

GET ME BUDAPEST!

Is This Why Hollywood Goes Doom-mongering?

Special to the "Record"

by

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SAMUEL GOLDWYN, we read in the newspapers, is predicting the doom of Hollywood. At the same time there is a campaign of sorts being conducted by some producers to tell the world just how much the cost of film-making has increased in the past year or so.

Harry Hunter, managing director of Paramount in Australia and New Zealand, who has just been visiting this country, quoted some facts and figures during his visit, which were widely reported. Hollywood, said Mr. Hunter, is seriously up against this question of soaring production costs. Adolph Zukor had estimated that the cost of materials and labour had increased 35 per cent. over last year. Just about every part of the industry was becoming organised in unions and guilds. It was stated, this resulting in a big increase in salaries. Coupled with this was the constant and ever-increasing demand of the public for better pictures. And Paramount, said Mr. Hunter, would produce them: this year they had budgeted for 22 pictures costing a total of 22,000,000 dollars.

It has not been expressly mentioned, but the inference is there for all to see—that if Hollywood is not going to lower its standard of production somebody has got to foot the bill of rising costs. This is not a matter that affects New Zealand more than any other part of the world, for pictures shown throughout the world are paid for throughout the world. But that's just the point, that's just what makes this a matter of general public interest—for obviously, in the last resort, it's the public who pays.

ORDINARILY, I believe, the picture-going public gets pretty good value for its money. So good that it has ceased to be grateful. There are comparatively few pictures not worth a bob to see, and a good many which are relatively worth at least 10 times that amount, when you consider the talent in them, the settings and costumes, and all the research involved. Yet, if you're lucky, you can see them all for the same price.

So, come to think of it, if perhaps we may have to pay a little more for our pictures, because of rising costs in a booming world, perhaps we shouldn't kick too much about it. (I should talk! I haven't paid to see a picture show in 10 years!)

Still, in that case, I do suggest we have a right to know where our money goes. We want the best possible value for it.

That is where the shoe pinches a little.

HOLLYWOOD seems most inclined to blame Mr. Roosevelt and the New Deal and the trade unions for its present financial problem. The argument would sound rather more convincing if Hollywood itself wasn't such a notorious waster of money.

It's Hollywood's own fault if we've got that impression. Reckless extravagance is part of the legend of Hollywood. Spendthrifts always make good news, and the Hollywood publicity machine has been working for years deliberately creating the impression that money is no object with film producers. When it comes to spending money, Hollywood is second only to Mr. Chamberlain when he is rearming.

As I say, if full value for this reckless spending were passed on to the public who pays, we couldn't complain. But does this always happen?

For instance, take the typical example of a best-selling book that they want to make into a film. Producer Joe Finklebaum bids, say, 70,000 dollars, and that's a pretty good price and just about what the rights to the book are worth. Then along comes Alf Snortz and he says, "I'll raise you ten grand." And finally into the market comes Rube Goldmeyer, and he plonks down another 20,000

and then they decide the deal is closed.

All very nice for the author, of course, but from the point of view of the public who pays, what has happened is that 100,000 dollars has been paid for a story that is worth, in entertainment value, 70,000. The extra 30,000 dollars is not passed on to the public.

But that's Competition.

The same sort of thing happens every week, not only with stories, but with stars' contracts, and directors' salaries and rights to this and that. And, every time it happens, the winning producer takes good care to tell us all about it, because that's good publicity for him. It's not such good publicity for Hollywood's complaint that it's getting hard up.

Sam. Goldwyn had probably got one (Cont. on p. 38.)

LAST week, Sam Goldwyn (who is clever at getting his name in the paper) was cabled round the world as predicting the doom of Hollywood.

Doomed that is, says Mr. Goldwyn (who produces only very big and expensive pictures) unless it ceases manufacturing second-rate movies in wholesale lots.

"It is a serious situation," he said, "when almost anyone able to write his own name can earn 1000 dollars a week as a scenario writer . . ."