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Speaking Candidly, by G.M.

MORE ABOUT 16mm.

THERE have been one or two interesting developments lately affecting the 16mm. film. They are mostly overseas developments, for at the time of writing nothing more has been heard about the conference which was to have been held in Wellington in September between representatives of the regular film industry and all interests concerned in the exhibition of sub-standard film in New Zealand, to consider a suggestion that the Cinematograph Films Act should be applied to this type of film (see *Listener*, August 31). Nothing has been heard, that is, except that the conference has been postponed. Whether it will eventually be held I don't know, but the prospect seems doubtful.

Possibly the film business here is reviewing some of its ideas on the scope of the 16mm. film in the light of an announcement made in the August 15 issue of *Variety*, that queer and colourful but usually authoritative organ of the U.S. entertainment world. According to *Variety*, a special 16mm. division for the distribution overseas of "narrow-gauge" film has been set up by Loew's International, the combine which, among other things, controls Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. One immediate result will be that, from next January, every M.G.M. release, whether it is a feature or a short, will be made in 16mm. as well as in the ordinary 35mm. size. Other major Hollywood companies are likely to follow suit. This move will primarily affect ordinary entertainment films, being additional to the present programme of producing 16mm. films for industrial or educational purposes which some studios have already embarked on.

Variety emphasises that these narrow-gauge versions of M.G.M. features and shorts are not intended for consumption inside America. Nor are they intended to supplant, or even compete with, the standard 35mm. film in any place where it is already established. They are aimed at an entirely new audience and market—those people in isolated areas or in communities too small to support a movie theatre.

"The move apparently runs counter to all previous feeling in the industry, where 16mm. was anathema and a suspected rival to regular 35mm. (says *Variety*), but it is a natural development of 16mm. use during the war by the armed services." The man behind the move is Arthur M. Loew, president of Loew's International, who is said to have decided on it as a result of seeing the increased use of 16mm. film, and its possibilities, while he was serving as a major in the Signal Corps Photographic Section. A special 16mm. section of the Loew organisation will be set up in New York, with a separate staff, and men will be given special 16mm. training there, before being added to the staffs of offices abroad.

THOUGH it may seem hard to believe, there are still many places in the world to which the ordinary Hollywood film does not penetrate; and the chief reason for that, apart from political

barriers, is the difficulty of transport and the high cost of freight. But a 16mm. print is only one-fifth the weight of a 35mm. one. In addition, 16mm. is non-inflammable, thus doing away with the need for insurance, fireproof projection boxes, theatre licensing, etc. Loew's project involves the wide use of mobile projectors similar to those used by the army; this in turn will involve the fixing of "caravan routes" for these mobile units to follow and, of course, the manufacture or purchase of projectors to equip the units. Thus there is likely to be a boom in the equipment section of the movie industry, for in addition to putting mobile units on the road, Loew's are going to "encourage local people to buy their own projectors." According to *Variety*, projectors (with sound) now cost between 300 and 400 dollars each, but post-war projectors are likely to be cheaper, as well as lighter and more mobile.

Several factors appear to have contributed to this rather revolutionary plan. One is the highly successful use made of 16mm. films by Germany in territories annexed during the war: Czechoslovakia and Austria, for example, were flooded with 16mm. German film and projectors, largely used for propagandist purposes in the schools. Another factor is the interest shown by foreign governments and industries: inquiries for a regular supply of 16mm. film have been reaching Hollywood from many countries. In North Sweden, where the winters are long, the Swedish Government has been anxious to get such mobile entertainment in order to keep workers at home and manning the mines; instead of going off to the cities to find their pleasures. A Swedish company, in collaboration with its government, has set aside 500,000 crowns (100,000 dollars) to buy projectors. Inquiries have come in from Palestine for mobile units to service farm communities. Swiss trade unionists want cultural shorts about the U.S.A. for their meetings—material on American industry, sociology, housing, and so on—and cannot afford regular film costs. Turkey is asking for educational films on the narrow gauge. A request has even come from Chungking for 16mm. versions of *Young Tom Edison* and *Edison the Man* for use in schools.

Though the majority of Loew's 16mm. films will be counterparts of full-length M.G.M. features, part of the programme includes educational films for training and classroom use. For the time being, however, the company will purchase such films from outside sources, instead of M.G.M. making its own. Thus Hollywood will not be looked to as the principal source of educational films.

"With projectors available, and students accustomed to visual education, a ready new market seems open to enterprising film companies," concludes *Variety*. In brief, the industry, seeing that it cannot restrict the increasing popularity of 16mm. films, intends to cash in on it.

WHETHER or not this plan will directly affect us in New Zealand is hard to say. After all, few country-dwellers are so isolated here that they

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