

LAWEEKLY

THEATER

BY JAN BRESLAUER



FTP supporters E.G. Marshall, Susan Franklin Tanner and John Randolph

Enter, Stage Left

BY STEVEN MIKULAN

“Fund 'em, kill 'em, archive 'em.” Finally, the third part of this venerable American attitude toward public artwork is being applied to the Federal Theater Project. Founded in 1935 under the auspices of FDR's Works Progress Administration, the FTP employed about 10,000 people, taking many an actor and director off the dole and putting them to work on stages across the country. Whether it was an all-black production of Gilbert and Sullivan performed in Harlem, a social docudrama like Arthur Arent's *One Third of a Nation*, or a left-wing musical like Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock*, these government-funded shows brought stage works to 30 million Depression-struck people, many of whom lived in rural communities that might otherwise never have experienced live theater.

Some of our best-known playwrights, actors and directors worked in the Federal Theater Project: Orson Welles, John

Houseman, Elmer Rice and Burt Lancaster were just a few to have participated in America's brief experiment with state-sponsored art. The government never had more than a love-hate attitude toward this bold project — at one point, the State Department forced the FTP to abandon production of Rice's anti-Mussolini play, *Ethiopia*, for fear it would damage our relations with fascist Italy — and, in 1939, Congress pulled the plug.

While it is viewed in our preppie bipartisan era as a New Deal golem, the Federal Theater Project still has many friends. This Monday the TheaterWorkers Project, in association with LATC, presents a tribute to the FTP with the added intention of raising funds to establish its West Coast archive at UCLA. Introduced by actor Burgess Meredith, the evening, produced by Susan Franklin Tanner and directed by Scott Reiniger, features testimonials from James Whitmore, Lee Grant, John Randolph, Jeff Corey, E.G. Marshall and many others. A dramatic reading of Martha and Hubert Morehead's *A Cast of Thousands* will document the FTP's role in American culture, as will the program's music and slide show. The \$50-\$100 admissions are noticeably up from the \$1.25 top-price seats offered by the FTP in its glory days, but this also lets you into an audience discussion about the state of government arts funding today. **LA**

FREE, ADULT, UNCENSORED!

Los Angeles Theater Center
514 S. Spring St., downtown
Monday, July 10, 8 p.m.
(213) 627-5599 for tickets
(213) 221-7672 for info