

MARCH 17, 1943

Speaking of Movies

'Strange Bad-Fellows' Aligned Against Film 'Mission to Moscow'



HOLLYWOOD, Mar. 17.—Any one of these days the lid will be popping off a whole kettle of red herring which has been stewing for a year in preparation for the release of the movie, *Mission to Moscow*. This is the Warner Bros. film based on Joseph E. Davies's best-seller report of his ambassadorship to Soviet Russia during 1937 and '38. The film reflects the undisguised admiration of Davies for Joseph Stalin and his government, as well as the ambassador's conviction that the famous Soviet "purge" trials of 1936-38 were based on proof "beyond a reasonable doubt" that the former leaders punished were guilty of plotting with Germany and Japan for the overthrow of the Stalin regime.

The late Leon Trotsky, Stalin's exiled arch-opponent and advocate of world revolution as opposed to Stalin's determination to build Russia and let the world revolution take care of itself, is represented in the film as visiting Ribbentrop in the German Embassy in Sweden on behalf of the plot to overthrow Stalin.

First the Anti-Stalinists

The film's representation of the trials, with dialogue written from the actual testimony, and its picturization of the absent Trotsky as the arch-conspirator, have already brought down on Warner Bros. and others connected with the film the recurrent wrath of the *New Leader*, an anti-Stalin Socialist weekly with a small but enthusiastic national circulation. Free copies of *New Leader*, with bold blue arrows pointing out its attacks on the film, have been sent regularly to film critics, Hollywood figures and others.

Late in February, Louis Fischer, noted liberal author but an undying unbeliever in the justice of the Moscow trials, prefaced a Los Angeles lecture in behalf of freedom for India with a statement that "Hollywood will be guilty of a scandalous distortion" if it depicts the Russian generals executed in 1937 as guilty of conspiracy with the Germans and Japs. Fischer had not seen the film when he spoke.

Thus far in the skirmishing, the Trotskyites, anti-Stalinists and professed liberals opposing the picture have found at least

one staunch ally—the isolationist *Chicago Tribune*. Walter Winchell, noting this odd accord, characterized its participants as “strange badfellows.”

The *Tribune*, never one to miss a chance to sock the New Deal and its war agencies, accused the government of “patronage, advice and encouragement” of the film, which it called “a plug for communism.” The *Tribune*’s reference to the government’s part in the production may have been to the fact that the Office of War Information now scrutinizes all movie scripts on war topics, or to the fact that the film (and Davies’s book) is based on official reports and documents now in the State Department files.

More Strange Bad-Fellows

If the current fears of Warner Bros. come true, the ranks of *Mission to Moscow*’s opponents will soon be swelled by the presence of Martin Dies, Westbrook Pegler and an assortment of isolationist and reactionary Congressmen, all of whom are reportedly spoiling to work the film into their favorite sport of Red-baiting.

Mission to Moscow was deliberately planned as a film to correct a host of misimpressions about Soviet Russia today, as well as to drive home some truths the isolationists, Red-baiters and Roosevelt-haters don’t like to have mentioned these days.

The film points out, for example, that as early as 1936 President Roosevelt was alert to the danger of world war, and through Davies sounded out Winston Churchill (not then Prime Minister) on the possibility of an Anglo-American front against Hitler. It shows the Russians as eager proponents of the principle of collective security among the democracies against Fascism, and as the one nation willing to go to war to maintain the existing collective peace machinery of the League of Nations. And it shows, if Russia’s fight to date hasn’t convinced everyone, that Lindbergh never was wetter than in his estimate of Russia’s military strength and intentions.

Because of all these violent views in *Mission to Moscow*, Warner Bros. foresee “bad-fellows” behind every bush prepared to sabotage the first out-spoken Hollywood movie of the war.—PETER FURST.

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