"THE VOICE OF THE VIOLIN" (American-Biograph, 1909) One reel
Dir: D.W. Griffith; with Arthur Johnson,
Stephanie Longfellow, Clara Dracey.

Since this rather naive little anti-Red reel was made some eight years
before the Revolution, one can perhaps forgive it for not having the social
insight of "A Corner in Wheat", a far better Griffith of the same year.
Actually, Communism wasn't being taken too seriously at the time -- and
what with memories of the Wall Street panic of 1907 still fresh, and the
problems of the then-new labor unions, the exploitation of child labor etc.,
the traditional figure of the "big business tycoon" was probably disliked
as much as the somewhat vague movement of Communism at the other end of
the scale. Perhaps, in any event, one shouldn't attempt to read too much
into such a minor work -- other than that it is interesting that such themes
were tackled at all so early in the movies' growth. Incidentally, it's
interesting that Griffith gives the head Communist a Ku Klux Klan type outfit!
Another point of interest -- the nice exterior shots of the old brownstone,
which appear to be the Biograph Hqs at 11 East 14th Street.

"SATURDAY AFTERNOON" (Sennett-Pathe, 1925) Dir: Frank Capra; with Harry
Langdon, Vernon Dent, Ruth Hiatt, Peggy Montgomery.

Most of us are familiar with the one-reel version of this later Langdon-
Sennett. I for one have always assumed it to be a neatly done and representa-
tive outcrop of the whole film. It now appears that this is not the case at
all; it may have been "neatly" cut in terms of story-line, but all it did was
to retain that story and the more obvious slapstick. We can now see that two
of the most typical of all Langdon sequences were removed, presumably because
they were slowly-paced and the easiest chunks to take out. These two
episodes are excellent examples of the cunningly babyish pantomime that
Langdon was later to exploit so beautifully in his later features. There
are other odd scenes too that were missing from the one-reeler, including more
footage at the end. At the other end of the scale, there is one short scene
missing from this print that was in the one-reeler -- Langdon's girlfriend
playfully pulling down the strap of his overalls, and Harry withdrawing in
indignant shock and horror. It doesn't seem to have been edited out
deliberately however, and one must just put it down to the ravages of time
and assume it was removed because of print damage.

"GOOE CLEAN" (MGM-Hal Roach, 1931) Dir: James W. Horne; with Laurel and
Hardy, Mae Busch, Charlie Hall. 2 reels

We've had this print for some five years or more, and have always held off
showing it, hoping for a better print. (This one had rather been through
the mill, and a few pieces had to be removed before it could be projected).
However, no better print seems to be forthcoming (two or three others that
we've checked have been in worse shape) and since it is a darned good Laurel
and Hardy, we decided to play it as is. The cuts are annoying because they
are obvious, but in terms of actual footage, comparatively little is missing.
The short gets little play, possibly because of the obvious street-walker
character played by Mae Busch, and this may well account for the scarcity of
new prints.

- Intermision -

"DANGEROUS HOURS" (Paramount-Artcraft, 1919; rel: 1920) 7 reels; Directed
by Fred Niblo; supervised by Thomas H. Ince; scenario by
G. Gardner Sullivan, from a Saturday Evening Post story, "Prodigal in
Utopia", by Don Byrne; photographed by George Barnes; art direction, G. Tracy
Beag; edited by Duncan Kansfield. With LLOYD HUGHES, Barbara Castleton.
"Dangerous Hours" (a curiously lack-lustre title for such an exploitable theme) is one of the most astounding films we've ever run across for the Hurlf Society - astounding by no means signifying greatness or importance, but rather a conglomeration of many things, all of them surprising. Undoubtedly the film was designed quite seriously as having a message to convey (if it had not been so designed, it would not, presumably, have been so ponderous in its early stages; nor would it have tolerated a hero so naive as to border on infantilism!) In some ways, it is incredibly naive. The characters and motivations are often superficial, to say the least. And its conception of the Russian Revolution as being mainly a matter of the execution of little kiddies, and the raping of well-upholstered young maidens, fun though it may be, is a little hard to accept so soon after the fact. (Our knowledge of Russian policy at that time is a little limited - was there a system of "nationalised" women??!) Yet, it is also surprisingly modern and sophisticated in its depiction of Communist exploitation of strikes, infiltration into labor unions, and so on. Not quite a serious expose, nor yet, despite its sensational elements, an exploitation of the old wartime order of anti-Hun pictures, it falls somewhere between the two camps. There is no doubt that it is an anti-Red film, but its uncertainties about how to state its case most effectively probably reflect confusion at the time about just what Communism was. ("Tempest", nine years later, had similar uncertainties - so played it safe by making both the Czarist and Red regimes unsympathetic, and planting particularly repulsive heavies at the head of each group! Incidentally, Boris de Pas (unbilled) plays a Red rabble-rouser in this Ince opus; in "Tempest", his appearance and hair style absolutely unchanged, he re-emerged as the leader of the Revolution!)

While the film is so interesting as a commentary on current political feeling, there is also a good deal in it of interest as film. The camerawork of George Barnes is as distinguished as that fine craftsman's photography always was; the opening scenes in particular are most striking, even though they do suggest the influence of the mill-strike scenes in "Intolerance". Niblo, to my mind always a mediocre director, gets the maximum out of his script, and puts real excitement into the climactic mob-fighting scenes. So many of these directors of dull prestige films turn out to have done much better and more individual work in earlier days. Without having read the original story, one can only guess at the re-workings suggested by Ince -- but it hardly seems accidental that his favorite old theme (the son disowned by the proud old father) -- the theme that he used in so many films from "The Coward" (1915) to "Scars of Jealousy" (1923) turns up again, with Walt Whitman doing his ample best to replace Frank Keenan. How much Ince's "supervision" helped the film we'll never know, but at least it enabled him to get his name into the main credits of the film three or four times. And for good measure, he also slapped his name twice on each leader between reels -- giving the audiences another 12 reminders of his omnipresence, if the projectionists were lazy enough to run the leaders. (Possibly Tom bribed them to - they're awfully elaborate leaders!) Without belabouring this point, I think it's interesting that Griffith's name only appears once throughout all thirteen reels of "Intolerance"!

The titles throughout are a delight -- especially those referring to the throwing of grenades, which make one realize how terribly far modern warfare has progressed (?) since then. However, we've no wish to make fun of the titles out of context, so we'll leave them for you to discover. You'll find a lot of familiar Ince faces in the crowds -- also, inexplicably, Fred Kohler, who hovers around, hardly seen, in three shots, and finally gets a closeup in the last minute of the film.

Mr. K. Everson

Next Tuesday: F.W. Murnau's "NOSFERATU" ("Dracula") 1922
Paul Wegener's "THE GOLEM" 1920