

## Lost: 65,000,000 Movie Fans

They don't want "escape" films or war propaganda. Will legs bring them back? Hollywood mourns the blackout of European markets.

SOME 125,000,000 Americans were attending the movies weekly in 1929; today the shocking fact is becoming accepted by the captainship of the industry that the figure has fallen to sixty million. The European market is in an almost complete eclipse, with the ironic exception of half a market in Germany and in a few "pacified" Nazi vassal states. The American film approaches normal trade relations in India and China. South America and Australia are still receiving a normal flow of product. Altogether 50 percent of the total overseas market has disappeared, which represents 20 percent of the total business of American films.

The contraction of the movie empire is answered by the producers by a wave of firings and wage cuts, talk about making fewer and better pictures, and schemes for setting a limit on production budgets. For instance, where an early Shirley Temple picture like *Curly Top* cost less than half a million to make and grossed over two and a half million, her later films were budgeted around a million and barely made the nut, owing to the loss of much of her phenomenal foreign market, the sharp decline in domestic audience purchasing power, and of course the fact peculiar to show business that Shirley was outgrowing her appeal and was placed in atrocious stories. Talk of limiting the cost of production is, of course, ridiculous in a business so heavily loaded with management and ballyhoo costs and periodically raided by financial hogs. Production costs will be limited only to the extent of job displacement in the lower brackets of film labor.

The utopian scheme, advocated by Samuel Goldwyn, of making 150 good pictures a year instead of five hundred hit-or-miss films would do nothing but abolish the double bill and about half the labor in the production, distribution, and exhibition branches of the movie monopoly. Goldwyn's plan is essentially that of crop limitation, or plowing under every second and third row of B pictures. The best refutation of Goldwyn's cure-all is his own record as an elite producer who makes only three films a year to the ten undertaken by, say, a producer on the Warner lot. Goldwyn has not proved himself an infallible manufacturer either in quality or financial success, although his standards, in the Hollywood sense, have been fastidious.

The European trader's war offers the capitalist class what seems like a way out, and the motion picture throws its projection beam ahead of any expeditionary force. There are two indications of the directions Hollywood is looking. One is the pro-war films. The other is South America. The Hollywood

*Reporter*, a semi-official trade organ of the industry, is urging the producers to invade the nations below the Rio Grande. A survey undertaken by a trade delegation-without-portfolio reports that the South American market cannot be exploited successfully without building theaters. Hollywood has reached that monopolistic state where it cannot invade new markets without owning everything from theaters to studios. One can envision American marines safeguarding a site in Peru on which Twentieth Century-Fox is building an air-conditioned, supercolossal Bijou.

But the problem remains, what shall the films of this new era be like? There is already a slight panic over the fact that jingo films, are going to have to be forced on the audience through some kind of official compulsion involving flagwaving patriotism and perhaps a new Creel committee to put the spiritual lug on the audience.

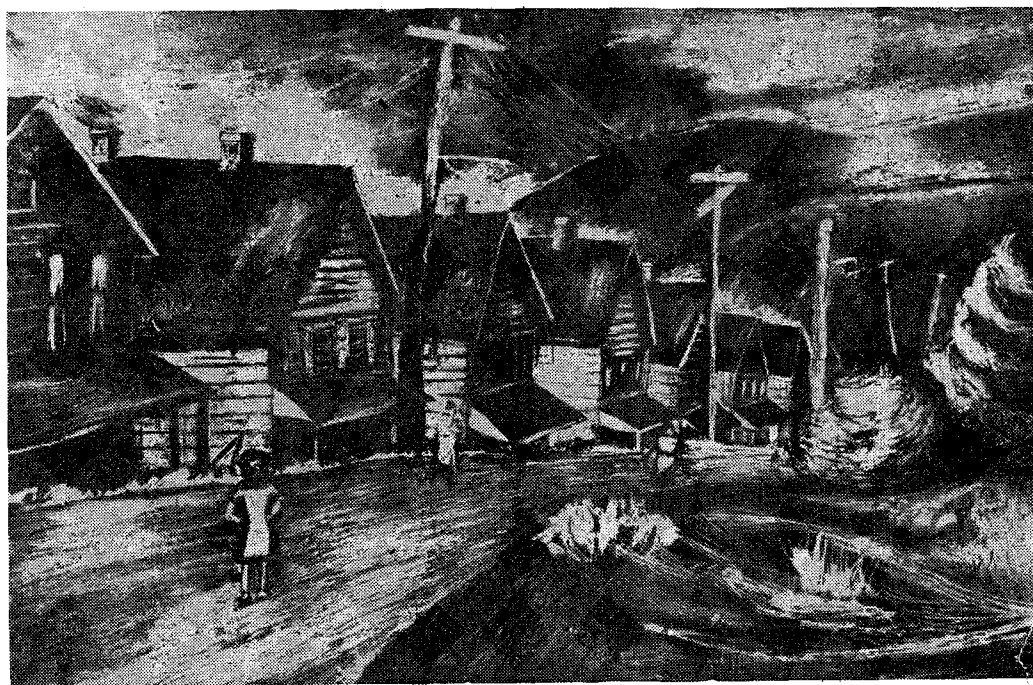
Warner Bros. three weeks ago began the spiritual offensive when it ordered all its employees to a special meeting on the lot for an unannounced purpose. The meeting proved to be a preparedness harangue by Harry Warner, in which he bade his happy family ferret out fifth-columnists. Mr. Warner was distressed by the fact that some miscreant had placed in his own automobile a leaflet "attacking the government." Whether this was a Wendell Willkie manifesto or a dastardly plea for peace, the reports do not state.

The fact is that the American people do not want this war—on the screen or in the plots of Col. Julius Ochs Adler and Gen.

Arthur Hays Sulzberger for general conscription of everything but the advertising revenues of the *New York Times*. For example, British propaganda films, very liberally distributed in the US, are proving to be resounding duds. *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* when it was first released was properly a success. That was in the days before September 1939. The new edition of this film, however, was a resounding flop when it played at the Globe Theater in New York. People were deeply suspicious that the reissue was a pro-Allied pro-war incitement.

The second theme for the movies of the new era is one that Hollywood considers unusually attractive, safe, and of proven financial soundness: sex. Each capitalist war is attended by grotesque outbreaks of sexual exhibitionism. In London a few months ago a fashionable club was padlocked because of its striptease contests among well born young women patrons. The best patrician peeler, in the opinion of the assembled officers on leave, was awarded a full length nude portrait of herself by a member of the Royal Academy. The English have at last found a use for the Royal Academy.

The vast armies of imperialist war demand a kind of sexual iconography best supplied by photographs of familiar movie queens. Already the demands from Allied and German soldiers for bigger and better cheesecake have obliged the Hays office to abandon its regulation of stills. In this hunger the soldiers are seconded by American newspaper editors who find increased space for more revealing leg art. For the people at home the opportunity



Painting by Louis Ribak

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for sexual titillation rises in proportion to the misery of the time.

One astute firm, Paramount, has announced it will make only escape pictures and musicals, which coincides with the desires of a large bloc of motion picture exhibitors. Cleveland exhibitors, for instance, report that the public wants only light comedy. *Boxoffice*, which often echoes the trend among exhibitors, reports the Cleveland theater owners as saying that this "is an antidote to the serious war condition. They say further that audiences do not even want to see newsreel shots of the war; they want to get as far away from the war as possible when they attend the theater."

The case for the exhibitor, in his enforced position of close proximity to the public, is put frankly in a passionate letter to *Variety* by Ken Woodward, manager of the Capitol Theater, Uniontown, Pa., which appeared as the lead article in the June 5 issue of *Variety*. Says Mr. Woodward:

My point is that if the film business expects to survive it must get some sex back on the screen! [Mr. Woodward's italics.] Even in the old days the various censor boards kept clipping away but even in their fondest dreams they could not imagine a situation where fairy tales would furnish the screen fodder of the nation. How the devil is my theater going to exist when in the beer garden right across the street they can have a look at a stripteaser by buying a couple of glasses of beer?

During the past few months I have been very happy to see my convictions borne out to an extent at least. I believe I noticed that one of the major studios had instructed its writers, directors, etc., to strain every last regulation of the Legion of Decency.

There is a deep, almost biological compatibility in sexual titillation and war, and the capitalist class has learned to use one for the other in the propaganda for war. The Hays office and the Legion of Decency are outliving their usefulness. Their function was mainly to prevent democratic propaganda in the film during the thirties. The sex taboos were an incidental disguise for the suppression at the source of subjects dealing with reality. Both censorship groups are strictly the creatures of the producer clique. Will Hays, the office boy of the Motion Picture Producers & Distributors of America, shunted away unwelcome inquiries into the evasions of the film. When the producers were challenged directly they answered that the office boy wouldn't let them make honest films. Now they may fire the office boy and his pious friend, Joseph Breen of the Legion of Decency.

The cinema art in the Soviet Union and, in brief periods of popular responsibility, in France, America, and Czechoslovakia achieved its proper function, the expression of truth and democracy. It guided and celebrated the people and belonged to them. This kind of cinema art marches forward today in the USSR alone. Elsewhere in the war-racked world the film has the objective of debasing and deceiving the people with flagwaving and peepshow.

JAMES DUGAN.

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