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'The Good Road' a Fine Show, A Vitally Important Message

By ELINOR HUGHES

Anyone in the vicinity of the Colonial Theater last Monday and Tuesday evenings around theater time must have been puzzled to understand what was happening at that esteemed playhouse. There were lights in the lobby but no posters on the outside, people crowding, even pushing, to get in but no money passing at the box office window. Obviously, something was going on inside, but what?

To those who finally by luck or perseverance or the possession of tickets did make their way inside, the something that was going on inside proved so unusual, so important and so interesting that it is only regrettable that more was not known of it in advance and that more persons could not have seen it while it was here. In short, for three performances at the Colonial Theater the National Committee of Invitation presented a new musical revue, "The Good Road," a revue created last summer at the Moral Re-Armament International Assemblies at Mackinac Island, Mich., and at Caux in Switzerland, which was intended to be and unquestionably is, a notable weapon in the war of ideas.

It is called a revue, yes, but when did you ever see a revue for which no one took program credits, neither author, composer nor actor? A revue with the professional touch in lighting and direction yet with a cast of everyday people inspired by an ideal? A revue which had something constructive and decisive to say and said it in terms that any intelligent person could grasp and remember? A revue, finally, which so inspired the hard-boiled professional theater people (and that includes the backstage unions) that they donated theaters and services free of charge?

CONSTRUCTIVE IDEOLOGY

We have heard it shouted and bellowed and shrieked that we are

involved in a death struggle between the Communist and the democratic ideologies and that to save what we believe to be the right way of life must forge new weapons in order to hold our own. Those responsible for "The Good Road" believe that the best way to fight ideas is with other ideas: To offer concrete and constructive philosophy to combat totalitarianism and Marxism, which are the antitheses of religion and personal liberty. Instead of screaming hatred and defiance and fear, "The Good Road" comes forward with a program of constructive ideology, telling us that to live together in safety and happiness we must in word, act and thought be good neighbors; that we must learn to yield something of our own wills, seek to understand those we work beside and live with and, above all, that we must do our part and not sit back and function as defeatists and commentators.

Whoever put this production together knew how to write: The sketches have broad understanding of human nature—the best of them being that all too faithful study of home life, "Families Can Be Fun." The songs are catchy and have good lyrics—"The Whole World Is My Neighbor," were this a commercial enterprise, would certainly make the Hit Parade, and maybe it will even as it is. The director or directors employ the spoken word, the chanted lyric (and very beautiful chanting it is, too), the stage technique so brilliantly employed by Kurt Jooss in his anti-war ballet "The Green Table," the medium of the folk dance, along with that of the flashback, the surging of crowds, and the sharp effect of the single isolated figure caught by a single light.

FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE

The text is equally concerned with the great lessons of the past—the teachings of Pericles along with the words of Lincoln, Jefferson and Joan of Arc—and the hope of the future, a hope which rests not only with hopeful and devoted youth eager to work for a better world, but also with all of us who, though helpless as isolated individuals to accomplish much, can together with the rest of likeminded humanity, make ourselves felt.

To say that all this makes for a memorable evening in the theater is the least part of the importance of this MRA production, which is traveling around this country and Canada as it has in England and France, for there can be good theater that carries no message, slight or otherwise. "The Good Road" is already proving itself of practical importance, in bringing increased production and decreased absenteeism in the English coal fields; it is penetrating the Iron Curtain in Europe and providing the nucleus for hope, self-respect and the will to build, to sacrifice and to make concrete the forces of good-will and brotherhood which the world so badly needs.

Finally, "The Good Road" is drawn from life rather than from rosy dreams: the scene "The Whole World Is My Neighbor," is taken from an incident in a western farming community where good-will and fair dealing ended a protracted and destructive feud; the words spoken in "Our Heritage" were spoken by the pioneers of democracy at crucial times in world history; and the memorable letter from "Which Way, America?" was written by an American soldier in Okinawa to his family shortly before his death in battle. I wish that letter could be blazoned forth in newspapers, on billboards and in the sky for the doubting Thomases and Mr. Fainthearts to read. "The Good Road" is not necessarily a soft or easy one to walk but it's going in the right direction and the hope of a free and peaceful world is traveling on it right now.