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that the free world represents God on earth and the Communist countries, the anti-Christ. Such a "useful myth" may very likely, however, be purchased (for the most part) just as cynically as it is sold. Is a myth a myth for the public that accepts it without conviction? The modern man who fights in a mythical holy crusade knows he's compelled to fight—whether it's for God or not. The real danger in manipulation, and in the cynicism that goes with it, is that we may lose the capacity for those extensions in height, in depth, in space which are the experience of art and thought. If the public becomes accustomed to being pleased and pandered to, the content is drained out of democratic political life.

After dozens of anti-Nazi films and countless slick stories and articles, the public had had enough of Hitler. What they wearied of had only the slenderest connection with the subject of Naziism; they got tired of the old formula with the Nazi label. But they didn't reject the formula, they settled for a change of labels. In the same way Hollywood may well exhaust anti-Communism before it has gotten near it: the cycle begins by exploiting public curiosity and ends by satiating it.

All our advertising is propaganda, of course, but it has become so much a part of our life, is so pervasive, that we just don't know what it is propaganda *for*. Somehow it keeps the wheels rolling and that seems to be what it's for. Why don't other peoples see that we are the heroes and the Russians cannibals? One reason is that America's public relations romance with itself is a spectacle to the rest of the world. In Hollywood productions, the American soldiers and civilians abroad are soft touches, chivalrous under the wisecracks, patronising and generous towards unfortunate little people the world over; aroused by injustice, the American is Robin Hood freed by birth from the threat of the Sheriff of Nottingham. Though this propaganda fails us abroad (too many Americans having been there) it functions at home as an entertaining form of self-congratulation and self-glorification: it makes the audience feel good. While we consume our own propaganda, other people are not so gullible about us. They have a different way of being gullible: they are influenced by Communist propaganda about us.

II. Propaganda—*Salt of the Earth*

ONE wonders if the hero of *Night People*, so sharp at detecting the cannibal under the Communist tunic, would recognise the Communist *position* when he saw it. *Salt of the Earth* is as clear a piece of Communist propaganda as we have had in many years, but the critic of the *New York Times* saw, "... in substance, simply a strong pro-labour film with a particularly sympathetic interest in the Mexican-Americans with whom it deals," and the critic of the *Los Angeles Daily News* had this to say: "If there is propaganda in this picture it is not an alien one, but an assertion of principles no thoughtful American can reject." There are Americans, then, who have not learned that Communist propaganda concentrates on local grievances. They fail to recognise that Communism makes use of principles that no thoughtful American (or Frenchman, or Englishman) can reject. Communism in each region appears to be divested of its Soviet accoutrements; its aspect is not alien; it is effective

because it organises, or captures the direction of, groups struggling for status.

Despite the reactions of some critics, it is not likely that the American film audience would react favourably to the publicity campaign, "At last! An honest movie about American working people." If American working people seek an image of their attitudes and beliefs they will find it in Hollywood films—they have helped to put it there. Though a Hollywood version glamorises their lives, it does justice to their dreams. If they did go to see *Salt* it is not likely that more than a small proportion would see anything that struck home, and that perhaps would be only as a reminder of depression days.

At special showings or at art film houses, it's a different story. *Salt* can seem true and real for those liberals and progressives whose political thinking has never gone beyond the 'thirties. Depression social-consciousness is their exposed nerve: touch it and it becomes the only reality, more vivid than the actual conditions they live in. Many Americans felt the first stirrings of political awareness in the 'thirties, and nothing that has happened since has affected them comparably. They look back to the social theatre and WPA art as to a Golden Age. The prosperity that followed is viewed almost as a trick, a device to conceal the truth and to prevent the oppressed workers from joining together to defeat ruthless big business. Prosperity is integrated with so much advertising and cynicism that it seems a sham—it doesn't look *real*. In search of something to believe in, they see the hollowness of the films played out in modern apartments and neat little cottages and tend to situate truth in the worst possible setting—in what has been left out of Hollywood films. What looks ugly and depressing must be true, since what looks prosperous is as empty as an ad. The depths to which they may fall have a greater emotional claim on them than the prosperity they (fearfully) enjoy. The worst makes the greatest claim to truth.

Salt of the Earth is not likely to be effective propaganda for overthrowing the capitalist bosses at home, a task which the Communists are not likely to envision in the United States anyway. But it is extremely shrewd propaganda for the urgent business of the U.S.S.R.: making colonial peoples believe that they can expect no good from the United States; convincing Europe and Asia and the rest of the world that there are no civil liberties in the U.S.A. and that our capitalism is really fascism. The American Communists are not so much interested these days in glorifying the Soviet Union as in destroying European and Asiatic faith in the United States. Fifteen years ago, if we had seen a movie like *Salt*, we might have tossed it off with "it's worse than propaganda, it's a dull movie." Flippancy makes us rather uneasy today: Communist propaganda, seizing upon our failures and our imperfections, and, when these are not strong enough, inventing others, has very nearly succeeded in discrediting us to the whole world. The discreditable aspects of American life are realities to be dealt with. Communist propaganda, however, treats them as opportunities.

The raw material of *Salt of the Earth* is a 1951-52 strike of Mexican-American zinc miners in New Mexico. The film, made in 1953, was sponsored by the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (expelled from the CIO in 1950 as Communist-dominated), and financed by Independent Productions Corporation (the money was