

ARE THEY POISON?

Revolt Against The Hollywood Star System

by

GORDON MIRAMS

WHEN Hollywood developed its star system, it developed one of the greatest schemes to make the public pay and pay that the world has ever known. To-day there are signs that Hollywood is in danger of killing the goose that laid its largest golden egg—killing it by the usual Hollywood fault of over-indulgence, of not knowing where to draw the line.

A few weeks ago, the independent theatre-owners of Manhattan issued a statement (you may have seen it in your daily paper) to the effect that some of the most-boasted stars of the screen were "box-office poison." By so doing they exploded a bombshell, which appears to have shaken the film industry more than it cared to admit at first.

Not that Manhattan's independent theatre-owners in themselves cut much ice. They are merely a minor group within a vast organisation. But when their bombshell set off similar explosions higher up, then the Manhattan revolt can be taken as a sign of widespread ferment over the star system in particular and the motion picture business in general.

Special Targets

THE special targets for the Manhattan bomb-throwers were Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Mae West, Joan Crawford,

Kay Francis, Katharine Hepburn, Edward Arnold, and Fred Astaire.

"WAKE UP," they cried to the producers of Hollywood. "Practically all of the major studios are burdened with stars—whose public appeal is negligible—receiving tremendous salaries. . . . We are tired of losing money on them. . . . Garbo, for instance, does not help theatre-owners in the U.S.A. . . . Kay Francis, still receiving many thousands a week,



Marlene in pensive mood—is she worried about the allegation that she is "poison at the box-office"?

is now making B grade pictures. . . . Dietrich, too, is poison at the box office."

This is a local protest, of course. What is poison to Manhattan may be good, nourishing meat in New Zealand or elsewhere. For instance, the average British audience would probably not agree with the attack on Fred Astaire.

Doom Of Hollywood

ABOUT the same time as the Manhattan fellows were lighting their fuse, Producer Sam Goldwyn had returned from a trip to Europe wringing his hands and prophesying the doom of Hollywood. The world, he said, was going on strike against motion pictures—people who used to stay away for fear of seeing one bad picture now stayed away for fear of seeing two.

"It used to be that one film of a double-feature would be poor," moaned Sam. "Now you've got to expect both of them will be terrible. . . . The American picture industry better do something, and do it soon."

One mustn't forget that Sam Goldwyn (quite apart from the publicity such a statement would gain him) may have a special axe to grind. His motto is "Quality, not Quantity"; he makes only so-called "big" pictures; and he is a notable example of the successful producer who does not bother much about the star system. His usual practice is to save money by creating his own stars, instead of signing up costly established "names."

In England to-day, British and American pictures



Mae West—"they call me the mortgage-lifter."



Edward Arnold looks doleful—perhaps the reason is to be found in this article.

thousands a week,

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