

No. 2

JANUARY, 1932

One Penny

# Our Theatre Awakens the Masses

HE whole world is approaching a crisis which is without a parallel in human history. Literally tens of millions of people—in the most "advanced" countries of the world—are living on the edge of starvation, without a future, without hope, while the present system lasts. And around them the warehouses are packed with food. Wheat and other foodstuffs are being burnt for fuel, and the factories which could clothe and house the waiting workers stand idle.

And what has the theatre, the most social of the arts, whose history reaches back to the primitive organization of production by means of ritual performances, and has reflected the lives of people for countless generations, to say on this world-shaking crisis?

The answer can be given in one word—"Nothing." You can search in vain in the contemporary theatre, and its recent offspring, the cinema, for any reflection of the realities of life to-day as the millions of ordinary people know them. While on the streets, and in their homes, the crisis and its effects are the great topics of conversation, in the theatre nothing is heard of it. There are very good reasons for this. To the capitalist controllers of the theatre, as to their more illustrious leaders, the politicians and bankers, the crisis is absolutely incomprehensible, a disaster caused by some forces of nature hitherto unknown.

To even admit in the theatre or cinema the existence of the crisis would require some solution of it to be shown. And this is beyond the wit of capitalist society to invent. So ostrich-like they annihilate the crisis by refusing to recognize it, and, on the other hand, redouble their efforts to take its victims' minds off their troubles by dealing with anything except the realities of the present time.

It was true in Russia, as the Kremlin wall proclaimed, that "Religion is the opiate of the masses." Here in England the queues are not outside the churches—but the theatres and cinemas; and it must



The Red Star Troupe in Action

be realized that with all its implications, capitalist amusement is the opiate of the people in this country. It was no happy coincidence, to take an example, that the sharpening of the crisis in America was accompanied by a spate of songs in the vein of "Keep Your Sunny Side Up," "There's a Good Time Coming," etc.

It is necessary to emphasize the present position as well as the rôle of the bourgeois theatre and cinema

(continued on back page.)

# GETTING DOWN TO IT

# HOW TO ORGANIZE A

S the Workers' Theatre Movement continues to develop with unusual rapidity, it becomes increasingly difficult for the centre to give personal assistance to new groups. In many cases interested comrades get to the point of talking things over in a locality, but are afraid to make a start through inexperience.

Forming a new group is quite a simple matter, if a few principles are adhered to. It is not necessary to obtain a large number of members; one London group has been working successfully for a long period with three only; but six or seven comrades form a better number. The first principle is proper organization. This means definite evenings for rehearsals (two or three a week), and at least one meeting a week to discuss new material, forthcoming shows and the general work of the group. A secretary should be elected who will keep in touch with other organizations, book the shows, obtain material, etc. Also a treasurer is necessary. A good group easily pays its own way. It is not usual to charge a fee to the N.U.W.M. and such organizations, but co-op. guilds, organizers of socials, etc., are usually willing to pay a small fee in addition to covering expenses. Local subscriptions are arranged according to local requirements, the only contribution to the national organization being one penny per month per member.

The importance of regular, fully-attended rehearsals cannot be over-stressed, these pave the way to efficient technique. A capable comrade should be appointed producer, and strict discipline is the rule at rehearsals.

Most troupes have a uniform of their own, usually blue dungarees bearing the troupe badge, with a distinctive coloured shirt. This is suitable for both men and women comrades. Copies of sketches, of course, are obtained from the centre (see directory), but a group working effectively round local questions soon commences to produce its own material. All material is read by the central Readers' Committee, and if considered suitable, is passed for duplication for all groups.

It should be mentioned that the W.T.M. is an independent organization (of which the British section is one part of the International Workers' Theatre), which is gaining power in all countries as one very effective weapon in the class struggle. Inquiries from comrades who require advice in forming new groups will be welcomed by the national organizer.

C. B. M.

## NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIAD

We are taking the step of planning for a first National Conference of Workers' Theatre Groups at Easter next, in order to consolidate our forces and to hammer out a general plan and basis of work. The

Red Stage," already twice the size and greatly improved will go on growing by the efforts of all our groups in selling it. And finally we are determined that at the International Olympiad of Workers' Theatres which will take place in Moscow next August, the Workers' Theatre Groups of England will be well represented. This will be the biggest job of the lot to raise the necessary fares—but it will be done.

These are the basis and tasks of the WORKERS' THEATRE MOVEMENT, and all workers who think the job is worth doing and can help in any way—however small—are urged to join us.

# OLD STAGER WANTS TO KNOW

What the "boys" said when the Red Players rolled up to a show in a Rolls-Royce?

Whether the garage proprietor—a posh old boy who drove them up owing to their own car (lent for the occasion!) meeting something on the way—really fainted when he heard they were Reds?

Whether Red Radio's show in a certain suburb was really sponsored by a Salvation Army lass?

And what she thought of the show?

What a certain group thought of the kids in Stepney, and their ability in aiming over-ripe fruit?

Whether the policemen who, using their belts effectively, drove them off (the kids), and enjoyed the show, will book their group for the next police social?

Whether a certain Red Spark from West London enjoyed slapping the bobby's face on the embankment, following a fracas?

And what she thinks of the cells at Bow Street?

### OYEZ! Piccadilly Circus

THE RED FRONT TROUPE ARE GIVING A JOLLY PARTY AT 12 ARCHER STREET (BEHIND LYRIC THEATRE) AT 7.30 p.m.

On MONDAY, January 4th, 1932
ARTISTS, TROUPERS AND FRIENDS
INVITED TO THE PARTY

DANCING LIGHT REFRESHMENTS

Tickets 1/-

From W.T.M., 16 BUCKLEIGH ROAD, S.W.16

# A SOCIALIST CONTRACT



The Revolution achieved, these members of a Russian troupe are concentrating on depicting the Five Year Plan.

Our task is of a different nature in this country.

N July 2nd of this year in Moscow, the English member of the Presidium of the INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' THEATRE UNION, Comrade Tom Thomas, signed a contract on behalf of the W.T.M., which has since been adopted and ratified by the Central Committee. In it the W.T.M. pledged itself to fulfil within a year certain tasks; and the other Party to the contract, the North Caucasian Federation of TRAM similarly pledged itself through its representative, Boris Fatelevitch, to certain other tasks.

First of all, what is TRAM? It is the large and powerful organization of Young Workers' Theatres which has branches in every part of the Soviet Union. (TRAM is made up of the initials of "Theatre of Young Workers"—Teatr Rabochi Malodyosh.) This organization which is closely connected with the Komsomol (Y.C.L.) sets out to organize and encourage young workers to themselves take part in theatre work, believing that this has for young workers very important educational and political results.

Most of the eighty TRAM theatres are staffed by groups of young worker actors and technicians, who are employed in factories during the day and give their spare time voluntarily and enthusiastically to this work. In some cases, however, there is such a demand for their services, that they find it impossible to cope with them and at the same time continue regular factory work. In these cases they become professional in the sense that they are paid by their

theatres instead of their factories, but certainly not in the English sense of adopting an aloof attitude of superiority over the masses and developing a "culchared" accent!

This, then, is the organization with which the British W.T.M. has entered into a contract of Socialist competition (or better—emulation). Our side of the contract runs:—

- 1. To expose, by means of artistic performances, the impending attack of the imperialists on the USSR
- To show to the workers of Britain the successes of the workers of U.S.S.R. in their struggles for Socialism.
- 3. To assist the revolutionary organizations in Britain to expose the treachery of the Labour Party and I.L.P.
- 4. To convey to the mine-workers of Britain the challenge of the mine-workers of North Caucasus for Socialist emulation.
- 5. To introduce the principles of TRAM to the Workers' Theatre Groups of England.
- 6. To raise the number of groups in Britain to fifty. The Central Committee of the W.T.M. in accepting this challenge realized that only by the co-operation of all groups could we hope to fulfil it. The first step to this co-operation is a discussion in every group as to what it can do to help in the contract.

Some groups in London have already set themselves tasks to perform. For example, the Red

(continued on page 7.)

below our results for



### ERYWHERE

bers, three of whom are women.

Group Reports

All Groups are invited to NE in the "Red Stage." Every-body is interested to know

FROM Red Front Troupe, We give their activities for publication MANCHESTER, LONDON, SCOTLAND

November. We have 11 members, five of whom are unemployed, one looks likely to drop out, and one having got an unemployed troupe together, finds most of his time now occupied by other N.U.W.M. organizing duties. We have thus nine effective mem-

South London.

what other groups are doing, and in this way we can present a picture of the development and practical work of the movement all over the country. See that your report is in for the next issue! Close for Press 10th of preceding month.

### LONDON

In accordance with the chang-Red Star Troupe, ing and developing situation West London. working confronting the

class, the Red Star Troupe has changed its tactics. A series of political discussions has shown us the necessity for leading the workers' struggles in each locality by dealing with the issues which are a lifeand-death matter of every day. We have commenced work on a series of new sketches, designed to answer the questions which are generally painfully unanswered—such questions as: "How can we get the housewives into our meetings?" and "Of what use is the Borough Council to the workers?" to mention only two of the important ones. We advise all provincial troupes to follow our example and dramatize the local questions. We are rehearsing solidly until we have an entirely new evening's programme.

South London. When the revolutionary contract with the Rostov TRAM was Red Players, announced, the Red Players

undertook to do their share by establishing at least five groups in their area of operations. Already we have been instrumental in the formation of three new groups: Croydon, Woolwich and Camberwell.

We have been working for months with three members only, and it has just been decided to temporarily amalgamate the Croydon group with the Red Players for more effective working. We issue a challenge to all groups, in that we will account for the formation of more new troupes than any other group during the period of the contract.

Our group is healthier than ever, and we are this week putting three new sketches into rehearsal. Technique has been developed excellently, and we feel confident of carrying off successfully our big programme of shows ahead, including three all-night full W.T.M. shows in Croydon, Lewisham, and Woolwich (joint show with Woolwich troupe).

(1) Paid up to Central Committee—100% (11), paid up to troupe—63% (7). (2) Shows given, five (one outdoor by unemployed). (3) "Red Stages" sold—9 dozen. (4) Song sheets sold—15 dozen. (5) Members of troupe brought into Party—1. (6) Recruiting for Party at meetings where we showed: Greenwich, 120; Wandsworth, 22; Battersea (2) shows), 76; total 218. (7) Troupes founded: Unemployed section of our own troupe; new troupe in Battersea. (8) Sketches written and accepted—1; song written-1.

(The Red Front Troupe, Streatham, is in revolutionary competition with the Red Front Troupe, Dundee, so far we have not heard from Dundee.-

### PROVINCES

Our first performance of "Meerut" Manchester. was given with prison bars at a "League Against Imperialism" meeting at Caxton Hall, Salford. Wm. Paul and Gen. Secretary Bridgman were the speakers. The sketch was very effective, and several new members of the L.A.I. were made. The mother of Hutchinson, one of the English Meerut prisoners, was in the audience, and pinned on one of the player's overalls a badge she had received that day from Meerut.

A full evening's programme was presented at the Clarion Clubhouse, Handforth, Cheshire, on November 29th, to a packed club. This clubhouse runs its own dramatic society, whose propaganda has never gone beyond Shaw, Galsworthy and Miles Malleson, and our simple direct message in humorous and serious form made a deep impression. We tried out a home-made operetta full of satire and wellknown tunes. This went down very well, and is a good change to the slogan calls of some of our regular items. About 80 "Red Stages" and song sheets were sold.

(continued on next page.),

# What the Groups are doing

### MORE REPORTS FROM SCOTLAND & PROVINCES

Two days later we travelled to Rochdale to help the Y.C.L. form a branch of the W.T.M. We gave several items at a social, and urged them to their new task. Good luck, Rochdale, we hope you will form yourself into a strong link in the chain of Workers' Theatre attack.

Our next big event is on December 13th, in the biggest hall in Rochdale. Prof. Mirski is down to speak on the Five-Year Plan.

Greenock. In addition to our choir and soloists, we have our own orchestra, consisting of experienced musicians who render really effective W.T.M. band performances.

On the 1st and 8th of last month we provided soloists and band for F.O.S.U. concerts, and since then we successfully carried through programmes for three N.U.W.M. and C.P. concerts in Greenock Town Hall.

On Wednesday of last week we provided band and artistes for concert given to German sailors by local branch of Seaman's Minority Movement.

There have been many favourable comments on our choir's rendering of workers' revolutionary songs.

Edinburgh. We were unable to make a start during the Election, but are now starting up on some simple material: "Jimmie Maxton" (skit), some songs from the song sheet, and the "P.A.C." sketch. The song sheets are going very well, and the paper will go even better. Please send six dozen for a start.

Chelmsford. Some of the members of our Mid-Essex Workers' Sports Club saw the W.T.M. show at High Beech two months back, and we are now trying to run a couple of sketches here; the N.U.W.M. sketch and "Jimmy Maxton," just to see how we get on with it. We think we can do these two things off our own bat, and will write later for more advice.

### W.T.M. DIRECTORY

Organizer.—Tom Thomas, 10, Gayhurst Road, London, E.8.

"Red Stage" Editorial.—Charles B. Mann, 61, Sydenham Park, London, S.E.26. Advertisements should be sent to the Editor.

Business Manager ("Red Stage").—Mrs. F. Woodard, 16, Buckleigh Road, S.W.16.

For Sketches and Songs write Librarian, D. Fender, 29, Grove Road, London, N.7.

Glasgow. The group here has been inactive for a long time owing to members being full up with other tasks. However, we've just got going again, and performed "Gas" and "It's Your Country" at a great meeting of the Friends of the Soviet Union. The audience of about 3,000 received our show with the greatest enthusiasm, and a large number of song sheets were sold.

As a result of the appeal made for members of the W.T.M. at this meeting, we are hoping to get the group on a firmer footing, with comrades who are not so busy in other directions. I enclose cash for 100 song sheets, and will soon want some more. Let's have some more sketches to get on with, particularly "The Sailors' Strike."

Dundee. No group report yet in. We hear that the group is kept very busy with shows, and that its membership is growing very rapidly. An audience of anything under 1,000 is considered small for the Red Front Group of Dundee, we understand! More next month—if they report!!

Liverpool. We have managed to make a start with ten reliable enthusiastic members and a host of supporters. We have held two rehearsals, which have shown the ability of our workers to enter convincingly into the dramatization of the struggle they experience daily.

(continued on page 7.)

### NEW GROUPS

We have only space enough to briefly mention the following new groups set up within the last month or six weeks. There seems to be a lot of activity in Lancashire, where the Manchester group helped to start a group at Rochdale; Pendlebury has also got to work, and there is an enquiry from Todmorden. Enquiries received from Burslem and Rhondda.

In London we have established quite a few: Bethnal Green, who gave a very creditable performance of "The Sailors' Strike" at a Y.C.L. aggregate; Bermondsey, where there are two teams at work upon the "N.U.W.M. Sketch"; Islington have distinguished themselves by selling 120 song sheets and three dozen "Red Stages" within three weeks of their formation; Woolwich, who are at last getting under way after many difficulties; Croydon, working for the time being with the Red Players; Walthamstow, who now have their first show fixed for December 30th; and Camberwell and Battersea both still in the initial stages.

As we go to Press we receive the welcome news of the formation of a group in Sunderland and another in Porth.

### WHAT READERS SAY

MORE ON "INDIVIDUALISM" — AND SHOULD WE USE JAZZ TUNES? COMRADE "BASS" SAYS "NO"

South London, 1st December, 1931. To The Editor, "Red Stage."

Dear Comrade,—What Dave Bennett chooses to describe as the "ghastly failure" (presumably from the technical standpoint) of "The Crisis at No. 10." is, like his "individualistic self-boosting" the figment of an obsessed outlook. As a matter of fact this sketch has been played before many thousands of workers, and received with great enthusiasm till we have got tired of being congratulated on the very clear exposition given of current events. Further, this sketch introduces as much mass acting and speaking as most W.T.M. sketches.

Some of us are getting a little too far with this "mass" complex. Properly utilized, mass effects can be wonderfully powerful, and we make more use of them than many groups, as for instance the mass scenes and actions representing Industry in "Enter Rationalization." There is certainly valuable scope for the intelligent production of mass effects, the Red Star Troupe has made excellent use of them; but to use mass acting, mass talking and mass glaring all the time on every occasion becomes aggressively boring—and we can't afford to be boring.

can't afford to be boring.

If Comrade Bennett's ideal state is one in which the individual is prohibited from personal expression, then that is not the state we are fighting for. Communism should be the means of releasing foundaris of individual energy which under the present system are prevented from finding an outlet except to support that system. No, Comrade Bennett, only as we develop the individual to a higher consciousness

of effectual ability can we achieve that mass power which is our only guarantee of individual security.

Yours fraternally,
THE RED PLAYERS.

To The Editor, "Red Stage."

Dear Comrade,—You devoted a considerable amount of space last issue to a question which, in my opinion, is of very little import to the W.T.M. I should like to see a discussion on the sort of songs and music we use for the Workers' Theatre. It seems a great pity that, when so many fine revolutionary and other great melodies are available, it is found necessary to descend to the level of the American jazz exploiters. It is true that the workers are already familiar with these, but should not our endeavour be to raise the standard of that with which the workers are familiar? And in any case, jazz tunes so quickly become obsolete, that we can obtain only a passing value from them. Let us have music by all means, but good music, music which will live and become part of our revolutionary history.

Fraternally yours,

"BASS."

(We have received an interesting letter from Comrade A. L. Norton, of London, on a somewhat similar strain, but which is, unfortunately, far too lengthy for publication. Correspondents must note that letters intended for publication must be brief and to the point.—ED.)

### What the Groups are Doing-cont.

We have decided to call ourselves the Soviet Star Troupe, and are rehearsing three songs and the Unemployment Sketch, which is so full of meaning in view of the introduction of the means test on November 12th. The struggles of the seamen and dockers of Liverpool against the shipowners and the N.U.S. present us with the task of entering into this fight with sketches which will show the whole working class of Liverpool the meaning of the P.C.5.

Sheffield. (We insert this on information received from a reliable source. No group report to hand.—Ed.) Formed about four months ago, it has made steady progress; starting with one or two of the older type of W.T.M. one-act plays, it has now played the more direct type with great success, including "The Crisis" and "The Sailors' Strike." Membership about 19. Good luck, Sheffield, carry on with the good work—will be glad to hear from you. (No subs. to hand! Treasurer, W.T.M.)

Birmingham. After a very successful start with a performance which was received with great enthusiasm, we have to admit that things slackened off a lot. Then came the election, and the group was broken up into individuals—a bad mistake, we admit. Since then we've made one or two efforts to get going again, without much success.

### A Socialist Contract—cont.

Players undertake to form five more groups in the surrounding areas and to do all they can to help in the early stages of the groups. Already three have been formed.

This is a splendid lead, and all groups whose own existence is strong enough should take steps to follow this and notify the Central Committee of their decision.

When the contract was signed there were certainly less than ten groups actually in existence. We have to date, at a moderate estimate, twenty-two; nearly half the promised fifty.

We all read with enthusiasm the accounts of how the Russian workers fulfil their part of the five-year plan in four years or even less. Now we have a chance to do the same. First, let us fulfil our plan of fifty groups by the date of our First National Conference at East. Fifty groups must be represented there. Then we can start arranging to fulfil the plan 200 per cent. by the date of the International Conference in August.

This is only the numerical side of the contract. The other aspects, and a report on the progress of our partners in the contract in Rostov and North Caucasus will appear in our next number.

# ADVERTISE

#### AND BUILD THE MOVEMENT

All groups should make generous use of this feature. Rates, which are extremely low, will have to be increased shortly as our circulation goes up—so get in now. 3d. line, small advertisements, 2/- per single column inch, displayed.

Send 'em in!

#### MANCHESTER AND SALFORD

Branch of the W.T.M. is open for engagements in Lancashire towns. Working-class organizations are invited to write the Secretary, W.T.M., Horrocks Hall, 69, Liverpool Street, Salford, Manchester.

### RED RADIO TROUPE

OFFER SKETCHES
IN NORTH LONDON
DISTRICTS TO ALL
WORKING-CLASS
ORGANISATIONS

Write Secretary:

P. J. Poole, 25 Powell Road, E.5

### RED FRONT

The popular South London Troupe

Always at your Service

Meetings and Socials

Write at once to Secretary: W.T.M., 16 Buckleigh Road, S.W.16

# FOR A SUCCESSFUL EVENING

RED PLAYERS

SOUTH LONDON KENT : SURREY

ALL THE LATEST SKETCHES

PHONE SYDENHAM 3871 OR POLLARDS 1355

or write to Secretary:

S. Banks, 22 Campshill Road, S.E.13

### OUR REPERTOIRE

It is proposed to review in future issues the material duplicated in the previous month for the information of all the groups. We begin by publishing a list of material at present available.

DOCTOR MAC, 1d.—A political knock-about skit on MacDonald's cures for unemployment.

"IT'S YOUR COUNTRY, FIGHT FOR IT," 1d.— What we fought for in 1914-1918, contrasted with what the Russian workers fought for.

THE ARCHBISHOP'S PRAYER, 1d.—The Archbishop meets two unemployed workers and holds his day of prayer for unemployment.

GAS, 1d.—The horrors of the chemical warfare now being prepared, and the way out.

THE THEATRE, OUR WEAPON, 1d.—A mass-speaking item on the tasks of the Workers' Theatre in all countries.

LOVE IN INDUSTRY, ½d.—A singing skit on industrial peace.

THE STRIKE SKETCH, ½d.—A speaking chorus with actions on a strike situation.

RUSSIAN TIMBER "DUMPING," 1d.—The forces behind the agitation to ban Russian timber, and to raise the cost of houses.

THE SAILORS' STRIKE (or INVERGORDON), 1d.—All the name implies.

MURDER IN THE COALFIELDS, ½d.—A short simple sketch, inspired by the recent colliery disaster. Particularly suited for the coalfields.

CO-OPERATE AGAINST THE BOSS, 1d.— Showing the attempts of workers to make the "co-op" a real weapon for the workers.

THE FRAME-UP, or Two Pictures and Three Frames.

1d.—The Means Test dealt with in a satirical way, by means of the snappy "inset scenes."

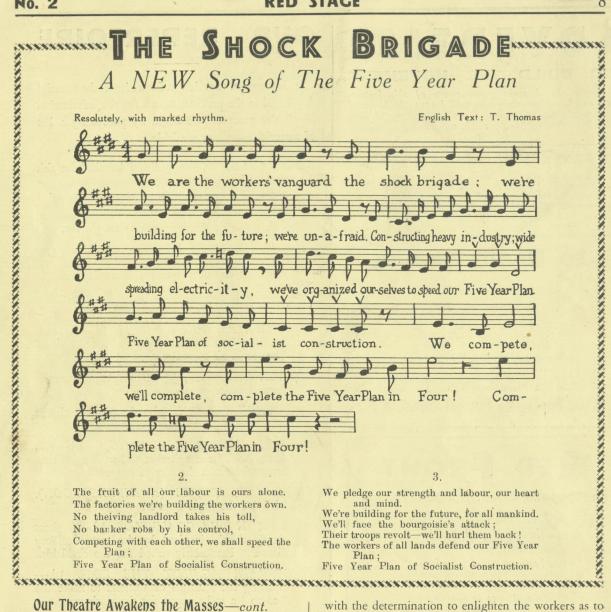
SUPPRESS, OPPRESS and DEPRESS, 1d.—A new edition (the fourth) of this very amusing exposure of the Boss Press.

### **TYPEWRITERS**

Duplicators, new or secondhand, all makes, repaired, overhauled; Stencils, Ink, Paper, Ribbons and Carbons, special prices to W.T.M. Terms can be arranged.—
TYPEWRITER EXPERTS CO. (Larkin, W.T.M. member), 55, Little Britain, E.C.1. 'Phone, National 8210.

# SHOCK

NEW Song of The Five Year Plan



2.

plete the Five Year Planin Four!

The fruit of all our labour is ours alone. The factories we're building the workers own. No theiving landlord takes his toll, No banker robs by his control, Competing with each other, we shall speed the

Five Year Plan of Socialist Construction.

We pledge our strength and labour, our heart

We're building for the future, for all mankind. We'll face the bourgoisie's attack; Their troops revolt—we'll hurl them back!

The workers of all lands defend our Five Year

Five Year Plan of Socialist Construction.

### Our Theatre Awakens the Masses—cont.

in helping the ruling class to keep the workers ignorant of the facts and contented to live a state of permanent under-nourishment, so that we can bring out clearly the job of the WORKERS' THEATRE MOVEMENT at the present time.

Our recent rapid strides forward are largely the result of the awakening of numbers of workers to the facts of the crisis as well as to the value of our performances, which show in a very strong and aggressive light, the meaning of events. Far from acting as a drug to dope the workers for further privations, our performances kindle in the audiences the flame of revolt against the system which means to them unending poverty and want.

Our march forward is begun. From all over the country comes news of further groups being formed

with the determination to enlighten the workers as to the meaning of the capitalist crisis, and to demonstrate the working class way out.

In this we are receiving as never before the assistance of workers of every type who have been made superfluous by capitalism, and are coming from the concert hall and the orchestra, the office and the factory, to develop this new conception of the theatre, as a weapon in the workers' struggle for freedom and life.

Without funds, without premises even, we are nevertheless taking on new tasks, new responsibilities, developing writers and technicians, knowing that if we can do our job properly we shall achieve our might in the course of the struggle, as more workers who see our performances will come forward to help with funds and services.