

OFF THE RECORD

By Dwight Macdonald

The trouble with lying is that, as Gainsborough remarked of Mrs. Siddon's nose, there's no end to it. What begins as a simple, unassuming frame-up is likely to end up by requiring a wholesale revision of history and art. Having successfully used the Moscow trials to destroy all potential leaders of an opposition, the Kremlin now finds itself committed to the extraordinary thesis that all the great leaders of 1917, except Lenin and Stalin, were even traitors and spies. This campaign of falsification, probably the most ambitious in all history, has corrupted every sphere of Soviet life. The cinema, above all has been pressed into service to document the trials in celluloid. A year ago the first of such films, *Lenin in October*, arrived over here. And now two more are being shown in the little cinemas: *Ermier's The Great Citizen* and Yutkevitch's *The Man With the Gun*. These are two of the leading directors in the so-called "Stalin School" which has come to dominate the Soviet cinema in recent years. In 1932 they worked together on *Counterplan*, a monumentally dull and now forgotten film which was the first major effort to introduce "Socialist Realism" into the cinema. There is no point in analyzing their films from a cinematic point of view: there is nothing in either of them that will get their creators into trouble with the authorities, which is to say they are the tamest, flattest, most banal sort of Hollywood realism. But they are more interesting from a political standpoint.

Down with Tractors!
Ermier's film shows us the struggle of "The Great Citizen"—evidently intended to be Kirov—against a sinister clique of saboteurs, evidently meant to represent the Bukharinist right-wing opposition to the first Five Year Plan. The plots and counterplots revolve around what would seem to be a simple enough question: whether it was desirable that the level of production should be raised. The *Great Citizen* takes a firm stand for industrialization, and also comes out strongly in favor of more tractors. The Bukharinists, motivated by that paranoiac malignancy which seems to afflict the opponents of Stalin, try to persuade the workers that tractors are evil and industrialization a curse. It is never made clear why they take this position, nor, for that matter, why they are willing to gamble, and as it chances to lose, their high governmental posts in this campaign for a lower productive level. It seems to be a matter of art for art's sake.

Everything comes to a head in a mass meeting, at which the Bukharinists are sandbagged with everything from mother love to the theory of socialism in one country, and are finally driven from the platform in deep and well-merited disgrace. After that, there is only one course left. The film ends with their first meeting with the emissary of an unnamed foreign power. As they plot, loud bursts of band music come in the windows from a passing demonstration of workers (who are celebrating the birth of a tractor), drowning out their talk. This is supposed to symbolize the ultimate triumph of the healthy masses. But I could not but remember that this music, the cheapest sort of Sousa brass band stuff, was advertised as by Dimitri Shostakovich, the once-brilliant young composer who was admonished by Stalin several years ago to "write tunes the workers can whistle." And the offstage

music seemed to be a symbol, in its noisy triviality, of something else again.

Those Men Are Here Again
In Yutkevitch's *The Man With the Gun* we see once more those twin demigods, Lenin and Stalin, pulling off the 1917 revolution practically single-handed. Their first appearance was in *Lenin in October*. Here once more, they steer the revolution to safe harbor in the teeth of treacherous opposition from their closest collaborators. "Never mind Zinoviev and Kamenev," Lenin tells Stalin on the phone. "They are fleas which will always irritate us." (He fails to explain why he didn't crush these "fleas" then and there.) He takes Trotsky more seriously, however. "Keep a close watch on Trotsky!" he counsels Stalin. But later on it appears that Trotsky has escaped from his keepers long enough to see to it that the wrong calibre shells are sent to a crucial sector of the battle front. When the news is brought to Lenin, he makes it clear that he suspects the fine Italian hand of the commander-in-chief of his army. Stalin bustles off to repair the damage at once.

By now such films have worked out a formula for portraying Lenin. On the one hand, he is shown as a simple, homey sort of old fellow—in the memorable phrase of Robert Forsythe in the *New Masses*: "A man who might easily have played third base for the Brooklyn Dodgers." He is constantly slapping people (usually Stalin) on the back, sharing their joys and sorrows, munching apples or cold boiled potatoes in democratic fashion, and otherwise demonstrating that he's a regular fellow. But this unprepossessing old gentleman has the most extraordinary effect on all who come into contact with him. Their awe and reverence approaches the mystical; their faith in him is the complete, touching faith of little children. When the simple soldier who is the hero of *The Man With the Gun* learns that he has been talking, quite unsuspecting, to Lenin, he rushes back to his comrades, assembles them around him and stammers out, "I have just talked to . . . LENIN!" Quick fadeout on his crazed, ecstatic face. Later on, he persuades a whole company of enemy soldiers to join the Reds simply by telling them he has talked to Lenin and that Lenin is O.K. and has their interests at heart. Thus on the one hand, Lenin is made human, all too human—to the point of vulgarization; and on the other, he is elevated to a living ikon, a leader whose mere presence, whose very name indeed, has magical powers. Both sides of the contradiction serve well the interests of the Kremlin today.

Uncomfortable Posts
I don't envy the actors who have to play "Lenin" and "Stalin" in these tableaux. In this film, both parts are taken by different performers from those who played *Lenin in October*. This Lenin is Comrade Shtraukh (Honored Artist of the Republic), and he has evidently taken to heart Krupskaya's criticism of his predecessor's ever-expansive gesturing. He seems none too easy in his part. Nor does Comrade Gelovani, who plays Stalin, seem to be having a good time. These are posts uncomfortably close to the lightning. What has happened, to Comrade Gelovani's predecessor I do not know, but the *Times* recently reported that Comrade Schushkin, who played "Lenin" in the earlier film, has been placed under arrest. Perhaps he took a Leninist line off as well as on the stage.

MEN AND WOMEN OF LABOR

Out of the Past

By EMANUEL GARRETT

AUGUST BEBEL

Feb. 22, 1840—Aug. 13, 1913
There was a time, and not so long ago, when the name of August Bebel was among the best-known of the international socialist movement. Today, time, the sweep of tremendous events since his death, and above all the degeneration of the party which he helped create and build, have contributed to the shrouding of his one-time prominence in the gallery of socialist giants.

Bebel was the rather unusual leader, especially for the pre-war days—a proletarian who without formal education, but with intensive reading and study added to a brilliant capacity, became one of the first-rank leaders of German socialism, "the father of the Social Democratic Party."

Guided Workers' First Strides in Organization
He was not a creative theorist, and his main and lasting contributions to socialism lie not in his books and tracts ("Women and Socialism," etc.). They lie in the magnificent ability which stirred the German proletariat to organization—in trade unions, and above all in a party which expressed their social hopes.

The first gigantic strides towards mobilizing the workers of Germany to express in political activity the interests of their own class were guided by Bebel. By Bebel who began his adult life as a journeyman, turner, working in Leipzig, and who remained the worker, acutely conscious of the needs of his class; so that, where other, and later, leaders of the German socialist movement sought to dilute the stream of socialism with class-collaboration, he, the "simple" worker remained steadfast.

While already an active and leading figure in the German working-class movements (the Worker's Improvement Society, the Congress of Workmen's Societies, the Association of German Workers, of which he was president), which were then only beginning to feel their way, to spread, Bebel studied the doctrines of socialism, the works of Marx. Sometime about 1865 he met Wilhelm Liebknecht, father of our great martyr, Karl. Well on the road towards socialism he was further influenced by his contact with the elder Liebknecht. Together they founded the German Social Democratic Party in 1869.

bune of the Reichstag that some of his most inspiring speeches were delivered. A forthright representative of the workers he revised the in-betweeners, the "Swamp"—"the 'Wise Guys' who always prick up their ears as if to say 'which way is the wind blowing now?'"

It was on this tribune that he rose on May 25, of which was being celebrated by bourgeois Germany:

"Even though Paris may now have been put down, I must tell you that the struggle in Paris is only a small outpost skirmish, that the main affair in Europe is still ahead of us, and that before a few decades have passed the battle cry of the Paris proletariat: 'War on the palaces, peace to the cottages, death to poverty and idleness!' will become the battle cry of the entire European proletariat."

Bismarck who heard the speech, called it the "ray of light" which showed him that socialism was an enemy to be crushed. He eventually saw to it that Bebel was incarcerated for two years for "high treason," and nine months for "lese majeste."

Workers Flocked to Hear Him Speak
Bebel's two outstanding abilities were as organizer and as orator. When Bebel spoke, there was a packed auditorium—of workers come to hear his relentless denunciations of Junker tyranny, his impassioned words. There was even an occasion when, the auditorium packed beyond roof so that they might hear him. The splendid vigor, the surge of his speeches did more than attract listeners—they were the eloquent instruments for proletarian organization.

The span of his life encompassed the first and feeble beginnings of the world's workers toward international organization (the First International) and the lusty, self-confident strides into mass organization (the Social Democratic party, the Second International). Under his guidance, the socialist movement grew, workers learned the importance and strength of organization.

Bebel did not live to see the organization he had created yield its life into the hands of German imperialism. He, whose proletarian firmness, whose hatred of German militarism stood out, did not live to deny and condemn the social-patriotic calumny which impudently sought to justify its own vile course by an appeal to his name. The Second International, one might say, died when he died. A whole period in the development of international socialism was at an end.

PRESIDENT AZANA AND NEGRIN SEEK JOINT BETRAYAL

Would Trade Spain For Personal Safety

(Continued from Page 1)
Irate comments in the Italian press testified to the progress made by the Anglo-French bloc in wooing Franco away from Mussolini and Hitler. Anglo-French offers of big loans, which the Italo-German bloc are unable to duplicate, are irritably referred to, and the uneasiness which the fascist powers feel in the face of these moves of the democracies is clearly apparent.

Democracies Sought This End
Thus the "great democracies" are seeking to achieve the objective they set for themselves when the civil war broke out: to prevent a victory of the Spanish masses over the fascists resulting in a Socialist Spain, while assuring Anglo-French spheres of influence in a "safe" Spain.

That the British had a definite understanding with Franco was apparent as early as July, 1937, when Bilbao was surrendered by the Basque bourgeoisie without a fight, and Franco entered into an amicable arrangement for joint exploitation with Britain of the mineral resources of the area.

The main problem the Anglo-French bloc faced was, not in preventing Loyalist Spain from embarking on an effective war against Franco. The Anglo-French feared, above all, that if the Spanish workers and peasants took over the direction of the war, they would decree independence for Morocco, thereby instigating revolts behind Franco's lines which would spread through the African colonies, and would rouse the Spanish peasantry on both sides by decreeing that the land was to belong to the peasantry.

Stalin Served Chamberlain
How prevent the masses from pursuing this obvious course? The Popular Front, inspired by the Stalinists, provided the way. Stalin was seeking an alliance with "the democracies"; let him demonstrate his usefulness by strangling the Spanish revolution. He did so. In the name of securing the good-will of the "great democracies," the masses were exhorted by the Stalinists to refrain from revolutionary methods. Over and over again, throughout the civil war, every proposal to conduct the war in a revolutionary way was frustrated on the basis that the favor of England and France must be courted.

The Stalinists, backed by the "liberal" bourgeoisie and the Socialist and Anarchist leadership, went to any lengths to curb the workers and peasants. Thousands of revolutionists were executed or imprisoned, their "collectivized" factories and farms returned to private ownership.

All this, to the end that the "great democracies" can now buy off Franco from his Italo-German backers.

CARDENAS GOVT. CONDEMNS LAND OF U. S. OWNERS

Sugar Holdings Are Expropriated In Mexico

MEXICO CITY, Feb. 14—Effective today, approximately 50,000 acres of sugar lands were expropriated by the Cardenas government in a decree made public in *The Official Gazette* this morning.

The lands had been held until today principally by the United States Sugar Co., an imperialist outfit whose stockholders reside in the United States. The company is notorious for its anti-labor policy and for the high profits it has wrung from its holdings in Latin America.

Land to Exploited
The expropriating decree charged the company specifically with maintaining unsatisfactory living conditions for its employees, with paying inadequate wages, and with maintaining an absolute lack of sanitary facilities.

Between 2,500 and 4,000 persons were being exploited by the imperialist concern at the time of the expropriation. The land will be divided for their benefit.

Secretary Hull, representing the interests of the American stockholders, asserted that the commission set up last November for adjustment and compensation of expropriated agricultural lands, would consider this new expropriation with the hope of obtaining compensation for the former American holders.

Preliminary steps for the expropriation began three years ago and were completed December 9,

Refugee Committee Decides To Abandon All Its Efforts

The Inter-governmental Committee on Refugees, after weeks of parleying in Berlin and London, wound up last Monday by deciding that the work of handling emigration of Jewish refugees from Germany was "beyond its scope."

Just what took place at the committee's secret sessions is unknown, the press being informed only that "one or two members of the committee had unexpectedly expressed reluctance to incur any financial responsibility."

Even a plea of leading British Jews for the committee's endorsement of a private corporation to facilitate emigration was not acceded to, the committee merely "faking cognizance" of the plans for the corporation. With most of the money coming from private citizens, the corporation is expected to be capitalized at \$100,000,000.

British Officials Prepare To Dash Zionist Hopes

A well-nigh fatal blow at Zionist hopes in Palestine is about to be struck by the British government, it was indicated by developments this week at the London conference of British officials with Arab and Zionist delegations.

Malcolm MacDonald, British spokesman, informed the Zionist delegation that preparations for the coming war necessitated substantial concessions to the 16,000,000 Arabs in Palestine and the neighboring Arab states, whose leaders are demanding an end to Jewish immigration into Palestine and a ban on further land sales to the Jews.

That concessions would be made was plainly indicated on Tuesday, when Prime Minister Chamberlain informed Parliament that he had agreed to the Arab delegation's request for the publication of the documents relating to the 1915 negotiations between Sir Henry McMahon and Sherif Hussein of Mecca, in which, the Arab claim, Britain pledged recognition of all Arab areas as independent nations in return for Arab support in the war.

Typical British Hypocrisy
For 20 years the Arabs have vainly endeavored to get the British government to publish the McMahon documents. But Britain's war promises to the Arabs were in direct conflict with the equally deceitful promises made to the Jews in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, and Britain's rulership of Palestine was formalized based on a Mandate issued in 1922 by the League of Nations, delegating Britain to "secure the establishment of the Jewish National Home." Fearful of Arab demands for independence, Britain justified her occupation of Palestine on the Mandate, and refused to publish the McMahon documents.

Now, however, the Arab nationalist movement, ever more turbulent, has forced imperial Britain to seek a compromise with the Arab landowners and capitalists who lead the movement. The compromise is to be arranged in accordance with the usual British combination of imperialist realism and moral hypocrisy. Chamberlain will now "discover" the juridical validity of the Arab claims as exemplified by McMahon's promises, and will render justice with Olympian "impartiality."

There is stark tragedy in the plight of the "Yishub," the 400,000 Jews in Palestine. Fleeing from persecution, they came to their "homeland," more than willing to work with their hands in field and factory. Their labors are embodied in fertile gardens wrested from the desert and in the most modern factories of the Near East.

Zionism in Blind Alley
But while they labored, they surrendered political direction of their course to the Zionist leadership which, whether of the bourgeois Chaim Weizmann or the "Socialist-Zionist" strip of Ben-Gurion, sought to assure itself permanence in Palestine by currying favor with British imperialism instead of establishing an alliance with the Arab workers and peasants.

British Recruiting Sergeants
The logical culmination of this road came when the Zionist delegation in London last Monday offered to provide a Jewish army to help Britain in event of another world war! They pledged that

Pity the Companies!
AKRON, Feb. 14—Profits for 1938 were the best for the last ten years, reported the Mohawk Rubber Company when it filed its report today. Net earnings were \$273,230 or \$2.07 for each share of common stock.

This was almost 19 times the earnings for 1937.

OLD GUARD - S. P. UNITY PUSHED BY READING SCHEME

Groups Ask National Office for Single Charter

(Special to the Socialist Appeal)
READING.—What is undoubtedly the first step of the formal National unification of the Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Federation has taken place in Berks County. Sixty S.D.F. leaders and 28 S.P. leaders will jointly petition the N.E.C. of the S.P. for a charter. Negotiations have been under way for more than four months with the approval of the N.E.C. of both the S.P. and S.D.F. The Executive Committee of Local Berks S.D.F. has given its approval of the unity move.

If the charter is granted a more general unification will be attempted at a state-wide conference to be called early next summer. The S.D.F. group will retain dual membership in the S.D.F. until the conference at least.

Instigators of the move include the S.D.F. leaders Mayor J. Henry Stump, James A. Maurer, "War Horse of Socialism," Raymond F. Hofess, editor of the "Reading Labor Advocate," and George Rhoades, President of the Federated Trades Council (A.F.L.).

The S.P. is led by Mark Brown, erstwhile radical, and member of the N.E.C. of the S.P. youth.

A Planned Move
Although the S.D.F. members are technically acting only as individuals, the fact that the action followed negotiations of over four months, involving consultations between local and national S.D.F. leaders; conferences attended by Paul Porter, Arthur McDowell and Roy Burt and local leaders of the S.D.F. and S.P.; a volume of correspondence between both groups, indicates that the move was planned by national leaders as a means toward hastening further state and national unifications. The hand of the extreme right wing of the S.P. is immensely strengthened by this move.

Spokesmen for the S.D.F. state that the political differences which caused the split have been largely removed as a result of the changes in policy of the S.P. Your correspondent knew that something big was in the offing by a conversation with Mark Brown, S.P. leader. But it was only until the capitalist press carried the news that the facts were made known.

'Leftists' Not Affected
A group of "leftists" led by former Councilman Charles Sands and Ralph Bigony is not affected by the move. They opposed the unification moves from the start. However, their opposition to the action is based purely on personal consideration and hate and does not constitute a progressive factor.

About six months ago a break between the Bigony group and the Brown group occurred as the final result of a bitter factional fight which began several months after the August 1936 split with the Old Guard. At the time of the Nov. 1938 elections Local Berks of the S.P. was suspended as a result of the refusal of the Bigonites to support the S.D.F. candidates at the polls as ordered by the State Committee of the S.P. The organization was ordered into a state of reorganization. The present action is the product of the process of reorganization. The Bigony group has no further basis or purpose for existence. Many of its members will go into the Democratic party.

So confident are the local S.D.F. leaders of unity that they are already making plans to bring Norman Thomas to speak at Socialist Park next summer.

Seeing the Plays

THE AMERICAN WAY, by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, with Fredric March and Florence Eldridge, staged by Mr. Kaufman and presented at the Kauter Theatre.

Messrs. George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart have written and staged a star-spangled cavalcade of America. It is, in every sense, a spectacle, staggering in its size, in its talents, in the amount of money that has been poured into it. It is housed in no less a playhouse than in the colossal Center Theatre built by the Rockefellers. With the strange exception of Robert Benchley, the critics have given "The American Way" a unanimous and, in the case of some, a wild and eulogistic endorsement.

Immigrant to Industrialist
"The American Way," is the "way" of the immigrant entrepreneur who comes to the land of the free and the home of the brave and through honest individual effort rises to become a benevolent industrialist, thankful for the inalienable freedom one enjoys on these shores. So thankful, indeed, is our immigrant boy who made good that he (Fredric March) makes a personal appearance at a rally of Nazis to denounce "the pirate flag that flies over Germany" and is mercilessly beaten to death by the uniformed brownshirts. Moral: The Democratic forces of every color, creed, race and nationality will average him, all roads from now on leading to Berlin.

Appropriately enough, the play ends with singing of the national anthem, the audience joining the actors.

No Mention of Labor
Here is a history of democracy and progress during the last four decades without so much as a word or whisper of labor's struggle for unionism let alone its struggle for emancipation from capitalism.

What makes their silence on labor even more remarkable is that Kaufman and Hart pretend to be anti-fascist; presumably they are unaware of the role of labor in the struggle against fascism!

There is a scene depicting the Liberty Loan campaigns during the war. One is overtaken with horror at the sum effect of the spirit which it so completely recaptures. What bloody insanity! Who could ever again want to experience such fanatical days! And then there appears a mother dressed in mourning watching the soldiers return, while her husband reassures her that their son died that democracy might live on.

No Longer the Satirist
One remembers the same Kaufman writing his satire of the American way as he knew it to be in 1932. One remembers his "Of Thee I Sing" which dealt such pokes at the America of seven years ago. But that was 1932. Satire was then an easy luxury and the halcyon days of the middle Twenties were still fresh in their minds, if indeed it wasn't just around the corner again. But it is now a long way since 1932. Satire in these troubled times is in strictly bad taste. There are more serious things to occupy the bright boys of the theatre. By god, the blighters must be stopped, by war if by anything.

A Manifesto for War
In short, Kaufman and Hart have written a manifesto declaring for a democratic war against fascism and a prayer that all good Americans will see their way clear to fighting it out for Rockefeller and Standard Oil.

—Nat Levine

lands: the development of Guam as "a strong advanced fleet base" will fundamentally alter the Pacific picture, "and we will enter upon a struggle with Japan for predominance in the Western Pacific. Our influence in the Pacific already secure in the East and made even more so by the other base developments now projected, we will be pushing further westward; the idea of 'Hemispherical defense' will have to be modified, a new, more far reaching formula for 'defense,' and a new phase of foreign policy initiated. And above all we shall have definitely committed ourselves to the Orient and its problems." (Feb. 12.) Which is by way of indicating that "we" are already sufficiently committed—by investments, by loans made for diplomatic purposes, etc.

On the Way to the Trenches

Within a few months the United States will have in various countries of Latin America twenty-nine army officers, including the air force, in addition to naval attaches and missions already there. These men will in many cases direct or assist in the military colleges of the republics. Their purpose will be to "offset the attempts by totalitarian states to penetrate Latin America." N. Y. Times, Feb. 15)—i.e., their purpose will be to prepare intercession in Latin America for protection of Yankee business interests. This is in line, says the Times, with the policies adopted at Lima.

Indications that "war may come in Europe at an early date" were the chief reasons advanced by the House Military Affairs Commission for presenting a bill authorizing the increase in the air corps from 4,000 (already voted) to 5,500 serviceable planes. \$300,000,000 would be spent for this purpose—exclusive of the money needed to train an augmented air force.

\$32,500,000 is asked for "educational orders" to familiarize industrial plants with the duties they will have to perform in war time.

Two mighty fleets, composed of 140 warships, are now in Caribbean waters for a three weeks battle to test Panama Canal defenses.

The N. Y. Times has this to say about the plan to fortify Guam which lies in the midst of 1,400 Japanese mandated is-

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