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FREDRIC MARCH, WILLIAM HOLDEN, WALTER PIDGEON
"There's no tension like hypertension"

Film Reviews, by Jno.

TYCOON TERRITORY

EXECUTIVE SUITE

(M.G.M.)

MORE pensively than usual (it was the night after Budget Night, and I'm slow at arithmetic), I pushed my half-crown under the box-office grille and pondered. There were so many stars it looked like the proverbial Frosty Friday. Fredric March, Paul Douglas, Louis Calhern, William Holden, Walter Pidgeon, Dean Jagger, June Allyson, Nina Foch, Shelley Winters, Barbara Stanwyck—with all that top brass on the payroll was it possible that there was base metal elsewhere? Such substantial concessions to the cash-customers suggested compensatory and constricting economies. Maybe the story was a job lot.

But there was, as it turned out, no need for cynicism. *Executive Suite* is not likely to figure as the picture of the year (though it could knock off an Oscar by sheer weight of tophammer), but it is a workmanlike piece of filmmaking, and if you find the final resolution of the drama a little too facile, the concluding speeches more slick than convincing, there is enough good acting (and enough suave ferocity) before that to send you home satisfied.

The story is set in tycoon territory—"the sky-reaching towers of Big Business," as the prologue puts it. "Some may think," the disembodied voice goes on, "that those Up There are above the tensions of ordinary existence. This is to say it isn't so." And, by George, he's right. There's no tension like hypertension, and that's what most of the characters in this story are suffering from. It's an occupational affliction at the executive level in American business (as, indeed, we are reminded before the first reel has run) but there are, in this case, special circumstances which make it more hyper than usual. Avery Bullard, president of the Tredway Furniture Corporation, drops dead in New York and rigor mortis has hardly set in before Calhern (a share-holding director) is selling Tredway common stock short in anticipation of a price-fall, and remaining male players—all vice-presidents of

BAROMETER

FAIR: "Executive Suite."
OVERCAST: "Tall Headlines."

the Corporation—are ganging up on one another in a fight for the vacant chair. It is, of course, a contest of ambush and stratagem, of votes and proxies, moral and immoral suasion. Except for young Mr. Holden, who is energetic, idealistic in a rugged way and (he says) no politician, the veeps all exhibit some archetypal human weakness. Pidgeon, the senior, is elderly, nervous and tired; Paul Douglas (Sales) is hen-pecked and unreliable; Jagger (Production) morose and unprogressive. Of the five, the most impressive—on celluloid if not on paper—is Fredric March. His interpretation of the vice-president in charge of Finance (a small-time Machiavelli consumed by ambition but inwardly doubtful of his ability to achieve it) is a rounded portrait complete down to the last nervous mannerism. And it is not an easy part. It demands a superficial air of decision, a surface assurance which is at the same time betrayed by the unguarded gesture, the sidelong glance or the changed inflection. All these March uses with practised skill. By the book he is the least attractive of the characters—a bloodless calculating machine, according to his associates. For all that, when the ballots had been cast, and the proxies (and the doxies) duly disposed of, he remained, for me, the most credible and human of them all.

TALL HEADLINES

(Grand National)

YOU don't really need to be miserable to sit through *Tall Headlines*, but I should imagine that it helps. The film has the advantage of good players—André Morell, Mai Zetterling and Michael Denison are all more than competent, and there is no one who can better convey mute agony of soul than Flora Robson. But the theme—the tragedy of a family who have lost a son on the scaffold—is too profound for the routine treatment given it here. And I must protest, too, at the arbitrary

(continued on next page)

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 6, 1954.