

TELEVISION MEANS FILMS

Though the technical problems of television lie mainly within the field of radio and telegraphy, on the side of legislative control and supervision, says GORDON MIRAMS, its problems are more closely allied to those of the film. Here is the first of two articles in which he discusses the developing relationship between television and motion pictures.

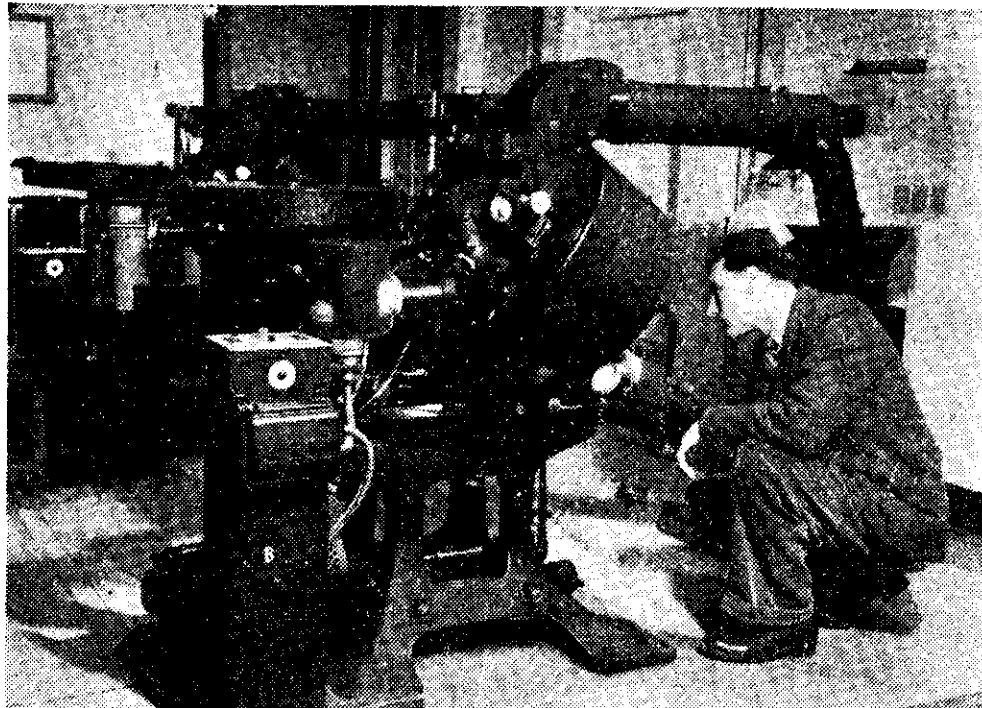
WHEN most people think of television they seem to think of it solely in relation to radio, as a development of broadcasting. There are special reasons why it is important for us in New Zealand to see that this is an erroneous idea. Although the technical problems of TV fall mainly within the field of radio and telegraphy, its problems on the side of legislative control and supervision, as well as its social and educational impact, are much more closely allied to those of the film. As Dr. Margaret Mead said when she was here recently, television simply amounts to bringing the movies into the home.

It is not too soon to be thinking about these things. Experts are already studying the technical and engineering problems of TV and actively preparing to introduce it in this country as soon as is practicable. Possibly this may take five or more years, though TV's rate of development overseas is now so rapid that it could be sooner. As the *Hollywood Reporter* of August 1 said: "In 1950 there were five million television sets in the U.S.A. Now there are 12 million. Next year there will be 20 million sets in American homes. The man who says 'Let's wait and see what happens' . . . has no vision." Whether it happens sooner or later, one may safely assume that not only will the new medium eventually make a direct impact upon us here, but also that long before we are having regular TV transmissions we shall have felt strongly its indirect influence. In the annals of the motion-picture, 1950-51 may well come to be known as The Year of Television; and already a careful observer can begin

to notice that TV has begun to affect the subject-matter, and to a lesser extent the form, of some recent Hollywood movies. During the next 12 months or so, this influence on our film entertainment will become more and more apparent.

Battle for Audiences

It is manifested in two ways at present. On the one hand, the American film industry (and particularly the major studios) is striving to find ways to retain its audiences and to win back those in America who have deserted the cinema in huge numbers for TV. Hollywood is doing this both by refusing, at the moment, to collaborate with television, and by making films of a kind suitable only for projection on large theatre screens. On the other hand, the industry does not intend to be caught napping. So on all sides, and especially among independent studios and technicians, there is vigorous experimenting to discover the type of screenplay best suited to the smaller screen and different presentation methods of TV. According to the *Hollywood Reporter* of June 26: "Hollywood's TV film industry has definitely taken on the stamp of big business, with 118 specific programmes completed, the figure representing, in terms of screen time, a yearly output of 2860 hours, more than three times the average annual output of the motion-picture industry's combined feature and short subjects footage of 855 hours. The young TV industry has already absorbed



BBC photograph
THIS massive machine is a telecine installed at the BBC's Alexandra Palace studios. It enables any standard cinema film, full length feature or short subject, to be televised

20 per cent of the cameramen's union on a full-time basis, and the number of Screen Writers' Guild members now working in the medium is 45 per cent above a year ago, not including countless free-lance non-members."

Another straw in the wind is the announcement that *The March of Time* is to cease production for the cinema and transfer itself to television.

Drift to the West

If you have noticed lately an increase in the number of large-scale "spectacles" of the Western or outdoor-action type, many of them with big stars, a wealth of visual detail, and a much greater degree of sophistication and realism in their treatment than was formerly found in a style of entertainment traditionally regarded as peculiarly suitable for children, that is largely because Hollywood is exploiting an essential difference in the two media: the fact that the theatre screen enlarges while the television-receiver reduces. Another method being used by Hollywood to meet the threat of television,

A third Hollywood tactic is to take advantage of present legal and technical handicaps on the use of colour by TV. So the proportion of colour films which we are going to see will be greater. It is already three-quarters of all "A"-grade features.

The general situation in the film world at present affords a close parallel with that existing just before the coming of the talkies two decades ago. Then, as now, the major film production and exhibition interests were not only trying to decry the lasting importance of the innovation, but were also actively resisting it, because of the enormous capital expenditure and the scrapping of existing equipment involved in conversion to the new technique. Now, as then, the major studios have a kind of uneasy "gentleman's agreement" not to co-operate with it—at least, until they can devise some satisfactory way of getting an adequate return from the showing of their films on television. But now, as before, it will need only one or two major film studios to tie up with TV and all the others will be scrambling to follow suit. I would predict, that, before another 12 months have passed, the present "gentleman's agreement" will be broken wide open and that all the studios will be in the race to convert a large part of their resources to TV production. After that it is likely that we shall notice a marked difference in many of our movies—possibly in the direction of more "compressed" action; more attention to close-ups and fewer changes of scene.

Remarking that "the idea of Hollywood turning to television is not at all novel to the film industry," *Variety* (the leading U.S. trade journal) recently quoted with approval the old maxim, "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em." And the *New York Times* commented: "There can be little question that a new period in screen entertainment has opened and that the motion-picture industry may yet hail television as its salvation."

(A second article on Television and Films will appear in our next issue)



GIT ALONG, LITTLE DOGIES!

There has been an increase in large-scale Westerns, with big stars, recently—from left, Montgomery Clift ("Red River"), Gregory Peck ("The Gunfighter"), Robert Taylor ("Ambush")