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Film Notes by G.M.

SHORTAGE AMID PLENTY

SEVERAL people have asked me why it is that so many films, which they have read about as having been completed months ago, take so long to reach New Zealand screens these days and why, when they do get here, they usually run for such long seasons that some weeks it is practically impossible for them to find a new show to go to—or for me to review, for that matter.

The main reason is that there is a war going on. This not only means

that the studios' production schedules have been curtailed, but it also means that in the cities (Wellington and Auckland are striking examples) more people are going to see the films that are available—civilians with more money to spend because of overtime on war work, and soldiers on leave. At week-ends particularly, there are thousands of people in town wanting to see a show, and full houses are the general rule. Here as elsewhere, box-receipts are soaring (*Time* reports that in the U.S.A., nation-wide cinema takings are up 25 per cent. on last year, and 40 per cent. in the main cities). Now, full houses at a week-end mean extended seasons, because the pre-war arrangement between film distributors and film exhibitors still holds good, under which, if a film grosses a certain figure at its opening screenings, it must carry on for another week. And if it takes a certain figure at the second week-end it must continue for a third week; and so on. These days, with so many American servicemen as well as our own troops on leave at week-ends (not to mention the civilians with money to spend), almost any film can reach its "carryover" figure—by sheer pressure of numbers on the box-office, so to speak, if not by merit. (The film people contend, of course, that it is by merit, and that the general standard of popular entertainment has greatly improved.) But however one tries to explain it, the fact is that extended seasons are now the rule rather than the exception: and so the new films are piling up behind a bottleneck. Though Hollywood and the British companies have curtailed production, I'm told that every studio and distributing agency has films which were completed months ago lying on its shelves awaiting screens to show them on.

So the apparent effect of the "carryover" system is that the law of supply and demand is being violated: there is the paradox that the more people want to see films, the fewer new films there are to see.

[N Wellington, of course, the situation is peculiarly aggravated because two theatres, the Regent and King's, have been out of commission for some time



"...Practically impossible to find a new show to go to"

as a result of earthquake damage. But apparently the same piling-up of films is happening in Australia and America, and for similar reasons to those I have mentioned. *Variety*, the trade paper, reports that seasons in the U.S.A. are now counted in months instead of weeks. However, some easing of the local position may be expected. In Wellington, the fact that the Opera House is now a full-time first-release house for A-grade pictures has to some extent relieved the pressure

caused by the closing of the Regent, and the State Theatre has just changed over to a policy of showing A-grade first-run films. The King's should be reopened soon, and the Regent may be ready again by December—if labour is available. And I understand that in Auckland and Christchurch, too, theatres which have previously been devoted to return seasons or to B-grade double-feature programmes are changing over to first-releases of bigger films. There have at any rate been a good many new releases up and down the country at Easter.

THE note on Thomas Mitchell last issue has aroused some interest, so here are a few details, culled from an American magazine, about this actor's career, for which there was no room last week:

He is 46 years old and likes to describe himself as "a man with two arms, two eyes, two ears, and an appetite like anyone else." But Thomas Mitchell is not like anyone else. Screen acting is only his favourite role. He has also in his time been a newspaperman (he gave that up because he was always landing his papers in libel suits), a vaudevillian, a stage actor (he has played some 55 Shakespearean roles), a stage director, a playwright, and a script-writer. By the time he closed his stage career by going to Hollywood to act in *Lost Horizon* (in 1936), Mitchell had played more than 1000 parts in 25 years. After a year and a-half with Columbia and a year with Sam Goldwyn, he started on the active, highly-profitable free-lancing which has kept him increasingly busy ever since. But this is not the only reason why he prefers the screen to the stage: the movies, he says, "can tell the same thing for 50 cents, and make it move."

LAST week, in discussing the suggestion that credit titles should be abolished, I might have added (but didn't, because it seemed so obvious) that the most practical argument against this step is that these titles now occupy such a small proportion of total footage that, unless the general length of features is drastically reduced, the deletion of "credits" would not mean any saving at all worth noticing.



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