

"THE HITLER GANG"

(Paramount)

FOR reasons which will appear in the course of this review, our little man feels it impossible to applaud *The Hitler Gang*. At the same time, he would like it understood from the start that his reaction was something more than just the polite interest which the grading suggests.

On the technical side, *The Hitler Gang* deserves full marks. It is a triumph for Paramount's make-up man (Wally Westmore) and for the comparatively unknown actors who portray the leading characters. It will be interesting to see what the future holds for them, for to say that he is the dead spit of Hitler, or Hess, or Himmler is a doubtful compliment to pay anybody. Yet, as the illustrations here indicate, the representation is so good, particularly in the case of Hitler, that even when authentic newsreel shots of the Fuehrer are included, they do not make the play-acting seem false. The make-up artist is not alone responsible for this uncanny likeness: there is much good acting as well, and it is not Robert Watson's fault that his portrayal of Hitler sometimes reminds one of Charlie Chaplin and, in some of the body movements, of Stan Laurel! In the case of Goebbels and Goering, the physical resemblance is not so close, but Martin Kosleck makes up for this by achieving exactly that mixture of cynicism and snake-like cleverness which is popularly attributed to Goebbels; and though Alexander Pope lacks some of Goering's girth, he packs plenty of vanity and cold-blooded ferocity inside his uniform.

In some respects, then, *The Hitler Gang* is a remarkable production. It is certainly not light entertainment—indeed, I have some hesitation in labelling it entertainment at all—but I would recommend you to see it if you are interested in a demonstration of the cinema's technical ingenuity along the propagandist line, and are not squeam-

ish about gruesome details. According to the foreword with the picture, this account of how Hitler and his followers rose to power is as authentic "as decency would permit," and even this restraint is, in parts, very cleverly overcome by subtle suggestion.

IN other respects, however, *The Hitler Gang* is disturbing and even alarming—and I am not now referring to its subject-matter. If, as I said the other week, a documentary film like *World of Plenty* offers an example of what the cinema may achieve as propaganda when it is directed with skill and intelligence towards constructive ends, then *The Hitler Gang* is an equally illuminating example of what it might do when turned in the other direction. The point is that whether *The Hitler Gang* is, or is not, completely authentic, it certainly looks it. Indeed, a film like this makes one wonder whether we may not have to revise our whole conception of historical method, now that the cinema has entered the field as the most powerful mass educational medium of all. We have probably by now just about got Napoleon into proper focus but, seeing *The Hitler Gang*, one may

speculate on what would now be the popular view of Napoleon and the French if British propagandists of that period had been able to use all the technical resources which are available to-day. If they had, in brief, been able to make a contemporary film called "The Napoleon Gang."

MORE to the immediate point perhaps are two other considerations. *The Hitler Gang* starts with the capitulation of Germany in 1918, and traces the rise of Hitler and the Nazis through the premature Munich Beer-Hall putsch of 1923 and the Reichstag Fire up to the Blood Purge of June, 1934, when, with Roehm and his henchmen eliminated, Hitler was firmly entrenched in supreme command and launched his plan of conquest. Apart from such problematical side-issues as the Fuehrer's infatuation for his niece, Geli Rabaul, whom he is alleged to have seduced and then murdered, this is a story with which all of us are already quite familiar, and I doubt whether it was worth going to such

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ROBERT WATSON as Hitler



VICTOR VARCONI as Hess



LUIS VAN ROOTEN as Himmler



MARTIN KOSLECK as Goebbels



ROMAN BOHNEN as Roehm



POLDY DUR as Geli Rabaul



Hitler ducks for cover when troops fire on his supporters following the premature Munich Beer-Hall putsch of November 8, 1923. The spectators in the background of this scene from "The Hitler Gang" seem curiously unperturbed.