A history and evaluation of the ILGWU labor stage and its productions of Pins and Needles, 1937-1940

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A HISTORY AND EVALUATION OF THE ILGWU LABOR STAGE AND ITS PRODUCTIONS OF PINS AND NEEDLES, 1937-1940

by

David Alan Rush

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Dramatic Arts in the Graduate College of the University of Iowa

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Chairman: Larry D. Clark
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INTRODUCTION

Pins and Needles, a musical revue produced in 1937 by the Labor Stage of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, was one of the most successful productions in the ten year period categorically labelled the thirties—1929-1939. Although the revue was similar to other productions in that time in its use of current events as subject matter, its unusually long run of 1108 New York performances and two successful national tours suggests that there were important differences between this production and others of its kind.

The events in America between the years 1929 and 1939 exerted a considerable influence on the theatre as well as on thinking and writing in general. The economic depression of 1929 and the ensuing events all gave rise to a particular literary movement which was characterized by a primary concern for contemporary problems and solutions—for themes of social significance.

As the depression forced more and more workers out of their jobs, the universal theme became not, as it seems today, how to maintain an identity, but rather how to survive and how to find the best means to help others to do so. Writers, including dramatists, were caught up in this concern; in many cases they felt compelled to use their skill to reinforce in the public mind the extent and scope of the evils of the depression and to suggest remedies.
Mordecai Gorelik emphasises:

The significant drama of the period was a forum for political and social issues; and its playwrights believed in remedial action—or at the very least, in the need for struggle against misfortune.²

For many writers, the proper course for "remedial action" seemed to lie with the line of the Communist Party; to many authors who were confused, angered, or disillusioned, the party "offered a program of action, a disciplined organization, a working model [in its first five-year plan], and a coherent body of doctrine."³ Consequently, many writers joined the party outright, or subscribed to its principles in their works. This influence waned considerably towards the end of the thirties, but between 1934 and 1937 was strong.

These influences—a concern for social problems, and a propensity for seeking the answers in a communist ideology—culminated in a particular theatre genre. Because it dealt with, and attempted to speak primarily to, a workers audience, the genre became known as proletarian drama.

The proletarian drama of the early thirties was relatively un-sophisticated as an art form. Being more concerned with results than with style, the writers often were direct and obvious in their technique. The plays were usually short sketches, playable in a regular
theatre, on a small platform, or at times on street corners. They
contained simple, almost allegorical characters, who were involved
in situations designed to be easily recognizable by workers, and who
spoke in slogans and clichés. These sketches were known as agit-props,
as their purpose was to create agitation and disseminate leftist propa­
ganda. A sample of dialogue from a sketch titled Unemployment gives
an indication of the agit-prop style:

5th Worker:
Won't somebody give me a job?

1st Worker:
I am hungry; why can't I have food? I see lots of
food in restaurants. I am cold; why can't I have
a coat? I see many coats in clothing stores. . . .

Capitalist:
There isn't anyone can have a better yacht than I.
I've got to have the best little yacht in the
world. . . .

The agit-prop soon gave way to the more sophisticated full-
length play. Here too, however, the emphasis was placed on simple
characters involved in dramatic and easily recognizable situations.
Rabkin describes the characteristic proletarian drama:

1) a situation centered around a strike;
2) a situation concerned with the development of an
   individual's class consciousness, and his conversion
to communism;
3) a situation which implicitly describes the decay of
   the middle classes.
The play, *Stowadore*, by Peters and Sklar, was one of the most successful of these dramas. In this play a negro dock-worker, Lonnie, is falsely accused of raping a white woman. In his attempts to prove his innocence and defend himself from his attackers, he comes to learn that unionizing his fellow dock-workers and fighting on masse against their "oppressors" is the only way they will receive fair treatment of any sort. The final scene is a battle between the negroes and the villainous capitalists in which the day is saved by a "cavalry-like" entrance of the men from a newly formed dock-workers union—both white and negro—to help the negroes. Lonnie is shot, but dies a martyr to the union cause.

Although proletarian drama attempted to exert a considerable influence on American affairs, it failed to do so. The plays were for the most part unimpressive as literature and unconvincing as propaganda, and the audiences that attended them were small. ⁶

The reason for the limited appeal of the proletarian drama becomes evident when another influence on the literature in general of the thirties is examined. This influence was the attractiveness of escapist literature; romance, adventure and comedy formed the basis for the most popular best sellers and for the longest running plays. *Stowadore* was timely, but *You Can't Take It With You* ran over 300 performances longer. Other popular successes of the decade—both novels and plays—included *Gone With The Wind, Northwest*
Passage, Three Men on a Horse, Boy Meets Girl, and Tobacco Road. Such serious plays as Children's Hour and Dead End achieved moderate success, but it was generally the comedies which appealed to the greatest audience. In the area of non-fiction, the literature of social significance also failed to out-do the appeal of such works as Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People. Writers of social significance who achieved artistic, but only moderate commercial success, include Dos Passos, Caldwell, MacLeish, Sandburg, Anderson, Odets, and Sherwood. 7

Thus, although proletarian drama was significant and timely, it was not commercially profitable. Consequently, the bulk of proletarian production came from producing groups which were committed to a particular point of view, rather than from single "Broadway" ventures. A history of this dramatic genre, therefore, becomes a history of several of these important independent producing groups.

This thesis concerns the production history of the most successful of all proletarian drama, the musical revue Pins and Needles, and the Labor Stage of the ILGWU which produced it. Chapter One provides a background for this production history by briefly chronicling the history of the most significant independent producing groups and by extensively describing the growth and decline of Labor Stage and its similarities to and differences from the other groups. Chapter Two is a history of the process by which Pins and Needles was brought...
to life; and Chapter Three describes the contents of the revue in its various editions. Chapter Four traces the run of the revue, and in Chapter Five, the success of the production is evaluated in terms of its popular acclaim as well as its influence on the contemporary scene—both in and out of the theatre. Most of the lyrics, together with a transcription from the stage manager's promptbook of the staging of one of the numbers, are included in an appendix.

Although much background material was drawn from histories of the thirties, both theatrical and general, most of the material for this study comes from newspaper articles and reviews, many of which are in the Pins and Needles collections on file in the Research Department of the ILGWU, New York City. In addition, interviews with three of the creators of the revue, Harold Rome, Charles Friedman, and Joseph Schrank, have provided vital and useful information of a more personal nature.

One convention in this thesis needs to be clarified: although the revue appeared in several editions, each with a different title, the original title, Pins and Needles, will be used to indicate the entire revue. The particular titles—Pins and Needles 1939 and New Pins and Needles—are used only when a particular point is made concerning the respective edition.
Footnotes to the Introduction

1 Personal Interview with Joseph Schrank, April 5, 1965.


5 Rabkin, pp. 35 ff.

6 For an extensive discussion of proletarian drama, see Himmelstein and Rabkin.

CHAPTER I

INDEPENDENT PRODUCING GROUPS

AND THE LABOR STAGE

Independent Groups

Rabkin points out that, "as befits an age preoccupied with theories of collectivism, the American drama of the 1930's was characterized by the dominance of theatrical groups."\(^1\) The function of these various groups differed in degree, but all were dedicated to fulfilling a social need — either to honestly reflect their times, or to disseminate communist propaganda, or merely to provide jobs for unemployed performers. When the need for these groups no longer existed, the groups themselves were unable to function.

The New Theatre League

The New Theatre League was one of the earliest workers' theatre groups that held a definite left-wing ideology. However, the roots of a workers theatre per se, extend as far back as 1926 when a Workers Drama League was formed. It did not last long, but "long enough to advance the idea of an American working class theatre."\(^2\) The idea was taken up soon after by the New Playwright's Theatre, organized in 1927 by John Howard Lawson, Michael Gold, John Dos Passos, and others. It was "devoted to the defense of the underprivileged,"\(^3\) but, probably
because there were too few people in those years who were concerned about the underprivileged, the group lasted only three years.

With the advent of the depression, however, small amateur groups developed out of the ranks of the "underprivileged." Answering a need for a simple, direct drama which spoke of their problems and offered solutions, several foreign-born workers' groups arose. As economic problems increased, many of the groups became more and more radical in their thinking, until, as Himelstein points out, they often became dominated by Communists.\(^4\)

By 1933, this general movement had coalesced into a unified organization called the League of Workers Theatres. The function of the League was to act as a central agency for these several small groups, providing them with appropriate scripts, personnel, or advice.\(^5\) Some of the most successful groups which belonged to the League in New York City were Theatre of Action, Theatre Collective, and the Artef Theatre.

The League's most important activity turned out to be its one-act play contests, the winning scripts of which were performed at New Theatre Nights. Some of the winners indicate the repute in which the organization was held for a while: *Waiting for Lefty*, *Hymn to the Rising Sun*, and *Bury the Dead*. However, since the League was not reaching as wide an audience as desired, it was re-organized on a broader scale in 1935, under a new name, The New Theatre League.
The announced purpose of the new group was:

for a mass development of the American Theatre to its highest artistic and social level; for a theatre dedicated to the struggle against war, fascism and censorship.

The League continued its policy of producing original one-acts, and of serving as a central agency for amateur groups. However, it was unable to achieve a marked success for two principle reasons: (1) it was constantly faced with a dearth of good scripts which would appeal artistically as well as socially; and (2) the left-wing movement itself soon began to decline. Faced with a dwindling membership, the League began to operate on a larger and larger deficit, until by 1940, the year in which it ceased functioning, it was in the red to the sum of $1500.

The Theatre Union

The Theatre Union was organized to fulfill essentially the same purpose as the New Theatre League—to serve as propaganda for a decided Communist ideology. However, hoping to reach a wider theatre-going public and to be able to better financially support itself, the Theatre Union was organized on a professional basis. It produced full length plays aimed at Broadway audience, which expressed the proletarian point of view. Its productions were:

1933: Peace on Earth, which had as its theme war
as capitalist expansion;  
**Stevedore,** which attempted to show that racial prejudice was the fault of an economic system;  
**The Black Pit,** which dealt with the hard life of coal miners;  
**Sailors of Cattaro,** which was the story of an abortive mutiny by oppressed sailors;  
**Mother,** which was the story of a woman’s conversion to Marxism;  
1936:  
**Bitter Stream,** which described fascist oppression;  
**Marching Song,** which was about a sit-down strike in an auto-town.  

Because of its specific point of view, the Theatre Union faced both operational difficulties and difficulties in reaching audiences. The administration of the group was set up in a collective manner, all decisions coming from a production committee rather than from a single director. The problem of finding accomplished actors who were also politically committed to the group’s ideology was never satisfactorily solved. Finally, the continual problem of finding good scripts proved too great. The limits on subject matter imposed on writers for the Theatre Union often prohibited them from writing plays which were dramatically meaningful to a large audience.  

Thus, the plays produced by the Union were of relatively poor quality. When these productions were measured by professional Broadway standards and subjected to stringent critical and popular evaluation, they failed.  

Another reason for the ultimate demise of the Theatre Union in 1937 was the same as that which helped to kill the New Theatre League: an insufficient audience. With the waning of left-wing enthusiasm,
interest in the proletarian cause declined. In addition, the left-wing audience which remained had found another group which it could better afford to attend—the Federal Theatre Project of the WPA.

The WPA Federal Theatre Project

Although this project was not financially self-supporting, as were the other groups described, the FTP was a significant producer of socially-significant theatre. Organized by Congress in 1935, and put under the directorship of Hallie Flanagan, the immediate purpose of the FTP was to employ out-of-work theatre people and not to advocate any particular ideology, cause, or point of view. Indeed, Miss Flanagan was keenly aware that, since the FTP was under the control of congressional purse-string holders, it was most vital to the existence of the project that it avoid controversy.

Consequently, much of the FTP's production output was aimed solely at being entertainment; dance dramas, operas, puppet shows, vaudevilles, pageants, and a circus were among the productions. The only criteria for their choice were the standards of good theatre. However, being a theatre group designed for the public, the FTP was unable to avoid dealing with political, social and economic matters which were of concern to part of that public. Therefore, the FTP also sponsored the simultaneous opening in eighteen cities of Sinclair Lewis' and John C. Moffitt's dramatization of Lewis' novel, It Can't Happen Here, a picture of a fascistic America. The most significant
of the FTP's projects, however, was the Living Newspaper, a dramatization of current events. *One Third of a Nation* described housing evils; *Triple-A Plowed Under* pointed out the faults of the government's agricultural policies; and *Power* was a survey of TVA controversy.

Because of its involvement in such controversial matters, the FTP did become a political hot potato, and finally was abolished by an act of Congress on June 30, 1939. Consequently, the project shared a fate similar to that of other independent producing groups; its demise came about largely because of its having to subscribe to a relatively limited point of view. This point of view was not imposed from within, as were the ideologies of the Theatre Union, but was imposed from without by the desire of Congress for a theatre which would stay away from controversial matters. This desire eventually served to sever the purse strings of the project and thus to bring about its demise.

**The Mercury Theatre**

The Mercury Theatre was organized in 1937 by John Houseman and Orson Welles as a break from the FTP. The two directors proposed to "present at popular prices great plays of all periods with a special view to their contemporary significance." This statement of purpose was as broad as was that of the Mercury's parent
body, but the Mercury's independent status left it open to a broader selection of material than the inherent censorship of the FTP allowed. Its first production was Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock*, which had been cancelled by the FTP because of its controversial nature. Other significant productions of the Mercury included a modern-dress *Julius Caesar*, which was subtitled "The Death of a Dictator," in order to point up the intended parallel; Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*; Shaw's *Heartbreak House*; and Buchner's *Danton's Death*. The plays were well-produced and of good quality, except perhaps for the last, which some critics thought to be too self-consciously attempting to draw an historical parallel with the French Revolution. This theatre also failed, after the above productions, for financial reasons. 12

The Group Theatre

The Group Theatre, founded in 1930 by Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford, was a reflection of a social consciousness less in the tradition of the Theatre Union than, as Rabkin points out, in the tradition of the Moscow Art Theatre of the Théâtre-Libre. The directors of the Group saw as its function to reflect life values, to be committed to real-life problems and situations, and to reflect its responsibility as a citizen of a social community. Clurman expresses these ideas in *The Fervent Years*: 
To what human beings, one might ask, were theatre ideals to be valuable. First, to the theatre artists themselves — to actors, since they were the theatre's crucial factor; actors were citizens of a community before they took on their dubious connection with "art." Second, theatre ideas were to be important to an audience, of which the actors were a focus, for it is the audience (seen as a "community") that has given birth to its artists. \\

Therefore, the Group dealt with social problems, but was committed to no specific social solution. Out of its twenty-four productions, therefore, only three or four dealt with matters other than those of social significance. Some of its major presentations were:

a) Odot's *Waiting for Lefty* and *Awake and Sing*, both of which strongly implied a Marxist leaning,

b) The Siftons' *1921—*, which attributed much of the depression to the failure of capitalism,

c) Shaw's *The Gentle People*, which was 'a Fascist parable'.

The decline of the Group Theatre resulted from several causes. Clurman describes internal strifes which served to demoralize the group, but he attributes the major cause to commercialism; the Group could find no patronage for its experiments, and was never fortunate enough to have a succession of hits:

The Group Theatre was a failure because, as no individual can exist alone, no group can exist alone. The several producing groups all originated for the purpose of conveying a particular social point of view, varying from the pro-
paganda of a political ideology, to the mere reflection of a social awareness. The various points of view limited the subject matter of their presentations and appealed to a particular and narrow audience. Since none of these groups was able to successfully compete in a commercial Broadway atmosphere, when their own audiences began to leave, these groups were unable to sustain themselves.

The Labor Stage had similar origins, and was similarly dedicated to a point of view. However, it achieved a commercial success greater than that of any other group. The history of Labor Stage will indicate what differences in approach led to this success.

Labor Stage

The roots of Labor Stage extend into the early years of the 1930's when the leaders of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union became acutely aware of an important fact of union life. They realized that their recruiting of new members and their holding power over past members would be increased if union membership had more to offer than mere bargaining power and wage insurances. If workers were made to realize the social and educational values of unionism, and the ILGWU were able to offer educational and recreational facilities, then the union would become a way of life and not merely a temporary tool for getting a job. In this way, the union could attract new members while jobs were hard to get and hold them when and if other op-
opportunities became available. David Dubinsky, president of the ILGWU recalls:

When, in 1933 and 1934, we became a union of several hundred thousand members, most of them young women and men still fresh to unionism, we were faced with a compelling task of giving our young people a program of labor education and recreation in various forms and aspects. 16

In order to best accomplish this dual purpose—of providing recreation for its members, and educating them to the union way of life—the ILGWU encouraged its many locals to organize drama groups and to present plays which centered around unionism. To aid the locals, the union set up a Dramatics Department, headed by Mark Schwaid, which would serve as a center of activity and a library for suitable scripts.

Many of these scripts had to be written especially for the union, as the subject matter was obviously limited. They came to be the usual sort of agit-prop sketches, showing how unionism offered a solution to the hopelessness and inequities of life in the depression. Written by the Dramatics staff, such titles as these were typical: "In Union There is Strength," and "All for One." Later, a comedy, "Who's Getting Excited," was made available, but it too centered around a union scene, in this case a strike. 17

To increase their supply of suitable scripts, the Dramatics Department held play contests. A bulletin issued by the union's
Educational Department, of which the Dramatics Department was a subsidiary, announces such a contest, and reiterates the philosophy behind the program:

Our union has a great advantage in dramatic work. The International with its tens of thousands of members, men and women, old and young, native and foreign, is really a little world in itself. We have our own audiences, our own show places, our own Unity House [the ILGWU-owned summer resort in Pennsylvania], various affairs and festivals, and—if everything goes well—perhaps our own theatre. We also don't have to ask others to write our dramas. The life of our Union members is packed with drama, with life, love, fear, hate, struggles, victories. We can write our own shows, and act them—and we will. There will be a competition among the locals in playwriting and play-acting. The winners will obtain handsome prizes. . . .

The dramatics program was successful; many locals produced not only union-plays, but also such works as Bound East for Cardiff. In addition, discussion groups were organized, dramatic festivals were held, and at one time, all local groups were "special guests" at a Theatre Union performance of Sailors of Cattaro.

In 1935, the ILGWU hired Louis Schaffer to be general supervisor of cultural and recreational activities. Seeing the popularity of the union's dramatics program, Schaffer possibly realized that the same device—play production—could be used to carry the labor movement philosophy outside the confines of the ILGWU. An expanded program, sponsored jointly by many labor unions, would bring labor plays to the attention of the general public and would inform them about the union way of life hopefully in the same entertaining way. The
idea was endorsed by Dubinsky and Julius Hochman, head of ILGWU's Educational Committee, and the three men offered their suggestion to the AF of L Convention of that year. 21

Other union leaders favored the suggestion of a labor sponsored theatre. Sidney Hillman (head of Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America), Francis Gorman (vice-president of United Textile Workers), Rose Schneiderman (Woman's Trade Union), Max Zaritsky (Cap & Millinery Workers' Union) and several executives of the ILGWU were among the sponsors of the plan. 22

Their aims were to establish a producing organization for plays dealing with the labor movement; however, they wanted it to be a professional undertaking:

[Their announced aim was] to promote the production of plays by professional groups devoted to a true portrayal of labor's position, struggles and viewpoint; of plays that inspire the trade union masses toward the attainment of their economic and social objectives. 23

In this respect, the sponsors of the program were following the tradition of the Theatre Union and similar groups by setting up a producing organization to make a specific social point. However, a difference in degree appears to be evident: instead of attempting to instill a particular political ideology in its audience, or to convince its viewers to join a labor union, the theatre group merely seemed to desire that an honest picture of the labor movement be presented. In a period when unions and strikes were causing bitter and
emotional reactions, an objective statement seemed necessary—a clear, concise picture of labor's intentions and needs. While other groups were propounding their points of view, this new labor group seemed merely to want to defend its own position against its attackers.

As enthusiastic as the original reception of the idea seems to have been, other unions soon withdrew their support from the plan, and after having contributed $25,000 for the venture, the ILGWU found itself in sole charge of it. It proceeded to re-arrange the scope of the program on a smaller scale. Schaffer announced that it would operate on a semi-professional level, using amateur actors, but would still play for a city-wide audience, with the same aims as before.

The organization was named Labor Stage, Inc., and was set up as a non-profit group with all profits to go back into the ILGWU Educational Department, to be used for "educational and charitable purposes." In this respect, it was unlike the other producing groups described in this chapter except for the FTP, all of which were self-supporting on a professional, commercial basis.

After establishing the legal and commercial status of Labor Stage, Schaffer decided that the organization should do more than just produce plays and should take over the responsibility for the ILGWU's cultural program in order to set up classes and activities of a more general than theatrical nature. But before this could be done, Labor Stage had to find a home.
Late in 1935, the ILGWU leased the Princess Theatre at 106 W. 39th Street for a period of eight years. The plant had been the home of the Princess Theatre Shows during the 1920's, but had been idle for many years. A program of renovation was begun: a balcony was installed, new seats were put in, and the interior was extensively repainted. In addition, the upper floors were made into three studios, with facilities for concerts, dance classes, rehearsals and readings. The name, Labor Stage, was lettered over the exterior, and the place was officially dedicated January 11, 1936.

The staff of Labor Stage was soon completed. The vice-president of the ILGWU, Julius Hochman, acted as president, while Louis Schaffer took on the functions of executive director. The dramatics activities were directed by Mark Schweid, who was assisted by William Gilman. Sointu Syrjala, a past member of the Theatre Union, was hired as permanent designer, and Benjamin Zemach was hired to work with dance. Classes were organized to serve many interests, and the original program of Pins and Needles lists the following "Cultural and Recreational Activities":

**Dramatics:** Beginners were taught acting, body movement, diction, and "dramatic expression." When they had "mastered these basic principles, demonstrating that they have done so in one-act plays, . . . they [were] moved up to the central acting company, the ILGWU players." Instructors listed were Friedman, Rome, Syrjala, Lee Mason, and Gerald Cameron.

**Mandolin:** Classes were offered in the playing of this and related instruments, such as mandola and guitar. More
advanced players formed a central orchestra. Instructors listed were Luigi Paparello, Herman Leebman, Syl Loro, and David Haiss.

**Chorus:** Members were taught ensemble singing, sight-reading, and music appreciation. Instructors included Lazar Weiner and Ben Pollack.

**Modern Dance:** Members were taught fundamentals of dance and body movement, in preparation for recitals and pageants. Benjamin Zemach was in charge.

**Band:** Conducted by Jack Zilbert, the band played at ILGWU functions.

**Athletics:** Although not a part of Labor Stage's activities, all sports and athletics were sponsored by the union, under the directorship of Milt Spiro.

In addition to these activities, other classes were added over the few years of Labor Stage's existence. At one time, Dr. Ilya Kotileff, from the Moscow Art Theatre taught a weekly class in the Techniques of Acting. Lehman Engle led a Dramatic Chorus for a few months, and Lee Strassberg, early in 1939, taught a short course in the Fundamentals of Acting. In September, 1938, Howard Da Silva was hired to work with *Pins and Needles*, but resigned his post two weeks later and went into the cast of *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*. 29

One of Schaffer's first plans for Labor Stage was the production of a musical revue. Early in 1936, he set out to gather material and personnel for what eventually became *Pins and Needles*. The production of the revue marks a major turning point in the history of Labor Stage. As the production became a popular, critical
and commercial success, it forced Labor Stage to operate on a different level; instead of being a basically amateur undertaking, Labor Stage became a professional organization. Therefore, the history of Labor Stage now falls into two basic sections: pre-Nos and Needles, and during-Nos and Needles.

While Schaffer was collecting his revue material, the ILGWU players were being formed. Since they were all union members, for the most part new to acting, it would take some time for them to prepare their first major production. In the interim, therefore, Labor Stage sponsored other types of activities and presentations.

On March 15, 1936, a dance recital was given at the theatre by the Jabawa Dancers, supposedly one of a series of "historic dance recitals." A discussion followed the program.30

Other early activities included two speaking events. A symposium was held on March 1, 1936, on "Why Labor Theatre?" The speakers included Elmer Rice, Albert Maltz, and Elia Kazan.31 The other event was a lecture, sponsored by the Labor Stage "Cultural Hour," on November 23, 1936. The speaker was Ernst Toller, and the title of the lecture was "Theatre in America and Europe."32

To meet one of the aims of Labor Stage—to reach a large labor audience—a "Show Bus" program was initiated. The plan was to send Labor Stage performers on out of town forays to demonstrate the fruits of their classes. The first busload went to Connecticut in November, 1936, and carried the makings of a one-act play, a mandolin concert,
and a choral performance. *Justice*, the ILGWU newspaper, reported the trip a success, and mentioned that Schaffer was making plans to make a permanent operation out of "Show Bus." However, no evidence was found that such a program did continue. 33

Labor Stage faced one difficulty common to the other similar groups of the period: a lack of suitable scripts. As expected, therefore, it sponsored a play contest "to stimulate the writing of and to seek out the best plays portraying 'social conflicts in contemporary American society.'" 34 The judges announced were Chester Bahn, Barret Clark, Max Danish, Julius Hochman, Sidney Howard, Worthington Miner, Hiram Motherwell, Mark Starr, Lee Strassberg, and Peggy W d. The winner was to receive $2,000, and a possible Labor Stage production. The contest was won by F. E. Faragoh, with a script titled *Sunup to Sundown.* 35

Late in October, 1937, another dance concert was held at Labor Stage. Blance Evan and Benjamin Zemach performed a program of Dance Characterizations. 36

In addition to sponsoring such programs as these, Labor Stage made its theatre available to other groups. Several Federal Theatre Project groups performed there: a workshop production of *An Enemy of the People* appeared in February, 1936; the Rebel Arts Players presented Michael Blankfort's *The Brave and the Bold* on March 21, 1937; and the Manhattan and Bronx Unit presented the Irish Theatre Players in *Mr. Jiggs of Jiggstown* early in 1937. 37
After *Pins and Needles* began to regularly occupy Labor Stage, there was less opportunity for other groups to use the theatre; however, Schaffer did make the facilities available for certain theatrical events. The American Theatre League presented an "evening of entertainment and dance" on February 19, 1938. A Memorial to Stanislavsky was held September 18, 1938, which featured Harold Clurman and other speakers. In November, 1938, the Yale Puppeteers presented a puppet musical satire, *It's a Small World*, fashioned after *Pins and Needles*. In January and February, 1939, the Theatre Arts Committee—a group of professional theatre people organized to aid the Spanish Loyalists—held their after-hours revue, *Cabaret TAC* in Labor Stage. The New Theatre League held a "Cavalcade of New Theatre"—a program of scenes from their prize-winning plays—on February 5, 1939. Finally, a performance of "Negro Music; Past and Present" was given on February 26, 1939, by the Labor Club.

It can be seen that the early activity of Labor Stage was varied in nature, and often—as in the case of its "Show Bus"—experimental in scope. Although it did have an announced purpose, this was not so confining or restrictive to limit Labor Stage's productions. It was this experimental attitude which ultimately led to the production of *Pins and Needles*, although the first play given by the ILGWU Players was a typical proletarian drama safely within the established tradition.

John Waxley's 1939 drama, *Steel*, was chosen as Labor Stage's
opening presentation. The play centers around the misfortunes of its central characters who are involved in a major steel strike, but Wexley updated the script to include contemporary references. The union actors opened on January 17, 1937, intending to perform for a few weeks on Sunday afternoons and evenings.

The production was well received, and was taken to Brighton Beach for a week of performances late in February. In addition, Clinton S. Golden of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee saw the production and asked Schaffer if it would be possible to organize a road company to tour several steel towns in the midwest. He felt the play would be helpful in the SWOC's recruitment drives, which at the time were culminating in major strikes in Pittsburgh and Chicago.

Pleased with the successful reception to the show, Schaffer scheduled nightly performances to begin February 27. After a few nights, however, the actors protested having to do double duty; serving as shop-workers all day and as actors each night was causing them to perform poorly in both capacities. Schaffer canceled the nightly runs, and returned to a schedule of weekend performances.

The SWOC repeated its request for a road company. Knowing the expenses involved, but realizing that the project would be in direct accord with Labor Stage's aims, Schaffer asked other groups to help finance the venture. A conference held on February 28, among representatives from Theatre Union, New Theatre League, Artef Theatre, and United Mine Workers, arranged to raise funds. Therefore, when Steel
closed its run at Labor Stage, after fifty performances, the show was sent around the midwest. Performances in Chicago, Youngstown, and Warren, Ohio, were well received.42

The next production of Labor Stage was *Pins and Needles*. The development of the revue, its content, and its success constitute the remainder of this study; however, several points relative to these subjects need to be considered here. Conceived as an amateur undertaking, although to be done with professional direction and material, the revue was designed for as modest an exposure as that originally conceived for *Steel*. Therefore, the unexpected commercial success necessitated important changes in the operations of Labor Stage. A fulltime *Pins and Needles* staff had to be employed—including the actors, who now had to become members of Actors Equity—and Labor Stage became a professional producing organization. Since this status was odds with its original intention, the rest of the history of Labor Stage becomes a description of the problems it faced in maintaining this delicate position between the two poles.

As soon as it became for all practical purposes—no matter what its ideology might have been—a professional organization, Labor Stage began to be regarded as a peer by other such theatrical interests. It has already been mentioned that the Actors Equity required the cast to join its union—a matter treated at greater length in a later chapter—and the next reaction came from the League of New York Theatres.

As a non-profit organization, Labor Stage was legally exempt
from having to pay a $500 yearly fee for a city license for its theatre. The League of New York Theatres protested that this constituted "unfair competition," especially since the City Council had passed a bill exempting Labor Stage in particular from this fee. Before Mayor LaGuardia could sign this bill, a required public hearing was held; and the League used as additional evidence of unfair practices against Labor Stage the fact that the ILGWU organization had violated several local fire ordinances when remodeling its theatre. Thus, the discussion at the hearing, held July 19, 1938, became a confusion of the two issues, as the conversation reported by the New York Times between LaGuardia and Frederick M. Umhey, treasurer of Labor Stage, indicates.

"All we want to do," said . . . Umhey, . . . "is to continue our run in that playhouse—experts tell us that we will ruin it if we take it out of that atmosphere." . . .

"What will you do if the Fire Department and the Building Department say you are violating the law?"

Mr. Umhey said that the Labor Stage was producing shows primarily for their educational value. He contended that the organization, by presenting productions of social significance, had made a contribution to the theatrical industry. Mayor LaGuardia remarked that if he signed the bill the Labor Stage would be exempted from payment of the license fee no matter which theatre was used. Mr. Umhey countered by saying that the organization would not ask exemption if it used any other house.43

How the particular physical plant made any difference in the social significance of the material on stage does not seem to have been questioned, but on August 10, LaGuardia signed the bill exempting Labor Stage from the yearly license fee, although he did caution the
organization to comply with city building and fire laws.

For another year and a half, the League of New York Theatres pressured Labor Stage to join its professional ranks, and Labor Stage refused on the grounds that, being an ILGWU Labor Union affiliate, it could not rightly join "a capitalistic group." Early in January, 1939, the League warned ticket brokers not to sell tickets for any production outside the League—which at that time included *Pins and Needles* and productions of the FTP—but a compromise was arranged before this issue came to a head. It was not until November, 1939, that Labor Stage conceded the equity of the League's claims; it then agreed to join the group, on the condition that it would not be asked "to sit in on discussions where [its] other interests were concerned."

The confused and confusing status of Labor Stage again became evident while Schaffer was arranging for the production to follow *Pins and Needles*. He had chosen a dramatization by Sidney Kingsley of Millen Brand's novel, *The Outward Room*, which was a psychiatric study of a young woman rather than a strike-conscious labor play. As Kingsley was finishing his script, Schaffer was arranging for a professional production; early in September, 1938, he announced that the play would open in a commercial theatre, and that several of the leading roles in the play, which "would be a shade beyond the union's playing members," would be cast from professional ranks.

However, as Labor Stage was enjoying certain benefits by being essentially an amateur organization, producing plays primarily for their
"educational value," this statement put Schaffer in a delicate position. The position was made even more delicate by rumors and charges that Labor Stage had taken unfair advantage of its situation by employing professional actors in the cast of *Pins and Needles*. In October, 1938, a formal charge against Labor Stage by an un-named Equity actor was lodged with that union. The actor complained that Labor Stage was guilty of unfair practices. *Variety* reports that when Equity approached the Labor Stage "management" with the charge, it "replied in detail to the effect that while a few professionals had been engaged, the Union preferred to 'use our own people.'" 48

Later, Schaffer denied that the charges were true; in regards to *Pins and Needles*, *Variety* quotes him as saying, "It goes without saying that there are no non-garment workers in it. Everyone in the cast has an ILGWU card, and has worked in a shop." 49 However, Schaffer was guilty here of begging the question, although it may not have been his intention to do so. The fact was that there were professionals in the cast of the revue; many actors had joined the ILGWU for the express purpose of going into the show, 50 and there was at least one instance of an actor joining the cast first and the union second. 51 Therefore, when Schaffer claimed that all performers in the revue carried union cards, he was speaking truth; whether he knew of any other cards they carried is uncertain.

To settle the matter to Equity’s satisfaction, Schaffer decided to demonstrate his contention by announcing that *The Outward Room*
would be cast solely from the ranks of the ILGWU players. However, this new policy seems to have met with disapproval by Kingsley, who felt that his play would suffer from such casting. Therefore, to put an end to the issue, Schaffer relinquished his rights to the novel, canceled the intended production, and went back to improving *Pins and Needles*. 52

In 1940, Labor Stage was involved in legal skirmishes several more times. In February, Charles Friedman brought a suit against the organization for payment of royalties. He had been earning $1-1/2$% of *Pins and Needles* grosses because of his co-authorship of three sketches: "Economics I," "First Impressions," and "We've Just Begun." These numbers were removed for the third edition—which opened in November, 1939—and Labor Stage claimed that Friedman had no interests in the remaining material. 53 The issue was submitted to arbitration, and Friedman did continue to collect royalties for the rest of the run. 54

In April, 1940, Schaffer was charged by three *Pins and Needles* actors with "requiring persons to play principle parts for the wages of supernumeraries." Schaffer's reply was that these performers were new to the cast, and it was Labor Stage's policy to try out new members for four weeks at an extra's pay. 55 No evidence was found to suggest the outcome of the matter.

In May, Labor Stage again had occasion to restate its status as an "educational" institution, when the State Division of Placement and Unemployment Insurance ruled that Labor Stage had to pay nearly
$5,000 in unemployment insurance for the cast and crews of *Pins and Needles*. Schaffer appealed, on the grounds that Labor Stage was a "non-profit organization engaged in an educational as well as amusement undertaking," and was therefore exempt from such payments. He won his appeal. 56

While Schaffer was defending the status of Labor Stage as a non-profit institution for educational purposes, he was also trying to arrange for its continuation as a producing organization. Although plans for *The Outward Room* were canceled, he had another project in preparation. Late in 1938, he had purchased two properties based on the life and career of John P. Altgeld, the governor of Illinois during the Haymarket Riots. A biography by Harry Barnard, *Eagle Forgotten* and a book by Waldo R. Browne, *Altgeld in Illinois*, seemed to offer material suitable for Labor Stage, and Schaffer looked for a writer to do a dramatization. There were early reports that Elmer Rice was considering the task, 57 but by August, 1939, the assignment was still unmade, and the project had reached no further development. *Variety* reports, on August 9, that Melvin Levy was working on an adaptation of Browne's book, and that production would be "almost immediate."

However, no definite scheduling of the production, or announcement of specific progress was made. Tentative plans were described in the announcement of the closing of *Pins and Needles*, in June, 1940, "if revisions being made are satisfactory," 58 but the production was
never realized. It may have been that the script was never fully satisfactory, or that Labor Stage turned its attention to other matters as it soon stopped functioning altogether.

Only one other major project reached completion: a pageant for the 1940 ILGWU convention. Based on the poetry of Walt Whitman and using music by George Kleinsinger, the production, "I Hear America Singing," chronicled the history of America from the Civil War period to the present. It used a cast of approximately 500 garment workers, and also appeared for one performance at the World's Fair. In comparison to Pins and Needles, however, the project was negligible.

After the production of "I Hear America Singing," the history of Labor Stage draws rapidly to a close. It produced no other works after Pins and Needles closed, and, although it did maintain its program of classes for a short while thereafter, it soon stopped functioning altogether. The theatre was used as a place for entertainments during the war, but, when the ILGWU's lease ran out in 1943, it was not renewed.

Several factors operated to close Labor Stage, and the most important of these seems to have been Pins and Needles itself. It has been demonstrated that the success of that revue placed Labor Stage into the confusing position of being a commercial producing company, even though it declared its position to be otherwise. Its attempt to produce a successor to the musical in The Outward Room
aborted, and plans for an Altgeld play never crystallized. The logical attempt to return to the limited scope of its first production, Steel, met with frustration. As Mark Starr, head of ILGWU's Educational Department, observes:

"After the dizzying success of Pins and Needles, it was impossible to return to the simple one-act plays of local union dramatic groups and choruses, run primarily for their participants."

Stolberg reinforces this observation:

"After Pins and Needles, ordinary amateur dramatics were bound to seem flat and stale; everything was judged by the standards of a Broadway smash hit."

Although Pins and Needles did play an important role in the demise of Labor Stage, it should be kept in mind that the entire movement of which Labor Stage was a part drew to an end in the first years of the 1940's. The Theatre Union had closed, the FTP was gone, the New Theatre League disbanded, and the Group Theatre had dissolved by 1941. The energy that had given birth to and sustained the left-wing theatre went into other channels; the proletarian theatre's cause was gone; Labor Stage went with it.

Labor Stage as an independent producing organization shared several characteristics with other such groups in the thirties. It came into being to express a particular point of view; but its point of view was never so confining as to limit the subject matter of its
production, or to demand censorship of the material in *Pins and Needles*. It was concerned with dramas of social significance, *(Steel)*, but allowed itself the risk of producing a musical revue—despite the fact that a similar revue had failed less than two years before. Other differences made Labor Stage unique: it was neither entirely amateur, as was the New Theatre, nor entirely professional, as were the other groups; but was an unusual combination of both. Finally, it was the only producing group which had a commercial success; it produced a hit show, which made Labor Stage thrive, and which helped it to die.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I


3 ibid.


5 ibid., p. 24.

6 ibid., p. 272.

7 ibid., p. 51.

8 Rabkin, pp. 55-65.

9 ibid., p. 53.


11 Himelstein, p. 113.

12 ibid., p. 120.


14 ibid., p. 263.

15 Interview with Charles Friedman, April 8, 1965.


17 Scrapbooks of Pins and Needles clippings, on file in the Research Department of the ILGWU, New York City.
Ibid.

Justice, September 1, 1934.

Justice, January 1, 1935.


ILGWU Files.

Ibid.


New York Herald Tribune, November 2, 1935. Because of Schaffer’s intention to use only amateur actors, and because of the nature of the organization, Actor’s Equity announced that it would not participate in the venture in any but an advisory capacity. (New York Times, November 2, 1935.)

Original program of Pins and Needles, in the ILGWU Files.

Justice, June 1, 1936.

Ibid.

All this material is from the ILGWU Files.


New York Herald Tribune, February 27, 1936.

Justice, December 1, 1936.

Ibid.

Justice, January 15, 1937.


ILGWU Files.
Ibid.

Daily Worker. February 19, 1938.

ILGWU Files.

Ibid.

Ibid.

All this material is from the ILGWU Files. A measure of the success of Steel is indicated by its financial outcome. At Labor Stage prices of 40¢, 55¢, 83¢, and $1.10, the production grossed $10,000 for Labor Stage. (Stolberg, p. 296.)


Variety, November 15, 1939, p. 56.


Variety, November 15, 1939, p. 56.


Variety, August 11, 1938, p. 12.

Variety, September 14, 1938, sec. x, p. 1.

Personal Interview with Harold Rome, April 9, 1965.

ILGWU Files.

This turned out to be an advantageous decision. Kingsley produced his script himself, under the title The World We Make. It opened November 20, 1939, and closed after 80 performances on January 27, 1940.

Variety, February 11, 1940.

Personal Interview with Charles Freudman, April 8, 1965.

New York Times, April 17, 1940, p. 18.


58 *Variety*, June 12, 1940, p. 44.

59 ILGWU Files.


61 Stolberg, p. 298.
CHAPTER II

THE CREATION OF PINS AND NEEDLES

Shortly after the establishment of Labor Stage, Louis Schaffer, its executive director, conceived the idea of collecting material for a revue. He thought that this unusual production would best serve Labor Stage's purpose, which was to disseminate the ideals and principles of the labor movement. Two important factors led to this belief. First, he had seen the limited success achieved by the typical proletarian drama, such as Stevedore, and other productions of the Theatre Union and New Theatre League. Second, Schaffer knew of an incident which occurred in 1935, when a union delegation from Allentown ignored their free tickets to Sailors of Cattara and paid their own way to see Jumbo. It seemed obvious, therefore, that the workers audience wanted entertainment first and education second.

Since another aim of Labor Stage was to serve as an avenue for recruitment of union members, Schaffer may have also realized that a humorous musical revue would establish in the public mind a favorable image for the union. While Stevedore urged the workers to join a union in order to fight, Schaffer's musical revue would suggest that they join the ILGWU in order to enjoy themselves. Out of these considerations Schaffer developed his purpose, which was quoted
by the *Daily Worker*:

[When the worker] goes to the theatre he wants to be amused and entertained. He doesn't mind a message, but he wants it in an artistic manner. . . . We are going to give them a very strong message in the Broadway revue manner.2

The "Broadway revue manner" to which Schaffer referred was a style of revue which had been very popular in the 1920's, but which had almost disappeared in the early years of the 1930's. However, there had been some important musical productions of social significance in the later period—both revues and musical plays—but they were so few and so basically different from what *Pins and Needles* came to be that Schaffer's revue was almost an innovation.

The earliest successful musical which used current events as a subject was *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), which—like its sequel *Let Em Eat Cake* (1933)—was written by George S. Kaufman, Morrie Ryskind, and George and Ira Gershwin. The content of these productions was primarily political in nature; both musicals portrayed the adventures of John Winterygreen in Washington.

*Face The Music*, a musical by Irving Berlin and Moss Hart, played a limited run in 1932. Using the depression as background, it was the story of a man's attempt to lose money by investing it in a Broadway musical. Another important musical play appeared in 1937: *I'd Rather Be Right*, by Kaufman, Hart, Richard Rodgers and Larry Hart.

That same year saw the opening of Marc Blitzstein's opera, *The
Cradle Will Rock. This production differed from the others mentioned in its attempt to reach a workers audience rather than a carriage-trade crowd. It dealt with strikes, attacked corrupt management, and described the evils of capitalism. In addition, its approach was serious, while the approach of the others was comic.

The productions described above are similar to Pins and Needles primarily because they are musicals. As a revue, with no particular story to tell, the Labor Stage's show was preceded by two significant productions in this manner.

In 1933 Irving Berlin and Moss Hart wrote As Thousands Cheer, a revue which poked fun at people and events of that year. It used a newspaper format in which each number was introduced by a curtain on which a headline was printed. For example, the headline, "Franklin D. Roosevelt Inaugurated Tomorrow" was the title of a scene which showed Mrs. Hoover moving her belongings out of the White House while commenting on the new tenants. "The World's Wealthiest Man Celebrates 94th Birthday" was the headline for a scene between John D. Rockefeller and his son in which junior tried to press Radio City on his father as a gift. A third headline read "Noel Coward, Noted Playwright, Returns to England." This sketch described the effects of Coward's stay in New York upon the employees of his hotel; they all begin to speak and act like him. The other persons and events spoofed in As Thousands Cheer suggest the type of satire and comment made by the show. Mahatma Gandhi was included, as were Aimee Semple MacPherson, Barbara Hamton,
and the Metropolitan Opera. The song "Heat Wave" talked about the weather, while "Easter Parade" suggested the season. The only relatively serious note in the revue came in the song "Suppertime," which was about the thoughts of a Negro wife on the lynching of her husband.

The shows discussed so far, with the exception of The Cradle Will Rock, were humorous in nature; since they satirized current events, their technique was to use exaggeration and flippancy. The Cradle Will Rock was a serious attack on society, intended for a workers' audience, but it was an opera. The production preceding Pins and Needles that was most nearly identical to it in form and content was Parade, sponsored by the Theatre Guild in 1935.

This revue, originally written for the Theatre Union, was described by Burns Mantle as "basically radical. The sketches were satirical digs at the New Deal and the ensemble numbers slapped at the extravagance of a capitalistic society." The theme—as well as the quality—of the material in Parade is suggested by this lyric:

Life could be so beautiful
Life could be so grand for all,
If just a few didn't own everything
And most of us nothing at all.

Other contents are described by Himmelstein:

1. "The Crisis"; a pantomime about a capitalist who tries to operate his plant without striking workers.

2. "The Dead Cow"; a skit in which "a Hearst photographer
photographs a starving American family as evidence of a famine in Russia."

3. "Free Clinic"; an attack on the "vicious incompetence of medical charity."

4. "Home of the Brave"; a satiric vision of America under a racist dictator who despises everything un-Indian."


The revue closed after thirty-two performances, and this reaction of Burns Mantle gave one important reason for its short life.

What may be described inelegantly but truthfully as the "bellyache" entertainment has to be exceptionally clever if it is to prove attractive, and "Parade" was far from exceptional. Whatever the [Theatre Guild] subscribers may have thought of it they kept mostly to themselves, but four weeks and "Parade" had passed.5

This is the environment into which Pins and Needles was born. The only close neighbor it actually had was Parade, and it should therefore be contrasted only with that revue. However, Schaffer hoped to avoid duplicating its failure, and so was more careful in his choice of material and approach.

Schaffer's original idea was to gather material for a revue which could be put into a short entertainment usable for performances at meetings, conventions or play festivals after an initial run at Labor Stage.6 He first solicited material from some of the
authors of *Parade*, and in addition, received some songs from Harold Rome, who had been introduced to Schaffer by Joseph Losey. After sifting and sorting and finally naming his show, Schaffer then submitted the package of material to his ILGWU Players.

However, the group was not excited by the material and refused to use it. The attitude of the union members was that such material "was not appropriate . . . for a class-conscious theatre." The times were too serious for such light-hearted matter; the labor movement was in too precarious a position to laugh at itself; and the world situation provided little that was humorous. Aside from these reasons—and the additional argument that *Parade* had not fared so well—many union-member actors rejected the idea of a musical revue because they were anxious to do serious dramas with "meatier" roles. Stolberg, in his history of the union, comments that "the young actors were eager to do some good old-fashioned class play, chock-full of Social Significance."

Schaffer set out to convince these critics that his position was sound. He had been approached by another group of actors, the Contemporary Players, who were hoping to use the Labor Stage studios for rehearsal space. Schaffer offered this group his package of revue material, intending to use their performance of the revue as proof of its worth for his union actors. The Contemporary Players, excited by the material, agreed to his plan and set to work. They asked Phillip Loeb to direct them and had the revue ready for per-
formance on June 14, 1936.

The performance was held at Labor Stage and was attended by an invited audience of about two hundred people. Charles Friedman, who was to direct the first edition of Pins and Needles, was there. Harold Rome and Earl Robinson played the two-piano accompaniment. Among the numbers presented were "Lesson in Etiquette," "Dear Beatrice Fairfax," "Mother," —all three later to be included in the first edition—and several others which were later removed from the final package: a sketch about the Supreme Court and a number titled "Magic at Sea" which was reviewed as "portraying what goes on below a Moonlight scene on the deck of a liner." 11

The show was received very well. The Daily Worker found it interesting, 12 and the New York Times thought it was promising. 13 Sam Schwartz, manager of the Belmont Theatre, offered to take the show and cast as they were and to present the revue commercially, but Schaffer refused his offer. 14 More important, however, was the reaction of the union members themselves: the performance had convinced them that they should produce Pins and Needles.

As various contributions were included or omitted during the rehearsal period, the content of the revue gradually changed. The production which eventually opened in November, 1937, was therefore the work of several authors.

The largest contribution was made by Harold Rome, who wrote the score. Previous to his association with Labor Stage, Rome had
worked for three summers at Green Mansions, a resort hotel where he had written songs and revue material for the guests' entertainments. He had then collected the best of his work into a package which he tried to sell to commercial producers. He had met with little success, however, largely because of the poor reception that had been given to Parade. For a while the WPA had considered producing Rome's show, but after much delay Rome had withdrawn his script. It wasn't until he auditioned for Schaffer that Rome found a ready ear; Schaffer decided that this material was what he was looking for.

An important sketch was contributed by Arthur Arent. Arent had previously had some work produced at a New Theatre Night of the New Theatre League in 1935 and had edited and co-authored the Federal Theatre Project's Triple-A Plowed Under in 1936. He remained with the Federal Theatre after his work with Pins and Needles. 15

Marc Blitzstein, David Gregory, Arthur Kramer, and Emanuel Eisenberg were minor contributors to the first edition. Blitzstein, who had recently left the Federal Theatre Project because of the conflict over the production of The Cradle Will Rock, contributed a sketch satirizing that experience. Gregory and Kramer had previously written for the New Theatre League, and Emanuel Eisenberg was press agent for the Group Theatre.

When the material for the revue had been collected, Schaffer hired Charles Friedman to direct the amateur actors. Friedman had a background of working in the left-wing theatre. After working on
the summer hotel circuit, he had affiliated with the Theatre of Action for which he co-authored a play about the CCC, *The Young Go First*. He had also worked with the Theatre Union, and served on its Board of Directors. Because of this background Schaffer felt that Friedman would be able to train his ILGWU actors.

When the second edition of *Pins and Needles* was being readied, Schaffer hired two other contributors: Robert Gordon and Joseph Schrank. Gordon had been an actor with Richard Beleslavsky's American Laboratory Theatre and with Eva la Gallienne's Civic Repertory Company. In addition to working in minor capacities with the Group Theatre and the Theatre Guild, he had also spent summers with Rome at Green Mansions. After Friedman left Labor Stage, Gordon took over the direction of the second and third editions. Joseph Schrank was the only sketch writer of the later editions. He had previously authored two plays for Broadway: *Page Miss Glory* and *Larger Than Life*. In 1938 he was in New York for the production of *Good Hunting*, which he co-authored with Nathaniel West, when Rome approached him for sketch material to be used in *Pins and Needles*.

When the script was ready, Schaffer arranged for the other production elements. Sointu Syrjala, who designed the scenery and costumes, had done work earlier for the Theatre Union and similar groups and was at that time a permanent staff member of Labor Stage. Benjamin Zemach and Gluck Sandor created the dances. Zemach, who had worked for a time with the Habima Theatre in Russia, was also
a permanent member of the Labor Stage staff. Sandor was hired to stage the non-ballet routines.

Thus, although the actors were amateurs, the remainder of the production staff were professionals. The original program lists the following additional credits:


When the script and the technical aspects of the production were ready, Pins and Needles was cast and put into rehearsal. The history of Labor Stage itself was described earlier as a blend of professional and amateur, and the rehearsing of the revue is another example of the amateur nature of the organization.

Casting was open only to members of the ILGWU, in accordance with a policy which Labor Stage always maintained. Because of this restriction, the directors were forced to cast "by potential." They had to choose what seemed the best talent available and hope that their choices could be developed into competent performers. Consequently, rehearsals often had to double as classes in which the cast members were taught to move and speak properly. The staff often used unorthodox teaching methods: Rome recalls taking one actress into Central Park and forcing her to shout, until she grew used to speaking loudly.
In addition to teaching them the fundamentals of acting, Friedman instructed the cast in those qualities he felt necessary for a revue. He taught them to be energetic in their business, spirited in their delivery, and bold in their approach to the material. An anecdote reported by Kyle Chrichton tells how six months were spent developing a nose-to-finger gesture of insult for one actor. Friedman made extensive use of improvisation in his rehearsals and occasionally, in order to establish a joyful mood, he would let his rehearsals relax into an undisciplined romp for the actors. However, he didn't hesitate to show an actor exactly and specifically what he wanted him to do.

The difficulty of the rehearsals was increased by matters other than the necessity to train the cast. Sessions were held only three nights a week from 6:00 to 8:30. The performers had to go directly from their jobs to rehearsals and their efficiency was often poor. One cast member was reported to have said: "I work at a cutting machine all day. If I don't get my sleep, I'm liable to lose a finger tomorrow morning." In addition, rehearsal space was at a premium. Since Labor Stage had only two studios and a small theatre for a large program of activities, rehearsals were often preempted by other classes and projects. The preparation of their production of Steel also interrupted the work on Pins and Needles.

In short, the blend of amateurism and professionalism which characterized the Labor Stage was strongly evidenced in the rehearsals.
of *Pins and Needles*. It was also apparent in the budget for the production. Attempting to produce a show of "Broadway Calibre," Shaffer had to work within a budget which was reported to be only about $10,000. With these funds a director had to be paid, a rehearsal pianist engaged, and scenery and costumes constructed. Syrjala, therefore, was forced to create simple designs; however, when *Pins and Needles* began to show a profit, he redesigned the show completely.

The rehearsal period lasted eighteen months during which several previews or tryout performances were given. Several of these were played in Labor Stage studios for union audiences, but the first major preview was held in the summer of 1937 at Unity House, the ILGWU's summer resort in Pennsylvania. The program for this performance lists several numbers that did not appear in the final first edition as well as many that did.

UNITY HOUSE presents Labor Stage in *Pins and Needles*, a musical revue in 13 scenes. Directed by Charles Friedman; words and music by Harold Rome; Production designed by S. Syrjala; Choreography by Benjamin Zemach.

1. Opening
2. Social Significance
3. Let Freedom Ring
4. What Good is Love?
5. The General is Unveiled
6. Mother
7. Nobody Makes a Pass at Me
8. Mussolini Handicap
9. Not Cricket to Picket
10. Four Little Angels
11. Nuts About You
12. Supreme Court
13. Finale
"Let Freedom Ring" was a spoof of the typical labor play while "Mother" was a take-off on Brechtian theatre. These two were re-written for the first edition as "The Little Red Schoolhouse." "Nuts About You" became "Economics I" and "Supreme Court" was withdrawn. The last sketch probably was taken out because the issue of Roosevelt's court-packing had become a dead subject by the fall of 1937.

When the company returned to New York in September, additional rehearsals were held in preparation for the public opinion of the revue. Other previews were played to which Schaffer invited workers and leaders from the union and public dignitaries. Three previews were held on November 6, November 12, November 13, and November 19, before Schaffer and the directors finally felt that the show was ready to open. Schaffer announced the official opening night for November 27, 1937, invited the critics of the New York papers to attend, and waited for the reaction.

Pins and Needles was intended to fulfill Labor Stage's aim of educating a large audience about union life and the positive values of the ILGWU, and to educate this audience through an entertaining medium. The preparation of the revue was a blend of amateur and professional elements in the same manner that the history of Labor Stage itself was such a blend. The production was performed by amateur players, but designed, staged, and written by theatre professionals. It is this last element, the script of the revue, which is described in the following chapter.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER II


5 Mantle, p. 17.

6 Strauss, p. 3.

7 Other names which were suggested included Labor Follies, Hooks & Eyes, Piece Work, and Shears & Thimbles. ("That Singular Anomaly, PIns and Needles; . . . " New York Herald Tribune, November 26, 1939, sec. vi, p. 2. [cited hereafter as Herald Tribune]).

8 Strauss, p. 3.


10 Herald Tribune.


12 Ibid.

13 Strauss.

14 Herald Tribune.


16 Personal interview with Harold Rome, April 9, 1965.
17 Ibid.


19 Personal interview with Charles Friedman, April 8, 1965.


21 "A Labor Union Goes Into Show Business with a Sparkling Musical Revue," Life, III (December 27, 1937), 52. A comparison with costs of other productions suggests the limitations of this budget. In The Fervent Years (New York: Hill & Wang Dramabooks, 1957), Harold Clurman mentions the cost of Johnny Johnson as $40,000, of Casey Jones as $25,000, and of Golden Boy as $19,000.
CHAPTER III

THE CONTENTS OF PINS AND NEEDLES

As it was a product of the theatre of social-significance, Pins and Needles, even though it was a revue, dealt with matters of contemporary significance. However, it differed from other proletariat productions in that its format as a revue allowed it greater variety in content. As the description of the many numbers which went into the revue throughout its various editions will show, it was this variety of material which contributed greatly to the success of the review.

The First Edition: Pins and Needles

The official opening of Pins and Needles was November 27, 1939.

The program for this first edition read as follows:

1. First Impression
   lyrics by Harold Rome and Charles Friedman
   music by Harold Rome
2. Why Sing of Skies Above!
   music and lyrics by Harold Rome
3. Mussolini Handicap
   sketch by Arthur Arent
4. Public Enemy Number 1
   music and lyrics by Harold Rome
5. The General is Unveiled
   staged by Benjamin Zemach
   Ballet music by Harold Rome
6. We'd Rather Be Right  
sketch by David Gregory  
lyrics by Arthur Kramer  
music by Harold Rome

7. The Little Red Schoolhouse  
sketch by Emanuel Eisenberg

8. Sunday in the Park  
music and lyrics by Harold Rome

9. Dear Beatrice Fairfax  
music and lyrics by Harold Rome

10. Economics I  
sketch by Charles Friedman  
music and lyrics by Harold Rome

11. Men Awake  
music and lyrics by Harold Rome  
(Prelude suggested by a poem of Langston Hughes)  
conceived and staged by B. Zemach

Intermission of Ten Minutes

12. Lesson in Etiquette  
music and lyrics by Harold Rome

13. Vassar Girl Finds a Job  
music and lyrics by Harold Rome

14. FTP Plowed Under  
sketch by Marc Blitzstein

15. What Good is Love?  
music and lyrics by Harold Rome

16. One Big Union for Two  
music and lyrics by Harold Rome  
dance routine by Gluck Sandor

17. Four Little Angels of Peace  
music and lyrics by Harold Rome

18. Slumming Party  
music and lyrics by Harold Rome  
dance by Gluck Sandor

19. We've Just Begun  
lyrics by Harold Rome and Charles Friedman  
music by Harold Rome

† First Impression (Original - November 29, 1939)

The opening had originally been conceived as a gimmick backstage
opening. The idea was to have the cast discuss what the public wanted, and to let the rest of the show be the answers. However, Friedman disagreed with this approach. He argued that it would be an unbelievable situation. After all, the cast members were amateurs; how could they know what the public wanted? Even the professionals could only guess. He thought it would be more appropriate to the approach of the production to speak the simple truth about their situation. To illustrate his point, he and Rome wrote the opening song which was accepted by the cast for the opening.

It was performed by the entire company, in working clothes, and served to establish the mood of the show. It told the audience that the singers were not professional performers, but were "plain, simple, common ordinary . . . men and women who work hard for a living . . . ."

* Why Sing of Skies Above! (Original - to close of show)

This song became popularly known as "Sing Me a Song of Social Significance" and was the statement of the theme of the show. As it was also a statement of the theme of much of the theatre of the thirties, it was not an original philosophy; however, its effectiveness lay in its approach. It was sung by the girls and boys of the chorus as the girls told the boys that they were tired of love songs with no meaning; they ordered the boys to

Sing us a song with Social Significance,  
Or you can sing 'till you're blue.  
Let meaning shine from every line,  
Or we won't love you.
Thus, the song reduces the idea of the literary *cause célèbre* to the level of the slightly ridiculous; when it comes to pass that young girls no longer care to talk of love, then times are indeed out of joint.

**Mussolini Handicap** (Original - November 20, 1939)

After his ascension to power in the 1920's, Benito Mussolini set into motion a campaign to increase Italy's population. In 1927, he said, "Italy must appear on the threshold of the second half of the century with a population of not less than 60,000,000 inhabitants." The Fascist government thereupon promoted early marriages, banned contraceptives, and made having a large family an act of patriotism. However, by 1937, Italy's population had reached only about 40,000,000. The situation was spoofed in this sketch.

The situation of this sketch is the presentation of the grand awards in the All-Italy Maternity Sweepstakes. The first prize goes to the winner of the "Sardinian Marathon Endurance," who, in sixteen years, gave birth to nineteen "bouncing bambinos!" Other such awards are given out, until Mussolini introduces Public Enemy Number 1, a mother of but one child. She is scorned and abused, and left alone on the stage.
Public Enemy Number One: or Womb for One  (Original - November 20, 1939)

As a continuation of the preceding sketch, Public Enemy sings her lament. She says that she wants to help her country, but is unable to.

You never did see a pod with one pea,
A pod with one pea's not much fun.
And every cow udder has lots in her udder,
But I've only womb for one.

The General Is Unveiled  (Original - March, 1939)

This number was an interpretive ballet, in the style of the Martha Graham or the Denishawn school. The program describes the action:

The Women's Auxiliary assembles to unveil the statue of a famous general on his birthday. In the middle of a stirring address by Mr. Warmonger, the general comes to life and does as he has always done; set man against man. When he resumes his granite self, he leaves behind him a chastened and thoughtful group.

The story of the ballet was probably not inspired by any particular international event; rather it served to reflect a general condemnation of the world-wide movement towards war.

We'd Rather Be Right  (Original - November 6, 1939)

The opening years of the New Deal were controversial. Roosevelt's
progressive legislation such as the AAA and the NIRA was endorsed by many Americans, but offended those who came to be known as the "right-wing." Republicans denounced heavy government spending; industrialists such as Henry Ford refused to subscribe to NIRA codes; conservative thinkers such as William Hearst called the approach of the administration "absolute state socialism"—this sort of criticism continued and increased as the thirties progressed, and included left-wing thinking of any sort in its attacks.

Extending this type of thinking to the ultimate degree, this sketch became a spoof on "the 100% American who smothers every suggestion of progressivism with the charge that it is quite un-American." The play on the word right is obvious. In addition, the Rodgers-Hart / Kaufman-Hart musical, I'd Rather Be Right, which satirized the New Deal, opened November 2, 1937, and the sketch's title may reflect this.

The situation of the sketch is a meeting of three "One Hundred per cent Americans" who are looking for a campaign slogan to help make America "bigoted and better." They comment on the national situation:

1st 100% American:
We have all been too carefree. Thank goodness we're meeting with a real conservative. A real leader.

2nd 100% American:
Amazing what he sees and hears. Only yesterday he put down a dangerous new element, had their headquarters raided, and found two copies of Little Red Riding Hood. They call themselves the Daughters of the American Revolution, and they couldn't even recite the amendments!
During their meeting, lunch is delivered. They find they are unable to eat, since it contains such foods as French Fried Potatoes, and Hungarian Goulash. The third 100% American declares, "I would rather read the Wagner Act than eat that."

Eventually they decide upon a slogan: Call it un-American!

The sketch ends as they sing about how to do just that:

If you find you can't reply to your opponent,
why don't try to,
Call him un-American.
If a radical idea gives you nervous diarrhea,
Call it un-American.

The Little Red Schoolhouse (Original - April, 1939)

In 1935, the Theatre Union produced Bertolt Brecht's Mother. The play dealt with a characteristic proletarian-drama situation: the manner in which an uninvolved character becomes caught up in a revolutionary movement. In Mother the movement was the Bolshevik Revolution; similar dramas set in America dealt most often with the labor movement.

In style, Mother was an extension of the early agit-prop technique, although Brecht now called it epic theatre. It still used a didactic approach, interrupting the action of the story to explain the significance of certain events, speaking directly to the audience, and relying upon obvious symbols.
This sketch was originally titled "Mother; or Let Freedom Wring" and focused on the absurdities of these theatrical devices. For the first edition of Pins and Needles, however—at a time when labor struggles were climaxing in sit-down strikes across the nation—the focus changed somewhat; more emphasis was placed on the labor-movement implications.

As a prologue, an Announcer appears, to comment on the Theatre Union's production of Mother and on Brecht's style:

In it [Mother], Brecht gave concrete expression to his theory of the perfect form of Worker's theatre. Among other ideas, he contended that the theatre was a classroom to which Workers audiences came to be taught; that the ideas and images should be simple and presented with such disarmingly simple devices as chants and ditties in order to make the fundamental political ideas more palatable. We will now give you our impression of the Epic form of theatre when it is carried to its logical conclusion in the performance of a typical labor play.

The sketch opens to reveal four employees of the La Dame Chapeau Company, who are discussing their grievances. One of the workers stops to tell the audience who the characters are; he then spells out for them the name of the company; and finally points to a sign on which is clearly printed: La Dame Chapeau Company.

Suddenly the Boss enters. The spokesman of the committee approaches him.

Schmaltz:
Mr. La Dame, there's something I've been
wanting to say to you for a long time, but excuse me for a minute. (HE TURNS TO THE AUDIENCE) I am now about to act the part of the shop spokesman and tell the boss just how we feel about things around here. You may have come to this conclusion yourselves, at one time or another, but we're not taking any chances on your intelligence.

Boss:
What's the meaning of this, a strike?

Lena:
Strike? What do you mean, a strike?

Boss:
A strike is a mov--- (interrupted by workers, who point to audience. Boss turns to audience) A strike is a movement on the part of all or some of the workers in a given establishment to call a halt to work in an effort to force the employers to grant them superior conditions in hours and wages ----- (he runs out of breath and has to stop)

As the Boss exits, a Union organizer appears who helps the committee define its demands. He then sends two workers to see the Boss, but they soon come running back on stage:

Schmaltz:
Where's John L. Lewis?

Others:
John L. Lewis?

Schmaltz:
The Boss sat down!

BLACKOUT
"Sunday in the Park" was supposedly the Labor Stage's answer to Irving Berlin's "Easter Parade," the Park Avenue ballad which had closed the first act of *As Thousands Cheer*. "Sunday in the Park" is the idyll of the average working class man and his family.

The locale is a public park on a Sunday afternoon. A man sings the initial chorus, which tells how he looks forward to his one day of enjoyment in the week:

Sitting in the sun,
With the trees and grass and flowers everywhere,
And lots of room to spare,
We have such fun
On Sunday in the park.

The song is then taken up by a series of park visitors, each singing about his particular situation. A mother and father appear, trying to keep their two children in line. A vendor sells them some frozen ice. A man with a carriage passes through, singing about meeting his girl on a Sunday in the park. He is followed by a "Lonesome Guy" who has never succeeded in finding a girl, and who sings, "I read a book / on Sunday in the park." The "Lonesome Guy" is accosted by a "Radical" who accuses him of class negligence: "You must learn the struggle of the masses, and what it means to be in the forefront of the Labor Movement, and the CIO!" A quarrel which turns into a fight develops between the two men. A "Cop" comes to stop them, but they
are halted instead by a rainstorm. The storm sends everybody running back home, turning their pleasant afternoon into a sad disappointment.

+ Dear Beatrice Fairfax (Original - to close of show)

Many of the numbers in Pins and Needles were written by Harold Rome at some time during his three summers at Green Mansions. "Sunday in the Park" was such a number, and "Dear Beatrice Fairfax" was another. The satire in this song rises from the brand names mentioned; but there is also popular appeal in the recognizable picture it presents.

The song is a lament of a frustrated young Brooklyn lady who complains that nobody makes a pass at her, even though she follows the advice of all the advertisements.

I wash my clothes with Lux,  
My etiquette's the best;  
I spend my hard earned bucks  
On just what the ads suggest;  
Oh dear, what can the matter be?  
Nobody makes a pass at me!

Economics I (Original - November 6, 1939)

The core of this sketch is a song, "Nuts About You," which was originally performed at Unity House around 1935. Thinking that a note of social significance should be added when the number was put into
Pins and Needles, Friedman set Roma's lyric into a play-within-a-play framework. A singer comes to the stage with her song and is told that the revue is a social document in which her song will not fit. Undaunted, she describes how her song could easily be interpreted as an expression of social significance. She then casts a "Banker," a "Manufacturer," a "Wholesaler," a "Retailer," and a "Consumer," and describes their business to them.

She sings her song, which runs in part:

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People think that love is blind
And though I may sound unkind
I think love affects the mind.

Hi-di-hi, ask me why
All my skies are so blue.
Love's just around the corner,
And I'm just nuts about you.
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As she sings the last stanza, a Rube Goldberg chain reaction is set into motion: the girl kicks the "Banker"; the "Banker" shoots a pop-gun at the "Manufacturer"; the "Manufacturer" hits the "Wholesaler"; the "Wholesaler" rattles the "Retailer"; and the "Retailer" squirts a bottle of seltzer into the face of the "Consumer." Thus, the sketch becomes a socially-significant lesson in the machinations of the capitalistic economy, and it demonstrates that it is the "Consumer" who gets it in the end.
Men Awake (Original - June, 1939)

The second of the two symbolic ballots in the first edition, "Men Awake" told the story of the disillusioned immigrant, who became the oppressed worker and who was roused to action by the song of the entire company. The ballet and the lyrics reflect the influence of the proletarian drama, an influence which this first edition was unable to avoid.

Workers all! Heed my call! 
You who toil and sweat and slave, 
From the cradle to the grave!

You in life's forgotten heap, 
You who sell your souls for keep!
Men awake! Heed the warning!
Men awake! The day is dawning!
Men awake! The wheels are humming!
Men awake! The day is coming!

† Lesson in Etiquette (Original - November 20, 1939)

The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 gave employees the express "right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing." Although the NIRA was abolished by the Supreme Court in 1935, the Wagner Act of that same year re-affirmed the rights of labor. These legislative measures prompted the establishment and growth of many trade unions, an increase in the power of the A.F. of L., and the origin of the C.I.O. However, these
unions often had to force unwilling employers to recognize their new status, to accept union leaders as spokesmen, and to concede to labor's demands for better working and wage conditions. Consequently, strikes were numerous, and picket lines became a common sight. Often these picket lines would become scenes of riots, as employers protested being forced into making concessions, and so a strike came to be a serious, often dangerous, undertaking.

"Lesson in Etiquette" shows a strike in progress. The picket line is approached by a society matron who sings "It's Not Cricket to Picket." As she sings, however, her emotions get the best of her and she begins to lose her self-composure. The scene ends as she is being taken away by a policeman.

† Vassar Girl Finds a Job (Original - November 20, 1939)

During the thirties, jobs were always difficult to find. When jobs did become available, often more applicants appeared than could be hired. Many large department stores, faced with this problem, decided to hire only college graduates, even as clerks. The situation was not laughable, but it did contain a touch of the ludicrous.

Such a college graduate clerk is spoofed by this song. A graduate of Vassar described how, after having "studied hard and thirsted after knowledge," she was hired by Macy's to sell ladies' undergarments.
Once I wrote poems, put folks in tears,  
Now I write checks for ladies' brassieres.  
I used to be on the daisy chain,  
Now I'm a chain store daisy.

FTP Plowed Under (Original - April, 1939)

The Federal Theatre Project of the Work's Progress Administration, initiated in 1935, was subject to many problems common to a bureaucratic organization. The most serious of these problems was censorship. Since the project was financed by public funds, many congressmen felt it necessary to ask for an exercise of control on subject matter of the productions, especially since much of the better drama produced by the FTP "inevitably exhibited spots of political pink, and sometimes undisguised Marxism." However, the temper of the thirties made avoidance of such subject matter impossible; consequently, the FTP became a center of controversy.

Another bureaucratic problem faced by the FTP is exemplified by this episode reported by Don Congdon:

Sometime [after the death of the project] Miss Hallie Flanagan . . . received a telephone call from a Congressman. She expected that he wanted to offer his sympathy; instead he wanted to talk about the theatre project in his state. She said, "But Congressman, there is no Federal Theatre. You voted it out of existence."

A stunned silence. Then, "What?"

"It was abolished on June 30, by an Act of Congress."
Again silence. Then a shocked and heavy voice said, "Was that the Federal Theatre?" 6

The sketch, written by Marc Blitzstein, attacks these elements of the project. Blitzstein himself was directly involved with these problems. His opera, The Cradle Will Rock, was originally planned as an FTP production; however a last minute ban on its presentation cancelled the scheduled opening. The opera's makeshift performance that same night in an empty theatre down the street marked the beginning of the Mercury Theatre.

The title of the sketch is a parody of one of the most successful FTP productions, the Living Newspaper edition, Triple-A Plowed Under.

The committee members in the sketch are named Mr. Bureaucrash, Mr. Zealous, Mr. Stallalong, and Mrs. Clubhouse. They are conferring with an author, Mr. Hippity Bloomberg [a name probably derived from Blitzstein], about the production of his script. They promise him a big, elaborate production, but insist on certain necessary changes.

The first objection is to the title, "Workers Also Love." That must go. The committee next objects to the play being about love.

Bloomberg:
Well, it's about a boy and a girl.

Zealous:
Now don't tell me SEX rears its ugly head!

Bureaucrash:
Not on the taxpayers' money!
Zealous:
Couldn't you change it to a boy and a dog?

Bureaucrash:
Or a boy and a horse?

Stallalong:
Or a boy and a box of cornflakes?

This continues, until:

Bloomberg:
All I've got left is: The Curtain Opens!

Bureaucrash:
How why can't our play open SMACK like that?
Do we have to have a curtain?

During the meeting, a guard has been handing the committee members little pieces of paper, which they have signed without examining. Ultimately, Bureaucrash realizes what he has signed.

Bureaucrash:
Pink dismissal slips for 3000 actors! Forty-five hundred musicians fired. All but three stage-hands dismissed. Entire office out by March 4. Well, that doesn't leave an awful lot, does it?

BLACKOUT

† What Good is Love? (Original - November 20, 1939)

Another of the songs from Green Mansions, this number reflects the disillusionment and pessimism that many young people felt during
the depression. Unable to finance a marriage, or to afford the luxury of dreams, many agreed with the mood expressed by the lyric:

What good is love,
If you have to face cold hungry days and sighing?
What good is love,
If life's just a race to keep your heart from crying?

† One Big Union for Two (Original - November 20, 1939)

Several threads form the background for this song. Both the A.F. of L. and the C.I.O. were in the midst of recruiting drives, and so the number is subtle propaganda for the virtues of joining a union. In addition, the A.F. of L.-C.I.O. feud was developing, and although the conflict did not come to head until the following year, the play on words, "union for two," is a gentle spoof on their problems. Finally, and perhaps most important, the number is a quiet tongue-in-cheek comment on the labor movement in general, and on the frenzied seriousness with which it was normally considered.

Rome reduces the labor movement to a song of courting, sung between the boys and girls of the chorus. They plan their lives together—lives of harmony and happiness—in their one big "union for two."

I'm on a campaign to make you mine,
I'll picket you until you sign
In one big union for two.

..........
When we have joined up and made the grade,
We'll add a member, union made,
Who looks like me and like you.
In one big union for two.

† *Four Little Angels of Peace* (Original - to close of show)

This number reflects the international situation and comments on the actions of the major aggressive powers in the late thirties. Both the lyrics and characters were continually changed in order to keep pace with the rapidly changing events.

By 1937, Japan had conquered Manchuria, and was now marching into China. Italy had taken Ethiopia in 1935, and had announced that their action had been a defense against acts of war, a claim which was proved untrue. Germany had infiltrated Austria with Nazis, and Hitler was setting up the coup which he would exercise five months later. As a climax to this action, these three countries formed their Anti-Comintern pact in 1937, ostensibly to ward off bolshevism, but in actuality, to guarantee an offensive alliance. Britain, primarily because of its position as an imperialistic power, was the fourth nation criticised in the sketch.

The four angels are Hitler, Mussolini, Eden, and an unnamed Japanese. As they sing of their desire for harmony and world peace, they kill each other off until they are at the end once again reunited.
Slumming Party (Original - November 29, 1939)

Like "We'd Rather Be Right," this number is a jab at right-wing reactionaries. Two of them are mentioned in the lyric: Henry Ford and J. P. Morgan.

A Mrs. Dalyrymple III and her entourage go slumming in a working-class neighborhood and teach the "natives" how to do their upper-class dance; they sing "Doing the Reactionary," which turns out to be a simple step:

Don't go left, but be polite,
Move to the right,
Doing the reactionary.

We've Just Begun (Original - November 20, 1939)

The finale of the first edition was, like the close of its first act, an element of proletarian drama. The entire company announces, with fists in the air, that labor intends to have an important voice in the future:

In the future to be built
We intend to have a voice.
There are millions of us.
Yes, we'll have something to say!
Projected Numbers

Between November, 1937, and September, 1938, several sketches were announced as projected inclusions into Pins and Needles. None of these numbers appear on any program, and were not seen in the show. Either the announcements were premature, or the numbers were withdrawn during their rehearsal.

"One Third of a Mitten," by Emanuel Eisenberg, was announced for inclusion around June, 1938. It was intended as a spoof of the FTP's Living Newspaper, One Third of a Nation, which opened in New York on January 17, 1938. 7

"The Great White Way Turns Pink," by John Latouche and Lee Wainer, was supposed to go into the show around September 26, 1938, to replace "FTP Plowed Under."

A number was projected for the run of Pins and Needles in Hollywood, in August, 1938: "Pins and Needles as the Movies Will Do It," by Eisenberg and Rome. Mr. Rome does not recall this number.

The New York Times of November 6, 1938, announces two numbers to appear as of December 19. The titles were "You've Got to Dance," and "Of Mice and Rats," and, as with the other numbers mentioned, the only indication of their content is what the titles suggest.
Early in 1933, Hitler began accusing the Czechs of "provocations" against the Nazis, and on September 12 he demanded that Czechoslovakia concede to Germany the Sudetenland area, by calling for self-determination for Sudetenland Nazis. This action precipitated the Munich Crisis—three weeks of conferences and negotiations between England's Neville Chamberlain, France's Edouard Daladier, and Mussolini and Hitler. The three weeks concluded with a complete concession to Hitler's demands, and Chamberlain returned to England, declaring that he had arranged "peace for our time."

Popular condemnation of Chamberlain's action found expression in this sketch by John Latouche, Arnold Horwitt and Bernece Kazounoff. It parodies what the conferences might have been like, and quotes Chamberlain as saying, "If at first you don't concede, fly, fly again."

Changes in Four Little Angels of Peace

To reflect the Munich crisis, Hitler's lyric was changed:

Now I've got the Sudeten, there's no need for waitin'  
Ja Wohl, all my plans are now surer,  
It will be hotsy-totsy to make the world Nazi,  
Under Adolf, the house painting surer!

The angel Eden was replaced by the angel Chamberlain, who was given the following lyric to sing.
Though we sold out the Czechs to protect our own necks,
And left Loyalist Spain high and dry,
Though Il Duce got tough, and we let Adolf bluff,
There's more to this than meets the eye,
When the taking was good, England took all she could,
Yes, we took it by hook or by crook;
Now we're in quite a spot, we finagle and plot
Just trying to keep what we took.

Lorelei on the Rocks (December, 1933 - April, 1939)

As the Nazis tightened their control of Germany, more and more works of literature were either burned or banned. Early in November, 1933, Hitler suppressed Heinrich Heine's poem, Lorelei. The sketch by John Latouche and Bernice Kazounoff, commenting on the passing of German culture, was put into the show soon after. In it, a lone, lonely mermaid is sitting on a rock, ignoring a soldier dressed in a Nazi-like uniform. She sighs,

Since the Nazi Vereine
Suppressed Heinrich Heine,
I've fallen on evil days.

... * * * * * * * *

I long for my merman, but I find the new German
Is too, too Teutonic for me.

The Second Edition: Pins and Needles 1939

In March, 1939, "The General is Unveiled" was taken out of the show and three new numbers were added. At the same time Schaffer felt
that enough new material had been added to the show to warrant the announcing of a new edition. Therefore, as soon as it was evident that the new numbers were successful, he re-arranged the contents and scheduled the official opening of *Pins and Needles 1939* for April 21, 1939.

The program for this opening read as follows:

1. First Impression
2. Why Sing of Skies Above?
3. Mussolini Handicap
4. Public Enemy Number One
5. I've Got the Nerve to be in Love
   music and lyrics by Harold Rome
6. Cream of Mush
   sketch by Joseph Schrank
7. What Good is Love?
8. Sunday in the Park
9. Britannia Waives the Rules
10. Dear Beatrice Fairfax
11. Economics I
12. Men Awake
13. One Big Union for Two
14. Papa Lewis - Mama Green
   music and lyrics by Harold Rome
15. Lesson in Etiquette
16. We'd Rather Be Right
17. Back to Work
   music and lyrics by Harold Rome
18. Vassar Girl Finds a Job
19. Four Angels of Peace
20. Slumming Party
21. We've Just Begun

† Papa Lewis - Mama Green (March, 1939 - end of New York run)

The rift between John L. Lewis, head of the C.I.O., and William Green, president of the A.F. of L., begun around 1935 increased until
late in 1938 when John L. Lewis announced the withdrawal of his organization from the ranks of the A.F. of L. The Committee for Industrial Organization was renamed the Congress for Industrial Organization. The ILGWU was vitally involved in this struggle, since its president, David Dubinsky, was one of the original proponents of the C.I.O. However, Dubinsky disapproved of Lewis' actions, and he took the ILGWU out of the C.I.O., in order to make it an independent group.

This sketch reduces the situation to a family quarrel between Papa Lewis and Mama Green with their two children, Rank and File, caught in the middle. It was played in the manner of a black-and-white newspaper cartoon; the appropriately labeled characters played against a two-dimensional setting painted in newspaper colors. The children sing "Papa Don't Love Mama Any More" and describe how their family quarrel is upsetting all the neighbors and the relatives, including Uncle Frankie and Big Brother Dave Dubinsky.

Papa don't love Mama any more,  
No, Papa don't love Mama any more.  
Once they were happy in one big family,  
Now they don't agree, they fight day and night.  
Papa don't love Mama any more.

† Back to Work (March, 1939 - end of run)

This number replaced "Men Awake" as the first act finale when the latter was withdrawn in June, 1939. The impetus for "Back to Work" was
an idea of the director of the second edition, Robert Gordon. Gordon suggested to Rome that there was a need for a happy number in the show—a song that would be melodious and joyful.

To meet this request, as well as to maintain the revue's slant, Rome wrote this song. It is about the happy celebration of a group of union workers who have just learned that their strike is ended and that they can now go back to work.

**Cream of Mush** (April, 1939 - end of run)

A sketch with no single event to attack, "Cream of Mush" is a general spoof on radio censorship and commercials. It begins with a sloppy love song, each line of which is found objectionable by the sponsor. Thus, the singer is forced to omit line after line of the song until he is left with nothing to do at the end but slurp the sponsor's cereal as sound effects.

+ **I've Got the Nerve to Be in Love** (March, 1939 - end of run)

Another song with a general appeal, this number was an answer to "What Good is Love?" It is sung by a young mechanic and a cafeteria waitress, and reflects a positive and optimistic attitude toward proletarian romance. The singers declare that, even though they don't have riches or luxuries, they still have the nerve to be in love.
I haven't got an income that G-Men care to question,
When market prices tumble, I don't get indigestion,
That may be true of me but still I've got the nerve
To be in love with you.

Changes in the Second Edition

Almost immediately after the second edition was officially
welcomed it was changed. "Men Awake" was removed in June, and was
replaced by "The Red Mikado."

† The Red Mikado (June, 1939 - end of run)

The season of 1938-39 was flooded with Mikadoes. The D'Oyly-
Carte Opera Company appeared in January with Gilbert and Sullivan's
Mikado. Shortly thereafter, on March 1, the Chicago FTP's production
of The Swing Mikado opened in New York and was soon running under com-
mercial auspices. The latter was a Negro Jazz version of the Gilbert
and Sullivan opera. Three weeks later, Michael Todd presented his
version, The Hot Mikado, and Broadway entered "the war of the Mikadoes."

Schrank and Reme used the Mikado framework as the basis for a
general satire on domestic and international events.

An announcer introduces this sketch, commenting on the plethora
of Mikadoes that season and promising that "The Red Mikado" will be
the last of the Mikadoes. The scene then opens on a chorus of seven
men wearing American dirty overalls and Japanese hats. After they intro­
duce themselves, the Lord High Executioner appears and sings about his
"little list," now up-dated:

There's that flabby Yorkville fuerher
By the name of Fritzie Kuhn,
And all bund members goose-stepping
To Adolf Hitler's tune.

Shortly thereafter the little maids enter, wearing Japanese kimonos,
American bonnets, and fans marked "Made in China." They tell the
audience,

Three little D.A.R.'s are wo;
Filled to the brim with bigotry,
Three little D.A.R.'s.

When they finish, a comment is made on Germany's recent economy mea­
sures and its development of synthetic materials. This comment is
set to another familiar melody:

Near a tree by a river a Rhine-maided sat;
Singing, "Ersatz, Oh Ersatz, Oh Ersatz!"

The frivolities are then interrupted by the entrance of the Mikado
who tells about his "object all sublime," which says in part,

And Nazi sheets, like "Social Justice,"
That specialize in abuse,
Must print up each issue on soft rolls of tissue
And be put to proper use.
After his song the Mikado sends the Lord High Executioner off stage with the three little D.A.R.'s. Three short sharp chops are heard. The executioner appears with a sword from which drips blood of the color blue. At this point, feeling that the nonsense has gone on long enough, Gilbert himself appears carrying a sign: "Unfair to Gilbert." From the opposite side of the stage, Sullivan appears, picketing: "Unfair to Sullivan."

† *Mene, Mene, Tekal* (July 29, 1939 - end of run)

Early in 1939 Russia, in order to secure adequate sea bases to her West, demanded land in the Baltics. Her demands were met by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, but Finland refused to allow Russian bases within her borders. In November, after negotiations between the two countries had finally broken down, Russia attacked. By March, 1940, Finland was forced to capitulate.

The growing tensions between the two countries, as well as a general condemnation of Stalin and dictators in general, is reflected in this song. It tells, in the form of a spiritual, the story of Belshazzar and the writing on the wall, using the words themselves as a refrain: *Mene, mene tekal, upharsin.*

Particularly noteworthy was the backdrop which Sointu Syrjala—a Finn—designed. It was a stylized Egyptian frieze, with hammers and sickles interspersed prominently among the figures.
Changes in *Four Little Angels of Peace*

Between September, 1939, and May, 1940, this number was changed frequently.

On September 4, 1939, the four angels became three as the British angel was dropped. England had been forced to declare war on Germany on September 3, and popular sympathy was on her side.

Around September 25, 1939, the skit was withdrawn. The months of August and September had seen rapid changes in the world scene. The Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed on August 23; the invasion of Poland by Hitler and Stalin was culminated on September 18; France had declared war on Germany early in September. In place of the sketch an announcement appeared, explaining that "the rapid changes in the international scene had driven the author insane. He had been able to write only nursery rhymes:

> Little Joe Stalin sat in the Kremlin,  
> Eating a Nazi pie.  
> He stuck in his thumb and pulled out a Polish plumb  
> and cried, "What a smart boy am I!"

On November 29, for *New Pins and Needles*, the number was put back into the show. It was now "Five Angles of Peace," and the characters were Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain, a Japanese, and Stalin.

*Paradise Mislaid* (September 4, 1939 - end of run)

Clifford Odets returned to New York from Hollywood in November,
1938, and produced *Rocket to the Moon*. Schrank took the presence of the Odets work in New York as the occasion for a general spoof of Odets' style of writing. The cast of characters in the sketch gives an idea of its content: Jake, Papa, Minnie, the Janitor, "Stupie," Max, Moe, Becky, the Nurse, Lucille, and Jack Smith. Sidney Whipple's reaction describes its style:

[It] seems to be a collection of incongruous characters from *Rocket to the Moon*, *Golden Boy*, *Awake and Sing*, and *Paradise Lost*. It doesn't make any sense, for it isn't supposed to, but it makes good comedy... All the characters think like Odets' creatures and all of them are given to the type of non-sequitur thinking that marks "advanced drama." 9

The Harmony Boys  (September 25, 1939 - end of run)

As liberalism developed in the thirties, so did an extreme reaction to it. Seeing dangers to liberty from both communism and democracy, several fascistic persons rose to prominence. One of the most "popular" of these was Father Charles E. Coughlin. He advocated the nationalization of the banks and our natural resources, and adopted the Nazi-doctrine of anti-Semitism.

Another prominent figure in this movement was Fritz Kuhn, who was Hitler's personal friend. He organized the Amerikadeutscher Volksbund, The American Nazi party which had most of its support in the Yorkville district of New York City. Early in 1940 Kuhn was arrested
for stealing bund funds.

A third fascistic figure was Southern Senator Robert Reynolds, who had organized a type of vigilante band in his home area.

The "Harmony Boys" sketch by Rome and Schrank parodies these three men in the characters of Coggie, Bob, and Fritzie. Kuhn dances on stage, doing the "Flat-foot Fuhrer with the Floy-Floy," and when Bob identifies himself, it is as the "goose-stepping pixie from Dixie." Coggie suggests that, since the three have so much in common, they ought to get together and form a trio, The Harmony Boys. The idea is approved, and the three sing their new theme song:

We're the Harmony Boys from Demagogue Lane  
Come get on board our gospel train,  
Though we've taken different paths to fame,  
Turn us upside down and we all look the same.

On the night of Kuhn's arrest, a piece of business was added: at the end of the song a policeman appeared, tapped Kuhn's shoulder, and led him off. This was a successful piece of business that was played throughout the run.

What This Party Needs  (November 6, 1939 - end of New York run)

As a change of pace, this number replaced "We'd Rather be Right." The song, "Call it Un-American," was retained, but it was set in a new context. The scene is the headquarters of the Republican Campaign
Committee, in 1940. The room has been closed and locked for eight years and when it is opened "Three Bearded Old Men" are discovered. They have fallen asleep on the night of Hoover's nomination, and lost eight years from their lives. The reporters who find them describe the current conditions to them and teach them the proper way of society—call it un-American.

The Third Edition: New Pins and Needles

As in April, so later in November, Schaffer thought that enough new numbers had been added to warrant the advertising of a new edition. He invited the critics, and on November 20, 1939, officially inaugurated New Pins and Needles. The program read as follows:

1. Singing a Song of Social Significance
2. Sunday in the Park
3. Papa Lewis-Mama Green
4. I've Got the Nerve to be in Love
5. Paradise Mislaid
6. Mene Mene Tekal
7. Five Little Angels of Peace
8. Give Me the Good Old Days
9. What This Party Needs
   music and lyrics by Harold Rome
10. Back to Work

11. Bertha; the Sewing Machine Girl
   music and lyrics by Harold Rome
12. Dear Beatrice Fairfax
13. The International Situation
14. Cream of Mush
15. The Red Mikado
16. Stay Out, Sammy
  music and lyrics by Harold Rome
17. The Harmony Boys
18. We Sing America

Give Me The Good Old Days  (November 20, 1939 - end of run)

By the end of 1939 both the appeal and the significance of "Vassar Girl Finds a Job" had dwindled; the expanded war market had done much to create jobs. The song was replaced by this number, which was in effect a gentle spoof on Pins and Needles itself.

The song was delivered by one of the cast, before a make-up mirror. She sings of longing for the simple days when she worked in the shop every day and was through at five in the evening. Now she's an actress, with "two songs a night, and diction worries!" However, even though she longs for the good old life, she whispers confidentially that she does prefer her new life to the old after all.

The International Situation  (September, 1939 - ??)

This little moment in the show consisted of the short announcement and poem mentioned in connection with the changes in "Angels of Peace." The number was withdrawn soon after the opening of the third edition.
† *Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl; or It's Better With a Union Man*  
(November 20, 1939 - end of run)

As with "One Big Union for Two," "Bertha..." reflects no more social significance than the setting of a popular idea into a labor framework. The story of Bertha is the story of the stereotyped "melodramer"; Bertha is pursued by the villain, Harold Hotfoot, and forsakes her lover, Tod Trueblue. However, Bertha, unlike others of her tradition, is lost in the end because she forgets—as all employers should not do—that it's "better with a union man!"

† *Stay Out, Sammy*  
(November 20, 1939 - June 17, 1940)

During the first months of the war in Europe, American public opinion was divided between joining the war and remaining neutral; isolation and intervention. Most people felt that all aid, short of actual participation in the war, should be given Britain. However, world events made this position more and more difficult to maintain; so public opinion gradually began to advocate sending American troops to fight alongside the British.

An isolationist sentiment is expressed in this song, sung by a mother as a warning to her son to stay out of the street brawl down the block:

Better stay out, Sammy, though all the others fight;  
Stick to your side of the street; you know that fighting's not right!
As dictators and demagogues swept into power throughout the world, Rome felt the need for a positive statement about the American tradition. The show closed with this choral tribute to the American way of life:

We sing American; we sing the land of pioneers;
We sing the dream that lasted through the years.

Changes in the Third Edition

*Let 'Em Eat Guns* (April 15, 1940 - June 17, 1940)

As most of her energies and monies were going into war production, Germany was put on a system of food rationing by Hitler. In this sketch Schrank introduces the "Head of the Department of Propaganda and Under-nourishment" in order to explain the situation to the *Pins and Needles* audience. The speaker (the Professor) appears in his shorts because he has already used up his pants ration. He described the situation in Germany as one that has called for the utmost patriotic spirit; whoever is fat is a traitor; it is "the concentration camp for those who belch!" As a visual aid, the professor brings on a weak, emaciated example of a man who has "none of the diseases of over-eating!"
Gee, But I'd Like to Be a G-Man (April, 1940 - end of run)

After the shooting of John Dillinger in 1934 the Federal Bureau of Investigation had come to be a powerful police agency. The head of the "G-Men," J. Edgar Hoover, was a dramatic and colorful personality who was thought to have had a fondness for "night clubs, columnary publicity, and Florida sunshine."

Both Hoover and the FBI are spoofed in this song by Rome. In it a little boy wants to grow up not to be an "A-Man, or a B-Man, or a C-Man, or a D-Man, or an E-Man, or an F-Man":

Gee, but I'd like to be a G-Man, and go bang,
    bang, bang, bang;
Just like Dick Tracy, what a he-man, and go bang,
    bang, bang, bang!
I'd do as I please, act high-handed and regal,
For when you're a G-Man, there's nothing illegal!

1 + 1 = 1 (June, 1940 - end of run)

Early in 1940 Bertrand Russell was discharged from his position as teacher of higher mathematics at City College of New York on grounds of "moral turpitude." Popular opinion seems to have regarded the charge as extravagant. This sketch by Schrank reduces the incident to its absurd dimensions.

An announcer informs the audience that Bertrand Russell has been forbidden to teach arithmetic because "he has a head full of figures—
but not arithmetic." A Man-on-the-street sequence follows in which diverse opinions are expressed. This section is then followed by a montage of scenes showing what would happen if Bussell were allowed to teach. One of the scenes involves a little girl and her mother:

Girl:
Momma, where do babies come from?

Momma:
Study your arithmetic!

Girl:
But Momma, I am!

New Pine and Needles closed June 22, 1940, after which its second tour began. In it the following numbers were deleted: "Dear Beatrice Fairfax," "Papa Lewis- Mama Green," "What This Party Needs." Chamberlain was again taken out of the "Angels of Peace" number, and five numbers were seen on the road that had not been seen in New York.

Pluto Boys

A general satire on commercials and advertisements, this song is sung by three devils who are the ads and who are designed to "scare the daylights out of you!"

You didn't alkalize today; your hair is mussed and frowsy;
You're wasting your whole life away; your etiquette is lousy;

...
Your conversation's dull, you dope,
Ha, ha, your friends won't tell you.
You'd better use our super soap
Or else your boss will smell you.

The Poker Players

A reflection of the war in Europe—which was enveloping more countries as 1940 progressed—this sketch by Schrank depicts four card players: Adolf ("Who could be Hitler"), Joe ("who could be Stalin"), Benny ("who could be Mussolini"), and Phui (who is obviously Japanese). The unusual thing about this poker game is that the stakes are neither coins nor chips but countries, such as Latvia, Estonia, and Indo-China. The scene ends as a piercing air-raid siren calls the game to a halt—a vivid reminder to the audience that steps were being taken against this type of gambling.

History Fight to the Bar

Another reflection of the war sentiment that spread over America in the early months of 1940, this song is a jazzy history lesson which draws historical parallels. The lesson concerns the War of Independence when Tom Paine, George Washington, and Paul Revere refused to compromise short of victory. The difference in sentiment between this number and "Stay Out Sammy" should be noted.
The last chorus of the song sums up the lesson to be learned.

So students, now you're hop, don't stop;  
Keep stepping to that Freedom Hop.  
Although the Tories beef and blow,  
To keep you sitting on your status quo.  
When they say, "Let's stand still a big;  
Give up some rights, no harm in it."  
Remember those are just the tricks  
That did not work in '76.  
Though Tories talk, don't be misled,  
And say what all those others said:  
No, no, no, no,  
When you got to go, you got to go.  
You can't stand still on Freedom's track,  
If you don't go forward, you got back.  
You can't giddy-up by saying whoa,  
And sitting on your status quo.

Alone on the Lona Prarie

A take-off on the typical cowboy-western song, this number was originally seen in Rome and Friedman's "Sing Out the News."

A Matter of Principle

This sketch appeared during the run of New Pins and Needles over the summer in the Bronx, but was not included on the road. It was a short monologue in which a wealthy man described his attempts to avoid paying his income tax and his subsequent tenure in jail.
1 The dates in parenthesis indicate the date the number first appeared in *Pins and Needles* and the date when it was removed. A cross (♦) before the title indicates that the lyrics for that song may be found in the Appendix.


7 All of this material is from scrapbooks in the Research Department, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, New York City, N. Y.

8 Himelstein, p. 81.

9 *New York World Telegram*, November 27, 1939.

10 ILGWU Files.
CHAPTER IV

THE RUN OF PINS AND NEEDLES

The creation of *Pins and Needles* demonstrated a mixture of amateur and professional elements. The history of the run of the revue will demonstrate how Labor Stage moved further away from a semi-professional organization and gradually became involved in a full-time professional undertaking.

The opening, on November 27, 1937, attracted little attention outside the immediate union. However, some drama critics had accepted Schaffer's invitation, and they reviewed the production a few days later. Their reactions were favorable, and the size of the audiences slowly increased. Because of the critics' praises and word-of-mouth publicity, *Pins and Needles* became a popular success. Some came to hear what was being said in the revue; some came to see their fellow-workers perform; and others came merely to see what the commotion was all about. It soon became a "sort of high society in-joke." ¹

The rumor spread uptown in the Republican archdiocese of the upper East Side. . . . The Golden Horseshoe set moved into the cramped little theatre, perfumes, corsets, lorgnettes and all. Dowagers guffawed . . . [and] business proprietors, who quite possibly were bargaining with workers' committees during the day, chuckled. . . . ²

The novelty and the charm of the production—the amateur players gently
and sometimes awkwardly sticking pins and needles into sacred cows—
attracted such people as Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Bea Lillie, Albert
Einstein, and many theatrical professionals. On December 14 the
March of Time radio program invited the cast to sing parts of the
score on the air. Jack Mills Publishing Company, jumping onto the
bandwagon, almost immediately published four songs: "Union for Two," "Sing Me a Song," "Doing the Reactionary," and "Sunday in the Park."  
The revue became so popular that it could no longer be played
on a part-time basis, and thus the first of several moves towards pro-
fessionalism was made. Although the original schedule had, like that
for Steel, been limited to four performances a week—two each on Fri-
day and Saturday—Schaffer arranged for regular evening performances
to begin as of December 26.

At the same time the demand for seats had become so great that
the workers themselves were unable to see the show. To alleviate this
problem, Schaffer organized a second Pins and Needles company to give
daily 5:00 matinees for union members at an admission price of 25¢. This company was directed by Robert Gordon, since Charles Friedman had
left Labor Stage by this time.

Early in its run Pins and Needles began to earn money. As ticket
prices rose to a top of $2.75, the normal weekly receipts for a capacity
house rose to approximately $6200. With an initial investment of
$10,000 and small operating costs, Labor Stage suddenly found itself
in the midst of a big business operation.
This operation continued to create public enthusiasm far beyond what would have been expected from such a modest undertaking. By March, 1938, record sales of songs from the revue were earning profits for Decca, Bluebird, and Brunswick recording companies. On April 14, 1938, David Dubinsky was interviewed on an NBC radio program about "How Pines and Needles Was Born." Talk began about a possible motion picture; news clippings in the ILGWU files report rumors of a possible purchase of the film rights by J. G. Leonard at a price of around $35,000. In addition, Eddie Cantor was reported to be interested in buying the revue's title to use for a film about a group of union worker actors who have to go back to their shops after their successful show closes. In other words, like most successful Broadway professional productions, Pines and Needles aroused much news, much interest, and much gossip.

Along with the changes in the number of performances, the increase in the price of tickets, and the widespread publicity given to the show, the production underwent still another change from amateur to professional: the status of the cast was changed. Originally the performers were full time garment workers who were paid nothing for their appearance in the show except an additional 50¢ for "supper money" on the night of each weekend performance. When the performances were increased to one per night, the cast members balked at having too much to do; they were afraid they might lose their jobs. Realizing the justness of this claim, Schaffer arranged to have the actors relieved of their jobs for the duration of the run while continuing to be paid the ILGWU minimum
wage. However, to insure that his actors maintained a proper sense of proportion about their new responsibilities, Schaffer insisted that they attend daily classes in fencing, movement, speech, and other fundamental acting skills. 10

Now that the cast members were employed as full-time performers, however, Actor's Equity demanded that they join that union. Besides that Equity was an A.F.L. affiliate and the ILGWU belonged to the C.I.O., the cast objected to this requirement on the grounds that they should not be expected to pay dues to two unions at the same time. Schaffer offered to settle the matter with Equity by contributing the difference between his actors' salaries—which were below Equity minimum—and the Equity minimum to the Actor's fund. Equity did not agree to this proposal, however, and so, early in January a compromise was made. The ten so-called principals of the cast became members of Actor's Equity, while the others were taken into that union as Chorus Equity, or as Extras. 11 This policy was maintained with each of the three casts that eventually performed in Pins and Needles.

After the show became an established success and something of a cause célèbre, it received a unique invitation for a commercial musical revue. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins invited Labor Stage to present Pins and Needles at a celebration to be held in Washington, D. C., in honor of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Department of Labor. In addition, President Franklin D. Roosevelt invited them to appear in a "dress rehearsal" for him and his guests in the White House
earlier the same evening. On February 2, 1938, therefore, the first cast travelled to Washington, leaving the second cast to perform in New York.

The performance for the President was held before a small audience at seven o'clock in the East Room. The White House staff insisted on furnishing all props, and the Secret Service double-checked all toy pistols used in "Economics I." Several numbers were omitted, primarily those which did not particularly pertain to social or political matters: "Little Red Schoolhouse," "The General is Unveiled," "Sunday in the Park," "Men Awake," and "What Good is Love?" Time reported the President's reactions to two of the numbers. After watching "FTP Plowed Under," he supposedly commented, "I wish the Senate and House could see this one!" His reaction to "Call It Un-American" was "That gives me an idea for a speech!" ¹²

The performance given later that evening for the Department of Labor celebration was also a shortened version, but this time the numbers that were omitted were those which did deal primarily with political, and not with labor, matters. The program for the evening was:

1. First Impression
2. Why Sing of Skies Above?
3. Little Red Schoolhouse
4. What Good is Love?
5. Lesson in Etiquette
6. Vassar Girl Finds a Job
7. One Big Union for Two
8. Economics I
9. Beatrice Fairfax
10. Sunday in the Park
11. Finale
The numbers omitted were:

1. Mussolini Handicap
2. Public Enemy Number One
3. The General is Unveiled
4. We'd Rather Be Right
5. Men Awake
6. FTP Plowed Under
7. Four Angels of Peace
8. Slumming Party

With such a popular production, Labor Stage realized it had certain responsibilities as a socially-conscious theatre. Consequently, many performances of *Pins and Needles* were given as benefits for various funds or organizations. Some of these occasions were:

February 18, 1939: a benefit for Actor's Fund,
February 20, 1939: the cast appeared with the cast of *The Cradle Will Rock* at a C.I.O. rally held in New Jersey,
March 7, 1933: a benefit for the Stage Relief Fund,
May 1, 1938: a benefit for the YMHA and the YWHA,
January, 1939: a benefit for contributions to Nazi Refugee and Spanish Milk funds.
January 29, 1939: a benefit for the Harlem Community Arts Center,

However, as conscious as it was of its functions as a socially-conscious theatre, Labor Stage was also aware of its fortunate position as the producer of a hit musical revue. Consequently, the next major event in the life of *Pins and Needles* was to follow the sound professional practice of organizing a national road tour.

Schaffer announced that, unlike the usual professional practice, he would send the original cast on tour, move the second company into the evening performances at Labor Stage, and cast a third company to
perform the weekend matinees. The announcement was met with opposition by Rome and Gordon, but Schaffer, perhaps realizing that unorthodox methods had helped to make *Pins and Needles* a success in the first place, carried out his intention. Thus, early in April, 1938, the first company began a ten month national tour, and on April 22, a third company gave its first performance in New York.

The *Pins and Needles* collection at the ILGWU Research Department offices contains programs for the following out of town engagements:

May 9: Boston, Mass.
May 30: Chicago, Ill.
July 14: Hollywood, Calif.
August 8: San Francisco, Calif.
(Not dated): Seattle, Wash.
September 19-20: Vancouver, B.C., Canada
September 23: Denver, Colo.
September 26: Wichita, Kansas
September 27: Oklahoma City, Okla.
September 28: Tulsa, Okla.
September 29: Kansas City, Mo.
October 3: Des Moines, Iowa
October 4: St. Paul, Minn.
October (?): Minneapolis, Minn.
October 9: Milwaukee, Wisc.
October 16: St. Louis, Mo.
October 24: Cincinnati, Ohio
October 31: Louisville, Ky.
November 1-2: Indianapolis, Ind.
November 3-4: Columbus, Ohio
November 16: Detroit, Mich.
Week of November 14: Cleveland, Ohio
December 5: Washington, D.C.
December 12: Baltimore, Md.
December 26: Rochester, N. Y.
December 29-31: Delaware
January 2, 1939: New Haven, Conn.
January 9: Bridgeport, Conn.
January 12-14: Hartford, Conn.
January 20-21: Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
Week of January 23: Montreal, Canada

Occasionally during the ten month tour cast members were called back to New York and were replaced on the road by members of the second company. While the reasons for this policy were not announced, it is possible that Schaffer either wanted to spread the travel among as many actors as possible, to use the "recall" as a disciplinary measure, or merely to keep the New York cast fresh with constant changes of personnel. When the tour finally ended it had played approximately 319 performances in thirty-four cities and grossed $333,000 for Labor Stage. Finally, the casts of the three companies were intermixed; the best performers appeared at night and the rest either appeared in the matinee or went back to their jobs as garment workers.

Sending *Pins and Needles* across the nation was a commercially sound decision on the part of Labor Stage. However, the tour served the ILGWU in several other ways as well. It showed union members throughout the country the results that their own Labor Stage had achieved; it served as excellent public-relations for the union to a public that was largely hostile to the growing labor movement; and it carried the ideas and principles of Labor Stage to a wide audience.

It was primarily this last consideration which prompted another important event in the *Pins and Needles* run, an event which again becomes a step in the professional direction. As the production became
popular late in 1937, the ILGWU was asked by union leaders in New York and across the country to make the production more readily available. The tour eventually satisfied the out-of-town demands, but the New York audience was still larger than the supply of seats could accommodate. The Labor Stage theatre seated 447, and, even when camp stools were added, the result was not satisfactory.

Early in January, 1938, the New York Times reported that Labor Stage officials were thinking of moving Pins and Needles to a larger theatre. The decision was complicated, however, by an artistic dilemma: much of the charm and consequently the success of Pins and Needles was due to the intimacy of the theatre, which helped to give the show a mood of what might be described as folksiness, naïveté, or amateurism. A larger playhouse might distort and destroy these qualities. A letter to the New York Times from an astute admirer of the show, Mr. Jasper Deeter from Pennsylvania, expressed this opinion. Mr. Deeter warned the producers about "the effects on content when form is suddenly altered for the sake of expediency."

Whether this letter had any influence on the decision is uncertain; however, Pins and Needles remained at the Labor Stage until June, 1939, when the matter arose again. By this time Pins and Needles had opened. It was felt that this show had a different quality, and that a move would affect it less than it would the earlier version.

Consequently, on June 26, 1939, Pins and Needles moved to the
Windsor Theatre for the announced purpose of being able to "institute a new low movie-price scale." The scale and seating was established as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Seats</th>
<th>Evenings</th>
<th>Matinees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>418</td>
<td>$1.65</td>
<td>$1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>242</td>
<td>$1.10</td>
<td>$.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>189</td>
<td>$.55</td>
<td>$.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>849</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides a change in prices, other new policies were instituted. The stagehands' union demanded, and received, an increase in personnel from four to ten. The Musicians' Union raised the quota of musicians from two pianos to a ten piece orchestra. This orchestra, however, only served in a token capacity. Since *Pins and Needles* was scored for two pianos, the other musicians only played while the house was filling and during the intermission.

Apparently these commercial concession were worth while. In October, a reviewer of *Pins and Needles* noted with pleasure that "their audience is becoming more the average public," and *Variety* soon began to report an average weekly gross of about $3,000 for the revue.

During the run of the show two new editions appeared which have been described earlier in the thesis. A new edition was so designated after several changes had been made in the content and the critics had been invited to another "formal" opening. This policy was established by Schaffer against the judgement of Schrank, Gordon, and
Rome commented,

Every time we had enough new numbers, Schaffer would announce a new edition and invite the critics. . . . But every time the critics would like the show and it surprised all the rest of us. 22

Consequently, two interim openings occurred: on April 20, 1939, for Pins and Needles 1939; and on November 20, 1939, for New Pins and Needles. Later in 1939 and early in 1940, announcements appeared in Variety and other newspapers of a possible Pins and Needles 1940, but this edition never materialized.

In mid-1940 the war in Europe began to press closer to the United States. Moreover, a basic disagreement over policy arose between the ILGWU and Schrank. According to Schrank, the union wanted to add new material with a specific anti-communist approach; whereas he wanted to maintain a neutral point of view in the show. 23 In addition to these problems, Rome believes that, by this time, the show was becoming "just tired out." 24 Whatever the reason, this announcement appeared in Variety on May 3, 1940:

Last two months announced; unionists' revue has been off lately, and road figured for better money; [week's gross:] $5,500.

On June 22, 1940, Pins and Needles closed its run in New York City. It had given 1,108 performances, a record run surpassed to that date only by Tobacco Road, which was still running, Abie's Irish Rose,
and Lightnin'. However, the road was again available, and Labor Stage took advantage of the opportunity.

The second tour began in New York City at the Windsor Theatre in the Bronx where *Pins and Needles* played for a few days beginning July 29, 1940. The programs on file for the remainder of the tour indicate the following engagements:

- **August 5-11**: Long Beach, N. J.
- **August 12**: Newark, N. J.
- **September 23**: Washington, D.C.
- **October 7**: Wilmington, Del.
- **October 8-9**: Hartford, Conn.
- **October 10**: New Haven, Conn.
- **October 14-26**: Boston, Mass.
- **October 28-30**: Providence, R. I.
- **November 1-2**: Rochester, N. Y.
- **Week of November 2**: Montreal, Canada
- **November 9**: Philadelphia, Pa.
- **November 11**: Toronto, Canada
- **November 21-23**: Buffalo, N. Y.
- **December 17 - April 5, 1941**: Chicago, Ill.
- **April 14-16**: Indianapolis, Ind.
- **April 23**: Louisville, Ky.
- **April 25**: Terre Haute, Ind.
- **April 26**: Evansville, Ind.
- **April 27**: Milwaukee, Wisc.
- **May 16**: Hollywood, Calif.

At the close of the last performance of *Pins and Needles*, Labor Stage had earned $1,500,000. In addition to this financial gain, the show had served the ILGWU well in other capacities: it had provided priceless publicity and public relations for the union, for the ideals of Labor Stage, and for the labor movement in general.

The show had begun as an entertainment for and by the garment
workers, intended for no broader audience than one of union members, union supporters, and the limited audience which supported the left-wing theatre movement in general; but it had unexpectedly become a popular and commercial success. The history of its run demonstrates how successive changes in Labor Stage's policies and practices moved the production further away from a semi-professional endeavor and made it a full-time professional undertaking. Thus, the show eventually thrust Labor Stage into a professional climate considerably different from that for which the organization had been intended; it forced the group to maintain its existence not as a labor stage, but as a Broadway producing unit, side by side with the Theatre Guild, the Group Theatre, and the Theatre Union. This essentially amateur group achieved, in its time and in its unorthodox way, a greater success than that of its professional peers. Some of the possible reasons for this success and the varied reactions that greeted the production will be considered in the following chapter.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1 Personal interview with Harold Rome, April 9, 1965 [cited hereafter as: Rome].


3 Scrapbooks on file in the ILGWU Research Department.

4 Justice, December 15, 1937.

5 Sales of sheet music were helped by the fact that they were conducted in the lobby of Labor Stage during intermissions.


7 Strauss.

8 ILGWU Files. In reply to the rumors of movie sales, Schaffer stated that he was not considering any such offer. He was in no hurry to sell the show, and would wait for a good, specific offer from a recognized firm. No evidence was found to indicate that any such offer was ever made to Labor Stage.


10 ILGWU Files.


12 Time, XXXI (March 14, 1938), 32.

13 Rome.


16 Starr.
21 Catholic World, CL (October, 1939), 87.
22 Rome.
23 Personal interview with Joseph Schrank, April 5, 1965.
24 Rome.
25 Stolberg, p. 297.
CHAPTER V

THE SUCCESS OF PINS AND NEEDLES:
CRITICAL ACCLAIM AND INFLUENCE

Although Pins and Needles was not an innovation, either as a satirical or a proletarian revue, it differed significantly from its predecessors, and the success of the show was rare for its time. The reasons for this success would appear, therefore, to be in those aspects of the show in which it differed from other musical productions. In this chapter, these reasons will be deduced from those aspects of Pins and Needles which were deemed worthy of praise in the critical and popular reactions to the production.

The critical reaction to the first edition of Pins and Needles was almost totally favorable; even those critics whose ideologies prevented them from endorsing the production completely found enjoyable moments. The element which was most enthusiastically approved was the novel approach in which the production attempted to reflect social significance with humorous, musical material, rather than with serious drama. Schaffer's original theory that such an approach would be successful was proved by such comments as this of John Anderson in the New York Journal-American:

In its good natured and youthful exuberance it achieves what must be a new record. To wit: this is the only
workers show I've seen that has a sense of humour, that is able to carry its points with infectious high spirits, and that is fair enough to poke a little fun at both sides even if the joke is on one. You can guess which one.\(^1\)

And John Mason Brown, writing from the perspective of 1940, comments about the left-wing movement in general.

Although most of these scripts [such as Stevedore and Parade] held "The System" at which they shook their fists to be their foe, their real enemy, from the standpoint of achieving continued success with America's proletariat, was a lack of humour which exceeded their lack of skill. It was the hilarity of such a healthy and intelligent product of the Labor Stage as Pins and Needles which . . . won for this sorely needed and astringent revue a passport into the hearts of playgoers of every class.\(^2\)

The charm of laughter, therefore, was one of the attributes of the show. However, jokes as jokes are seldom successful, and many reviewers emphasised the fact that the particular direction of the humour was important to the success of the production. The intelligence and pointedness of the satire was noted by Richard Watts, Jr.:  

At its best, the proletarian revue captures a quality of political satire more biting than such elaborate shows as I'd Rather Be Right or Hooray for What manage to achieve in their expensive fashion.\(^3\)

It is generally assumed, however, that successful satire usually requires a more or less special audience: one that is knowledgeable about the object of the satire, and one which would probably not be large enough to support a production for four years. Therefore, the humor
in *Pins and Needles* appears to have been of a more universal nature, closer to the experience and tastes of its predominantly workers audience. Brooks Atkinson comments on that quality of humour in his review:

> But most of the wit, humour and sentiment that the revue makers have assembled springs logically from the culture of the union garment workers who play it. 4

He refers specifically to the "romantic sentiment" of "Sunday in the Park," and to the "unconventional mating-song," which was "One Big Union for Two."

Himmelstein, describing the satire of "Vassar Girl Finds a Job" comments that Rome enlarged the scope of satire, however, to include more eternal subjects:

> "I'm selling things [girdles and brassieres]
> To fit the figure,
> Make the big things small, and the small things bigger." 5

Finally, the *Variety* reviewer of *Now Pins and Needles* makes special note of the "plenty earthy quality" of such numbers as "Dear Beatrice Fairfax" and "Harmony Boys." 6

The use of humour, both satiric and gentle, romantic and ribald, was an essential part of the appeal of *Pins and Needles*, and a large factor in its success. However, the date of the production is an important consideration in the evaluation of the success of the humorous approach.
The proletarian musical, *Parade*, which was similar to *Pins and Needles*, appeared in 1935, and ran only thirty-two performances. While the cause of this failure cannot be solely attributed to the date, the time of its appearance was an important factor. Had *Pins and Needles* appeared at that time, it too would have found America in the throes of a severe depression and Europe stirring in preparation for a great war. The election of F.D.R. and the years of the New Deal converted the social movement to a social turbulence. Class-consciousness was a philosophy of life; class wars in the form of unionizations and strikes were a way of life; and finding a job, food, shelter, and some shred of human dignity was the end of life. Consequently, the times seemed to call not for laughter and song, but for anger and action. In the light of this mood, Mrs. Harold Rome, replying to the observation that much of the proletarian drama of this period consisted of heavy-handed melodrama, defended the form.

When you say that "most of this theatre was heavy-handed melodrama," you must remember that the era was fraught with so-called heavy-handed melodrama. There was nothing humor-making about the depression, the crash, or the forward march of Hitler, and what seems like heavy-handed melodrama in the context of today was then at one with its background. *Waiting for Lefty* did not seem the least bit heavy-handed or melodramatic against a daily newspaper which screamed of people who were trying to organize unions, being clubbed to death by finks and scabs and labor spies.

By 1937, however, this mood had somewhat abated. President Roosevelt's New Deal had reduced unemployment to an encouraging extent, and
the country began to see a future end to its misery. Harold Clurman comments on this changing attitude, by calling 1937 the "year of hope and confidence among the progressives." It appears therefore, that Pins and Needles was well-timed. America was in a more receptive mood for humour and satire, and the Labor Stage production was fortunate enough to take advantage of that mood.

The intelligent, astute and well-timed use of humour, therefore, was one of the major appeals of Pins and Needles. Another aspect of the production which appealed to its critics was its cast. That the competent performers, some of whom showed talent, were full-time garment workers, was pointed out by Atkinson as "one of the conspicuous virtues of their skylarking to music on Broadway at night." A significant reason for the appeal of the cast was suggested by the Daily Worker's critic. He noticed an enthusiasm and energy in their performance, and urged his readers,

Go to see Pins and Needles, if only to learn how smooth and agreeable the amateur player can be—just because he is not professional and because he has accepted the necessity of performing with the precision he uses in his own craft.

The quality of freshness suggested by this reaction was augmented by the size of Labor Stage theatre. As it seated only 447, a sense of intimacy and earnestness was more easily conveyed. The attention of the audience focused on the material, not on the scenery or the performers. In addition, the nearness of the audience to the
stage made the material seem all the more meaningful to the audience. The use of only two pianos probably contributed to this mood. The appeal of this intimacy is suggested by a comment made by John Anderson, reviewing *Pins and Needles* at the larger Windsor Theatre:

I reserve the right to sigh sentimentally over the fact that the success of [the ILGWU players] has carried them away from Labor Stage . . . to a bigger and more Broadway theatre. Though I know it is completely unreasonable, I even lament a trifle the assurance and expertness which [they] have achieved in their two years on the stage. Maybe Equity's gain is the ILGWU's loss. 11

In addition to humor, therefore, the charm of the production was an essential appeal. Other aspects of the show met with critical approval. The sets by Syrjala were found to be colorful and efficient; and, although most critics found the balets ponderous, John Mason Brown acknowledged that they were based "upon excellent ideas." 12

These "ideas"—not only those of the ballets, but also of the entire content of the various editions—were no doubt another major factor in the success of *Pins and Needles*. The opening reviews all approved of the songs and sketches, although not always of the same ones, and it appears that much of this approval was a result of the topicality of that material. As suggested earlier, the 1930's were characterized by an increasing preoccupation with social problems and current events which more than ever before reached nearly all people. That *Pins and Needles* constantly changed its contents and still met with success in each of its editions can be attributed in
a large measure to its ever-changing topicality.

The general critical reaction to the show, therefore, reflects some of the aspects of the production which contributed to its success. John Mason Brown's comment may serve as a summary of these aspects:

**Pins and Needles** is a gay show, and an intelligent one. It widens the theatre's horizons, as they stand in desperate need of being widened, to include the interests and the problems of those who do not belong to what was once known as the carriage trade. 13

Since **Pins and Needles** was an attempt to educate a wide audience in an entertaining way, it would seem that the reaction of this wide audience would indicate whether or not this purpose was accomplished. The audience did react favorably; the demand for tickets led to the creation of a second **Pins and Needles** company, to perform at matinees with an admission of 25c. Furthermore, a later reviewer of the first edition noted that

The audience crowding in nightly are not only garment workers eager to see what their fellows can do when they leave pressing and cutting and button hole making and turn their talents to satire, but uptown ... trade interested in seeing a witty revue well sung and well acted. 14

During the tours of the revue, public as well as critical approval often reflected the same appeals of the show as did that of the earlier critics. However, what seemed to always have been the
main attraction of *Pins and Needles* was its novelty; if a left-wing musical was a curiosity for the smart New York audience, it was a phenomenon for other parts of the country. An article written in Los Angeles during the first tour reports this reaction. After having referred to that city as the "anti-union capital of America," the *New York Times* correspondent described the opening:

> Under ordinary circumstances, the "Red" squad of the police department would have halted the offering as subversive, but when they arrived at the theatre and found the actors singing, dancing, and laughing, the officers were bewildered; they had never been confronted with anarchists (Los Angeles definition) who laughed and were happy, so they retired completely baffled, and the show went on.15

Once the initial surprise had worn off, however, the public response was enthusiastic. The support it gave to the show is indicated by the success of the first tour; it played thirty-four cities, and grossed—after an outlay of $10,000 for the creation of the revue—$333,000.

Rewards other than financial were tendered the production. In Washington, the opening was sponsored by Mrs. Roosevelt herself, who had earlier expressed her delight on seeing the show in New York in her newspaper column, "My Day."16 While in Washington, the cast members were feted at an afternoon tea given by Mrs. Evalyn Walsh McLean in appreciation for her enjoyment of their performance.17 In Chicago the cast received an award of merit from the Hull House.
Finally, as a cap to all this, the cast was named to Nation’s 1938 Honor Roll. Their citation was for "meritorious activity" and specifically for "producing labor’s most successful theatrical venture." This enthusiastic support indicates that *Pins and Needles* did strike a responsive chord in its large audience. It did, as Brown said, widen the theatre’s horizons; and it did so because of the appeal, wit and charm of both its production and its content. However, there is still another element in the success of the show. The reactions discussed so far have been favorable; but *Pins and Needles* content also met with unfavorable reactions; thus the appeals of *Pins and Needles* included that of controversy.

Several newspaper critics greeted the opening with reservations. Heywood Braun’s reaction suggests that such a radical departure from the left-wing drama tradition was less than desirable:

> The show is too funny. I wish it had less entertainment value and more bite as propaganda. *Pins and Needles* has attracted the carriage trade, but the carriage trade just eats it up. There ought to be one number, at any rate, which would send some dowager screaming into the night at every performance. I doubt that this has happened. ... Naturally I had a grand time. That’s precisely what I’m kicking about. I wanted to get steamed up and save for the stirring finale ... that isn’t in the show.

19

Among the attackers of *Pins and Needles* in the press, the *Daily Worker* proved to be the strongest. Having greeted the opening with approval, that Communist newspaper gradually changed its mind as changes
in the show's content gradually hit closer to their home. The initial review was headlined: "Sparkling Revue on Labor Stage," but the review for New Pins and Needles bears the headline: "Somebody Has Given the Revised 'Pins' the Needles." 20

Among the content objected to by the Daily Worker was the song, "Mene Mene Tekel," which spoke derisively of Stalin's actions against Finland. Other numbers found objectionable included "Give Me the Good Old Days" and "Sunday in the Park." "Good Old Days" was the thoughts of a cast member, who remembered with nostalgia her days in the shop; the Daily Worker thought it "shamefully careless and cynical" to think that "life in the shops was such a paradise." One of the characters in "Sunday in the Park" reads the New Masses: the critic objected to the depiction of this character as a "tactless troublemaker," and chastised Labor Stage for "going out of its way to deride ... the very sources from which it evolved." 21

It is significant that the Daily Worker objected only to the content and never to the performance. This proved to be the case in other instances as well; it was the force of the issues involved—and the audacity of Labor Stage for publicly speaking its mind on these issues—which provoked condemnation.

This condemnation was not always in the mild and relatively passive form of a newspaper review. Schrank remembers several performances at which there were disturbances in the audience when irate hecklers rose to shout epithets at the performers. 22 The opening of Pins and
Noodles in Montreal, January 23, 1939, was disturbed by a group described as "known fascists," which had to be dispersed by the police. This group objected to "Angels of Peace" and "Mussolini Handicap"; and, even though slight alterations were made in the material, the Labor Stage management felt it necessary to arrange for the police to protect the cast for the remainder of the run. 23

Other restrictions were placed on the show which, if not as sensational, were at least as effective. During the second tour the show met censorship problems in Providence, Rhode Island. Police Censor George W. Cowman, having seen New Pins and Needles in Boston, refused to grant the company a license to perform in Providence unless "The Harmony Boys" was eliminated. The Boston attorney for Labor Stage, George Roower, answered by stating that the police censor could legally stop a show's appearance only on grounds of obscenity, and not for political reasons. However, the scene did have to be withdrawn. Although Labor Stage formally announced that it was doing so only under protest, the show opened in Providence without that number. 24

Institutions and businesses also attacked Pins and Needles. For a while, the NBC Radio Network banned the revue's songs from its programs; when they finally relaxed this ban, the NBC officials allowed only certain numbers to be aired, such as "One Big Union for Two." Even then they demanded changes in the lyrics. For instance, the line "fifty million union members can't be wrong," had to be changed to "fifty million happy couples can't be wrong." 25
When the first tour reached Washington, D.C., in December, 1938, the show came up against the ire of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Mrs. Frank Towner, chairman of the D.A.R. National Defense Committee, described the show as "so profane, so Communistic and so broad in its implications [as to make it unfit] for any child to see and to make an adult ashamed to be in its audience." Acting on this basis, she "suggested that patriotic members of the D.A.R. warn their out-of-town friends that such a play is beating its way up and down the countryside, and thus prevent their innocent attendance at the subversive exhibition."  

Finally, the Catholic Theatre Movement list, prepared by the Archdiocese of New York, added the capping touch. It listed *Pins and Needles* as Wholly Objectionable, although no reasons were given for the ban.  

It appears likely that such criticisms and condemnations actually added to the attraction of the revue. While the issues expressed in the show were dramatic in themselves, the controversy raised by those issues doubtlessly attracted many people to the production just to see for themselves what was causing the controversy. However, the implication should not be drawn that Labor Stage was appealing to sensationalism or pleading for publicity. Rather, the production should be appreciated for having been courageous and honest. It risked the loss of some patronage by attacking and offending certain "sacred cows"—even its own—and it constantly opened its eyes and
ears to the problems of the times.

It has been suggested that the wide appeal of *Pins and Needles* arose from the wit, approach, style and content of the production. If this is true, it would seem likely that theatre producers and union group theatres would attempt to duplicate the format in order to duplicate the success, and this in fact happened. In addition, the increasing number of revues that were produced after *Pins and Needles* suggests that the Labor Stage production may have exerted a small influence on the total American theatre picture during the years immediately following. For example, the *New York Times* referred to *Pins and Needles* as the "forerunner of such later productions as *Sing Out the News*, Cabaret TAC, and other leftist extravaganzas." 29

Prior to *Pins and Needles*, of the major musical productions dealing with current events, only *Parade* in 1935 was like the Labor Stage revue. Although the revue had been a popular genre in the 1920's, it was a rarity on Broadway in the years immediately prior to *Pins and Needles*. Mantle reviews only three for the season of 1936-37: *Ziegfeld Follies of 1936-37* (112 performances); *The Show is On*, Rodgers and Hart, Dietz and Schwartz, and others (197 performances); and *The Pepper Mill* (6 performances). Revues described in 1937-38 are even fewer: a return of *The Show is On* for seventeen additional performances; a Leonard Sillman production, *Who's Who* (23 performances); and *Pins and Needles*.

The New York season 1938-39, however, saw the number of sati-
rical revues increase from one to three: Sing Out the News, One For Your Money, and Sing For Your Supper.

The first of these was clearly a result of Pins and Needles. This is emphasised by Mantle, who calls Sing Out the News Max Gordon's "attempt to capitalize on the Pins and Needles excitement." It was written by Harold Rome and Charles Freidman who were hired by Max Gordon as a result of their success with the Labor Stage review. Rome himself describes the revue as an attempt to take Pins and Needles uptown. They were not so successful the second time; Sing Out the News closed after 105 performances.

The second satirical revue of 1933 also owes its existence to Pins and Needles because it was intended to be an answer to it. Again, Mantle emphasises this by calling One for the Money, written by Nancy Hamilton, "a right wing revue, . . . opulently produced in direct contrast to the left wing success, Pins and Needles. It was aimed directly at, and staged for, New York's cafe society set." One for the Money was as moderate a success as Sing Out the News, running in New York for 132 performances.

The third review of that season was another which originated from the so-called left. It was the Federal Theatre Project's production, Sing for Your Supper, which was criticized by Variety for being only "a crude attempt to follow the pattern of Pins and Needles." It contained material by Harold Hecht, John Latouche, and Lee Wainar and ran for only forty-four performances. The most interesting
number was "Legitimate," which is about a girl who, because she wanted to be an actress, went to work in a lingerie shop, since she thought the next logical step would be getting cast in a revue produced by Labor Stage. 34

The two seasons between 1939 and 1941 contained more revues in general but fewer revues of social significance. Nancy Hamilton's sequel, *Two for the Show*, and a *Straw Hat Revue* which had, like the Labor Stage show, originated in part at a summer camp, were the only significant ones in 1939. The following season saw only one satirical revue of importance: *Meet the People*. This show was originally produced in Los Angeles by the Hollywood Theatre Alliance, which was a professional group organized on a collective basis. The revue was praised by Mantle because "its biting satire and irony stretch far and wide, and it is rich in universal human satire." 35

After the 1940-41 season, the left-wing movement itself nearly disappeared, and the theatre began to be influenced by the national concern with war. This abrupt change in the tenor of the theatre brought a premature halt to whatever influence *Pins and Needles* had on American production techniques.

Although *Pins and Needles* gave rise to relatively few professional copies, its influence on amateur groups was more widespread. While labor union theatre was prolific by the late 1930's, productions had largely been confined to modest endeavors, small productions, and local audiences. The early history of dramatic activity in the ILGWU
was typical of many unions. However, the public favor bestowed on *Pins and Needles* suggested to many of these groups that they might now find a larger and more responsive audience, and their activities began to expand. Mantel confirms the influence of *Pins and Needles* on these groups: "the ILGWU achieved such noted success with *Pins and Needles* that other labor groups went into the business of producing plays." 36

One outgrowth of this increased activity was the appearance of a New York Trade Union Drama Tournament in 1939, which was instituted because there were in New York City at least twelve unions actively engaged in dramatics by this time. 37 Among these unions were two that Mantle described in his yearbook: a Furrier Workers' Union which produced *Waiting for Lefty* in July, 1939, and a Retail Drug Store Employees' Union which produced a new script in June, 1939.

This rise in popularity of labor-sponsored amateur groups serves to demonstrate again that *Pins and Needles* successfully appealed to a workers audience. Furthermore, such an audience had learned from the revue to like laughter and music; therefore, many of the ensuing productions were musical revues. A listing of some of them will show how popular this style of production became with the amateur labor groups:

1) *Melodies and Moods*, produced by the "Bundle Brigade" of Local 62 of the Undergarment and Negligee Workers' Union; two performances, March 28, 1939, at Labor Stage, New York.

2) *Pandemonium of 1938*, produced by an amalgamation of several C.I.O. Unions, announced for production in
May, 1938.

3) A revue "in the Pins and Needles manner," produced by the State, County, and Municipal Workers of America, Local 46; around December 20, 1938, in Philadelphia.

4) It Seems to Us, produced by an amalgamation of several C.I.O. Unions (intended to be given a professional run if it proved successful—which it didn't); two performances around April 1, 1939, in Philadelphia.

5) Labor Pains, produced by the ILGWU in Los Angeles; a short run around July 19, 1939, in Los Angeles.

6) Partners Always, produced by the Rochester Pants and Vest Makers Local 227; around September, 1939, in Rochester, N. Y.


8) Lot Freedom Siding, produced by the St. Louis ILGWU; intended to tour after initial run, March 3-8, 1940, but it was not successful.38

It can be seen therefore, that the success of Pins and Needles is confirmed by the influence it exerted upon the theatrical scene, both professional and amateur, in the late 1930's. Since the history of the production was itself a blend of the amateur and professional, this double influence seems only natural. However, since Pins and Needles was a product of the Labor Stage, the influence of the show upon the labor movement is another important factor which needs to be considered.

It has already been detailed that the show appealed to a workers audience. The extent to which the revue impelled people to join
the ILGWU, or any other union, is something which can not be determined; although many observers at the time were aware of a resultant change in attitude toward unionism. The New York Times remarked that several of the numbers in Pins and Needles "have done more than anything else to remove the Fannie Brice curse of 'revolt' from the stagecraft of the labor movement." A comment on the effect of the show on the attitude of labor towards labor was made by Stolberg:

A worker who is proud of the national success of Pins and Needles is far more apt to come to an important meeting to settle a strike than a member who has taken a hand-me-down course in English literature.

Therefore, Pins and Needles would appear to have had some positive effect as favorable propaganda for unionism, although the tangible results of this effect can not easily be determined.

The same problem arises in evaluating the effect of the revue on the ILGWU itself. Obviously the production did carry the ILGWU label and therefore served as national publicity for the union. Sponsoring a successful cultural endeavor doubtlessly improved the prestige of the union, especially at a time when unions as a whole were often condemned as either dangerously radical or radically dangerous. Earning around $1,500,000, the revue helped strengthen the union's position as a bargaining agent by providing funds for the recruitment of new members and for the maintenance of strikes when they became necessary. In addition, the proceeds from the show helped to make union life more at-
tractive by financing educational, recreational, and social programs. Thus, while the union gave birth to *Pins and Needles*, the revue helped the union grow into adulthood.

The effects of the revue on Labor Stage have been described earlier in the thesis where it was demonstrated that in many respects, the revue did more harm than good. Having once had a professional success, Labor Stage was put into a position of having to maintain itself in a Broadway climate. Its several attempts to produce another show in that climate were unsuccessful, and it soon ceased operating altogether.

The success of *Pins and Needles*, as deduced from the reactions to it, was due to several factors. The novelty of a proletarian production using song and dance was appealing. Although *Parade* had also used this unique approach, it seems to have lacked the humour and satire which many critics found so enjoyable in *Pins and Needles*. Another appeal of *Pins and Needles* was the charm of its production; the small theatre, the use of only two pianos, and the enthusiasm of the amateur players all combined to create a mood of intimacy and earnestness for the revue.

A certain degree of controversy was raised by the reviewers because of the frankness with which it dealt with important issues. Several groups, such as the D.A.R. strongly objected to the show, but this reaction did not detract from the revue's general appeal.

Although the revue exerted a small influence on the Broadway scene, many union amateur groups were stimulated to produce similar
revues on their own scale. The influence of the production on the labor movement and on the ILGWU is not measurable, but the show did seem to cause a change of attitude towards these groups. In turn, this new attitude may have led to an increased expansion of the power and activities of the labor movement.

Therefore, the success of _Pins and Needles_ can be summarized by stating that it seems to have accomplished the purpose for which it was intended: it was created to reach a wide audience with the message of unionism, and to reach them in an entertaining way.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER V


6 Variety, November 26, 1939, p. 42.


13 Ibid.

14 "Labor Goes on the Stage," Scholastic, XXXIX (March 5, 1938), p. 19E.

15 New York Times, August 21, 1938, sec. ix, p. 3.

16 Scrapbooks of Pins and Needles clippings on file in the ILGWU Research Department, New York.
18 ILGWU Files.
19 Ibid.
20 The first headline is from June 17, 1936, p. 7. The second appears November 30, 1939, p. 7.
21 Daily Worker, November 30, 1939, p. 7.
22 Personal interview with Joseph Schrank, April 5, 1965.
24 The incident spread over three days, and is reported in the New York Times for October 22, 1940, p. 21; October 23, 1940, p. 27; and October 24, 1940, p. 30.
26 Mark Starr, "Why Not a New Pins and Needles?" Jewish Frontier, September, 1958, p. 16.
27 ILGWU Files.
28 Ibid.
31 Personal interview with Harold Rome, April 9, 1965.
32 Mantle, p. 9.
33 Variety, April 26, 1939, p. 40.
34 Ibid.
35 Mantle, Best Plays of 1940-41, p. 25.
36 Mantle, Best Plays of 1938-39, p. 484.


38 ILGWU Files.

39 Strauss.

CONCLUSION

Much of the drama of the 1930's was concerned with materials of social significance; using current events as its basic subject matter, this "proletarian drama" centered around the lives and struggles of "working class" characters. However, as these plays seldom achieved commercial success, they were most often presented by independent groups. Such a group was the Labor Stage, sponsored by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Its most important production, the satirical revue *Pins and Needles*, was the most successful of all proletarian productions, as well as one of the longest-running commercial productions in the American theatre.

As an independent producing organization, Labor Stage was similar to such groups as the New Theatre League, the Theatre Union, the Federal Theatre Project, the Group Theatre, and the Mercury Theatre. All were established in dedication to a particular social point of view and were limited in their choice of plays by this specific purpose. The purpose of Labor Stage differed in degree from the others however. Its purpose was not to express a particular ideology, such as the communism of the Theatre Union; not to produce the classics with a view towards emphasising their current significance, as did the Mercury Theatre; nor was the Labor Stage intended to provide jobs for actors, as was the FTP. Its intent was two-fold: first, to provide an outlet for the theatrical
interests of union members; and second, to demonstrate that the unionism carried important positive values to a public that was in a large part still hostile to the growing labor movement. Because of its philosophy, which was broader than any of the other groups, Labor Stage exercised a greater freedom in its choice of material.

Another important difference between Labor Stage and other independent producing groups was its curious status. It was neither a professional group, like the Group Theatre, nor an amateur organization, like the New Theatre League; but as its history reveals, it operated in a sort of no-man's land between the two camps. Its use of amateur actors and its declared function as an "educational institution" allowed it to take certain freedoms with professional regulations, while its use of professional material and production personnel gave it an advantage over solely amateur groups.

Labor Stage's broad production policy led it into the production of the musical revue, Pins and Needles. Expressing social significance in song and dance was almost an innovation, since very few revues of the 1930's had been socially oriented, and only one—Parade—had taken the proletarian point of view. The blend of amateur and professional is apparent in the story of both the creation and the run of the revue. However, as the history of the run indicates, the success of the show led Labor Stage further away from being an "educational institution" and caused it to operate strictly as a Broadway-type producing organization.
Pins and Needles was an unexpected success. It ran for a record 1108 performances in New York, went on two extensive national tours, and earned over one million dollars for the ILGWU.

The approach of the revue towards its material met with critical and popular approval. In a theatrical environment which perhaps took itself too seriously, the production found the courage to laugh at many contemporary ideas and personalities. It demonstrated that humor was as powerful a weapon for the union movement as were banners, sermons, exhortations or harangues.

The quality and the mood of the production were appealing. In a theatrical environment which ordinarily called for professional polish and poise, the simplicity, earnestness and honesty of the shop-workers' directness was an exciting novelty for its time. It demonstrated that the actors attitude toward their material and their job can add charm and appeal to a production.

The material in the show was intelligent, witty, and timely; and it demonstrated that the theatre can be an important social mirror, if not always an effective social weapon. The songs and sketches were universal enough to be familiar, timely enough to be significant, and honest and courageous enough to be controversial.

That these elements—humor, quality of earnestness, and social significance—were universally appealing was seen by the several attempts which were made to copy the success of Pins and Needles by duplicating these elements. It was in these attempts that the in-
fluence of the revue can be seen. The show prompted a modest trend toward satirical revues in the professional theatre—a trend which lives today in such revues as Second City or That Was the Week That Was. The success of Pins and Needles also encouraged an expansion of activity among amateur groups—labor-sponsored and otherwise—an activity which exists today.

The influence of Pins and Needles on the labor movement and the ILGWU is difficult to assess, but the show did seem to cause a change in attitude towards these groups. In turn, this new attitude might possibly have played a part in the expansion of the power and activities of the labor movement, but such threads of influence would be too tenuous to follow.

But most of all, this curious musical production in a period of crisis and despair struck a welcome and responsive chord of humor. It spoke to a wide audience with intelligence and wit, and was, as Charles Freidman calls it, "the voice of the American people laughing themselves out of their misery."
First Impression

We're not George M. Cohans or Noel Cowards
Or Beatrice Lillies or Willie Howards;
We've never played in stock or studied at the playhouse,
And the only line we've ever said in a Broadway house
Is—Which way to the gallery?
As you see we're not tragedians or comedians
Or show girls or kick-in-row girls
Or trouper or even supers,
We're plain, simple, common ordinary
Everyday men and women who work hard for a living—
We're from the shops.
Dressmakers, cloakmakers, cutters, underwear workers,
   knit-goods workers, neckwear makers, embroiderers,
   stampers, checkers, examiners, graders, pressers,
   trimmers, binders, pinkers—
All of us — From the Shops!!

Public Enemy Number One;
or Womb for One

Although a girl is cute she must follow what Il Duco
Commands, but it's no use. I simply can't produce.

I'm sure that Mussolini thinks I'm an awful meany,
No matter how I try, I cannot multiply.

I feel quite bitter 'cause dogs have a litter,
And the best I can do is just one.
I envy the rabbits, with their plural habits,
They know how things should be done.
Old kangaroos have them by threes and twos,
Turtles are fertile by the score;
Mr. A. Moeba is a mighty conceiver,
He keeps getting more.

(continued)
You never did see a pod with one pea,
A pod with one pea's not much fun.
And every cow mudder has lots in her udder,
But I've only womb for one.

Why Sing of Skies Above?

Along with the lyrics, the staging instructions for this song are included here. As the style and steps of the routine were characteristic of the choreography of the thirties, it is interesting to note how this number was "routined."

Boys and girls enter down right, boys asking and being refused dates. Girls go behind sinks stage left; boys behind sinks stage right.

Boy:
What is my fate I await your answer.

Boy:
Wait; this will get them.

Boys:
I love you, I love you, is all that I can say...

Girls:
We're tired of moon songs
Of star and of June songs
They simply make us nap.
And ditties romantic
Drive us nearly frantic
We think they're all full of pap.
Nations are quaking
History making
Why sing of stars above?
While we are waiting
Father Time's creating
New things to be singing of.

A La Bing Crosby. He continues to croon being joined by the boys. The girls groan loudly.

Starts to sing "O Solo Mio."
Girls wet a towel and throw it at him across the partition.

Glissando as girls come down stage.

(continued)
Sing us a song
With Social Significance.
All other tunes are taboo.
We want a ditty with heat in it,
Appealing with feeling and meat in it.
Sing us a song
With Social Significance,
Or you can sing 'till you're blue.
Let meaning shine from every line
Or we won't love you.

Sing us of wars
And sing us of breadlines
Sing us of front page news.
Sing us of strikes
And last minute headlines;
Dress your observation with Syncopation!

Sing us a song
With Social Significance;
There's nothing else that will do.
It must be packed
With social fact

Or we won't love you.

Girls:
You don't have to croon about blue noons.

Boys:
What's the matter with the good old tunes?

Girls:
If you want to make us, you will have to make us with a brand new style.

(right fists in left palms
Girls run to diagonal line,
DL to UC

right foot forward, right hand on right knee

imitating girls, but with left

girls run back into line across stage.

right hands in air.)

(continued)
Boys:
What new style?

Girls:
All you have to do is look around.

Boys:
Are there any better subjects to be found?

Girls:
If you must keep singing
Keep your voices ringing
With songs worthwhile.

Boys:
What's worthwhile?

Girls:
Sing of workers' rights.

Boys:
Sing of sit down fights

Girls:
Sing of things you know.

Boys:
Things we know?
What of Labor agitation?
We can give you information
On the C.I.O.

Girls:
Now you know.
Sing the end of war.

Run into place behind and to left of girls.

turning right away from Boys

hands along girls' sides.

wheel to boys, taking hands and swinging them up and down as they sway in tempo.

girls spin boys who land sitting in front of girls.

hands on Boys' shoulders resting on left hands standing up

pointing front
pointing right
pointing left
fists up

pick up boys' right hand & into place at right of partner.

(continued)
Boys:
Sing of five to four.
girls in front of boys.

1st couple:
Sing us of kings,
turning and facing front.
(St. R. pair)

2nd couple:
And of revolutions.
ditto

3rd couple:
Sing us
ditto

4th couple:
Of social trends.
ditto

5th couple:
Sing us of old
ditto

6th couple:
And new constitutions
ditto

7th couple:
What's to be done with 'em
ditto

All:
We want it in rhythm!
All turn and truck to left.

Sing us a song
With Social Significance
Stop in place
There's nothing else that will do
It must ring true
With social view

Girls:
Or we won't
one step right

(continued)
Boys:
Oh please!

Girls:
No we won't

Boys:
Oh please!

Girls:
No we won't

Boys:
Oh Hell!!

Girls:
Love you.

Girls:
Sing dictators lies

Boys:
Now we're getting wise

Girls:
Sing of oily politicians

Boys:
And the men who make munitions

Girls:
Open up your eyes

one step right

one step right

one step right

one step right

one step left

squealing and running to boys, putting their arms around them.
girls lean back on partners

partial embrace

girls throw men's arms off and step R.

boys one step left
take hands on "eyes"

(continued)
Boys:
And realize
raise hands
girls leave and run to lockers, left

Boys:
We'll sing a song
With Social Significance
All other tunes are taboo.
We'll get a song that's satirical,
Putting the "mere" into miracle
We'll sing a song
With Social Significance.
We'll get a song that will do,
Entirely fraught with social thought
Tell us will that do?

hands down on "social"

We'll sing of wars
And conferences martial
Tell you of Mills and Mines;
Sing you of courts that aren't impartial
Dress our economics
In the best harmonics.

right hand across body on these two lines.

We'll sing a song
With social significance
There's nothing else that will do.
It will be tense
With common sense,

Girls:
Then we will love you.
girls in place behind partners on "tense"

Both:
Sing us a song
With Social significance
All other tunes are taboo.
We want a song to make history,
Robbing the great of their mystery.

Sang us a song
With Social Significance
Or you can sing till you're blue
It must get hot with what is what
couples stop apart

Then we will love you.
girls come around in front of partners.

swaying from right to left

hands on knees on "blue"
Charleston step & clap on second "what"
all turn left to profile.
Call It Un-American

If you find you can't reply to your opponents, why don't try to,
Call them un-American.
If a radical idea gives you nervous diarrhea,
Call it un-American.
If some idiot would regulate the traffic in munitions,
Or advises that we socialize our surgeons and physicians,
Or suggests that trade unions better working men's conditions,
Call him un-American.

If the union you're attacking doesn't fear the whip you're cracking,
Call it un-American.
If you rouse to indignation all the recent population,
Call it un-American.
When investigating Senators establish that your riches
Were extracted from the pockets of the public's tattered breeches,
Never stoop to contradict the socialistic sons of bitches,
Call them un-American.

Sunday in the Park

All week long I work in the shop,
I work and work and never stop.
Get up at six and go to bed at nine.
But the day that I think is the best
Is Sunday, that's my chance to rest,
The only day that you might say is mine.
We leave our hot and stuffy flat,
There's one place that we know.
And subway to the public park.
Oh, that's the place to go on

Sunday in the park,
All week long we keep on looking forward to
The happy things we do,
It's such a lark,
On Sunday in the park.
Sitting in the sun
With the trees and grass and flowers everywhere,
With lots of room to spare.
We have such fun,
On Sunday in the park. (continued)
Rich folks go away to the country, you know,
When the days get hot.
But we all decided that we wouldn't go,
We prefer this quiet spot, on
Sunday in the park,
It's our summer home where we can play and sport,
Our fashionable resort, Until its dark,
On Sunday in the park.

Dear Beatrice Fairfax

I want men that I can please, that I can squeeze, that I can tease,
Two or three or four or more; what are those fools waiting for?
I want love and I want kissing; I want more of what I'm missing.
Nobody comes knocking at my front door;
What do they think my knocker's for?
If they don't come soon, there won't be any more!
What can the matter be?

I wash my clothes with Lux; my etiquette's the best.
I spend my hard earned bucks on just what the ads suggest.
Oh dear, what can the matter be?
Nobody makes a pass at me!
I'm full of Kellogg's bran, (I eat grape-nuts on the sly)
The date is on the can of the coffee that I buy.
Oh dear, what can the matter be?
Nobody makes a pass at me!
Oh Beatrice Fairfax, give me the bare facts,
How do you make them fall?
If you don't save me, the things the Lord gave me
Never will be any use to me at all.
I sprinkle on a dash of "fragrance dee amoors"
The ads say, makes men rash! I guess their smell is poor.
Oh dear, what can the matter be?
Nobody makes a pass at me!
Men Awake

Workers all! Heed my call!
You who toil and sweat and slave,
From the cradle to the grave!
You who strive with head and brain!
You who live in fear and pain!
You who slumber! Countless number!
You in mines and fact' re stalls;
You within the sweat shop walls,
You in life's forgotten heap,
You who sell your souls for keep!
Men awake! Heed the warning!
Men awake! The day is dawning!
Men awake! The day is dawning!
Men awake! The wheels are humming!
Men awake! The day is coming!

It's Not Cricket to Picket

It's not cricket to picket, not cricket.
Oh no, it's just not comme il faut to picket.
You haven't any right, you know, you're acting in great haste.
Just think of the predicament in which your boss is placed.
And, entre nous, I think it's in exceedingly bad taste.
Not cricket to picket, not cricket.

It's not cricket to picket, not cricket.
Atrocious, and gauche, you know, to picket.
Go home and starve like gentlemen, not like a noisy brood.
Real ladies never make a fuss, though they lack clothes and food,
And money's never talked about, for that would be quite rude.
Not cricket to picket, not cricket.

It's not picket to cricket, not picket,
Uncultured and unmannerly to picket.
You know you're misbehaving now, you mustn't lose your mind;
You're being so inelegant and frankly quite unkind;
Excuse my indiscretion, but you're all damned unrefined!
Not picket to cricket, not picket.

(continued)
It ain't ticket to stick it, not picket.
Now officer, give each man there a cricket!
Oh dear, where is your decency, no Vanderbilts or Astors
Would act in such a vulgar way, befitting only dastards,
I beg you, get the hell away, you lousy bunch of—

(What do you mean, disturbing the peace? Come with you?
Officer, you're bruising my mink! Get your hands off me,
kid! You don't seem to know who I am, or whom I know; listen,
I'm an intimate friend of Jimmy Walker———)

Vassar Girl Finds a Job

When I was young I studied hard, and thirsted after knowledge,
And often burned the midnight oil, so I could get to college;
They told me my fine education
Would help improve my situation.
So then I crammed and crammed, till I was almost in a coma,
And thesis-ed and exam-ed until I got me a diploma.
A-Hah, they said, now comes admission
Into a very high position.

Out I went and looked around, and Macy's is the place I found.
I filled my blanks and application,
And went for my examination.
They took my weight and took my height,
And tapped my chest and tested my sight.
Examined my head, took prints of my nose,
looked at my teeth, and up my nose,
Examined my throat, and measured my hips,
And even took prints of my fingertips.
They made me say "Ah," and told me to grunt,
Examined my back, examined my front.
They tested my I.Q., and asked what I'd like to do,
And when that exam was through,
What there was to know, Macy's knew.
So I got the job.

(continued)
Life is a bitter cup of tea; now I'm just salesgirl.
I used to be on the daisy chair; now I'm a chain store daisy.
Once they gave me the honor seat;
Now I stand up with pains in my feet.
I used to be on the daisy chain; now shoppers drive me crazy.
I sell smart but thrifty corsets at three-fifty,
Better grade, four-sixty-nine.
I sell bras and girdles for Maudes and Myrtles,
To hold in their plump—behind this counter.
Once I wrote poems, put folks in tears,
Now I write checks for ladies' brassieres;
I used to be on the daisy chain; now I'm a chain store daisy.

Oh yes, Madame; oh, no, Madame;
I guess, Madame, that's so, Madame;
Of course Madame, that's the very best,
Exactly the kind that's worn by Mae West.
For you, Madame, we do, Madame.
That's true, Madame. In blue, Madame?
That one is nineteen-seventy-four,
It ought to be expensive, it's the biggest in the store.

Once I had a yearning for all higher learning,
Studied till I made the grade.
I pursued my knowledge, and finished college,
Well, look at the kind of grade I made!
I'm selling things to fit the figure,
Make the big things small, and the small things bigger.
I used to be on the daisy chain,
Now I'm a chain store daisy.

What Good is Love?

Everywhere I go I hear sweet songs about the moon,
Songs about the stars above and songs of love in June,
Songs of hearts that beat as one to some sweet lover's tune,
But they're not songs that sing for me.
Songs about the dreams that lie within a lover's eyes,
Songs about the cloudless sky in lover's paradise,
Songs about the joys of love, and lovers' lullabies,
But they're not songs that sing for me.

(continued)
What good is love, if you have to face
Cold hungry days and sighing?
What good is love, if life's just a race
To keep your heart from crying?
Let the poets sing of skies above
And endless love, and hearts that dance.
Where is my chance for the call of romance?

What good is love, if you haven't got
All that makes life worth living?
What good is love, if you haven't got
Even a thing worth giving?
You can keep your little songs that sing
Of all the joy that love can bring.
What good's romance? What good is love to me?

One Big Union for Two

I've decided the only way I can woo you
Is to take a hint from the A.F. of L. and the C.I.O.
(Now you're talking, perhaps I might listen to you,
I don't say I'll say yes, but I don't say I'll say no.)
Then it's not too late to negotiate?
(Oh well, we'll see.)
Perhaps we can agree.

I'm on a campaign to make you mine,
I'll picket you until you sign,
In one big union for two.
No court's injunction can make me stop
Until your love is all closed shop,
In one big union for two.
Seven days a week I want the right
To call you mine both day and night.
The hours may be long, but
Fifty million union members can't be wrong.
When we have joined up perhaps there'll be
A new recruit or two or three,
For that's what teamwork can do.
In one big union for two.

(continued)
We won't have sitdown within our gate,
We'll never need to arbitrate,
In one big union for two.
We'll have no lockouts to make us frown,
No scabbing when I'm out of town,
In one big union for two.
Will you pay your dues, they're very light,
A kiss each day and a kiss each night?
Oh life can be a song, for
Fifty million union members can't be wrong.
When we have signed up and made the grade,
We'll add a member, union made,
Who looks like me and like you.
In one big union for two.

Four Little Angels of Peace

ALL:
Four little angels of peace are we,
Loving our neighbor so peacefully,
There's really no harm if we do not disarm,
For we're always in close harmony.
Four little angels of peace are we,
There is one thing on which we agree,
With foe and with friend we will fight to the end,
Just for peace, peace, peace.

EDEN:
Though we butchered the Boers on their own native shores,
And we slaughtered the Irish no end,
Though on India we poured, slaying horde upon horde,
We were playing the part of a friend.
Yes, our arms we increase, but we're really for peace,
(Except in the case of a crook!)
We conquered both spheres, now we're up to our ears,
Just trying to keep what we took!

THE OTHERS:
Three little angels of peace are we,
Living together so blissfully,
Oh, we never fight, unless we're in the right,
But we're always in the right, you see.  (continued)
Three little angels of peace are we,
There is one thing on which we agree,
Until we are wrecks, we'll break each others' necks,
Just for peace, peace, peace.

JAPANESE:
In Japan we delight in our general's might,
But the Emperor knows peace is finer.
It isn't our fault, it's a case of assault,
We're picked on and bullied by China.
Oh, how we deplore equipping for a war,
We're a nation of poets and thinkers,
Though we bomb without pity and lay waste to each city,
It's because all the Chinese are stinkers!

THE OTHERS:
Two little angels of peace are we,
Living together in amity,
We'll sign any pact saying we won't attack,
But that's just a more formality.
Two little angels of peace are we,
There is one thing on which we agree,
We try to keep calm when we gas and we bomb,
Just for peace, peace, peace.

MUSSOLINI:
Now I know that war is a thing to abhor,
And peace will fill our cornucopia,
With love from the start, I just did my part
To civilize dear Ethiopia.
Though you call me sadistic, imperialistic,
My armies require a quarry.
And though we slay hordes of Spaniards each day,
After all, don't we say that we're sorry?

HITLER:
Though I fall for the urge of a nice bloody purge,
And leave in my way piles of carrion,
Though I clean up my schmutz with a nice Nazi putsch,
It is all for the sake of the Aryan.
My ambitions are small, I want nothing at all,
My plans couldn't be any littler;
Now that Austria's Nazi, it would be hotsy-totsy
To put the whole world under Hitler!

(continued)
ALL:
Four little angels of peace are we,
Reeking with odor of sanctity,
Though we slaughter the meek we confer every week,
And we talk it over peacefully.
Four little angels of peace are we,
There is one thing on which we agree,
With shot and with shell we give each other hell,
Just for peace, peace, peace.

Doing the Reactionary

It's darker than the dark bottom,
It rumbles more than the rhumba,
If you think that the two step got 'em,
Just take a look at this number.
It's got that certain swing,
That makes you wanta sing.

Don't go left, but be polite,
Move to the right,
Doing the Reactionary.
Close your eyes to where you're bound,
And you'll be found,
Doing the reactionary.
All the best dictators do it,
Millionaires keep stepping to it.
The four hundred love to sing it,
Ford and Morgan swing it!
Hands up high, and shake your head,
You'll soon see Red,
Doing the Reactionary!!
We've Just Begun

Go hire a hall!
Yeah, Tammany Hall!
Peddle your papers somewhere else.

We'll stand by what we have to say,
And do it in our own sweet way;
So now let's finish up what we've begun,
Well, our work is almost done!
Together now we know the song to sing,
The words are our's; our's is the tune.
We're the ninety-one per cent,
We're the many and the strong.
In the future to be built we intend to have a voice!
There are millions of us.
Yes, we'll have something to say!!!

Papa Don't Love Mama Any More

Papa don't love Mama any more.
No! Papa don't love Mama any more!
Once they were so happy in one big family,
Now they don't agree, they fight day and night.
Papa don't love Mama any more. No!

There's no peace behind our family door.
Pa told Ma he wanted a few more progeny,
Ma said, "Mister Lewis, you won't get them from me!"
So Pa went off and made himself a brand new family.

Papa don't love Mama any more.
No! Papa don't love Mama any more.
Why don't they make amends and be friends again?
Why don't you two call it quits,
Before our home is on the fritz?

So now we're in a plight that we deplore!
 Relatives keep wishing that things will be O.K.
Uncle Frankie sends them a message every day,
Big Brother Dave Dubinsky got so peeved he ran away!

......................................................................................................(continued)
Why can't they be lovebirds like before?  
Papa likes it vertical and he won't change his mind,  
Ma likes horizontal, she says it's more refined;  
Between them both we can't tell who's in front and who's behind!

Mama Green, you know what we mean,  
Papa Lewis, don't do this to us,  
Time to stop your fretting, time for tote-a-toting,  
Time for petting, and getting together again!

Back To Work

Ain't had such good news, since Lord knows when,  
For the strike is over boys,  
Back to work again!  
The fighting's through now, there's no more fuss.  
For the strike is over boys,  
Back to work for us!  
We gave a little, and we took a little,  
It was quite a fight,  
But things came out all right!  
Shout to the rafters, let yourself go,  
For the striking all is done, let's have fun, the day is won,  
Back to work we go.

Note: The reference in the sixth stanza (Papa Don't Love Mama Any More) is to the basic difference between the two union affiliates. The A.F. of L. was organized on a craft basis, such as unions of electricians or carpenters. The C.I.O.'s organization was by industry; thus all those engaged in the same industry — such as garment-making — belonged to one union.
I've Got the Nerve to Be in Love

Some folks say that love is a luxury
But I'm afraid I don't agree.
What's good enough for Woolworth heirs, and debutantes and millionaires
And kings and queens and people such as
Edward Windsor and his duchess,
Is good enough for me.

I buy my things at Woolworth's, no charge account at Sax's,
I never have to juggle reports of income taxes,
That may be so why should I deny myself a try at love?
Don't look for me on Broadway, dressed up in tails and high hat,
The check girls at Morocco's would turn away at my hat,
That may be so but still I've got a right to have the thrill of love.
No, I don't R.S.V.P. when high society
Invites me to a dance,
Working in a shop all day don't give much time to play
With debutantes, fat chance.
I haven't got an income that G-Men care to question,
When market prices tumble, I don't get indigestion.
That may be true of me but still I've got the nerve
To be in love with you.

I haven't got a chauffeur, no limousine to roam in,
And Miss Elisabeth Arden don't work on my abdomen,
That may be so but why should I deny myself a try at love?
I haven't got a wardrobe, no gowns and rings that glisten,
No penthouse on the river, I've just a hall to kiss in,
That may be so but still I've got the crust to want the thrill of love.
I prefer to keep away from Newport and the gay society affairs
Sewing underwear all day don't give much time to play
With millionaires, who cares?
No Mrs. Schiaparelli designs the gowns I wear
I fight for them in markdowns at Klein's on Union Square,
That may be true of me but still I've got the nerve to be
In love with you.
The Red Mikado

The Lord High Executioner's Song

As someday it may happen that a victim must be found, I've got a little list; I've got a little list, Of Society offenders who might well be underground, And who never would be missed; who never would be missed. There's that flabby Yorkville Fuehrer By the name of Fritzio Kuhn, t And all bund members goose-stepping To Adolf Hitler's tune. The idiots who criticize in loudly raucous tone All customs and all races and religions but their own, Reactionaries that call their opponents communist, They'd none of 'em be missed; they'd none of 'em be missed.

† [Kuhn was the leader of the American Nazi Party]

Ersatz

Near a tree by a river a Rhine-maiden sat; Singing, "Ersatz, Oh Ersatz, Oh Ersatz." And I said to her, "Dear, why are you singing like that? Oh Ersatz, Oh Ersatz, Oh Ersatz?" "We've got substitutes for every product," she sighed, And she wept and she sobbed and gurgled and cried, And no matter what I said, she only replied "Oh Ersatz, Oh Ersatz, Oh Ersatz."

"The stuff on our bread is not butter," she said, "But Ersatz, all Ersatz, all Ersatz. As a matter of fact, we don't have any bread, Just Ersatz, all Ersatz, all Ersatz; I don't mind if our clothes are all paper and sand, If for dinner we roast up an old rubber band, But instead of a man at the head of our land, We've got Ersatz, all Ersatz, all Ersatz."
The Mikado's Song

All prosy dull Congressional fellows
In Washington, D.C.,
Economy talkers and president balkers,
Just leave them all to me.
I'll put 'em on projects where talk's forbidden
And where they can't open their lips,
Then by easy stages, we'll cut out their wages,
And let 'em eat old pink slips.
For industrial spies and strikebreaking guys
I have something really cute,
Through bristling thickets of militant pickets
They'll walk in their birthday suit.
And Nazi sheets like "Social Justice" *
That specialize in abuse,
Must print up each issue on soft rolls of tissue
And bo put to proper use.

*K [Nazi party's newspaper in America]

Mene Mene Tekel

The King of Babylon, Belshazzar,
He sat feasting on his gold empiaza
With his court and concubines,
Stuff'd in fried chicken and imported wines.
Mene mene tekel, tekel, tekel,
Mene mene tekel, upharsin.
They sat there at that banquet board
Drinking from the vessels of the Lord,
Big swells of the neighborhood,
Praising gods of gold and silver, iron and wood.
Mene mene tekel, tekel, tekel,
Mene mene tekel, upharsin.
That King of Babylon, Belshazzar
Was a mean ol' razzle-dazzer,
Never paid no income taxes,
The big shot of the Babylon-Jerusalem Axis.

(continued)
He was a tyrant took delight in
Startin' wars and doin' fightin',
Sons of Israel he called scamps,
Set them all to makin' bricks in concentration camps,
Mene mene tekel, tekel, tekel,
Mene mene tekel, upharsin.
The tribes of Judah from below
Heard the saxophones and trumpets blow,
Sore and weary laid them down,
While the shoutin' party kept on going to town.
Mene mene tekel, tekel, tekel,
Mene mene tekel, upharsin.
The guests were shagging, horns were blowin',
Lord, how gin and beer and wine was a-flowing,
Of a sudden all was still,
Everyone stood frozen to the floor with a chill.
Mene mene tekel, tekel, tekel,
Mene mene tekel, upharsin.
For through the plaster and the brick
Over by the candlestick
In Balshazzar's banquet hall
A hand was writing writing slowly on the wall.
The king grew pale where he was sittin',
The fingers wrote, and having written
Vanished slowly overhead.
And this is what the writing of the good Lord said:
Mene mene tekel, tekel, tekel,
Mene mene tekel, upharsin.
The king called all his council table
To read the writin' but they weren't able,
All his wise men, old and gray,
Couldn't tell him what the letters had to say.
Mene mene tekel, tekel, tekel,
Mene mene tekel, upharsin.
Belshazzar offered jewels and gold
If the meaning of the words was told,
In came Daniel, spurned them all,
And for nothing told the bad news on the wall.
Mene mene tekel, tekel, tekel,
Mene mene tekel, upharsin.

(continued)
"King, them words mean to stop yer flauntin',
You've been weighed, and yer found wantin',
All your days is numbered days,
The Lord don't like dictators or dictators ways!"
Belshazzar cried out, "Man, you're lying!"
But there was no use denyin',
For he saw those words divine,
Shinin' out just like a cafeteria sign:
Mene mene tekel, tekel, tekel,
Mene mene tekel, upharsin.

Now the king of Babylon was slain,
But the children of the Lord remain.
All his idols turned to rus',
Crumbled are his kingdom and his power to dust.
Mene mene tekel, tekel, tekel,
Mene mene tekel, upharsin.

Bertha; the Sewing Machine Girl;
or it's Better With a Union Man

Oh list to the story we sing you
Of everything that came to pass.
To Bertha the sewing machine girl,
A windsome and class conscious lass—
As sweet as the flowers in springtime,
She worked at the men's pants machine,
Her sweetheart close by at another
While union love blossomed serene.
One day little Bertha was sewing,
Not knowing that danger was near;
A villain espied her, and paused there beside her,
A non-union man with a leer!

CHORUS:
Oh, it's better with a union man;
It's better with a union man.
You'll live to regret if you ever forget
This motto proletarian.
So always be upon your guard,
Demand to see a union card.
You'll never go wrong if you follow this plan:
It's better with a union man!

(continued)
Poor sweet innocent little Bertha,
She did not suspect that this guy,
Contrary to all union by-laws,
Had six other wives on the sly.
While Bertha was sowing her wild oats,
Midst black caviar and champagne,
Her true union lover was waiting,
At local sixteen all in vain.
Alas, she forgot all the precept
Which for working girls are correct.
That non-union cad, he was thoroughly bad,
He did just what you all would expect.

CHORUS:

Stay Out, Sammy

Sammy! Sammy!
Get away from that there fight!
Don't go near now, just sit tight!
Sammy! Sammy!
Don't get mixed up in that brawl,
You got no business there at all.
Better stay out, Sammy, though all the other fight
Stick to your side of the street,
You know that fightin's not right.
Better stay out, Sammy, and if you use your dome,
You won't go near those hoodlums,
There's plenty to do at home!
We Sing America

We sing America; we sing the land of pioneers;
We sing the dream that lasted through the years.
We sing America; we sing the struggle for the right;
We sing the burning torch of freedom's light.
We sing the hope, the dream, the majesty and might.
Across the seas down through the years we came,
Dauntless seeking freedom's name!
Oppressed we fled seeking free-er shore,
Where we could build once more.
America! You are the hope we sing,
You the dream that millions hail!
We the people; We the people, say democracy shall prevail!

We sing to man's dignity and his place
With no thought of creed or race.
We sing a land that is too free and great
To sow the seeds of hate.
America, you are the hope we sing.
You're the light that must not fail.
We the people; We the people, say democracy shall prevail!

We sing America; we sing the dream fulfilled;
We sing America, that we shall build!
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