

— REPERTORY BLUES —

THIS setback suffered by the Little Theatre Society does not, however, mean any lessening of Auckland's interest in amateur drama. There was never, in fact, a time when interest was so strong. In every suburb associations have been formed until greater Auckland is covered by a network of small societies giving plays in all kinds of venues—public halls, Sunday schools, friendly societies rooms, Returned Soldiers' Association halls, club rooms and even in the houses of enthusiastic members.

Urgent Necessity

Many centres of social activities such as the women's clubs, the churches, the Rationalist Association, even the larger stores and factories have their play-reading sections which, with splendid and sometimes almost reckless courage, produce anything from Shakespeare to Shaw, from old morality plays to the modernism of O'Neill. The "leftist" repertory societies are particularly active. The Workers' Educational Association is the strongest, and is still gathering support for its propaganda plays.

THE most urgent necessity of Auckland repertory is the building of a special theatre adapted to the requirements of the combined movement—and a co-operative federation of the many societies that lack a place for the presentation of their efforts.

Auckland, indeed, badly needs a repertory theatre—a small house seating 500 with an adequate stage and dressing rooms. A pretentious building would be unnecessary. Its necessities would be a central site, comfortable seating, a one-floor auditorium, efficient stage and mechanical arrangements, good lighting, and—above all—good acoustics. Such a house, independent of the cost of the site, could be built for £5000. It should be managed in the interest of all the societies by an experienced executive and, fully equipped, should be operated upon sharing terms with the individual societies, the executive having voice in the choice of plays to be presented—but that choice should be influenced solely by the probable public demand. The best of movements must pay its way or perish!

Could It Be Done?

There are over 100,000 people in Auckland attending weekly fifty-five cinemas, and it is reasonable to calculate that 20 per cent. of this large number would support a repertory theatre playing at the same cheap prices as the cinemas—an attendance of 2000 weekly would pay expenses.

Many of the cities and towns of England have such repertory theatres. Bradford, for example, with a population about the same as Auckland, has for the last three years been running nightly repertory, without a break, and Wolverhampton, with a much smaller and poorer population, runs the whole year round.

AND repertory has come to stay in New Zealand. There is a special need for it since, isolated as we are the number of visiting legitimate drama companies is far less

than in more populous and centrally situated countries.

Russia has proved the interest of the proletariat in "live" drama. In repertory she leads the world. Dr. Dillon, an Oxford professor, who was in the British diplomatic service in Russia and was later the special theatrical correspondent of the London "Daily Telegraph"—a conservative journal—in reporting on the progress of repertory in Russia says this, "Never in the history of mankind has there been so much enthusiasm for anything as the enthusiasm for theatrical art in Russia—the only parallel is the enthusiasm which France had for liberty in 1789. . . . Everybody is furiously learning some form of art—there are over fifteen hundred repertory societies in Moscow alone, and last year 471 performances of Shakespeare's plays were given."

Support From The People

That is in Russia. When was a Shakespearean play ever adequately presented in New Zealand by any repertory society?

Dr. Dillon continues:—"I attended a repertory performance of Wagner's opera, "Lohengrin," given entirely by the operatives of one Moscow factory! There were 80 in the chorus, 70 in the orchestra, with a cast of principals all drawn from the one factory, and it was an excellent show."

The people of New Zealand can take heart from the example of the efforts of English towns and the splendid enthusiasm of the Russian people. The larger centres of New Zealand should provide small theatres for repertory, and if the municipal authorities neglect to provide their citizens with these cultural utilities, then the people should get together and build and operate themselves.

THE ultimate success or failure of repertory in New Zealand depends upon the perception that it is meant to be both educative and entertaining—and that one need not be opposed to the other. Repertory has the possibility of such large public support that a mass movement might be begun which would do much to let into the stuffiness of many present tendencies both sweetness and light. As Shaw said, "Art is kept alive, not by the established trade in it, but by the desperate efforts of art-hungry individuals to create and re-create it out of nothing for its own sake."

To those who have had practical experience of organising repertory in New Zealand, some of the foregoing ideas may seem Utopian, but it is my belief that the time is now ripe for one of the four main centres to take the lead courageously, and to organise and exploit the enthusiasm for drama that is undoubtedly sweeping this country. One progressive and well-organised concern would be an assurance for the future of New Zealand's interest in dramatic art. The question is: has the personnel of any existing society the character and business sense to bring a progressive business-like plan to fruition?



REPERTORY IN RUSSIA.

Eighty in the Chorus—Seventy in the Orchestra!