

"Epic of an Era"

SAMUEL BRODY and TOM BRANDON

"And I am convinced that if we did put on here in one of our cinema palaces a film that did actually embrace our era, that was actually a real National-Socialist 'Battleship Potemkin,' the house would be sold out and for a record run!"

—Goebbels.

ON JUNE 28, 1933, in the Ufa Palast, Berlin, Hitler, Goebbels and Goering, surrounded by uniformed Storm Troopers, acclaimed National-Socialist Germany's major film of their "era": *S. A. Mann Brand*. Since then, whatever was left of the moribund German film industry was called again and again to hear Propaganda Minister Goebbels exhort that "real life must once more be made the basic stuff of films."

And now in an unknown New York "palace" in Yorkville, seating some 300, whose Jewish owner has for years specialized in dishing out fifth-rate sex and cowboy ribbons to relaxation-seeking proletarians, this film version of what Goebbels calls "real life" is being shown to "special" audiences recruited from the shopkeepers of the vicinity by S. A. Manner of the local Friends of New Germany. Not that this theater was their original choice. For the past few months Herr Herrlitz, manager of the Bavarian Film Co. in N. Y., had insistently informed the trade journals that *Brand* would appear in grand style in one of the better known theatres. So completely unsuccessful did his plans prove to be, that the idea of general exhibition of the film to include English-speaking audiences was finally abandoned. A version with English titles was not made, and in its present form *Brand* is relied upon to attract solely the German population of Yorkville and possibly of one or two other cities.

What are the main threads in the disjointed and at times almost completely unrelated episodes that constitute *S. A. Mann Brand*?

The Nazis act in the interests of all the German people—in the interests of the German working-class. They will solve all social and economic dilemmas confronting Germany. All opposing groups are the natural enemies of Germany's "awakening," particularly the Communists.

Brand, the young Storm Trooper, is the incarnation of the lofty, heroic ideals motivating all Nazis. He is home-loving, God-fearing, self-sacrificing, humble, kind to his mother, a lover of kiddies; clean, neat, and decidedly blond. His old father, however, is what the program-note characterizes as "a fanatical Marxist." Between father and son, there is no possible reconciliation until the former, inspired by "the mighty and inspiring speeches" broadcast by Hitler, goes to the polls and votes

Nazi. "The hard-boiled Marxist, Father Brand, weakens slowly, and the Communists, too," reads the program synopsis. Brand is the inspirer and protector of a little 14-year-old (also neat, humble and very blond) boy, a neighbor, whom he guides in the theory and practice of Nazism.

In the same poverty-stricken section of Berlin lives a Communist family, Baumann, and their Red followers "who thrive by terrorization." Baumann's daughter, Anni, is the black sheep of the family, but she has an honest face. She falls in love with Brand, the handsome Aryan. An ominous note is struck very early in the development of the story when Anni, returning home after having been out with Brand, is greeted by her father with a terrific bombardment of assorted right-hooks, round-houses, jabs, finally culminating in the successful delivery of a "one-two" follow-up in the traditional Manassa Mauler fashion. We are now in the Baumann household. The family, considerably more ferocious in appearance than the classic Hollywood melodramatic versions of underworld characters, blandly continues its feast while sister is being treated to the aforementioned reception. In a stray piece of dinner-chatter, one of the sinister young Baumanns inquires of mother as to the number of love affairs she has had in her life.

These dregs do not complete the picture of Communism, however. There is Turrow, Moscow agent, bearer of Moscow gold. From his home, splendid as an oriental potentate's, emanate the plots and directives for the destruction of law and order, religion, the home, and the Aryan race. This leader of the Reds is an out and out degenerate who is forever guzzling vodka and issuing orders over the telephone in the presence of a divan-ful of heaving harlots. The cut-throats and blood-thirsty morons who make up his groveling if

not too distinguished following, greet his every depraved comment, his every drink of vodka with "Red Front!" This salute is invariably photographed from an angle revealing pornographic pictures on the walls of the cafe where the Reds meet. Turrow who bribes Anni into using her feminine appeal to win over the Storm Trooper Brand to Communism. In order to put Brand in a position where he will be unable to resist a large money bribe to spy on his fellow-Nazis, Turrow divests himself of his Russian blouse for the moment, visits Neuberg (Brand's Jewish employer), and arranges to have the young Storm Trooper fired. Brand yields, but with a noble purpose in mind. He finally succeeds in leading a raid of Storm Troopers on the arms cache of the Reds. Anni saves his life in the nick of time by warning him that the Reds have discovered his incorruptible devotion to the cause of THE LEADER.

Turrow and his bloody gang finally arrange to snipe at a peaceful parade of Nazis. Bearded Jews spit and heckle from balconies along the line of march. Erich, the little blond parader, is fatally wounded by a Red gun that stealthily protrudes three feet from a cellar window. Brand carries the dying victim of Communist individual violence, as men, women and strong Troopers weep. But all this bribery, lechery and violence is calmly vanquished by the orderly selection of Adolph Hitler for the Chancellorship. A decent life finally and forever more is assured by the peaceful but jubilant balloting of the Nazi Party into power. Into every home the voice of Hitler brings the message of the New Germany and everybody back from the orderly polls cries with joy and drinks beer. Plenty of orderly Nazi parades. "The Nazi payoff period is recorded as an extremely courteous event, with even the Communists picked up on a raid, shown as being daintily assisted by the elbow into the paddy wagon" (Variety).

The pressure of special conditions characterizing the American market as an outlet for Nazi propaganda films has forced the distributors to make certain important omissions in the present version of this movie.¹ What are these conditions! What are the reasons for the deletion of most of the anti-Semitic material? What caused the American agents of Goebbels' Propaganda Bureau to cut out of the running cry of "Judah Verrecke!" (Perish Jewry!) What made them patch over the exile of Neuberg, the Jew? The answer lies in the political policies of German fascism

¹ In his dispatch from Berlin to Variety on June 28, he also wrote "no kidding, the picture might be a big movie maker in houses catering to serious-minded and politically interested audiences. I have personally advised London Film Society to book picture for their highly select and highbrow members."



GOEBBELS SPEAKS

Mackey

which finds it necessary to hide its ruthless persecution of Jews at home while it counters international protest and boycott against these actions with the brazen lie: "Atrocity stories!" Moreover, Herr Herrlitz and his crew were fully aware that the wrath of the American Jewish population would have driven him and his film out of the country had the original version been offered in a New York theatre.

In this connection it is interesting to see that the Congressional Committee for the Investigation of Nazi Activities has not bothered to investigate this Nazi film brought into the country through the German Consulate. Though American and German capitalism may for the moment differ as to the forms and degree of anti-semitism, they stand united—like capitalism the world over—in their bitter and ruthless opposition to Communism. The Nazis hail Hollywood's most mature fascist effort in the field of the cinema, *Gabriel Over the White House*¹ with: "It is a document indicating a nation seeking truth" (Prussian Minister of Justice on March 27, 1934), while the violently anti-working-class film, *Brand*, is received in New York as "really thrilling" (New York Times, May 28). Nazi censorship put its stamp of approval on *Gabriel* and the New York censorship board approves *Brand*.

It will prove instructive at this point to examine the place of *S. A. Mann Brand* in the recent history of the German film industry. The so-called "heroic" period of the German film (*Caligari, Destiny, Mabuse, Dracula, Dubarry, Faust, Golem, Joyless Street, Last Laugh, Metropolis, New Year's Eve, Nju, The Street, Student of Prague, Tartuffe, Variety, Warning Shadows, Waxworks, etc.*) lasted approximately six years, ending in 1926. Even that period was made possible only by the perennial financial patches applied by the Government. But the irreparable fissures of German post-war economy doomed such heroics to inevitable collapse. The Hugenberg (Nationalist) interests grasped what was left of the industry in almost complete monopoly.

The German film entered upon the period of the "waltz" and "costume film—false papier-maché romances and operettas designed to supply the masses with inexpensive escape from the misery of hunger and unemployment which at that time was beginning to assume catastrophic proportions (*Waltz Dream, Two Hearts in Waltz Time, etc.*). Supplementing the production of these mass soporifics, there appeared a number of "historical" films designed to stimulate jingoistic aspirations in the hearts of the masses. The dramatic descendants and prototypes of Thor re-echoed in the third-rate "epics" emanating from Hugenberg's highly class-conscious brain. Whenever the production schedules were unable to produce a sufficient number of variations on the "wine-music-dance - women-moonlight - sofa"

theme, the good old-reliable shadow of Siegfried was once more invoked and dragged willy-nilly across the screens of Germany. But the box-offices continued to reflect the increasingly negative sentiment of the movie-goers,—a sentiment now prevalent in all capitalist countries—and which must here of necessity be euphemistically conveyed as approximating "Aw, nuts!"

The German film continued its rapid economic disintegration and artistic decay. The few important independent films of the period prior to 1933 (*Comrades of 1918, Kameradschaft, Weavers, M, Accident*) present no exception to this continuous decline. While it is true that in treatment and subject matter these films tended towards independence, an iron-ring of censorship regulations, monopolized theatre control, and unstable financial backing doomed them to a brief life. Long before the German capitalist film industry had reached complete bankruptcy, the "independent" movement was already a thing of the past.

Between Ourselves

WILLIAM FRANCIS DUNNE, better known as Bill Dunne to thousands of workers, has been active in the labor movement for nearly a quarter of a century. One of the earliest members and leaders of the Communist Party in America, he has written extensively on all phases of the revolutionary movement and has actively participated as an organizer in many of the most important labor struggles in this country—Butte, Montana (1917), Gastonia (1929), Penn-Ohio-West Virginia Coal strike (1931), etc. In our next issue we will publish the second section of his analysis of provocateurs of the New Deal.

Educating the Army (page 6 of this issue), which appears as an editorial statement, was contributed by M. B. Schnapper of Washington, D. C., whose report on the Dickstein Investigations was published in our issue for June 19.

THE NEW MASSES together with the Friends of the Soviet Union will hold a moonlight boat ride on July 21. The excursion steamer, *Ambassador*, will leave South Ferry at 7:30 p. m. There will be music, dancing and entertainment on board; refreshments will be available. Tickets are 75 cents in ad-

vance, \$1 at the pier. The affair is being conducted for the joint benefit of THE NEW MASSES and the Friends of the Soviet Union.

Edward Dahlberg's short story *The Tombstone Swastika* in this issue is an excerpt from his forthcoming novel, *No Giants Live Here*.

Error crept into the editorial paragraph on the relief situation in New York published in last week's issue, despite all our editorial care. It was stated more than a million families were on relief. As a matter of fact, the number is 270,000 families—more than a million persons. Also, LaGuardia was quoted as saying there would be no relief funds at all available after July 1. What he said was that these funds would be exhausted during the summer unless new appropriations were made.

We regret that we have been unable to publish in this issue John L. Spivak's article, *Something to Eat*, which was advertised to appear this week. It will appear next week without fail.

Don West—wanted by Georgia, dead or alive—is the author of several pamphlets of poems. Some of his verse has appeared in THE NEW MASSES and The Daily Worker.

Edward Newhouse, formerly sports writer for the Daily Worker, is now completing a proletarian novel which will be published by the Macaulay Company.

Richard Wright, a young Negro poet, is a member of the John Reed Club of Chicago.

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¹ The movie-goers will also remember that in this film an American President becomes a fascist dictator after falling on his head in an auto accident resulting in a cerebral concussion.

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