

By Bosley Crowther  
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It won't be at all surprising—this being a Presidential year and the Music Hall's "State of the Union" being the picture it is—if a spontaneous grass-roots movement develops within the next few months to send Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn to the White House on Nov. 2. For, among other things, Mr. Tracy, who plays a Presidential aspirant in this film, is a much more attractive-looking candidate than anyone who has yet declared and he is certainly makes a much more forceful stump speech than any this corner has yet read. Likewise, Miss Hepburn as his helpmate and as his conscience in moments of need, gives every assurance of making the most stylish First Lady we've had in years. Furthermore—and this is most important—Mr. Tracy and Miss Hepburn, display in this two-hour-and-then-minutes picture, a most refreshing attitude toward politics. In short (but at length), they're ag'in 'em—ag'in old-fashioned politics, that is, and ag'in the backroom politicians who are "trying to pull the country apart to get votes." And their earnest avowal of these high sentiments, plus their delightful demonstrations of contempt, are certain to set some folks to wondering whether they wouldn't be perfect for top jobs. Not some Republicans, however. We rather imagine that some of those are going to be awfully put out by the name-naming candor of this film. For it makes no bones about it—the villains of the piece are an "old Harding gang" politician and a horde of Republican lame-ducks. And because it opposes its hero to actual aspirants now in the party race, it might seem, by implication, to cast a shadow of doubt on some of them. Also, there is a possibility that a few of the more conservative stripe will be somewhat shocked by the political theories which Mr. Tracy propounds. Quite bluntly, he mentions in passing that capitalism is being challenged today and that "thinking about high profits instead of high production is just playing the Communist game." A working and sovereign world government, with full atomic control, receives his unqualified endorsement. Quite a platform for a dark-horse GOP! But regardless of partisan reactions—and there are bound to be plenty of those, in view of the frank and intensely topical nature of the yarn—it cannot be denied that this picture which Frank Capra has made from the popular Lindsay-Crouse stage play, is a slick piece of screen satire. If anything, it is sharper in its knife-edged slicing at the hides of pachyderm schemers and connivers than was the original. For Anthony Veiller and Myles Connolly have actually worked into their script even more withering commentary on current issues and compromises than was in the play. And Mr. Capra,

whose penchant for lance-busters and reformers has been frequently displayed, has given his most sarcastic treatment to the back-room politicians on the screen. Unfortunately, one weakness which was briefly apparent in the play obtrudes rather plainly in the picture, by virtue of virtue itself. On the stage, it was frankly admitted that the high-pressure lady publisher who needled the hero's aspirations was more than his platonic friend, which neatly—if not entirely—explained her influence over him. But in the film, with such intimacies ruled out, it is harder than ever to believe that this lady could cause the well-launched gentleman to swerve from his ideals—and from his wife—by a flick of her hand. Likewise, it is slightly incredible that a lady of such obvious youth and immaturity as Angela Lansbury could make a wised-up Spencer Tracy jump through hoops, which is what she does in this story as the peak in the antique triangle. And it is also a bit unbelievable that Van Johnson could be a Washington scribe of wide and commanding importance, even though he is quite amusing as such. But Mr. Tracy is glib and delightful as the gentleman who would rather be right than be the Republican candidate for President and Miss Hepburn is charming as his wife. Adolphe Menjou is perfectly bald-faced as the horse-trading campaign manager and a host of other people are tart and amusing in character roles. To quote from one of the ladies, we haven't had so much fun—or so much instruction, for that matter—from a political ruckus since Huey Long died. On the stage at the Music Hall is a revue, "Spring Rhythm," which features Sylvia Barry, Bob Williams, the Corps de Ballet, Glee Club and Rockettes.