



Waiting for Lefty

Clifford Odets

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One of the most celebrated and significant plays of the modern American theatre, WAITING FOR LEFTY by Clifford Odets is set in the Depression era and deals with the exploitation of the working classes. First presented by the famous Group Theatre, the play has become a symbol of its times and a beacon for many soon-to-be famous playwrights. The action of the play is comprised of a series of varied, imaginatively conceived episodes - five in all - which blend into a powerful and stirring mosaic. The cast, which can be modified, calls for thirteen men and two women. Just a flexible, unit set is required.

The "Acting Edition," published in soft cover by Dramatists Play Service, has a list of characters preceding the text and a complete prop list following the play. The text includes explicit stage directions.

Waiting for Lefty Details

Date : Published June 28th 1975 by Richard West (first published 1935)

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Author : Clifford Odets

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From Reader Review Waiting for Lefty for online ebook

Cynda says

Seven vignettes about problems workers experienced in 1935 during the Great Depression: Pay, unions, families, prejudice, unemployment.

Very appropriate for our times. The American People are standing up as other Americans and other power People have stood up for their rights before. The Human Rights Act states that humans have a right to shelter and food and education (academic and skills) and medical care, all things Americans are sorely needing.

Gary says

This play is a classic Man vs Big Business. Man never wins let me tell you. It's always some big cat fisher calling the shots. Over moral donkey headed prigs are getting in improvements way to save their own arses. The losers are the workers and philosophers who dream on short sleep of a better way.

I'm tossed in the middle with meddlers always trying to influence my decision on which way to turn. This has been a rare reread for me, but an important one.

Nik Smith says

Amazing play that really grasps the ideals and feelings of the working class. Whether it's 1935 or 2015 it grasps the feeling of not getting what you're worth and the decision to put up with it or not.

Maria says

I like the structure of this play best of any of its elements. It was easy to visualize and would be a snap to stage. At 25 pages, it really moves too which is nice. It's about unions which I think is still relevant although I think the issues are more grey now than they are in this time period. I don't think I would really want to watch this play unless it was modernized and re-contextualized but I think the author achieves what he set out to do so it is a success on those grounds.

Brittany Jackson says

Good play!

Patricia says

This Great Depression-era play about labor organizing has been called little more than communist propaganda (and not only by the House of Un-American Activities Committee), and the assessment is, frankly, not entirely false. Odets clearly has an agenda, one that emerges in this short play at the expense of characterization or plot. But there's something charming about the unfettered political motivations on display here.

Nima says

I was in the third grade, when I first came across this one. My mother was playing Agate Keller, and at the time, other than the fact it was set in The Great Depression, I had no idea, what it meant. As an adult, now I do. I would go on record to say, that it's possible one of the most in depth looks at human nature during the depression, and especially now, it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world to go back and read it.

Carol says

Short and sweet. Such potent pleas without much backstory to these men and women. Such great one-off scenes. The play continues to live on in my mind while I hope the workers get what they need...

Loved the scene between husband and wife, and the scene between young woman and her love. Heartache.

Tony says

Odets, Clifford. WAITING FOR LEFTY. (1935). ****. This is probably one of the best known plays by Odets, one that neatly summarizes his belief in the sanctity of workers and their right to fair employment. Written as it was in the midst of the Depression, it had an obvious audience and an obvious response. The action takes place at a workers' meeting in a hall where the plight of the men present is outlined by both the men themselves and several of the speakers. The actual meeting, however, was called by a representative of "capitalism" in the form of a company spokesman. He has with him a gunman and a group of like-thinking men on stage with him. While he tries to explain to all the workers in the audience – Candide-like – how good they have it, they are all thinking in more realistic terms. They want fair pay and fair hours. They want a union. They're waiting for their leader, their worker organizer, Lefty to come by and take over the meeting. Unlike the Iceman and more like Godot, Lefty never shows up. This is Odets' condensed plea for a more socialistic system for the American work force. It's as close as he came to promoting Communism as he would ever get, though he was a member of the party. It's a little disturbing, however, that when Odets was later called up in front of the HUAC years later, he brought his address book with him and practically named everyone in it to the committee in order to save himself from harsher treatment. The play should be read, however, since it is the mainstay of the period. Recommended.

Laurence Li says

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Phillip says

This was an ok play, but not really my cup of tea. This is a Depression-era worker's activist play, inciting the workers to strike for better conditions and so on. The problem I have with a lot of political texts is that they frequently sacrifice art for direct political commentary, which doesn't appeal to my aesthetic (Native Son, for instance), and I think this play falls almost into staged political speech.

The play itself is an interesting piece of political drama, however, because of the structure. The play consists of a series of short scenes interspersed amongst a choric union committee meeting. At the plot level the vignettes have nothing to do with one another, but thematically they are linked because they all represent different struggles of the working classes and different forms of corruption among the owners of the means of production. Although still heavy-handed and overtly political, this structure of interlaced scenes playing off and supporting a central theme (the union meeting) do redeem the play somewhat.

Michelle says

I understand the choice of the episodes in the play, but I feel like we don't get a clear view of many of the characters. This is an interesting script with potential. It does seem to be cut short.

Julia says

this was in some parts really funny but overall it was too strong with the black and white / good and bad message that came off as very propaganda-like. i was also a bit shocked at how short this was

Jody says

I actually really enjoyed this play, in contrast to the previous one. The clever use of staging the speech combined would give a really effective performance (in my opinion, but I have not seen it performed so I can't be sure). The reason I didn't give this one any higher than 3 stars was purely because of length.

Lizzie says

I actually really enjoyed this play, in contrast to the previous one. The clever use of staging the speech combined would give a really effective performance (in my opinion, but I have not seen it performed so I can't be sure). The reason I didn't give this one any higher than 3 stars was purely because of length. I have never been a fan of short stories for the fact that you do not gain any character development (something I love about reading books) and so I felt the same with this play, since it is so short. I would have loved for it to have been longer and have found out more about the characters but I suppose the dramatisation when being performed adds to the characters as well.

Overall, I enjoyed reading this play but would have liked for it to have been a bit longer.
