

TELEVISION'S THREAT TO FILMS

A BIG battle is in progress. Cinema interests are trying to persuade the B.B.C. to grant permission for television programmes to be shown in cinemas. That permission has so far been refused.

So at the moment the situation is that cinemas must on no account show television programmes to paying audiences.

The matter is being gone into thoroughly between screenland and the B.B.C., and at any date now the result of the negotiations may be announced.

In the meantime, cinema circuits are not letting the grass grow under their feet. They realise that television has arrived. "Televiwing" is no longer a novelty. The obstacle of distance is being overcome. A television programme from France has been received in this country. Hundreds of radio dealers now demonstrate television receivers. Hours of broadcasting have been extended.

Let me make a forecast. It will not be long before all cinemas are equipped with television sets. Television projection is as inevitable as talkies were, once they were perfected. Ten years ago, cinema owners were scoffing at the idea of talkies ousting silents. To-day, practically every cinema in the country is equipped with talkie apparatus.

Behind the scenes there is furious activity in the cinema-television world—that is to say, among the people who are interested in installing television sets in cinemas. Without the public being aware of the fact, more and more cinemas are having television sets put in, with their special beaded screens.

Television was one of the main objects to be discussed when the Cinema Exhibitors' Association held its convention not long ago. Invitations were sent to the exhibitors to attend cinema television demonstrations.

Television was shown at one cinema on a screen sized 8 feet by 6 feet 6 inches, and at another demonstration on a screen sized 6 feet by 5 feet.

Since then, the Baird Company alone has received about one hundred orders for cinema television sets, and the big Gaumont-British combine is so interested that it is anticipated that the whole of its circuit will eventually be wired up for television.

Already Gaumont-British have two West End houses equipped. The Tatler, where demonstrations have been taking place for some time, is to have television as a permanent part of its instal-

EVERY year the great new entertainment medium of Television gets nearer perfection—and the film makers are wondering how it is going to affect them, says

John K. NEWNHAM

Here are some of your favourite radio and screen stars who have already been televised—and there are many more

lation. The newly redecorated Tivoli has a television set, and the Marble Arch Pavilion is being equipped now.

The big new £50,000 news theatre which is being built at the Marble Arch is also to have television facilities.

So you can see that the cinema people are serious about their television campaign, and are gambling on negotiations with the B.B.C. being successful.

The aim is mainly to show news events on the screen when they are actually happening, such as the Derby and the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race, and big boxing matches.

"At the moment," I was told by one authority, "we have no intention of relaying ordinary programmes or showing televised films. Our present arrangements are too satisfactory for that."

"After all, though television has advanced so much, it is not yet perfect. Atmospheric conditions provide one big trouble. Again, cinema projection and photography have reached such a high quality that televised films would not be so satisfactory. Angles also provide a television problem, for if you're too much on one side the reproduction looks distorted."

"What will happen in a few years' time remains to be seen. But for the time being all we want is permission to show news events, and perhaps occasional ordinary programmes when there is anything special."

What has the B.B.C. to lose by granting the required permission?

As things stand, television programmes and improvements all come out of licence money. Whether people see the programmes in their own homes or in theatres cannot possibly make any financial difference.

In fact, the publicity value would be enormous. People, seeing television demonstrated in a cinema, are far more likely to

purchase a set of their own than if they never see a television programme.

In addition, the cinemas would undoubtedly be willing to pay for the permission—and the B.B.C. always seems to be in need of extra money!

Televiwers would not be lost; many would probably be gained. And, from the cinemas' point of view, patrons are less likely to stay at home when big events are on. For instance, if a big fight is being broadcast, a lot of people will stay at home to listen to it. But if they knew that they could see it at their local cinema, they could combine film and radio entertainment at the same time.

It seems a fairly safe forecast to say that television and the cinema are more likely to be allies than enemies. It is the most common-sense step, for both sides have so much to gain by co-operation.

It is with this idea in mind that cinemas are now being equipped with television apparatus.

There are, of course, two sides to every question.

On the one hand, there is the established fact that ordinary radio has affected cinema attendance, particularly in America. And cinema exhibitors are nervous of television because it is so similar to films in its type of presentation and technique.

There is a risk that people, able to see television at home, will not be inclined to go to cinemas and would rather see something entirely different, such as a stage show.

If television kills the cinema, that will be the reason. But I for one don't think that this is likely to happen. I don't think for a moment that television is likely to harm the cinema any more than films have hindered television's progress. One might just as well say that television has no future because it is so similar to screen technique.

There are so many things to back up this view, the first of which is money.

Funny how most things in this world boil down to money, isn't it?

The essential difference between television programmes—unless they turn to advertising for revenue—and the screen is that the former have to keep within the limits of their portion of licence revenue, while films are produced on a profit-making basis.

A television programme may be startlingly good, but it won't earn any extra money.

But a startlingly good film will reap a fortune when released to cinemas.

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Jane Carr also televised from Radiolympia

Everyone's favourite, Gordon Harker

Maude Lloyd took part in the televised Markova-Dolin Ballet

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For this reason, films on the whole stand a far better chance of reaching high peaks of entertainment value. It's obvious that, if a television programme mustn't cost more than, say, £200, and a film may cost £100,000, the film has a flying start.

Money in turn leads to the most important factor in the question, which is that of star value. The star system is permanent. It counts in every branch of the entertainment industry. Given the choice between Greta Garbo and an unknown girl, the customer will choose Garbo any day.

One thing is inevitable. There will be a lot of rivalry between television and filmland in developing new stars. But unless the B.B.C. is willing to place its newcomers under long-term contracts those who make big names for themselves will soon be snatched away from television by the big-moneyed movie people.

There is no need for a bitter war. Working in harmony, television could benefit exceedingly from the popularity of film stars.

An obvious arrangement presents itself. The B.B.C. should give cinemas permission to show television programmes on the screen. And, in turn, the film people should give permission for their stars to televise.

Naturally, the movie executives would have to give the B.B.C. fair value. They would have to work out a fair quota of stars available in each of the studios, and guarantee to loan them to the B.B.C. when convenient to both sides. If the scheme worked well, television would have at its disposal many ready-made favourites.

Already it has been proved that film stars make excellent television stars. Any number have televised—such favourites as Leslie Howard, Patricia Ellis, Wendy Hiller, Gordon Harker, Diana Wynyard, Lucie Mannheim, Esme Percy. Ann Todd recently became television's first serial queen; Gracie Fields holds the unique distinction of having had television's closest "close-up."

In addition, television and filmland have exchanged staff members. Television has given to filmland its good-looking announcer, Leslie Mitchell, who is now a news-reel commentator.

Alexander Palace houses scores of ex-film folk. Dallas Bower, for instance. He used to be assistant director on the Bergner films; now he is a senior television producer.

Philip Dorte, outside broadcasts producer, used to be a film location expert. F. Baker Smith, ex-film designer and assistant director, is now in charge of properties and scenery at Alexander Palace.

Harold Cox, on the outside broadcasts staff, used to be an assistant director and location expert. Ismay Watts, now television studio manager, was a film assistant director and unit producer.

Films and television have much in common so far as the most important power of all is concerned—personality-power.

That filmland has already considered the possibility of future problems governing television appearances of movie stars is proved by the fact that several players now have clauses in their contracts forbidding them to televise for anyone other than the studio unless special permission is granted. Before long, this clause will probably be generally added to all contracts signed.

There are other reasons why the cinema is not likely to be killed by television.



LOUD ONE

"**H**OW did you discover that you were a better singer than you were a dancer? Was it a little bird that told you?"

"Little bird! Huh, you could hear it all over the theatre."

By Fred Hartley (Johnson's Glo-coat, Songs you can never forget, Luxembourg, Sundays and Normandy, Wednesdays.)