PHOTOPLAY
AUGUST, 1947
PAGE 3

Is Hollywood RED?

AN EDITORIAL BY JAMES M. CAIN

Because of his known liberalism, **PHOTOPLAY** *asked the eminent author of "Double Indemnity", "The Postman Always Rings Twice" and "Mildred Pierce" to discuss for our readers the question, "Is Hollywood Red?" In all fairness to Mr. Cain we are publishing his thoughts on the subject just as he put them down on paper.*

Fred Hamm's

Mr. Leo Birinski, in recent years a picture writer, before that a playwright, once did a play called "Narrentanz," which had quite a vogue in Middle Europe, and which furnishes a viewpoint, it seems to me, on this question of Communism and Counter-Communism currently so hot in the picture business. It was based on a curious and little-known aspect of the Russian Revolution of 1905, in which certain spots were designated by the Revolutionists as neutral ground, where for various reasons, such as the safety of their archives, they permitted no disturbances, and life was quiet. In the play, the Governor of one such place was shown as quite unhappy, because though other governors were getting large sums from St. Petersburg to suppress the revolution he was getting none, a situation thus arising which was distressing to the gubernatorial, to say nothing of the Slavic mind. So, to stir up a little revolution he arranged an *attentat* on his life, a shot outside the window neatly pulled off by his secretary; but the chief revolutionary, thinking fast, made the thing personal, rather than political, by saying he fired the shot because he was in love with the Governor's wife. From there on in, as you might suppose, it was a delightful piece of nonsense.

But it embodied a principle which I believe both sides in this dispute might reflect on with the utmost concern. It is this: There can be areas where even the most fanatical Red can properly keep hands off, and where even the most well-intended counter-Red activities can easily verge on the absurd. That pictures should become such an area must be evident to all who have their well-being at heart. For, despite the megalomania of Hollywood, which tends to assume that because it speaks to the world it also speaks for the world, the conflict

Is Hollywood RED?

(*Continued from page* 31) we have here can have no effect, or at most only an infinitesimal effect, on the general result. Whether we have war with Russia, whether we declare the Communist Party a foreign agent, whether we extend the Graeco-Turkish policy to Persia and India and Korea and China, will not be decided in Hollywood. Some of these questions, by the best odds that can be calculated now, will not be decided in our lifetimes. But what can be decided in Hollywood, and not only in our lifetime but quick, is whether pictures are to be declared legally dead or not. For they can die. Other forms of entertainment have died, of grotesque and trivial causes, and when they died they stayed dead. And all that pictures need to turn up their toes is that they become the football of politics, as they have already become the football of do-gooders and sam-singers and soul-savers. They don't need to go sailing between the goal posts, sent there by the victorious boot of either side. This game doesn't have to be won, and it doesn't have to be lost. All it needs is to go on, and as sure as God made little apples, when we look up, during one of the wrangles between officials of a long, dreary, and pointless tie, we shall find out our customers have gone home.

ON BOTH sides, I think, even among the extremists, there are many who would like to see pictures made an "open" industry, at least within certain limits, so the conflict could suspend. The trouble is, though there might be desire for such an agreement, there is at present no means by which either side could make sure of the good faith of the other in carrying it out. For such are the reputations that conspiratorial activity has got for itself on the one hand, and narrow chauvinism on

OldMagazineArticles.com

the other, that if the word of a Red is worth considerably less than a plugged dime, the word of an anti-Red as a polemic curiosity is worth considerably and unfortunately more. For some of the charges made by the Moving Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, through its house organ Vigil, its close ally the Hollywood Reporter, and its friendly backers among the Los Angeles press, have to be seen to be believed, and have only to be read to be discredited. That the Reds dream silly dreams I don't for a moment deny. But that they have a monopoly on the disservice now being done the picture business is indeed far from the truth. Among the MPA are some fine men and women, with solid records of civic activity going back many years. But that any large number of them are noble *Horatiuses*, backed against the bridge, facing fearful odds for the ashes of their fathers and the temples of their gods, is most unlikely. Actually, they suffer from the same diseases as afflicts the rank and file of Reds. They are Johnny-come-latelys to the field, political amateurs, with all the zeal of the recent convert, and all of his ignorance, too, of the possible consequences of his zeal. And their "educational" campaign, designed to awaken all and sundry to the menace that besets our hallowed sound stages, happens also to be an advertising campaign, and of the very worst kind. It does awaken all and sundry, that is the trouble with it. And it convinces them that Hollywood is about five times as sinister a place as it really is. They are in the position of the man who gets up in church and asks all the brethren and sistern present to pray for his beloved wife, who now feels temptation a-threatening her. It may make for salvation but it'll hardly

OldMagazineArticles.com

make for marriage, and you wouldn't blame the lady much for getting up and taking a swipe at his jaw.

Possibly I am naive, and certainly one can rarely be sure of one's ground in realms where conspiracy is part of the scheme of things, and has been intellectually rationalized. And yet I believe that on the left there are many professionals, that is party members, or those commonly believed to be party members, who would be agreeable to a truce of some sort. On the right, allowing for flag-wavers, I think there is a good solid faction for such a truce, if it felt there was any prospect whatever that the left would abide by it. In the middle, I can guarantee there are thousands, in every part of the industry, from executives to talent to just plain mugs, who would give anything for a truce, as they are utterly sick of the whole miserable turmoil. If this is the case, I think it is wholly practicable for the moderates in each group to approach each other, through the contacts afforded by the guilds and the unions, and try to arrive at an understanding on a very simple formula. The formula would be that however sharp the fighting might be on the organization level, each side would give over any effort to capture film, that is to use film for propaganda purposes, to slip into the pictures themselves material of a partisan nature, to put something over. It may be objected that in the long run the film will be exempt from subversion in any particular direction, as it must remain entertainment if it is to remain profitable, so that any imbalance here must inevitably right itself. However, there is one other alternative, already alluded to: If it does not remain entertainment it can kill the business, so the film is no *ipso facto* exception to the dis-

OldMagazineArticles.com

cussion, but the very center of the case. Furthermore, it is what both sides worry about. Dominance in the guilds and the unions, each side realizes now, is something that cannot be handed to either on a silver platter. To get it you have to work at it, and if you don't get it you can't blame anything but a superior organization for your defeat.

But the film, subversion of pictures to an ulterior plan, lurks as a danger over and beyond anything that can be achieved through control of this or that executive committee. However, by now I believe there is sufficient realization on all sides, except as I have noted among the romantics, that the film must be kept sacrosanct, to provide the basis for an understanding. Of course, it will be a bitter pill to many that one more Gable leer must be in, where a star-eyed look at the mention of Stalin must be out, but if it has to be, it can be swallowed. And it is the considered opinion of my riper years, as Joe Von Sternberg puts it, that it has to come out this way, or we are sunk. It is the only way that confidence can be gained, that this mutual suspicion and name-calling and recrimination-howling can be stopped. For there is always the old Franklinian warning to sober us: If we don't hang together, we shall certainly hang separately.

OldMagazineArticles.com