

TIME MARCHES ON AND ON

A Hurried Investigation of That Highly Potential Screen Feature

WHEN the voters of Greater New York go to the polls on Tuesday, it is a pretty safe odds-on bet that a sizeable percentage of them will do so with a fresh reminiscence of the most surprising pieces of political persuading that has been put to the public. The emphasis is, of course, to the extraordinary film document in which the familiar March of Time has dramatized the past four years of Mayor La Guardia's career. And if that gentleman is duly re-elected as impartial prophets ordain, a good measure of his success will certainly be due to the wholly inspired and unintended contribution of this film.

Indeed, it is doubtful if ever a vital political campaign, motion picture has had such amazing effectiveness as has this timely résumé of a candidate's claim to favor. The news-reels have been reporting for years the progress of the major campaigns. And yet, in the four hurried weeks since it was unsuspectingly released, this minor epic on Mayor La Guardia has captured the public's fancy and focused its interest on a point as no news-reel has ever done before. In the way of electioneering, it has proved a decided "find."

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But, aside from that, it has again emphasized the established premise of the March of Time—namely, that current events can be most impressively reported through the medium of the motion picture when dramatic continuity is given their unfolding on the screen. Behind every story in the news, according to the theory on which it works, there is a background of significant developments—and it is this background which it seeks to dramatize. To give the news meaning—that's the aim. And now, less than three years old, but already an institution, the March of Time is today one of the most successful and forward-looking features on the screen—a dynamic force for the purveyance of information through the medium of the film.

The idea for the March of Time is generally attributed to a sort of chemical combination of several minds working upon one another, but the success of the enterprise is largely due to the combined efforts of two men, Louis de Rochemont, its producer, and Roy E. Larsen of Time, Inc., which owns the producing organization. Together they put the idea into execution and, by the force of their own belief in it, imbued a growing staff of fellow-workers with the vitality and excitement which are perceptible in their products today.

Actually, the March of Time has no set policy, except to make the news film as compelling as possible. It turns out a new release every four weeks—thirteen releases a year—and each is of two-reel length, or approximately twenty minutes' running time. The pattern which is usually followed includes three subjects in one release, and an attempt is made to vary these so that one treats upon a foreign news topic, one a national subject of immediate interest and one a more general feature of lighter but informative nature.

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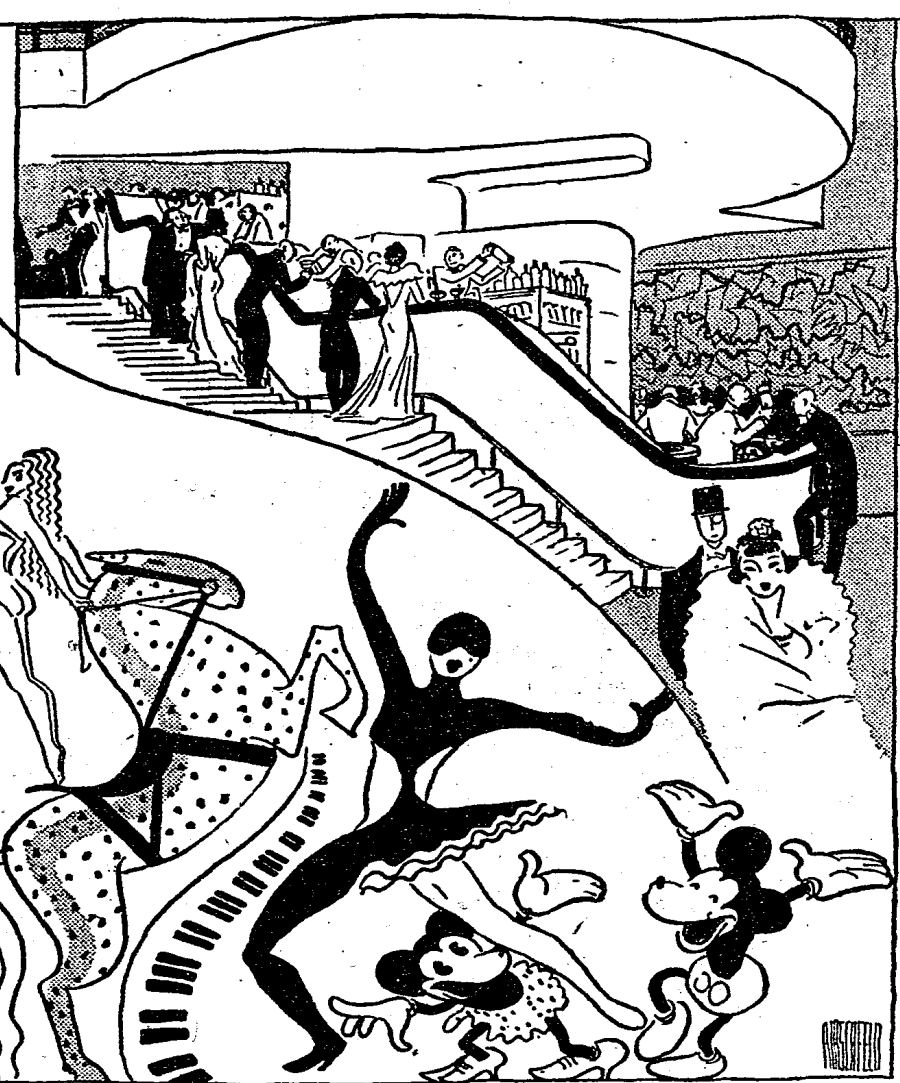
For instance, the release which contained the La Guardia story was prefaced by a round-up pictorial account of the scrap-metal market today—a subject of immediate interest in relation to foreign rearmament programs—and a lighter feature on the "blue laws" (D. O. R. A.) in England. The latest release, which hit the screens of the first-run houses on Friday, treats on the United States Secret Service, the rehabilitation of Manchester, N. H., and the conditions in French Algeria which make a crisis there appear imminent.

This latter feature represents the sort of thing the March of Time strives most to do—that is, spot pretty well in advance a situation or theatre of potential news, get their camera men and directors on the scene before anything happens and stock up a lot of timely background footage which can be edited into a film story just when (preferably) the lid blows off. Obviously, they can't call the shots every time, as they did on the present war in China, but still—as in the Algeria picture—they have a film of pertinent interest which loses nothing through the suggestion of impending conflict. And who knows when the spark might be struck!

The period of time which is devoted to the making of a March of Time release is the same as that between them—four weeks. No sooner is one gotten off than another is put in the works, and the outfit has not yet been able to catch up on itself by so much as one spare feature in advance. The first week of production is given over to planning and preparing the ground work. Headed by Mr. de Rochemont, who is the spark plug of the entire force, the staff lays out its subjects, decides in general what it wants to get and writes a tentative script for each idea.

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Then, the second week, the camera expeditions go out into the field. Their shooting-scripts invariably call for a certain number of "must" shots which are gotten first of all and hustled back to New York headquarters. Then the camera men set about rounding up as much additional material pertaining to the subject as they see. In the meantime, their initial neg-



Hirschfeld views certain of the antics that go on these days at the New International Casino.

atives (the "rushes") have been initiated and run off in New York City. The editors to inspect. More often than not, these first prints give the editors new ideas, or the camera men on the scene will discover new angles to the story which will change the original conception. This means, of course, a change of emphasis and the necessity of taking more pictures.

The third and fourth weeks of a production are then given over to editing and final preparation of the film. This is a period which becomes progressively more hectic as the inevitable deadline draws closer. The countless sequences must be distributed, fitted together and cut. And, when the final print has been squeezed into its allotted two reels, the voice continuity must be written and recorded on the sound track, along with the musical accompaniment. In the last few days of production virtually the entire outfit is working twenty-four-hour shifts.

In addition to the regular American release, the March of Time also produces one subject every four weeks which has some particular interest for the Great Britain market. This is added to the release which is sent overseas. It may be along with the usual three subjects that are seen by American viewers, or it may be substituted for one of them—which is most often done.

Naturally, in the production of which is as compact and highly merged as the March of Time successfully aims to be, an economy of expression must be sought which demands an eternal vigilance. de Rochemont says that there is a great formula for it—that the film itself represents the combined efforts of every one on the production staff to achieve perfection with each release. One of the rules, however, is that there shall be no "wipes" and "dissolves" from one sequence into another which are familiar in most

newsreels. Every cut is made clean, speeding the action and favoring the eye.

Experience, of course, accounts for a lot of the perfection of the March of Time films. Mr. de Rochemont himself is an old newsreel man from 'way back. He was a lieutenant in the navy in 1923, when he resigned and went to work for the International Newsreel. Later, he switched over to Fox and worked among other shorts, the Magic Carpet series and the Adventure of a Newsreel Camera Man. He also worked with Laurence Stallings in producing the documentary film, "The First World War." When the March of Time was originally conceived, he and three other men put the first trial film together. They even had to borrow a camera for the job. Then the first March of Time release was

put on the market in February, 1935, and was shown in 432 theatres. Today, the organization has a staff of near seventy persons and its product is released in close to 11,000 theatres throughout the world.

Now that the original idea has been developed to the proportions of an accepted fixture, Mr. de Rochemont is speculating upon even more worlds to conquer. He hopes to experiment some day with topical news features and perhaps even get around to a new sort of weekly newsreel. A whole generation of young people is coming along, he says, with minds trained to seeing pictures and grasping ideas in that form. The thing is to do the job right, and Mr. de Rochemont feels he is on the track. So do a lot of other people, as time inexorably marches on.