



SIGHTS and SOUNDS

HOLLYWOOD CALL FOR FDR

By **DALTON TRUMBO**

IT SEEMS to me that the most important reason for the organization in Hollywood of Writers for Roosevelt is that one simple, stark fact upon which everything else depends—the fact that it is possible for Thomas E. Dewey to become the next President of the United States. Never before have the various sample opinion polls been so close. Even those which favor Roosevelt concede a possible three or four percent inaccuracy and if this three or four percent went against the Democratic Party, Dewey would be elected. The successful prosecution of the war has filled us all with false optimism, not only concerning the war itself but the election. The Democratic Party is frankly alarmed at this astonishing and inexplicable let-down. It is part of our job—and perhaps the most important part—to realize that as matters stand, Roosevelt can be defeated.

Perhaps never since the Civil War has there been an election so filled with unpredictables. Never before has the press been so solid against a candidate as it is now against President Roosevelt. Never before have so many millions of people been uprooted from their registered voting grounds and transferred to remote cities where they feel that they live only on a temporary basis, and hence are inclined to neglect the simple act of registering. And, perhaps, never before has such a vicious and concentrated attack been made on any individual in our history. Not even upon Thomas Jefferson. Not even upon Abraham Lincoln. Both had full opportunity to taste the bitterness of a reactionary press.

The Dumbarton Oaks conference has been dragged down to the level of partisan politics by Republican, wheelhorses who have no idea of what is actually going on there, and who have made no legitimate effort to get such an idea before they launched their attack. Thus, the opposition attacks any possibility of a durable peace. And as if to emphasize this determination, we find their press filled with accusations that American forces in Europe are bearing more than their share of the burden; that the British have slickly inveigled us into fighting their war, and that the casualty lists, weighted in our favor, offer the final proof. Along with this

deliberate attempt to inflame public opinion against our British ally—and all of this, mind you, for election purposes—goes another campaign which charges that Mr. Roosevelt has been a sucker for Mr. Stalin, and that American lend-lease dollars are being shipped to Russia in order that Russia may communize the whole of Europe. At the very moment the Dumbarton Oaks Conference is being held, the reactionary press has cunningly launched an attack upon England for her relations with India and an attack upon Russia for her relations with Poland. And the real object of these attacks—so ill-timed in terms of international stability—is none other than the President himself. These people, in order to win an election, are willing to destroy any possibility of amicable understanding and a permanent peace. That is why the whole world waits in suspense for November 7.

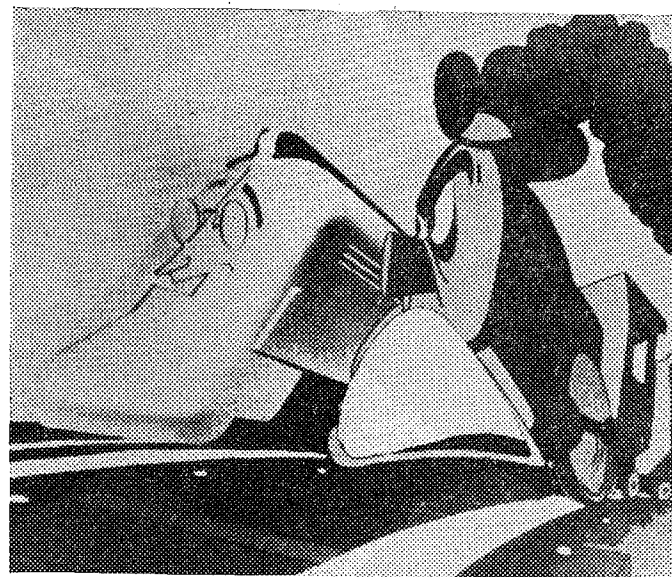
A LONG with these major attempts to sabotage the future there go the usual scurrilous attacks upon the President and the Democratic Party, whose candidate he is. To read the *Los Angeles Times* or the *Los Angeles Examiner* or the *Herald Express* or the *Hollywood Citizen News*, one would come away with the impression that the President of the United States is a conscienceless tyrant, that he is capable of stealing x-millions of dollars for a fishing trip under the guise of a piddling little war; that he actually runs the war on a schedule which will benefit his own political fortunes; that he was nominated by Earl Browder and that all union support in the way of the CIO and the AFL political action committees comes either from Communists or gangsters; that his wife is a schemestress whose only object is the accumulation of money for her private fortune; that his children are swindlers, and that the entire administration of which he is the head is composed of crackpots, thieves, con-men and radicals who seek the overthrow of our capitalist system. There could be no other conclusion for a visitor to this country than that the President and his entire family should be not only cast from office, but shot for high treason as well.



This is the wrong train to take, says "Hell Bent for Election," a campaign film released by the United Auto Workers-CIO, and ready for general distribution.

Now, we hear a lot of talk about freedom of the press. And we as writers are deeply concerned to maintain the freedom of the press, in which is involved our personal freedom of expression. But here in this country today—with ninety percent of the press attacking the President—can we literally and truly say that *we* have any freedom of expression? The press is free only for those who subscribe to the political beliefs of its owners. We get a pretty clear idea of this when we notice that Miss Vivian Kellems receives more publicity in Los Angeles than Senator Claude Pepper. We understand it clearly when we realize that the Pepper dinner given by the Hollywood Democratic Committee, and attended by one of the most notable groups of Hollywood people who have ever turned out to such a meeting, gets only three inches in the *Times* and about the same in the *Examiner*.

Supposing we agree with Oliver Wendell Holmes that, "... as life is action and passion, it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of this time at peril of being judged not to have lived." What then, what do we do about it? How does our free press permit us to share the action of our time? And the answer very simply is that it doesn't. Neither does it reflect the will of the people. And it is because of this astonishing, undemocratic, unpopular monopoly of political expression that we are gathered here tonight. We think we have a remedy. We think we know of ways and means through which we can bypass our free press and go directly to the people on the radio, in the theater, by way of motion pictures and labor unions, in cultural groups and, if necessary, by ringing doorbells. Because if we're going to be heard at all—if the talent reservoir of Hollywood is going to speak anywhere above a whisper—



The United Auto Workers recommend the streamliner on the left.

this is the way to do it. The need is overwhelming. The situation is desperate. We've worked out a plan. It's not without flaws and it is wide open to suggestion. But it is a plan that *has* worked before and, with combined efforts, *can* be made to work again. It's a plan which will save us from being completely stifled at a moment when we do have something to say and when there are millions eager to hear it.

The preceding is an address made in Hollywood September 6 before the organizational meeting of the Writers for Roosevelt.

FILMS OF THE WEEK

IN THE light of all the public discussion on military tactics and strategy, the new Soviet film, *1812*, at the Stanley, offers an absorbing study in military science as it was practiced by Kutusov and Napoleon. As a dramatization of the defeat of Napoleon in Russia it is, of course, a good deal more than that. It follows closely Tarle's *Napoleon's Invasion of Russia*, and like the book shows the invasion as the battle of a military machine against a whole people. Then as now, the defense in depth was a military-social strategy that meant the defeat of the enemy. Judging the minutiae of military movement, and the meaning of the quarrel between Kutusov's generals Barclay and Bagration, I would leave to our Colonel T. I am more particularly concerned with what *1812* attempts to achieve as a motion picture.

The main drama arises from the opposing objectives of the two military leaders. Kutusov, overwhelmingly outnumbered by the French in a ratio of six to one, is confronted with the problem of keeping his army intact and

maintaining its morale in the face of withdrawals and seeming defeats. Napoleon's objective is to annihilate the Russian army, march on Moscow, and arrange a peace that will leave him master of Russia. The drama requires the portrayal of an intellectual contest in terms of physical movement; consequently the picture makers take on a large problem. In this respect the producers of *1812* have come off well. It is obviously impossible to have continuous movement in terms of battle, marching troops, charges, and retreats. Even the most exciting scenes would become dull through repetition. There is but one large battle, that of Borodino, in which the issue is joined, the objectives of both armies tested and fought for. For the rest, through the generous use of closeups and carefully selected dialogue, the matching of wits continues. The deterioration of Napoleon's hopes and the disintegration of French morale are perfectly registered, as are the rising morale and strength of the Russian troops.

While the use of the closeup solves

some of the problems of the producers, it tends to slow up the picture. The sense of the patience and waiting which were crucial to the Russian strategy is fully imparted to the audience, but the drag upon the tempo of the picture is equally perceptible. Historical pauses need not be matched by cinematic pauses in order to achieve veracity. A film which has an expository purpose, however dramatic its intentions, should use expository techniques when the action slows down. Thus, animated diagrams on the plan of battle, terrain charts on Napoleon's retreat and visual exposition or documentary bits in between would have stepped up the pace considerably.

As a spectacle, the battle of Borodino is brilliant. There is the usual competence in acting that characterizes the Soviet films, and the English titles and commentary by Sergei Kournakoff are the best we have seen and heard in a long time. Captain Kournakoff's work goes a long way toward making *1812* an entertaining and profitable show.

Two election campaign films, the first, we hope, of a large number, have just been completed and are ready