

NEWS AND COMMENT ON VARIOUS FILM MATTERS

By THOMAS M. PRYOR

ALTHOUGH "Prelude to War" will be released theatrically on May 27, it is not certain at the moment whether the six other subjects in the series of Army-sponsored films generally titled "Why We Fight" also will be made available for public exhibition. "Prelude to War" is the first issue in the program of orientation films designed originally to acquaint Army personnel with the causes of the present World War. It runs sixty minutes and was produced by Lieut. Col. Frank Capra, former Hollywood director-producer. Three others, "The Nazi Strikes," "Divide and Conquer" and "Battle of Britain" are completed, but decision on their release to theatres is being held in abeyance pending study of public reaction to "Prelude to War."

When the question of public exhibition of the film was raised some time ago, the OWI Motion Picture Bureau, headed by Lowell Mellett, reportedly objected to its release, and then requested that the Army make certain changes in the film. The matter of the alterations is still in dispute, according to unofficial sources. However, under the arrangement arrived at between the OWI, the Army and the film industry, 150 prints of "Prelude to War" will be placed in theatrical circulation at no cost to the theatres. The industry's War Activities Committee will defray all distribution expenses.

Since considerable background footage used in the film was obtained without cost by the Army

Some Sidelights on the Public Release of 'Prelude to War'—Other Items

from commercial companies, the public release of the picture presented its own problems. First of all, clearances had to be obtained from the various copyright holders. Last week all but two of the necessary clearances had been granted. As arrangements now stand, the Army will loan the 150 prints to the OWI, which, in turn, will make them available to the WAC for the theatres. Exhibition of "Prelude to War" will be entirely voluntary on the part of theatres. The WAC is not distributing it as a "pledge" subject as is the case with other government war film shorts, but the WAC will sponsor a special exploitation campaign stressing the official importance attached to the film.

The attitude of the theatre operators to this new development in government-industry war film relations will undoubtedly be closely watched in official circles, particularly in view of the growing reports, from industry sources, that theatre men are finding audiences becoming increasingly apathetic to war films. As a starter, "Prelude to War" has been booked by the Warner Theatre Circuit, numbering 465 houses.

When and if "Brooklyn, U.S.A.," the play about the Murder, Inc., syndicate, written by Asa Borge and John Bright for the

Broadway stage the season before last, reaches the screen via Warner Brothers, the authors probably will find it hard to recognize their handiwork. The Warners, it develops, have not had an easy time in whipping the play into the desired cinematic form. The latest inquiry at the studio brought the answer that the piece probably would be taken off the shelf in a couple of weeks and put before the cameras. Difficulty in casting certain roles was said to be the principal stumbling block, and this may well be since the studio has at one time or another mentioned Edward G. Robinson, Humphrey Bogart, George Raft and John Garfield for "Brooklyn, U. S. A."

But, and on this point the Warners just aren't talking, it also is being whispered about that the Hays office and the Hollywood branch of the Office of War Information, presided over by Nelson Poynter, did not look too kindly upon the screen treatment in which "Brooklyn, U. S. A." became a melodrama dealing with American fascists and gangster activities in sabotage along the waterfront. However, Mr. Poynter says the OWI did not request the Warners not to make the film. It was merely pointed out to the studio, he says, that it was OWI's policy to discourage over-emphasis

of gangster phases of American life, especially in pictures which may be exported. Final say on that last matter rests with the Office of Censorship. Meanwhile, OWI says the Warners are free to make the film in any manner that they please.

Biggest surprise of the week was the sudden resignation of William Goetz as vice president in charge of production for Twentieth Century-Fox. No reason for the move was announced other than that Mr. Goetz was going to form his own producing unit. This is the second defection within the Fox producer ranks in as many weeks. Also leaving the studio, with the idea of launching his own production company, is Nunnally Johnson. He probably will leave the lot in the next month or two, depending on how quickly he winds up shooting on the Gracie Fields-Monty Woolley comedy, "Holy Matrimony," and completes writing the screen play for "Keys to the Kingdom." Mr. Goetz probably will remain at the studio for another six to eight months as he has agreed to complete his current program of ten films including such top budget offerings as "Jane Eyre," "Guadalcanal Diary," "Claudia," "The Song of Bernadette," and "Life Boat." With Colonel Darryl F. Zanuck on active duty as yet, though he has applied for inactive classification, the studio now is technically without a production head.