

(October 18th, 1937)

The British Motion Picture Industry

MR. HERBERT WILCOX AND MISS ANNA NEAGLE.

T. D'ARCY LEONARD, Chairman:—Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a singular pleasure to be doubly honored as we are today by the presence of Mr. Herbert Wilcox and Miss Anna Neagle. Mr. Wilcox is extremely well qualified to address us on the British Motion Picture Industry, for he has been one of the most important figures in the development of that industry since the war. We welcome Miss Neagle on her first trip to Canada, as one who is already well and favorably known even before the crowning achievement of her Career in "Victoria the Great." We are to hear from both our guests. Mr. Wilcox will address us first, and Miss Neagle will have the privilege of the last word.

MR. WILCOX:—Your chairman has very aptly said that I am well qualified to address you on the subject of British films, but he does not know me as a speaker, and though I may be extremely well qualified to address you on the subject, I cannot imagine anyone who would be less competent to do it than myself. Speech making is not my long suit.

I would like first to thank you on behalf of Miss Neagle and myself for the welcome we have had in Toronto. We have only been on Canadian soil just five days, and in that time we have been in Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. That is not bad going and, during the trip, we have been chiefly impressed by the sincerity of Canadian hospitality.

With regard to British Films, I am afraid that the story at the present moment is a very sad one. Without going into reasons, British films, at the present moment are at the lowest point of their existence. That has been brought about

primarily by a very well meaning act called the Quota Act which provides for film quantity but not quality. During the last ten years, under the protection of this Act there has grown up within the industry a group of small producers, quick producers, and certain elements have appeared that can only creep into an industry when it is unhealthily supported by legislation. Most of these firms have no right to be in the business, and they would not be so for very long, under a system of healthy competition.

But on the other hand there has been a great deal of enthusiasm in the industry and much progress has been made in certain sections of British Films, largely as the result of individual effort. Korda has put up a magnificent show, and certain others have done well. I would not like to fail to give them credit for the fight they have put up to improve the industry.

I am very glad we came to Canada. I was very flattered to hear that this is the first occasion on which a producer and a star have visited Canada to make a round of the cities and get for themselves the reactions of the critics and the public to their production. From what we have learned already we have reached the conclusion that the reason British films have not been very successful is that they have not deserved to be. Some pictures have been good, and I have met on all sides a genuine desire to see more if a good standard is maintained, though they urge us not to send bad ones. It is excellent advice. Your public needs to be protected from the indiscriminate sending of poor films to the dominions, and if that control could be achieved it would be excellent. It is quite evident from the standard of criticisms that one has read over here that expectations are far higher over here than they are in England. It is a very great delight to read well written criticisms, and I am quite certain that, by and large, the voice of the critic is the voice of the public.

I am hoping from my own angle that this is going to be the start of a new era. I have been able, fortunately, to make a picture which is very timely, and the repercussions of Victoria the Great will have great effect on British films, for it has given me the opportunity that so many seek to

secure, (and in so seeking, spend enormous sums of money) —to achieve world distribution. The important thing to me, taking the long view, is that Victoria the Great has enabled me to get an agreement from a first class distribution company to take every film I make for the next ten years. That contract over the next ten years will be worth approximately £6,000,000.

I am quite certain, too, that what is the opinion of Canada is the opinion of the other Dominions and of the United States. From every angle I feel that a great British Film sent to the Dominions will make many friends for British films throughout the world.

If I may digress a little I would like to say that there is a great deal of feeling in Canada and in certain uninformed circles that British films should be in competition with Hollywood. That is foolish. They should be partners. There are many things we have to thank Hollywood for. They have been enterprising. They have invested enormous sums. They have gone ahead with beautiful pictures, and I feel that what is needed more than anything else is a partnership between Britain and Hollywood.

One reason we don't send so many films to Canada is, that the officers here say that they want entertainment, and that American films have us beaten there. There are exceptions, and when we succeed we do just as well as the best American film. One of the conclusions I have reached since I came over here is that Canadians want good films, be they British or American, and they would rather they were British.

I should just like to thank you again for our welcome and assure you that from my own angle my visit has been a success. And that I will try to see, when I get home, that there are sent to Canada many good British films, and no poor ones.

MISS NEAGLE:—I have not the faintest idea how to make a speech but it has been a most wonderful experience coming out here—it has been an amazing experience. We took tremendous pains with Victoria, to get things just right, and we had to come to Canada to get them so. In England we had nowhere an authentic picture of her as a

young girl. We had to come to Montreal to see a statue of Victoria as a young queen. We found people have an enormous knowledge of incidents in her life and we could not afford to make any mistakes. We took no liberties whatever with our subject. I feel it a great privilege to have been invited to such a gathering as this, and I thank you all for the opportunity to be present.