

# NEW THEATRE

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# "PEEKSKILL"

by Howard Fast

Howard Fast is well known internationally as one of the leading writers of the United States today. Although only in his thirty-fifth year, he is already responsible for a number of historical novels and biographical works, perhaps the best known of which is his "Citizen Tom Paine."

In this article, which is reprinted by permission of **MASSES AND MAINSTREAM**, he gives a relentless, dynamic picture of one aspect of the contemporary American scene.

"Germany Awake." That was in the back of our minds, deep back somewhere in the memories overlaid by almost twenty years, with one great war and many small wars in between, with Hitler mouldering in the earth, and Mussolini remembered as something strung up by the heels, like a stuck pig. But when we drove through Peekskill, at half past seven, on the morning of September 4, we saw the banner slung from housetop to housetop; the dead filth was alive again. "Wake Up America" it said "Peekskill Did." That way the day began which none of us will forget very quickly.

For me, however and for a few hundred others, it began a week before, on Saturday, the 27th of August. I must tell about that too, for I feel that things can be better understood, and should be better understood. On the 27th of August I discovered that it is not enough for a writer to write of things, no matter how well he observes those things, no matter how clearly he sees those things, no matter how well he tells his tales. A point comes in the anti-fascist struggle where even the most truthful observer must take another step; this I discovered at Peekskill. I had not discovered it before, not during the war, not through any of the many things I

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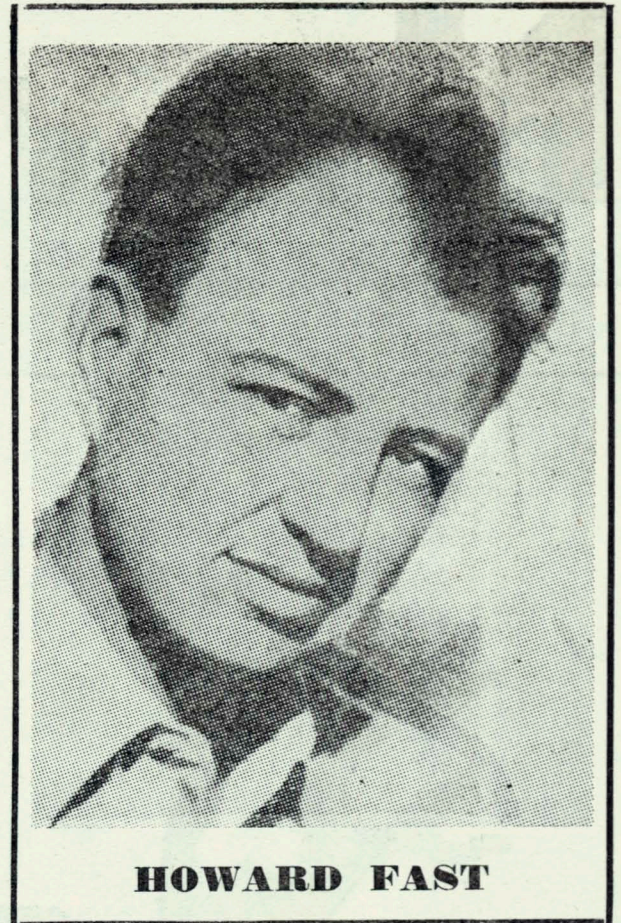
had seen and put down on paper.

I was asked to be the chairman of the first scheduled concert, in Peekskill on the 27th. I was spending my vacation in Croton, and I thought it would be nice to be part of a concert where Paul Robeson sang, in a bowl of green hills and meadows, which is a better amphitheatre for such singers than a concert hall.

I also considered taking my five-year-old daughter with me, since she loves Paul so much, and since an occasion like this would be well worth remembering. Neighbours up there advised against it. "There have been threats by the Legion" they said. I left the little girl at home, not because I believed in the threats, but because I thought the concert would last too long.

The point is, I didn't believe in the threats. Fascism was an abstraction, an abstraction I understood, but an abstraction nevertheless. For a week before this, I had read in the Peekskill Evening Star, a dirty little sheet, typical of our corrupt and rotten press, exhortations to prevent the concert. "The time for tolerance," said this miserable rag, "is over." But hadn't the Journal-American issued this same frantic call for violence again and again, to no effect?

I spent most of that day swimming with my children; we had dinner together and then I



**HOWARD FAST**

went to the Lakeland Picnic Grounds where the concert was to be held. I arrived there at seven o'clock, an hour before the scheduled time of the concert. One more car was admitted after mine. Then the road was closed—by storm-troopers, and no other term fits. Stormtroopers they were, some in uniform, some in plain clothes, all of them fitted out with the historic equipment, the brass knucks, the billies, the rocks, the wooden clubs, the lead pipes, and the filthy slogans. Between five and seven hundred of them closed the road, locked us in, and proceeded to attempt the mass murder of fifty men and a hundred and fifty women and children. Only the first two hundred of us, girls and boys who had volunteered as ushers, some concert goers and their children, and a handful of trade-unionists, ever entered the grounds and for the next two and a half hours after the road was closed we fought the storm-troopers. And for two and a half hours, the police stood by, hands off, for the police.

We lived—because we organised and fought and maintained our discipline; and we learned about fascism. Half of us had seen some part of the war, the Bulge, the Pacific, Africa, the C.B.I., but

# editorial

*In writing the play "Had We But World Enough," Oriel Gray has shown in its local form a problem which is world-wide. In South Africa, and in the United States particularly, colour discrimination has reached proportions of far greater magnitude than seen here. This is borne out by the number of films on this theme which are coming from an otherwise conscienceless and artistically bankrupt Hollywood.*

*One of the most recent manifestations of colour prejudice in America was the frenzied violence at Peekskill, where in September last year members of the Ku-Klux-Klan and the American Legion combined with other repressive elements in an attack of unprecedented fury on the audience of both Negroes and whites at an open air concert at which Paul Robeson sang.*

*Both this incident and the examples to be seen in our own outback are part of a world-wide*

*campaign against coloured peoples which is reminiscent of fascism at its worst. We are continually admonished to arm against the "yellow hordes" on our northern shores, and warned of the designs of these so-called "asiatic barbarians." It becomes increasingly obvious that this is no more than a deliberate attempt to prejudice Australians against these northern neighbours, and prepare us for a war to stem the rising flood of demands for national independence throughout Asia.*

*Australians must not permit this wave of hysteria to delude them into jeopardising their lives and the future of civilization by joining in a war to maintain trade monopolies and the oppression of the coloured peoples.*

*Artists in every field of expression must recognize their duty towards Peace, without which we face not merely the destruction and futility of modern warfare, but absolute extinction and the complete termination of our culture. We must fight for Peace by combating, wherever we find them, the twin evils of race hatred and war hysteria.*

we learned about fascism here, and I left the little girl at home, not this was a little worse. The lessons were on our skulls, our faces, our bodies; and at the last, when we stood in a tight circle, with the women and children inside, we saw the literal, the great fire into which our books, our music, our pamphlets were tossed, while the storm-troopers danced around in a drunken, screaming frenzy. "Wake up, America! Peekskill did."

So we came back a week later, to Peekskill, and we had our concert. We had learned about fascism, so a week later, when we returned, four thousand trade unionists, Negro and white, Jew and Gentile, stood shoulder to shoulder, a living ring of steel. Paul Robeson sang, and Peekskill heard him. We learned about Negro-white unity when thirty six negro and white men, alone in the darkness and cut off, fought shoulder to shoulder for two



**PAUL ROBESON**

# "HAD WE BUT WORLD ENOUGH" by Oriel Gray

## Oriel Gray in the Australian Tradition

Oriel Gray's name will take a prominent place in the history of Australian theatre. Together with other struggling pioneers of a native drama, her name will be inscribed in the annals of the Australian National Theatre movement of the future. Painstaking, consistent, always consciously aware of the Australian people's struggle against all forms of oppression, Oriel Gray has used her own far-seeing knowledge for the dramatic expression of Australian life.

Among the plays by this author which have been presented in the past, are "Lawson," a lively dramatisation of the short stories, poems, and life of Australia's national poet; "Western Limit," a play revealing small farmers' twin menaces of soil erosion and the stranglehold of private banks; and a one-actor, "My Life is My Affair," which shows a deep insight into the personal and political problems of Australian workers.

In this play "Had We But World Enough," Oriel Gray fearlessly treads controversial ground with a moving exposure of our relations with the aborigine.

Here is a playwright with a tight grip on the present and the future.



This scene from the Sydney New Theatre's production of "Had We But World Enough," shows Pat Hill as Nan Thomas, and Loretta Boutmy in the role of Lily.

## PRAISE FOR AUSTRALIAN WRITER

*On reading the play "Had We But World Enough" by Oriel Gray, Professor Elkin of Sydney University, who is one of Australia's leading anthropologists, wrote the following comments, which require no elaboration.*

I have read the play "Had We But World Enough" by Oriel Gray. In my opinion it is a very useful contribution towards the

enlightenment of public opinion on the very real Australian problem of racial and colour prejudice.

The picture it gives of the unfortunate position in which aboriginal mixed-bloods find themselves in some of our country towns is a true one.

On the other hand there are signs that the prejudice is lessen-

## PROGRAMME

ASSEMBLY HALL, 26th, 27th, 28th and 29th APRIL, 1950

### THE PEOPLE as they appear :

MRS. SHIELS .....	Vern Roberts
PHYLLIS WRIGHT .....	Eunice Griffin
DAVID HAINES .....	Peter Broun
NICK SHIELS .....	Robert Smith
NAN THOMAS .....	Leila Huggett
JOHN CHALMERS .....	Harry Leighton
MR. WHALEN .....	Bert Vickers
MRS. WHALEN .....	Alicia Clarke
LILY .....	Beverley Broun

Production ..... MARY BROUN

Stage Assistants : MARION CURRIE, WILLIAM NILAN and JOHN COLE

### THE PLACE :

Living room of Mrs. Shiels' home in Seaton, a country town in New South Wales.

ACT I.	Scene 1.	4 p.m.	Wednesday before Easter.
	Scene 2.	8 p.m.	That night.
ACT II.	Scene 1.		Thursday morning.
	Scene 2.	8 p.m.	Thursday.
	Scene 3.	11.30 p.m.	Thursday.
ACT III.			Easter Sunday Night.

ing. It is certainly less than it was when I started working for the progress and assimilation of our mixed bloods some fifteen years ago.

It varies, of course, in different parts of the Commonwealth. There are some country towns in which the position depicted in the play would not arise, but there are many others in which I fear it would arise.

In any case the general prejudice

is there, and makes it all the harder for people of aboriginal descent to adapt themselves to life around them.

The play really refers to the wider issues of racial prejudice arising out of the possibility of other manifestations of it in our country. It is a good thing that the play does this. We must do all we can to get rid of such prejudice and I am sure that this play will perform a useful function in bringing this about.

Our Next Production

# WE THE PEOPLE

by Elmer Rice

August - - Assembly Hall

# Theatre Abroad

## LETTER FROM PRAGUE

Writing from Prague, ex-member of the Sydney New Theatre, Marj Rose, has sent an interesting article on Theatre in Czechoslovakia. Here we quote briefly the main points from her letter.

There is a good deal of amateur theatrical work still carried on throughout the country, and this is encouraged by the interest and assistance of professional groups. The love of the theatre is fostered from the earliest stages of education, as all nursery schools are equipped with puppet theatres, mostly using glove puppets enacting simple fairy tales.

The National Theatre of Prague has adopted one of the city schools, and puts on special performances for its proteges, and in-

vites the children to participate in minor ways in the activity of the theatre—cleaning up backstage, repairing wardrobe, etc.

### THEATRE ORGANISATION

Theatres in Prague have permanent companies made up of workers in all branches of theatre—actors, producers, scene designers, musicians, costume designers, make-up experts and all technicians. Members receive full wages whether employed on current show or not. In addition they re-

ceive full National Service benefits, cheap holidays to workers' vacation resorts, etc.

Recruiting for the stage is carried on mainly through the State Dramatic Schools. It is possible to enter a theatre company without graduating from a state school. There are still private teachers, and outstanding amateurs are often given a chance of qualifying for a permanent theatre company. Employment is guaranteed to all graduates of State Dramatic Schools.

I do not know of any outstanding new Czech plays, but I imagine with the theatre on a sound organisational footing, and inspired by the stimulus of keen and intelligent audience support, the emergence of a new Czech drama cannot be long delayed.

In the present troubled times, faced as we are by the menace of atomic bombs and germ warfare, Peace has become not merely a desirable state, but an essential prerequisite to the continued existence of life on our planet. War in the past, robbing the world of successive generations of its youth, destroying, maiming, bringing a wake of suffering and impoverishment, has caused many serious interruptions to the continuity of our cultural life. What confronts us now is the possibility of total annihilation. We are brought face to face with the stark realisation that no matter how far from the battlefields of the past, we are now menaced by weapons of mass destruction without precedent in the history of man, capable of wiping out the entire population of the earth.

The emphasis of war has changed over the last generation from a remote affair of battles and trench warfare, to the horrific mass destruction of civilian populations. The people themselves are placed in the forefront of war

## Peace and a Sword

in the atomic age, and it is the people who must unite in demanding Peace, disarmament, and the banning of atomic and biological horror weapons.

Great numbers of people throughout the world are awake to the urgency of the issues at stake, and are making their voices heard in Peace Conferences in many countries, where leading artists, writers and poets unite in the common cause of Peace. Easter, 1949, saw some of the greatest living figures of the intellectual world attending a vast Conference of representatives of millions of people from 72 nations gathered in Paris to declare a policy of Peace. Now Australia's peace lovers from all over the continent have come together in Melbourne to unite with outstanding delegates from overseas in the struggle for Peace.

The People of the world are beginning to demand a sane approach to modern problems, and the abandonment of preparations

for a third world war, and the artists who realise the significance of these demands are mirroring them in their art, directing their creative talents into the great mass movement for Peace.

Picture Paris last year, when nearly half of the city's population crowded to the huge Buffalo Stadium to give a mighty welcome to the hundreds of delegates to the great Peace Congress. Paris—where Picasso's dove of Peace, the emblem designed for the Congress by one of the greatest artists to ever breathe the air of Paris, met the gaze in every street, at every corner. Picasso had designed a work of art that expressed the great unity which had been born in Paris. And on the same day that the Congress began, a daughter was born to Picasso—a daughter, whom in honour of the great occasion he has named Colombe. Could anything be more symbolic of the great new spirit of Peace which has been launched into the world?

# new theatre and you

## What is new theatre?

**THE NEW THEATRE LEAGUE OF W.A.** is a cultural movement of ordinary working people whose aim is to achieve artistic sincerity through the production of realistic and thought-provoking drama. This programme of social realism in the theatre is carried out in accordance with the League's officially stated Objects and Principles:

- To produce plays of a cultural value to the people of Western Australia.
- To cultivate a theatre free from commercialism, capable of developing an Australian drama, and of educating all sections of the people to appreciate a high standard of contemporary and classical drama.
- To secure the widest possible co-operation with all associations with similar aims.

In addition to the regular presentation of plays, these aims are carried out by a number of different groups, which co-operate fully with one another to form the broad basis of artistic endeavour upon which the League is formed.

- **DRAMA CLASS:** Every Friday evening, at 8 p.m. Classes in mime, speech, make-up, stagecraft, etc.
- **ARTISTS:** The design of stage settings is the task of this group, in addition to lino cuts and art work for the illustration of articles and posters.
- **WRITERS:** Meetings are held on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month at 8 p.m. Round table discussion of members' work. Study of technical and aesthetic problems.
- **EDITORIAL** group is responsible for the publication of the magazine "New Theatre" in collaboration with the Writers' and Artists' groups.
- **MUSIC** group promotes interest in all musical activities. Meetings held at regular intervals.
- **EXPERIMENTAL** group undertakes the experimental production of plays, drawing, where possible, on the work of the Writers' and Music groups.
- **DISCUSSION** group meets for the evening meal every Friday evening at 6 p.m. to discuss current events in relation to the theatre.
- **SOCIAL** group organises social functions for League members incorporating productions by the Experimental group, and arranges League outings, etc.

## How to become a Member

Membership of the New Theatre League is open to all those who support its aims and objects.

You can apply for membership by contacting the Secretary, whose address is:

The Secretary, New Theatre League,  
58 Mounts Bay Road, Perth

or by contacting any New Theatre official at one of the League's productions or social functions.

The following are details of membership, together with fees:

- **ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP** entitles the member to take part in all theatre and social activities, with the right of helping to govern the League through attending monthly general meetings. 21/- annually, or 2/- monthly.
- **ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP.** Each Associate Member receives two tickets for preferential booking of seats at every major or experimental production presented by the League, and special concession tickets for all New Theatre social functions, together with a copy of each issue of the magazine New Theatre during the year. 16/- annually.
- **LIFE MEMBERSHIP** gives full Associate and Active Membership rights as set out above, for life. £10.

Although Active Membership gives the right to participate in all activities, a small fee is payable for tuition at drama classes.

READ

## new theatre

Official Organ of the New Theatre League of W.A.

Recent contributors include:

KATHERINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD, one of Australia's foremost writers, author of many novels, plays and stories of Australian life and the Australian people.

J. B. PRIESTLEY, leading English novelist and playwright, who played a leading part in the formation of the International Theatre Institute.

**new theatre is published regularly  
with each new theatre league  
production.**

**6d. per copy**

# Peekskill

Continued from Page 3

hours, arms linked, and we saw the evidence of that unity, not only in Harlem, where fifteen thousand negroes and whites demonstrated their fury, but in Peekskill on the 4th September, when we came back together, negro and white, twenty five thousand strong.

But we hadn't learned enough. There were twenty five thousand of us the second time, men and women of diverse backgrounds and beliefs, and only nine hundred of the storm-troopers; we were disciplined and we had defending us the best of all fighters, the workers; but we hadn't learned enough of the nature of that peculiar filth that capitalism excretes, that thing called fascism. It was the nature of the beast that we were unwilling to admit; and again I almost took my children and other people did take theirs.

When that day was over, we knew more, we understood more. Twenty-five thousand of us are different, and our blessed, beautiful, wonderful land is different, too; and that must be known and understood. For in the course of that day, the 4th of September, 1949, we saw a thousand police, state troopers, sheriffs, deputies county police, town police—we saw them join forces with the storm-troopers and turn the aftermath of the concert into an orgy of blood and pain. We saw ourselves and our friends and our children covered with blood, beaten, blinded maimed—we saw a battlefield stretched out over ten miles of road—we saw the sub-human frenzy of the union of police and storm-troopers, Ku Klux Klan and Legion—we saw the hospital wards fill with our cut and bleeding — we saw

what we had only read about, and when a storm-trooper's knife cuts the eyeball of a negro lad in two, so that it opens up like an egg, and a policeman watches, smiling, there are no words sufficient. This we saw—and as I said, we are different.

And the Negro people are different—make no mistake. This abomination at Peekskill, the logical extension of Foley Square, was directed against them, and against the Jewish people, and against the Communists, and they are all different. I am different, and I am not just a writer anymore, and this is something writers who read this must understand, that from here on we must make of our writings a sword that will cut this monster of fascism to pieces, or we will make no more literature. Understand the difference! They thought the people would run, but they didn't run; they stood like a mighty rock — together, Negro and white, Jew and Christian, Communist and Progressive. And the Jews learned that fascism in America is one with anti-Semitism, even as the Negroes learned that fascism in America is another face of Jim Crow. Even as the workers learned that the Communist Party of the United States,

like Communist Parties everywhere, will not retreat, will not cower, will not give ground.

On Saturday, the 27th of August, in Peekskill, and on Sunday, the 4th of September, the progressives who came to hear Paul Robeson, stood forth for America, for what is best and noblest in America. And the workers know, the Negroes know, the Jews know! The press will scream—but the truth proves out.

Yes it proves out. There were two busloads of Negroes, and they went, on that same Sunday, to Hyde Park, to spend an hour or two in the library of a man they remembered and loved; and coming back to New York, their buses entered the Peekskill area, and suddenly their day's outing was turned into flying glass, blood, and blinded children. . .

So the truth proves out. We learned and we grew, and we are wiser, more sober, and less afraid. We have a governor in Albany who welcomed the storm-troopers, aided them, and put his cheap stamp of white-washing approval on their work; but we have a people in our state who do not want fascism and are willing to pay a price to halt it. Halt it we shall.

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## What Goes On?

The forthcoming Drama Festival, to be presented during May-June by the Theatre Council, in the Assembly Hall, is the most noteworthy event in the world of the amateur stage during the next few months, and we give here the names of the clubs participating, together with the plays to be presented.

Theatre Arts Academy  
**An Inspector Calls**

Repertory Club  
**Enduring as the Camphor Tree**  
Therry Society  
**Song out of Sorrows**  
Mercury Players  
**The Father**  
Independent Players  
**The Shadow of the Vine**  
Garrick Club  
**Laburnum Grove**  
University Dramatic Society  
**The Hypochondriac.**