John. "The Socialist Theatre", Left Review Vol. 3, No. 7, August 1937.

Anderson, Michael. "From Epic to Alienation", New Theatre Magazine (U.K.) Vol. 7, No. 2, Spring 1967.

Arent, Arthur. "The Techniques of the Living Newspaper", Theatre Arts Monthly XXII, November 1938, reprinted in Theatre Quarterly Vol. 1, No. 4, 1971.

Baxandall, Lee. "Brecht in America, 1935", The Drama Review Vol. 12, No. 1, Fall 1967.

Bernard, Heinz. "The Theatre of Erwin Piscator", Prompt No. 3, 1963.

Bernard, Heinz. "A Theatre for Lefty : U.S.A. in the 1930's", Theatre Quarterly Vol. 1, No. 4, 1971.

Bowers, Diane. "Ethiopia : The First Living Newspaper", Phoebe (The Bi-Annual Publication of George Mason University) Vol. 5, No. 2, 1976.

Bowlt, John E. "Constructivism on the Russian Stage", Performing Arts Journal Vol. 1, No. 3, Winter 1977.

Brandt, Raymond P. "The Dies Committee : An Appraisal", The Atlantic Monthly Vol. CLXV, February 1940.

Brecht, Bertolt. "Against Georg Lukacs", New Left Review No. 84, 1974.

Brewster, Ben. "The Soviet State, the Communist Party and the Arts 1917-36", Red Letters No. 3, Autumn 1976.

Brown, Lorraine. "Melodrama, Social Protest, and Genius", The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress Vol. 36, No. 1, Winter 1979.

Burian, Jarka M. "E.F. Burian : D34-D41", The Drama Review Vol. 20, No. 4, 1976.

Campbell, Russell. "Radical Cinema in the Thirties", Jump Cut No. 40.

Caughie, John. "Progressive Television and Documentary Drama", Screen Vol. 21, No. 3, 1980.

Chinoy, Helen Kritch. "Reunion : A Self Portrait of the Group Theatre", Educational Theatre Journal Vol. 28, No. 4, December 1976.

Clarke, Jon and Margolies, David. "The Workers' Theatre Movement: A Propertyless Theatre for the Propertyless Class", Red Letters No. 10.

Collier, John W. "Theatre Documentary", Theatre Arts Monthly Vol. 31, July 1947.

Cosgrove, Stuart. "Cabaret and Counterculture : The Anti Fascist Theatre in New York", Theatre Quarterly Vol. X, No. 40, 1981.

Cosgrove, Stuart and Mathers, Pete. "Urgent Theatre and the Practices of Cultural Democracy", Theatrework, September-October 1982.

Davies, A. "A Theatre for the People's Army? The Story of the ABCA Play Unit", Red Letters No. 13, Spring 1982.

Davis, Mike. "The Barren Marriage of American Labour and the Democratic Party", New Left Review No. 124, November 1980.

Deak, Frantisek. "Blue Blouse", The Drama Review Vol. 17, No. 1, 1973.

Deak, Frantisek. "The Agitprop and Circus Plays of Vladimir Mayakovsky", The Drama Review Vol. 17, No. 1, 1973.

Eagleton, Terry. "Aesthetics and Politics", New Left Review No. 107, January 1978.

Elion, Harry. "Injunction Granted", New Theatre, September 1936.

Ewen, Frederic. "The Thirties, Commitment, and the Theatre", Science and Society No. 32, 1968.

Farrell, J.T. "The Literary Left in the Middle Thirties", New International Vol. 13, July 1947.

Fielding Raymond. "Mirror of Discontent : The March of Time and its Politically Controversial Film Issues", Western Political Quarterly Vol. 12, 1959.

Fielding, Raymond. "Time Flickers Out : The Passing of the March of Time", The Quarterly of Film, Radio and T.V. Vol. XI, 1956-7.

Flanagan, Hallie. "A Theatre is Born", Theatre Arts Monthly Vol. 15, 1931.

Flanagan, Hallie. "Democracy and the Drama", The Listener, 20th April 1939.

Flanagan, Hallie. "A Theatre for the People", Magazine of Art (Washington), August 1936.

Flynn, Vincent. "Looking Back", New Edinburgh Review No. 40, 1978.

Fortini, Franco. "The Writer's Mandate and the End of Anti-Fascism", Screen Vol. 15, No. 1, Spring 1974.

Fuegi, John. "Russian 'Epic Theatre' Experiments and the American Stage", Minnesota Review No. 1, 1973.

Fuegi, John. "The Soviet Union and Brecht", Brecht Heute/Brecht Today Vol. 2, 1972.

Gerould, Daniel. "Eisenstein's Wiseman", The Drama Review Vol. 18, 1974.

Goldberg, H. "Heywood Braun - Radical Journalist", Monthly Review Vol. 7, 1956.

Goldman, Arnold. "Life and Death of the Living Newspaper Unit", Theatre Quarterly Vol. III, No. 9, January 1973.

Goldman, Arnold. "Injunction Granted : An Introduction", The Minnesota Review No. 1, 1973.

Gorelik, Mordecai. "I Design for the Group Theatre", Theatre Arts Monthly Vol. 23, 1939.

Gorelik, Mordecai. "Epic Scene Design", Theatre Arts Monthly, October 1959.

Gorelik, Mordecai. "Legacy of the New Deal Drama", Drama Survey Vol. 4, No. 1, Spring 1965.

Gorelik, Mordecai. "In Search of a Metaphor", Players Magazine Vol. 44, No. 6, August 1969.

Gorelik, Mordecai. "Theatre is a Weapon", Theatre Arts Monthly Vol. XVIII, 1934.

Gorelik, Mordecai. "Epic Realism", Theatre Workshop, April-July 1937.

Gray, Ann. "Brecht and the Unity of Opposites", Marxism Today, April 1971.

Hecht, Werner. "The Berliner Ensemble and the Spirit of Brecht", World Theatre Vol. 14, No. 4.

Hecht, Werner. "The Development of Brecht's Theory of the Epic Theatre 1918-33", The Drama Review Vol. 6, No. 1, September 1961.

Hedgbeth, Llewellyn H. "Meyerhold's D.E.", The Drama Review Vol. 19, No. 2, June 1975.

Herman, Louis. "The Worker's Theatre?", Theatre Arts Monthly Vol. 16, 1932.

Hill, John. "Glasgow Unity Theatre", New Edinburgh Review No. 40, 1978.

Himmelstein, Morgan Y. "Theory and Performance in the Depression Theatre", Modern Drama Vol. 14, 1971-72.

Hoover, Marjorie. "V.E. Meyerhold - A Russian Predecessor of the Avant-Garde", Comparative Literature Vol. 17, 1965.

Hunter, John O. "More Blitzstein's The Cradle Will Rock as a Document of America 1937", American Quarterly Vol. 18, 1966.

Issac, Dan. "Introduction to Ethiopia", Educational Theatre Journal Vol. XX, 1968.

Jardine, Robin. "Living Newspaper : Kusmen", Left Review Vol. 3, No. 15, April 1938.

Jones, Len. "The Workers Theatre in the Thirties", Marxism Today, September 1974.

Kern, Edith. "Brecht's Popular Drama and its American Popularity", Modern Drama Vol. 1, No. 3, December 1958.

Kernodle, George R. "The Death of the Little Man", The Drama Review Vol. 1, No. 2, 1957.

Kowan, Tadeusz. "The Sign in the Theatre", Diogenes Vol. 61, 1968.

Larkin, Margaret. "Building a Social Theatre : A History of the Theatre Union", New York Public Library, Unpublished Document.

Lavery, Emmet. "Communism and the Federal Theatre", Commonweal, 7th October 1938.

Lloyd, Norman. "Norman Lloyd in Interview with Hilary Mackendrick", Gambit (Magazine of K.C.E.T. Television Los Angeles), October 1975.

Losey, Joseph. "The Individual Eye", Encore Vol. 8, 1961.

Losey, Joseph. "Injunction Granted : Prefatory Notes", The Minnesota Review No. 1, 1973.

Lunn, Eugene. "Marxism and Art in the era of Stalin and Hitler : A Comparison of Brecht and Lukacs", New German Critique Vol. 1, No. 3, Autumn 1974.

MacCabe, Colin. "Realism and the Cinema : Notes on Some Brechtian Theses", Screen Vol. 15, No. 2, Summer 1974.

MacCabe, Colin. "The Politics of Separation", Screen Vol. 16, No. 4, Winter 1975-6.

MacCabe, Colin. "Principles of Realism and Pleasure", Screen Vol. 17, No. 3, Autumn 1976.

MacColl, Ewan. "Grassroots of Theatre Workshop", Theatre Quarterly Vol. III, No. 9, January 1973.

McCreery, Kathleen. "Prolet : Yiddish Theatre in the 1930's", Race and Class Vol. XX, No. 3, Winter 1979.

McDermott, Douglas. "The Odyssey of John Bonn : A Note on German Theatre in America", The German Quarterly Vol. XXXVIII, May 1965.

McDermott, Douglas. "The Theatre Nobody Knows : Workers Theatre in America 1926-42", Theatre Survey Vol. VI, May 1965.

McDermott, Douglas. "The Living Newspaper as a Dramatic Form", Modern Drama Vol. 8, No. 1, May 1965.

McDermott, Douglas. "Propaganda and Art : Dramatic Theory and American Depression", Modern Drama Vol. II, May 1968.

McDermott, Douglas. "Agit Prop : Production Practice in the Workers Theatre 1932-42", Theatre Survey Vol. VII, July 1966.

McNamara, Brooks and Shuman, Mady. "Spartakiade", The Drama Review Vol. 17, No. 4, December 1973.

Mathers, Pete. "Brecht in Britain - From Theatre to Television", Screen Vol. 16, No. 4, Winter 1975.

Mathews, Jane de Hart. "Arts and the People : The New Deal Quest for Cultural Democracy", Journal of Arts and Humanities, Vol. LXII, September 1975.

Page, Malcolm. "The Early Years at Unity", Theatre Quarterly Vol. 1, No. 4, 1971.

Pettifer, James. "The Limits of Naturalism", Screen Vol. 16, No. 4, Winter 1975.

Pettifer, James. "Against the Stream - Kuhle Wampe", Screen Vol. 15, No. 2, Summer 1974.

Piscator, Erwin. "Novel into Play", Prompt No. 5, 1964.

Piscator, Erwin. "The Theatre of the Future", Tomorrow No. 1, February 1942.

Robinson, T.C. "Fascism and the Political Theatre", Sewanee Review Vol. 44, January 1936.

Rotha, Paul. "An Account of the American Stage Sensation - Living Newspaper", World Film News Vol. III, 1938.

Rybar, Jan. "Personalities and Influences behind the success of the Czech Avant Garde Drama in the Period between the Wars", European Studies Review Vol. 8, 1978.

Samuel, Raphael. "Documents and Texts from the Workers' Theatre Movement 1928-36", History Workshop Journal No. 4, Autumn 1977.

Sano, Saki. "The Tokyo Left Theatre and its Relation to the Japanese Stage", Theatre Arts Monthly Vol. XV, No. 10, October 1931.

Smiley, Sam. "Rhetoric on Stage in Living Newspapers", Quarterly Journal of Speech Vol. 54, February 1968.

Sontag, Susan. "Film and Theatre", The Drama Review Vol. XI, No. 1, 1966.

Spence, Jo. "The Sign as a Site for Class Struggle : Reflections on the work of John Heartfield", Block No. 5, 1981.

Spitzer, Susan. "Agitprop à la Française : the Group Octobre, 1932-36", Theatre Quarterly Vol. VIII, No. 30, 1978.

Strasberg, Lee. "Russian Notebook 1934", The Drama Review Vol. 17, No. 1, 1973.

Suvin, Darko. "The Mirror and the Dynamo", The Drama Review Vol. 12, No. 1, Fall 1967.

Thomas, Tom. "A Propertyless Theatre for the Propertyless Class", History Workshop No. 4, Autumn 1977.

Viertel, Berthold. "Bertolt Brecht Dramatist", Kenyon Review Vol. 7, 1945.

Watson, Don. "Busmen : Documentary and Political Theatre in the 1930's", Media, Culture and Society Vol. 3, No. 4, 1981.

Watson, Morris. "The Living Newspaper : The Federal Theatre Dramatizes the News of the Day", Scholastic Magazine, 31st October 1936.

Weiss, Peter. "The Material and the Models", Theatre Quarterly Vol. 1, No. 1, 1971.

Wekwerth, Manfred. "Brecht Today", The Drama Review Vol. 12, No. 1, Fall 1967.

Williams, Raymond. "Realism and Non-Naturalism", Official Programme of the Edinburgh International Television Festival, 1977.

Wollen, Peter. "The Two Avant-Gardes", Studio International Vol. 190, No. 978, November-December 1975.

Woolf, Janet. "Bill Brand, Trevor Griffiths and the Debate About Political Theatre", Red Letters No. 8.

Worrall, Nick. "Meyerhold's Production of The Magnificent Cuckold", The Drama Review Vol. 17, No. 1, 1973.

Wright, David. "Documentary Theatre", Plays and Players Vol. 14, No. 3, December 1966.

A P P E N D I C E S

1. TECHNIQUES AVAILABLE TO THE LIVING NEWSPAPER DRAMATIST

When the words "Living Newspaper" appear in print these days, they are naturally associated with the new flexibility which this technique has given to the modern stage.

But how seldom do most theatregoers realise that the Living Newspaper itself is as flexible as the new techniques which it has brought to the stage!

Yet one look at "... one third of a nation ..." now playing at the Adelphi Theatre in New York demonstrates a new use of the Living Newspaper technique - namely, the place for a realistic background in a medium heretofore confined to purely imaginative settings. And reference to the unanimous praise of the critics indicates that the occasional emphasis on realism is no less exciting than the stark simplicity of scripts like TRIPLE A PLOWED UNDER and POWER.

All of which is not so surprising as it might seem at first reading. Almost from the very start the Living Newspaper was destined to go through many changes because no theatre medium had yet been developed with such unlimited capacity for transmitting subject matter of large proportions in crisp and efficient form.

Only one major premise seems to have been predominant at the outset: Living Newspaper was not to concern itself with the problems of any one individual or even any one group. It was to concern itself with problems of the people. Warfare, both actual and imminent, the struggle between progress and reaction, the vicissitudes of politics, the advance of science, the fight for the preservation of civil liberties, labor's organisational activities, the problems of youth and other swiftly changing aspects of present-day civilization, were the logical objectives of this new technique.

Could the conventional theatre with its single or even three-act format cope with the magnitude of these subjects? An inventory of what had to be included in a script pointed to the negative. A story based upon any live issue was found to be made up of too many component parts - there was too wide a spread in its telling for the formal single - or three-act stage.

Yet, as a technique, Living Newspaper is notable for its adaptability for production on almost any scale. Small amateur groups can apply it for use in almost any auditorium with limited facilities and larger, better equipped groups can give it its fullest expression on the standard stage. Non-project groups have been reported as playing with great success in union halls in the steel area during the big organizational campaign last year. On the other hand, the technique was applied to a sort of cavalcade or pageant, with central staging, before an audience of over twenty thousand people in Madison Square Garden in New York City.

When Living Newspaper came into being it had available all the generally established theatre techniques plus the rudiments of some not fully explored. These latter really sprang from the revolt against the old, decadent forms of stagecraft led by such men as Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appin in the opening decade of the twentieth century.

In simple terms, these men renounced the stark-realism school of design and production, bringing to the stage in its stead a more abstract technique which widened the scope of action and mood. Of this new stagecraft Kenneth Macgowan, in his "Theatre of Tomorrow" says:

"It is a technique that applies to realistic plays as well as plays of spiritual value and plays of color.... It can create illusion as well as understanding. It does, in fact, range from beautiful realism to absolute, abstract form. Its one definite limitation cuts it off from the theatre of photographic realism. It is always opposed to copying on the stage the confusion and the detail of actuality."

The last two sentences uttered by Macgowan should have special emphasis in the minds of Living Newspaper dramatists for, while they are in a broad sense admirable principles, they are not canons to be strictly adhered to. The current production. ". .. one third of a nation ..." will be touched upon to illustrate this.

The complex and many-sided nature of Living Newspaper subject matter does not actually prohibit but limits the use of stark - or quasi-realism in design and production. Thus while strong effort is made to include as much excitement and dramatic conflict as possible, its very nature makes for a preponderance of stylization. Many Living Newspaper scenes are of an expository character which calls for abstract treatment and space staging.

Mrs. Hallie Flanagan, Director of Federal Theatre, summed up the spirit of this trend toward space staging when she said, recently:

"In an age when every other art and every science is concerned with pushing the thought of man through the fourth dimension, the theatre has continued to think largely in terms of two-dimensional flats and surface ideas. In an age when men are soaring through space, whispering to the stars and flinging miles of steel and glass into the air, the theatre has continued to tell its pleasantly plausible tales within the confines of a painted box set ... tales of small triangular love stories in small rectangular settings. Federal Theatre, particularly in its Living Newspapers, is trying to create theatre on other terms; not of two men for one woman, not of one psychological trait against another psychological trait in a man's soul, not of one social class against another social class. All of these struggles are important for the theatre, but the Living Newspaper seeks to dramatize a new struggle - the search of the average American today for knowledge about his country and his world; to dramatize his struggle to turn the great natural and economic forces of our time toward a better life for more people."

Mrs. Flanagan shows us that it is the job of modern theatre to break through the technological barriers of decadent stagecraft as well as the ideological barriers of decadent thought. Modern theatre has already broken through many of these barriers - both in a technical and ideological sense, but still the overwhelming majority of plays falls into the category described by Mrs. Flanagan - *"pleasantly plausible tales told within the confines of a painted box set."*

The theatre is still dominated by characters pitting "one psychological trait against another psychological trait", with each conflict taking place inside a more or less traditional atmospheric shell of wood, canvas and paint. The Living Newspaper, on the other hand, can confidently say that it has attempted - and more often than not succeeded - in transcending these limitations. It has peopled its stage with interesting characters but they are the physical, human manifestation of forces that are larger and more important than individual psychology. They are individuals whose psychology is, in fact, the very product of these forces.

When we present a scene in a Living Newspaper of an individual committing suicide because of poverty and hunger are we putting before the audience a study of that individual's morbid psychology? Rather, we tell of the even more malign nature of the forces that motivated the act: unemployment, lack of proper relief, etc. And, back to the technical aspect, do we present the character in a setting of stark realism: a wretched room, miserably furnished, in all its detailed ugliness? Usually we do not, he is most likely presented in a single shaft of dim light which was swiftly blacked out and then counter-pointed upstage with a projected chart giving all the vital statistics showing the factors which made the character seek that escape. Instead of pinning the character down to one specific locale, abstract staging gives the scene a timelessness and universal tone that transcends the bounds of the specific. This is an example of space stage.

This predominantly valid principle, however, need not be sheer dogma. It is not an arbitrary ruling which banishes the possibility of sometimes depending upon realism. For example, in the current production, ".. one third of a nation ...", which deals with the housing problem, the dominant feature of the show is the formidable, ever-present four storey tenement, sliced into cross-section and exposing with shocking realism the filthy, horrible, disease-infested life in the typical slum fire trap. This fascinating set, designed by Howard Bay, possesses all the detailed realism denounced by Craig and Appia, yet its inclusion in the play does not in any way contradict the principles of abstract, or space staging. In spite of the admitted realism of this setting, the play as a whole is done in a stylized manner with practically all of the expository scenes acted out in a free, mobile area in front of the permanent set. The story of Housing, especially the slum aspect of it, is a miserable one, and in "... one third of a nation ..." the Living Newspaper simply encrusted the rear wall of the stage with the embodiment of that misery.

Beethoven's early music, scored for quartet in strings, can be exquisite. But, Beethoven's music scored for full orchestra and voice as in the Ninth can lift one to fullest heights of emotional experience. And so, properly composed, a theatre piece of the Living Newspaper sort will be a vastly more exciting creation if it is "scored" for the full instrumentation of the theatre: lights, levels, projection, scrim, sound, music, pantomime, dance and other techniques to be discussed.

The Living Newspaper dramatist should, whenever possible, conceive of his stage as a mobile area, unencumbered by bulky, fixed sets - a stage pliable and subject to swift change. Furthermore, he should often conceive of the entire theatre as a single unit, as opposed to the concept of a stage separated from its audience by that invisible fourth wall which is arched by the proscenium. In most theatres the audience has paid to attend and watch the spectacle of a group of characters undergoing some experience which the author has created. The characters may have the sympathy of the audience but there is a conscious effort to retain their own identity as something separate from the observers.

The Elizabethan drama, the theatre of the middle nineteenth century, and modern burlesque are exceptions to this custom and are notable for their tendency to indulge in "asides" - lines played directly to the house. The recent period of realistic drama regarded this as naive, and, perhaps it was. It had, however, a healthy tendency to bring about a stimulating unanimity between actor and audience.

The invisible barrier between stage and spectators is broken down in remarkable fashion in Clifford Odets' "Waiting for Lefty", not through comic asides but by the direct sharing of a problem with the audience. The result is dynamic and stimulating. The question is raised: Why did he do that and how did he accomplish it? Odets knew he was playing to people who work for a living and he was writing about a topical subject - a taxi strike. He turned his theatre into a union hall in which the decision to strike was being determined. Instead of confining all his action to the stage, his characters often played from the house itself and the play was so skilfully constructed that soon the entire audience identified itself directly with the problem of the characters. The climax of the play brings about the astounding situation of an entire audience participating in the strike vote.

As was mentioned in a previous article, subjects of minor importance - of no social significance - have no justification for being done in the Living Newspaper manner. It follows, therefore, that every subject will be one that vitally concerns all or most members of its audience. Thus, the desirability of bringing about audience participation will be acknowledged.

How is this brought about? Odets planted characters right in the audience's midst. There is also the device of apron staging. The apron - that portion of the stage which juts out beyond the proscenium arch - is an area that brings the actor into more intimate proximity to the house. It is almost never used in conventional theatre and because of this is so much more markedly noticeable. The dramatist can even insist that special construction of this area be undertaken: extensions, runways, ramps. However, this technique should not be overdone - the bid for audience participation should be made only during certain strategic points of the play. Apron staging also serves the very practical purpose of facilitating scene changes upstage - of permitting mobilization of mass groups to take place in the dark area behind it.

LEVELS

As for the stage itself, the dramatist can utilize levels for greatest flexibility of scene arrangement. The writer's sense of imagery and pattern will determine the success of this method. Also, there must be an awareness of each scene's relationship to the play as a whole, insofar as practicability of production is concerned. In other words, he should not set a scene on an elaborate series of levels if the scene immediately following it on that spot calls for a bare stage. However, a unit of levels can, within itself, be divided into a sectional affair by the use of good lighting.

Indeed, a swiftly moving effect of counterpoint can be obtained with levels. A particular argument might be made by a character in a sequence - an individual in authority: perhaps a judge or an official. He is shown on an upper level as befits his "station" in society. After his provocative statement he is blacked out and spots come up elsewhere on the unit where, on other levels, sharp answer is given to the first utterance; after which the controversy is quickened in tempo with each speaker spotlighted, than blacked out, appearing at different points and elevations on the stage. The rapid movement of this sequence and the vagueness of each speaker's surroundings expand the scope of the stage to tremendous proportions.

Thus, for example, we hear a jingoist launch forth, on the upper level, with an unpopular plea for bigger and better battleships, only to be promptly answered, on other levels, by peace advocates. Each individual might be from an entirely separate part of the country, but audience attention is focussed on the individual and his utterances, not on his surroundings. Geographical lines are broken down through the technique of space stage. The dramatist will

ask: But, if the action is so swift and the characters so diverse, how will I be able to identify them for the audience? The partial answer to character identification lies in the use of the loudspeaker. This will be touched upon later.

HAND SETTINGS

The extraordinary number of scene changes usually involved in a Living Newspaper production raises another question from a production point of view - a question that must be considered by the dramatist. Chairs, tables, desks, court benches, doorways and similar properties are often needed for atmospheric effect. How can the rapid pace of this technique handle the traffic of such equipment?

The problem was solved by using painted, flat-surfaced cut-outs, actually carried on stage by the actors playing the scene. A board of directors meeting is shown. The actors have come on carrying the cut-out conference table, behind which they then sit on small, portable stools. Clever lighting lends a startling reality to an otherwise totally unreal scene, and the problem of storage and unwieldy paraphernalia has been solved. While this is more the concern of the technical staff, the dramatist might well be advised of the ease with which such scenes can be handled.

STAGE TRUCKS

Again, another device is valuable as a transition between major scenes. This is the use of trucks - flat platforms on rollers that glide on stage from either wing. The truck conveys an already waiting scene - actor and cut-out prop, if need be, - making for admirable precision in staging, a precision that lends itself to rhythmic presentation of contrapuntal ideas.

SCRIM

The writer should also exploit the possibilities of scrim - a stage drop made of thin, translucent gauze. Light directed upon this material from the front gives it a solid appearance; yet, when an object is lighted behind the scrim it is entirely visible. Thus, the sudden dramatic infusion of a new element can be disclosed as a climax to any scene. The reverse is true also. A tableau effect can be lighted behind the scrim and, with the dimming of its lights to dark, and the synchronized raising of lights downstage, action in the latter area moves forward without a second's pause. The opening of 'Triple A Plowed Under' applied this idea in breath-taking fashion. The brisk overture ended, and then over the staccato news flashes enunciated by the loudspeaker, a war scene tableau came into view behind the scrim. Presently this dimmed out and immediately actors downstage were seen delivering their lines which dealt with conditions arising out of the war.

BACKGROUND

Backdrops in the conventional sense, that is, with the scene literally printed upon them, are in opposition to the concept of abstract design. They strike a jarring note with the stylized effect sought after in Living Newspaper productions. Yet, the dramatist can indicate that he wants a background that has meaning - that integrates itself with the theme. He can ask for a cyclorama - a drop that hangs in a concave, semi-circular manner, giving an

illusion of distance. Or, he can utilize cut-out drops against scrim, such as factory smokestacks, skylines and the like. These designs establish the atmosphere of a scene with the greatest simplicity. He should also take cognizance of the dramatic result of moving, human shadows looming large on either white or colorful surfaces. In "Triple A" this device was introduced particularly in the Supreme Court scene, with well-known figures silhouetted against the Bill of Rights.

PROJECTION

The chief value of projection is that it can establish an idea with lightning speed and succinctness, and then withdraw it, or even fuse it with another with equal speed. Dates, statistics, charts, facsimiles, photographs, headlines and unusual effects such as fire, rain and snow can be projected on stage drops or scrim as a background for certain scenes. Two typical usages of projection will show the possibilities of this device:

In "Triple A" a sequence telling of post-war deflation was played on three levels, each in itself a sub-scene. Only the scene actually played was lighted by an overhead spot, blacking out after its conclusion. The first scene, on the highest level, showed the exporter refusing to ship any of the jobber's wheat abroad. On the middle level, the city banker explained why he had to refuse the country banker credit. On the lowest level, the farmer was seen vainly trying to get loans from the country banker. All three of these scenes took place behind the scrim upon which a typical business chart was projected from the front, with the receding deflation line following the sub-scenes in their downward trend. This projection was successfully wedded to the other facilities of Living Newspaper technique.

"Power" showed a board of directors' meeting in full detail before the audience, with a projected photo of the room's interior thrown on the scrim behind the group of actors who sat at their cut-out conference table. This is not inconsistent with the premise of abstract design for the reason that it was a quick flash, flat-dimensioned and further, it was necessary to establish the exact background: a specific meeting place. The stylized note was sustained.

Animated cartoons and charts livened up many of the scenes - one in particular showing the octopus-like growth and control of a super-holding company.

If the dramatist feels that a short sequence of motion picture will give more point to a scene he should unhesitatingly write it in. The spectacle of exploding shells, swift rushes of marching feet, onrushing tanks and the like, sweeping across a downstage scrim while, behind it a scene showing someone laying a wreath on the tomb of the unknown soldier, is suggested as a possible example of how film can be included.

SOUND

The loudspeaker functions, among other things, as an ideal means of establishing time. A flashback scene, even though enhanced by definite costuming, might yet be ambiguous. The loudspeaker enunciating descriptive narrative and the date makes the audience, through the visual image augmented by the audible idea, intellectually receptive to the scene.

Also, when certain expository scenes are shown, the loudspeaker can become the voice of the public at large - posing questions that are the

uncrystalized opinion of the layman, only to have the answers expounded on the stage in some fashion by characters and action. An examination of the script of "Power" will disclose how neatly this can be done.

And - to answer the query about character identification: where the visual characterization, timing and dialogue make for ambiguous identity, the loudspeaker is brought into play. The spotlight might suddenly come up on an individual (or, he might make an entrance) who is supposed to be, say, Secretary of State Hull. Due to the practical problem of casting the actor might not closely enough resemble the figure - or, even if he did, the suddenness of his appearance would leave the audience unprepared to gather who he was. The speech of the actor would be preceded by a crisp announcement from the loudspeaker such as, "Secretary of State Hull said - ". The dramatist should try to avoid this device as much as possible, for if overdone it may become too mechanical.

Identification can be achieved through anticipatory dialogue - speeches containing reference to generally recognised characters and situations that make the audience intellectually receptive to the entrance of the following speaker. The dramatist is assisted, also, by the ingenuity of the actor and the director who know how to heighten the most familiar characteristics of famous people.

Another interesting use of the loudspeaker is that of conveying crowd noises. When an atmosphere of panic or hysteria needs the accompanying element of sound the surplus forces of actors off-stage ad lib into microphones, augmenting the excitement visible to the audience. All other sound effects of the sort used in radio: airplane, mechanical, motor, etc., can be fed into the loudspeaker.

MUSIC

Living Newspapers are plays mainly about the people of these United States, and the people have given us a rich culture in the field of music. Many scenes deal with aspects of regional folklore, deeply rooted in the traditions of the people. Research will surely bring to light folksongs that lend color and expression to the play. These songs, in the hands of one who knows music, can be transcribed into a full score for a sequence in the script. The same theme can be so treated that it will vary in mood from the sombre to gay and even exultant. The dramatist need not hesitate to include his suggestions for musical accompaniment - he may be absolutely without training along these lines, but his dramatic instinct will guide him in the adaptation of music to his script. The task of handling the music will not be the dramatist's but, just as he has the prerogative of prescribing stage settings, so has he the right to indicate music that will give his script effective overtones.

PANTOMIME - DANCE - PUPPETRY

When all the above techniques are welded together in the creation of a Living Newspaper script a highly stylized effect will be obtained throughout, successfully removing it from the heavy, realistic approach which cannot cope with the swift, review-like pace of this kind of play. And, the author will discover that even as regards acting stylization can be sustained.

Pantomime has proven to be extremely useful. This is not the responsibility of the actor alone. Living Newspaper, if honest, will almost surely contain some element of sharp social criticism. Satire will be needed - and satire can be cleverly and acidly purveyed through the medium of pantomime. Characters can even do the pantomiming and the loudspeaker can supply the dialogue for them. It should be easy to imagine some nation-wide figure being lampooned in this manner: a demagogic speech or a palpably false statement coming from the lips of a silent yet eloquently gesticulating actor. The dramatist should recognize this device and exploit it.

The dance, like music, calls for expert knowledge, but as with the latter, the dramatist can indicate whe, where and how he deems it advisable for use. As a matter of fact, too little thought has been devoted to the possibilities of the dance in previous Living Newspaper productions. Mob scenes, in the hands of a good choreographer, might well make more fascinating patterns for the eye than some of the milling around that was characteristic of these plays. Again, as with folksongs, research will certainly disclose folk dances which are always colorful. The modern dance especially complements the stylized manner of Living Newspaper production. It extracts the essence out of movement and lends itself to the modern mood.

Another technique which falls into the general category of these two forms is that of puppetry. In "1935" a scene which earned extremely favorable comment was that telling of Huey Long's regime. The scene showing his machinations in the State legislature was done in puppet style, with several members of Long's cabinet - real actors - the puppets, bending to his will as he jerked strings attached to them.

* * * * * * *

If the ground covered in this brief guide on technique seems to be inadequate it is only because this manual wishes to avoid setting down arbitrary rulings for the dramatist. The factors mentioned are the result of ideas already tested and proven practical. Dynamic theatre has come of their application. Out of each venture in the search for new and lively ways to tell a Living Newspaper story may come vigorous and acceptable principles of technique. Some of these principles were stumbled upon. Many were consciously adopted. The Living Newspaper dramatist, handling subject matter whose very nature is subject to change, will surely discover ever-changing media with which to present it. In the meantime, the abundance of ideas that already exist will enable him to assemble a play capable of holding the sustained attention of any audience.

* * * * * * *

2. STRIKE MARCHES ON

SCENE ONE:

The assembly line. During the scene the speed of the line increases with the years. Monotonous music and percussion accompany the actions of the workers.

Loudspeaker: The motor assembly line 1928 ...

(a worker drops out of the line)

1930 ...

(as the music increases in tempo some more workers drop out)

1932 ...

(still more drop out as the tempo becomes frantic)

1936 ...

(the foreman who has been standing behind the workers, taps a man wearing a union button.)

Foreman: What's that?

Worker : You know what it is.

Foreman: YOU tell me.

Worker : I don't have to, you've got fellows who can tell you.

Foreman: You belong to the union?

Worker : You know damn well I do.

Foreman: Then you can go. We haven't any room for union fellows here.

(HE goes offstage.)

The assembly line begins again. The remaining workers whisper to each other. The factory whistle blasts to show the end of the shift and the workers file offstage.

- - - - - - - -

SCENE TWO:

The workers vote for a sit-down strike.

- - - - - - - -

SCENE THREE:

The strikers sing their anthem "Solidarity Forever." The stage and audience becomes the plant and the tear-gas attack is enacted.

- - - - - -

SCENE FOUR:

(Inside Chevrolet Plant No. 9)

Loudspeaker: Who are you?

Worker: I'm an automobile worker.

Loudspeaker: What's that you've got there?

Worker: (Tapping the box he has been sitting on) That's my job.

(He sits down on it again)

Loudspeaker: What are you doing with it?

Worker: I'm sitting on it.

Loudspeaker: Why are you sitting on it?

Worker: Because I own it.

Loudspeaker: What about property rights?

Worker: What about human rights?

Loudspeaker: The court says ...

Worker: (Interrupting) I say this is my job, I own it. (He thumps the box.) And I'm going to sit on it and see that nobody takes it away from me.

More community songs ...

Newsboy: Extra, Extra, all about the riot in front of Chevie, four hundred killed.

- - - - - - - -

SCENE FIVE:

Loudspeaker: Watch your sound car, everything is quiet. The sit down is successful. We suggest you barricade the windows against tear gas. We suggest you barricade the bridge between two and four. Protection squadron guard your sound car ... guard your soumd car. Watch the roof, watch the tunnel between two and four and blockade all the doors. Guard your sound car ...

Newsboy: Extra, Extra. Great riot in front of Chevie.

Loudspeaker: Sheriff Wolcott is telephoning ...

Voice: I want to talk to the Governor. Tell the Governor I can't control the mob. Tell the Governor I want troops tonight.

Loudspeaker: Mayor Bradshaw is telephoning ...

Voice: Tell the Governor we want troops ... troops ... yes tonight.

Loudspeaker: Roosevelt moves to bring General Motors and Lewis together ... when the C.I.O. was formed with John L. Lewis at the head, hope flowed like blood through the workers of America. The steel workers organized ... Camden won ... Goodyear won ... There was a stir throughout the unorganized workers of America. They felt their political power. Steel ... Rubber ... Automobile ... Electrical Workers ... Miners. They no longer voted as their bosses told them.

Newsboy: Extra, read about the Chevie riot. Read all about it.

Loudspeaker: Roosevelt was elected. Automobile started organizing. The bosses started firing workers. There was a sit down in Fisher Body No. 1 ... Fisher 2, followed shortly.

Voice: Troops ... we want troops ... yes tonight.

Loudspeaker: Governor Murphy called both sides together. The workers agreed to leave the plants in return for union recognition.

Newsboy: Extra, Extra. Great riot in front of Chevie Plants.

Loudspeaker: The Flint Alliance ...

(Shouts of derision from actors in the audience)

... pretended to represent the workers ... General Motors ... (more shouting from the audience) ... agreed to bargain with the Flint-Alliance ... (more shouting) ... Negotiations deadlocked ... Vigilantes were formed ... General Motors started ... court action for plant evacuation ...

Voice: Troops ... we want troops ... yes tonight.

(Troops begin to march on to the stage).

Loudspeaker: (Reaching a climax) ... BUT THE STRIKE MARCHES ON ...

Worker 1: (From the audience) Cadillac here.

Worker 2: Chrysler here.

Worker 3: Dodge is ready.

Loudspeaker: The great manufacturing cities answer the call.

Worker 1: Atlanta here.

Worker 2: Birmingham is here.

Worker 3: Pittsburgh is watching.

Worker 1: Toledo here.

Worker 2: Detroit standing by.

Worker 3: Ohio watching.

Worker 1: California watching.

Worker 2: Alabama watching watching.

Worker 3: Pennsylvania watching.

Worker 1: England.

Worker 2: France.

Worker 3: Spain.

Loudspeaker: THE WORLD IS WATCHING ...

3. EXTRACTS FROM HALLIE FLANAGAN'S TESTIMONY BEFORE THE DIES COMMITTEE ON 6TH DECEMBER 1938

MR. STARNES: Now, there is another statement you have made here, that some of the plays that were put out by the Federal Theater Project are propagandistic or that they breed class consciousness - is that true or untrue?

MRS. FLANAGAN: When we remember -

MR. STARNES: Not all of them, because the testimony is that nine hundred twenty-four plays have been produced, and only twenty-six, as I recall, were in question. Let us confine ourselves to those that are in question.

MRS. FLANAGAN: I do want to go into the matter of the twenty-six plays as much as this Committee will allow me to do. But before I go into that I would like to say that I could not say that we never did a propaganda play. But I should like to go to the actual definition of "propaganda". Propaganda, after all, is education. It is education focused on certain things. For example, some of you gentlemen have doubtless seen *One Third of a Nation*, and I certainly would not sit here and say that that was not a propaganda play. I think in the discussion yesterday the word "propaganda" was used in this connotation only - that any play which was propaganda was necessarily propaganda for Communism. I should like to say very truthfully that to the best of my knowledge we have never done a play which was propaganda for Communism, but we have done plays, which were propaganda for democracy, propaganda for better housing -

MR. THOMAS: I think you ought to develop that point right there. You said that some plays were propaganda for democracy. What do you mean by that? Propaganda for what forms of democracy and what particular things? Like housing, as you just mentioned?

MRS. FLANAGAN: Yes.

MR. THOMAS: What others?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I would say - shall we go into a discussion of democracy?

MR. THOMAS: No. Just name some of the things that the Federal Theater Project has put out propaganda plays for.

MRS. FLANAGAN: Yes. Well, let us say first, *One Third of a Nation*. In that the definite propaganda was for better housing for American citizens.

MR. THOMAS: What others?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I would say that in general, Mr. Thomas, the Living Newspaper would be propaganda for -

MR. THOMAS: But you are not answering the question. You mentioned housing?

MRS. FLANAGAN: Yes.

MR. THOMAS: How about *Power*?

MRS. FLANAGAN: Yes. I would say that *Power* was propaganda for a better understanding of the derivation and the scientific meaning of power and for its wide use -

MR. THOMAS: Was it for public ownership of power?

MRS. FLANAGAN: - that portrayed as effectively as possible both sides of that controversy, and quoted both sides.

MR. THOMAS: How about this new play, *Medicine*? What is that going to be like? What is that going to be for?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I wish I could answer that question. I am sorry to say that the play is not at the present time ready, and I could not possibly tell you, but I can tell you that it will not be a passionate brief, it will be rather in the nature of a scientific inquiry as to the whole history of medicine. You probably know that many people quarrel with the Living Newspaper because they say that we have gone into the matter too historically.

MR. THOMAS: Will it also be propaganda for the socialism of medicine?

MRS. FLANAGAN: Well, I couldn't tell you that, because the play is not complete, and I have not seen the scenario. I believe that *Prologue to Glory* could be called a propaganda play in its intense emphasis on the distinct value of sturdy American qualities and simple living.

MR. THOMAS: How about *Injunction Granted?*

MRS. FLANAGAN: *Injunction Granted* is propaganda for fair labor relations and for fairness to labor in the courts.

MR. STARNES: In other words, it does teach class consciousness, doesn't it?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I am trying to give you my definition of propaganda and just what it teaches.

MR. STARNES: Yes. Well, that is what this play teaches, isn't it?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I was trying to explain more clearly and more definitely what I mean by propaganda.

MR. STARNES: Yes. But the play *Injunction Granted* was an attack against our present system of courts, wasn't it?

MRS. FLANAGAN: No. I should say that that play was a historical study of the history of labor in the courts.

MR. STARNES: I know, but don't you believe that it does attack the present system of courts?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I do not believe that it fosters class hatred. No, I do not believe so.

MR. STARNES: All right. Now, I want to read from your article "A Theater is Born," on page 908: "Strong he must be, however; for the theater, if it is to be of use to the worker, must be divorced from expensive buildings, stage equipment, painted sets, elaborate costumes and properties, made-up plays; above all, divorced from actors who want to show off or make money. If the theater can throw all these things into the discard it may perhaps become, as it has been at certain great moments of its history, a place where an idea is so ardently enacted that it becomes the belief of actors and audiences alike."

MRS. FLANAGAN: Well, that is a better article than I remember.

MR. STARNES: You subscribe to that? You agree with it?

MRS. FLANAGAN: Read it again. I would like to know whether the gentlemen around this table would not subscribe to it.

MR. STARNES: I can read that again if you would like to have me, but I want to read some other excerpts.

MRS. FLANAGAN: That is all right. Don't read it.

MR. STARNES: I continue to read: "Where are these theaters to exist? According to the pamphlet I am quoting, everywhere."

MRS. FLANAGAN: Notice, please, that I am quoting.

MR. STARNES: I am quoting from you: "If you are a worker in a shop, a factory, or a mine, where struggle for existence makes one day as dark as the next, if you are oppressed by capitalism and want to cry out in protest - organize a dramatic group."

MRS. FLANAGAN: May I interrupt one minute? Please notice that this is a quotation.

MR. STARNES: That is correct, I said so. "Start dramatic groups in unions, in fraternal organizations, in social clubs, in company unions, in YMCAs. Start dramatic groups in the North, South, East, and West. Let dramatic groups dot the land from coast to coast. Don't expect profit in money. These theaters exist to awaken the workers." Now, you wrote that in your article? I mean, you quoted that with approval in your article, did you not?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I did. I quoted it in my article -

MR. STARNES: With approval?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I quoted it because it was a piece of reporting in which I was showing how these theaters came into being, and I was quoting from their own magazine.

MR. STARNES: Yes. You are the protagonist for this new theater. Isn't that correct? Didn't they use some of your plays in this new theater that was being born in America at that time, Mrs. Flanagan?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I don't know ...

MR. THOMAS: Now quite a bit has been said here today about the theater as a weapon. Have you read the script of *Injunction Granted*?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I have, and I saw the production also.

MR. THOMAS: I have here the script of *Injunction Granted*. The last part of the script is all devoted to a criticism of the legislature in the State of New Jersey. It has to do with the Workers' Alliance coming into the halls of the legislature in the State of New Jersey and sitting there and taking over the government. Do you think that that is the proper kind of propaganda to put out through the Federal Theater Project?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I think that that episode was necessary in the development of a study of labor in litigation.

MR. THOMAS: This latter part has nothing to do with labor in litigation. It has to do with the Workers' Alliance's criticism of the state legislature.

MRS. FLANAGAN: It was headline news of that period which had a direct relevance to the theater. You see, in the Living Newspaper, everything is factual. The records from which any Living Newspaper is taken are always open to all of you and to anyone. And I think it is rather a remarkable fact, gentlemen, that in the three years of the existence of the Living Newspaper, not one allegation has been made that the news were untrue. Nobody has ever proved that we have ever misquoted.

MR. THOMAS: I want to read a few lines from this play. The first man on the dais, who is a member of the Workers' Alliance, says this, *(Putting up his hand for silence)*: "'Brothers, we of the Workers' Alliance, a relief organization, have taken over this house to protest against the inaction of our elected legislators.'" I happened to be a member of that legislature at that time, and I happen to know that there was nothing in the way of inaction at that time.

MRS. FLANAGAN: I beg your pardon, but that was a quotation.

MR. THOMAS: A quotation, yes, from one of the members of the Workers' Alliance who were sitting in our seats in the legislature.

MRS. FLANAGAN: From a newspaper.

MR. THOMAS: Here is another line: "We consider the Workers' Alliance a responsible labor organization, and as such we have been reorganized by the American Federation of Labor. The cause of demonstrations such as these is not agitation, but rather the continuance of six years of mass unemployment." Now certain members of the state legislature at that time offered jobs to different members of the Workers' Alliance who were sitting in the house at Trenton, and those jobs were not accepted.

MRS. FLANAGAN: May I break in there to say that if you had written to us at that time and given us that material over your signature, we would have tried to get that into the play. We have done that many times, gentlemen, for members of Congress.

MR. THOMAS: Do you know about all the plays that are put out by the Federal Theater Project?

MRS. FLANAGAN: No. But we are doing, in the eyes of expert historians, a very good critical job.

MR. THOMAS: But how can I select anything out of any of these plays and make a suggestion to you unless it has been called to my attention by somebody?

MRS. FLANAGAN: You quoted something you would like to have seen in there, and I say that it might have been in there, if you had called it to our attention.

MR. THOMAS: Again I quote: "Mimics the compass of the legislature." "Sister Speaker, fellow representatives, and the great American public outside. Things have come to a hell of a pass. We have been dilly-dallying," and so on. Spain - this man Spain, as I understand it, was one of the heads of the Workers' Alliance, and is still one of the heads of the Workers' Alliance. He says in the last two or three pages, Spain says: "Motion carried. Well, this is only our first day, but we have done just as much as the legislature did in three months, which seems practically nothing. (*Laughter and applause as Powell committee returns.*) Hello, Powell. What does the Government have to say?" Now, that is in this play *Injunction Granted*. Do you, as the Director of the Federal Theater Project, think that that is the right kind of propaganda to put out against the government of a particular state, against the legislators who were elected by the people of that particular state?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I think that the scene was taken from newspaper reports -

MR. THOMAS: I want an answer to my question.

MRS. FLANAGAN: I do. I think that plays dealing with real problems facing all of us as Americans today may be one phase of the work that the Federal Theater should do. Remember that on the children's plays, religious plays, and musical plays -

MR. THOMAS: I want an answer to my question specifically, and I want to say that representatives of the Federal Theater Project and the Art Project who have come before this Committee - and this is my personal opinion - have evaded question after question. Now I want to find out, Mrs. Flanagan, whether you, as National Director of the Federal Theater Project, think that is proper for the Federal Theater Project, an agency of the Federal Government, to put out this kind of propaganda against the elected legislators of a particular state.

MRS. FLANAGAN: It is not propaganda against the elected legislators.

MR. THOMAS: You said it was propaganda, originally.

MRS. FLANAGAN: I said it was propaganda for fair labor relations, and I must insist that I think that that is one thing that the Federal Theater should do.

MR. THOMAS: What has that play to do with labor relations? It has to do with the question of the relations between the state legislature and the Workers' Alliance, who said at that time that they were working in behalf of unemployment.

MRS. FLANAGAN: It was all information from the daily papers. It was intended to prove that during the time when there was this mass need and this mass unemployment, their people were not getting sufficient help from their legislative bodies. It was taken from the daily papers bearing on that point.

MR. THOMAS: Then you will admit that we should use the Federal Theater Project, through their plays, to encourage mass movements? That is practically what you just said. Do you admit it or don't you?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I think that the Living Newspaper, which I have discussed fully and would like to discuss more, may be one phase of proper activity for any theater.

MR. THOMAS: But you don't answer the question.

MRS. FLANAGAN: Yes, I am answering it.

MR. THOMAS: Do you admit or don't you admit it?

MRS. FLANAGAN: I do think it is a proper use of Government funds.