

COLUMBIA PULLS BOTH THE LEFT LEG AND THE RIGHT

HE STAYED FOR BREAKFAST

(Columbia)

 COMMUNISTS will see red over this picture. Capitalists (bankers particularly) are likely to go blue in the face with indignation. But everyone between these two extremes of the human species—and the field is pretty wide—should enjoy a jolly good laugh at their expense.

Hollywood has been making fun of bankers for as long as I can remember (nice gentle fun, of course, for finance is very important in producing pictures and it would never do to annoy the bankers into closing their cheque-books), but until recently direct reference to Communism was taboo on the screen. It was one of the Words that Must Not be Spoken. Even to treat it as a joke was apparently to take it too seriously. When they couldn't altogether avoid the whole unsavoury subject, they skated round it by talking vaguely about "Reds" and "Radicals."

It's different now. In M-G-M's "Ninotchka," Greta Garbo was quite unashamedly an emissary of the Soviet (at least she wasn't ashamed till near the end), who went to Paris and remained wedded to the doctrines of Communism until she met Melvyn Douglas and married him instead. In Columbia's "He Stayed for Breakfast," it's Melvyn Douglas who is the Communist, and he hasn't even got Ninotchka's excuse of being a Russian. I mean you rather expect that sort of thing of the Russians. No, Comrade Douglas in this new film is a Parisian; and he's a professional agitator of the rankest but handsomest kind who's never content unless he's leading a strike or a demonstration.

When the picture opens he is busy "organising" the waiters of Paris. As you'd expect, bankers are anathema to him—but not bankers' wives. At least not Loretta Young, who's the wife of the podgy and plutocratic Eugene Pallette. When I think of a banker having a wife as beautiful as Loretta Young it reminds me of the title of that book "All This and Heaven Too." Indeed, I almost become class-conscious myself.

Well anyway, Comrade Douglas is so acutely class-conscious that, even before he has seen Loretta Young, he can't resist taking a pot shot at the podgy Monsieur Pallette. With the whole police force of Paris at his heels, where shall the desperate Communist hide? Where else but in the private apartment of the banker's lovely wife. For you should know that she herself is on strike—against being married to M. Pallette. And he is such an unpleasant object and it is so much a case of beauty and the beast that I cannot find it in my heart to blame her: just as one cannot altogether blame Comrade Douglas for firing that pistol.

Perhaps it's this feeling that they have something in common in their dislike of M. Pallette that makes the banker's wife shelter the Communist. Not that she has much choice really; but her calmness is commendable when he breaks into her apartment brandishing his pistol and talking rather wildly about Karl Marx and Capitalism. Comes the Revolution and there will be no such parasites as Madame, he asserts, but Madame, refusing to become alarmed at the prospect of early liquidation, goes upstairs to bed with a copy of "Communism for Beginners," just to humour the poor fellow: while he, being a gentleman in spite of everything, goes to sleep on the downstairs sofa.

Comes the Dawn, but not the Revolution, and the police are still on patrol outside. So he stays for breakfast—and dinner and tea and breakfast the next morning, and several mornings after that. And although Madame's political education does not progress very fast, and although Comrade Douglas has qualms that he is not being altogether loyal to The Party and Karl Marx, and protests frequently that he is being deliberately sabotaged by luxury, it is obvious that he is rather enjoying himself.

And if I am any judge at all, I think that the audience (within the limits of Paragraph 1) will also enjoy itself, for the complications of the plot are many, the dialogue is sparkling, and the acting is expert. So is Alexander Hall's direction: having been given the chance to do some leg-pulling he has spared neither the Left nor the Right.

However, lest you still find it hard to credit that Hollywood can have allowed a Communist to be the hero of a story, you had better hear how that story ends. When our hero has successfully evaded the police, he still has to answer for his conduct to The Party, which, judging from this film, seems to consist of half the population of Paris. When from his answer it becomes apparent that Comrade Douglas has allowed himself to be sabotaged by the bourgeois emotion of love, he leaves The Party rather violently; and with the banker's wife beside him—but a banker's wife no longer—he sets off for the States with the intention of becoming a good American and voting for Mr. Roosevelt. So you can see that Hollywood's burst of originality and courage couldn't quite stay the distance, and that Comrade Douglas's "conversion" is really no more convincing than was Comrade Garbo's before him. What we are asked to believe is that Love conquers both Communism and Capitalism, of which I am doubtful.

But there I go myself, looking for political significance where only entertainment should exist. The search for ulterior motives in "He Stayed for Breakfast" can quite safely be left to the Communists and the Capitalists. That leaves the rest of us free to enjoy the joke, and it is, I repeat, an excellent one.

THE BOYS FROM SYRACUSE

(Universal)

 ALTHOUGH the film publicity boys have said not a word about it, the basis for this extravagant musical-comedy-revue is a play called "The Comedy of Errors," written some time ago by a well-known playwright by the name of William Shakespeare.

Having had the inestimable benefit of secondary education I twigged it immediately I saw that the name of one of the characters was Dromio. "Dromio?" I thought, "Dromio? Wherefore art thou Dromio? Ah, Shakespeare!"

"The Boys from Syracuse," I am in a position to be able to inform you, was a George Abbott musical-comedy with music by Dick Rodgers and lyrics by

Famous Benchley Snore

Robert Benchley, around whose head funny stories buzz as mercilessly as they do around Dorothy Parker's, is in trouble again. From the Universal Studio, where Benchley has been making "Hired Wife," comes the following report.

For one comedy scene, Benchley was required to do his famous snoring act—and for many years the Benchley snore has been famous. As dramatic critic for "The New Yorker," he has snored in every theatre on Broadway. When the time came to shoot the scene, Benchley could not be found. Frantic calls were of no avail, but the director had an inspiration. He gave the dramatic studio shout "Quiet—everybody!"

All noise stopped, but shattering the silence was the Benchley snore. Soon it was traced to a secluded corner where the comedian was fast asleep. His only excuse was that he had over-rehearsed the scene.

Larry Hart, and featured, in the part of Dromio of Ephesus, Larry Hart's diminutive brother Teddy, who was seen on the screen here in "Three Men on a Horse."

The Harts, apparently, were not at all awed by the fact that they were playing Shakespeare. Said Teddy Hart in an article in "Stage": "Shakespeare's all right. He's O.K. He's swiped a lot of stuff from vaudeville, but he's O.K. I read 'The Comedy of Errors' this summer, and at first the language mixed me up. All the free verse they've got in there. But once you understand it you can see how hokey this Shakespeare is. Good, but hokey. I used a lot of the gags 15 years ago in vaudeville."

The film, which is pure farce, has Allan Jones, Rosemary Lane, Joe Penner, Martha Raye, Eric Blore, Alan Mowbray, and Charles Butterworth—a pretty lively cast for a musical comedy. Few liberties have been taken with the basic plot of "The Comedy of Errors"; but, if the plot remains intact, Will Shakespeare would certainly be perplexed by the trappings.

These include Allan Jones singing love songs to Rosemary Lane, "hot numbers" by Martha Raye, a chorus of beautiful young things in abbreviated Grecian costumes, taxi-meters on chariots, a sign, "Office hours 12.0—12.5" on the state apartment of the Duke of Solinus, Nubian boys on roller skates, a tablet newspaper with the headline "Ephesus Blitzkreigs Syracuse," and Zeus alone knows what else.

The plot, which concerns two sets of twins, is too complicated to outline in any detail, and if you're interested I suggest you read "The Comedy of Errors." What matters in the film, as I've indicated, are the trappings.

If you have a long enough memory you may recall that Eddie Cantor used somewhat similar gags in "Roman Scandals" and "Ali Baba Goes to Town." And the business of twins playing about with reflections in a mirror has been used in vaudeville since Salome did her headline

(Continued on next page)



TINTS as you RINSE

Sheena TINTRINSE

CONTAINS TWO HENNA HAIR RINSES

1/3

in 10 FLATTERING SHADES

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