

THE ENEMY WITHIN

HIGH TREASON

(Rank-Paul Soskin)

THIS is, without a peradventure, the best British thriller I have seen since—well, since last I saw a good British thriller. I was about to say the best since *Seven Days to Noon*, but that passed through here in 1951. In the interim there may have been one or two of the same genre as good as this latest arrival, but my memory obstinately refuses to recall them.

Comparison with *Seven Days to Noon* is, in any case, inevitable. That was a Boulting Brothers production. *High Treason* is directed by Roy Boulting. Roy Boulting and Frank Harvey collaborated in the scripts of both films. One character—Inspector Folland of Scotland Yard's Special Branch (played by André Morell)—is common to both stories, some of the minor players looked familiar, too, and in each case the plot concerns a plot against the Safety of the Realm.

Seven Days was undoubtedly excitement on a grander scale, with its threat of the atomic obliteration of London, its crowded evacuation shots and the vast empty perspectives of the abandoned city which followed them. *High Treason* is about sabotage—in particular, an attempt to destroy the great generating stations of Britain—but if it lacks the atomic dimension it comes disconcertingly closer to everyday experience.

It is, of course, in that particular quality of documentary realism that Roy Boulting excels. His films are crowded with the kind of people you pass in the street, his themes are drawn from contemporary history. The crazed scientist of *Seven Days to Noon* was quite a credible creation to filmgoers still dazed by the appalling forces science had unleashed. The sabotage of *High Treason* is a similar extension of a current problem. It is good cinema, I suppose, because it has that concentration of reality which (as Victor Hugo pointed out) is the essence of good theatre.

That very quality, however, makes this picture more disturbing than a simple thriller. The communist "apparatus" for example, uses a chamber-music group as cover for its contact men and the picture of the chamber music enthusiasts is just too good to be false. (They even speak the language: "Beneath the cerebral," says their chairman, introducing an *avant-garde* string trio, "there's loads of lyrical and heaps of jolly good tunes...")

A few more films as potent in their impact as this one and it would scarcely pay to be a card-carrying member of the local chamber music society. We are, of course, the prisoners of our time, but it would be pleasant to live once more in the days when spies were recognisably sinister characters found in books (or seen at the pictures), not corduroy-trousered enthusiasts, such as one rubs shoulders with at Prom. concerts, or meek little home-loving men like the bloke who sits next you on the 8.5 every morning.

UKRAINIAN CONCERT HALL

(Kiev Film Studios)

THIS determinedly cheery, tuneful (and at times beautiful) production has been heading an all-Russian bill dur-

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "High Treason."
MAINLY FAIR: "Ukrainian Concert Hall."

ing the past week at Wellington's "Continental Cinema." I'm told that the programme, complete with supports, is later to be shown in Auckland, Palmerston North, Christchurch and Dunedin, so I can perhaps draw attention to it for those who are prepared to listen to music and let the words go by. There is, in any case, a long ballet sequence which needs no translation, and the supporting films carry English commentaries.

Ukrainian Concert Hall recalls *Big Top*, the Soviet circus film shown here towards the end of last year, but it is not so long and by no means so exhausting to watch. It opens with an impressive male voice choir, moves on to a full-length ballet, an excerpt from a Russian comic opera (obviously comic, but difficult to follow without the book), and finally a stage performance of a *gopak* performed with enough vigour to make a dervish dizzy. The show is filmed in good colour, but with fairly straightforward stage settings and (as in *Big Top*) no attempt to do more than present the various sequences as concert items.

The supporting films included two presumably made for young Soviet Pioneers: "Forest Speedsters"—Aesop's hare and tortoise with a new ideological slant (the tortoise had become two small bears) and a pictorial treatment that obviously stems from Disney—and "The Magic Seed," a fairy tale with a Young Pioneer for a hero. However, the item which I enjoyed most was "The Glorious Sea," which isn't about the sea at all, but about Lake Baikal in Central Siberia. I would recommend this to anyone interested in natural history, for Baikal has a fauna all its own, and a good deal of it is shown here in full colour—the Baikal seals, for example, and the trout-like *omul* which is caught in vast numbers in nets. The commentary also points out proudly that the lake is the deepest in the world. I was inclined to treat this as just another of those Russian inventions, but according to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (American edition at that) they're not wrong, they're right. Baikal is not only the deepest lake in the world (it holds about as much water as the Baltic and the Kattegat), it is also the deepest crypto-depression on the earth's surface. One of the few things "The Glorious Sea" omits to tell us about Baikal is that it is frozen a yard thick all over from December to May, but perhaps temperatures are low enough without getting into a deep freeze about what is, in summer at least, an obviously beautiful and interesting place.

Correspondence

Sir,—I should be grateful if you could give readers any information on the film of the 1952 Olympic Games at Helsinki. Before the Games, considerable publicity was given to the forthcoming production of the film. Amongst other things it was announced that Leni Riefenstahl, producer of the Berlin film in 1936, was to advise on its production. The cinema record of these Games promised therefore to be even better than the superb 1936 film. This latter film was shown several times in New Zealand, as was, of course, that of the 1948 London Games. Will there be any prospect of our seeing the production from Helsinki? Our own New Zealand gold medalist would no doubt make the film of added interest to us.

STUDENT (Wellington).

(I have been unable to find any references—even with the help of international periodical indexes—to a film of the Helsinki Games, and the only recent reference to Leni Riefenstahl seems to be a report dated April, 1952, relating to a court action which finally cleared her of the charge of Nazism. She was quoted then as saying that she had only one wish—"to be left alone." And that was just three months before the Helsinki meeting. Neither of the local well-informed circles to whom I usually turn for help on more recondite film queries could help me either, though, according to one, "it would be safe to say that no feature-length film of the 1952 Games has been brought into New Zealand for commercial exhibition."—Jno.)

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 2, 1954.



GIBRALTAR BOARD

IS A DEFINITE
FIRE-STOP

★ ACCEPT NOTHING ELSE FOR ALL
INTERIOR WALLS AND CEILINGS

- WILL NOT WARP, TWIST
BUCKLE or CRACK
- VERMIN and BORER PROOF

DISTRIBUTED BY WINSTONE LTD.

