

[1930-]

HOUSING . . . . . YOUTH . . . . . CREDIT UNIONS

MILK.....LABOR . . . . CRIME . . . . MEDECINE . . . .

real problems in our neighborhood

SPAIN . . . . . They are headlines, these subjects; we

face them every ~~May problems~~ day. But how much do we really ~~know about~~ understand them, in their broader aspects? There's a theatre in the settlement. Could we put these problems on the stage? And perhaps, in the process of dramatizing them, we could somehow bring them into focus for ourselves and other people; get a clearer idea of what we might do to help solve them.

Education for action is not an uncommon precept today. Nor is the use of the theatre for such a purpose. There must be as many techniques for constructing and producing plays about current social problems in a group as there are schools, unions and community centers throughout the country experimenting with this type of education. The only thing that may be peculiar to our application of this idea, in the Playhouse of the settlement, is, as we're constantly forced to explain, that "we don't have a Dramatic Group.

Our potential actors, - yes, and playwrights, - may be anywhere in the neighborhood. They may be already organized, within or without the settlement; or they may be isolated individuals who are interested in a social problem. Needless to say, there are some who simply drift into the theatre.....the kibitzers, those; and occasionally one of them will be caught up by the subject and stick with it. And there are a few, particularly among the younger people, who will participate just for the fun of acting. If it were only for the, we should simply put on good published plays. But the fact that even the artictically discriminate will work with a script that they've constructed themselves presupposes one very important condition: they must understand their subject; more, they must believe in its importance.

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At first it was hard to persuade groups who were anxious to promote their ideas that a play would be a good means of education. Then, after a few successful dramatizations of local problems, we began to be beset by the request "Can't you do a play about.....?" And our answer is always, "Sure. Fine. <sup>If you have the</sup> ~~How many of your~~ <sup>who</sup> people ~~will~~ want to work on it?"

Last summer the union leaders ~~on~~ a local pencil company were pretty bewildered by that reply when they had asked us if we could dramatize their strike. "But our members make pencils, they're not actors. Never been in a theatre, most of them. Besides, they're busy picketing." Nevertheless, after we'd spent two weeks becoming acquainted with the workers as they came off the picket line, ate their lunch, waited for meetings in the union hall, we managed, not only to get enough material to make up a script, but to convince a dozen of them that they should play "themselves" in the crowd scenes. Specific parts, the boss, the foreman, members of the NLRB, were played by some of our neighborhood actors. But it was the presence of the union-members, coming out of the audience and, finally, speaking ad lib from the stage, that gave the play its vitality.

So, usually, a production will stem from some organization, some club or group which has a Cause to promote. But even that's no rule. AS we write this we are embarking on a "Medecine Show", because Socialized Medecine is in the air and more and more people in the neighborhood are beginning to question the economic aspects of their own problems of health. But there is, as far as we know, no Socialized Medecine Movement or Group-Health-Group extant within our reach. It may be that the people who have discussed and read about the subject and worked out a play together will form into such a specialized neighborhood <sup>organization</sup> ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~. Perhaps they will simply carry their special knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject back to their respective groups - Social Club, Mothers' Club or Co-op. The action that may be taken on a problem after we've put on our

show

~~play~~ is no immediate concern of ours . But if our actors and audience carry the subject of the play away with them from the Playhouse we may feel that we've done a decent job.