

February 7, 1955

TODD OPENS OWN 'WAR' CAMPAIGN WITH \$7,500,000 BUDGET BARRAGE

Saying that he "wouldn't be intimidated" by the plans of any other companies to make Tolstoy's "War And Peace," Mike Todd yesterday took the "if and maybe" out of his own proposed production of property by confirming, in their presence, the signing of Robert E. Sherwood to screenplay and Fred Zinnemann to direct; "a guesstimate" of a \$7,500,000 budget for the picture to be made in Yugoslavia, and late fall start of production.

Clarification of the position held by his Michael Todd Co., which will produce film as part of its eight-picture franchise with Magna for the Todd-AO 65m process, was made by Todd at a press conference called at Joseph M. Schenck's Holmby Hills home. Schenck, board chairman of Magna Theatres, co-owner with American Optical Co. of Todd-AO, appeared in role of elder statesman, to give his sanction to project in which he said he had no direct interest.

Not Under MPAA Control

While anticipating some sort of dispute over production of the picture, for which both the Italian producer, Dino de Laurentiis, and David O. Selznick also have revealed plans, Schenck, in commenting that both Selznick and Metro had registered the title, said that the Todd Co. isn't bound by the Motion Picture Association agreement governing stories in public domain.

It would be up to the MPAA to decide who should make the picture among its own members, due to this agreement, Schenck declared, but as an outsider the Todd firm isn't committed and is "just as justified as anybody" to screen the property.

If more than one version is made, he stated, "the better picture will get the money." To this, Todd added, "The unconscious genius—the public—has a wonderful way of knowing the difference."

De Laurentiis, while here last week, declared he already had a second unit filming in Finland and planned to deliver film for release by February or March of next year.

Selznick Hurries East

Selznick yesterday afternoon reported he is flying east tomorrow and will have a "formal announcement" when he returns next week.

"I don't know what serious moves they've made," Schenck remarked of the two other producers, "but I do know these gentlemen have been serious," referring to Todd, Sherwood and Zinnemann. Also referring to the "artistry" of Todd, Sherwood and Zinnemann, Schenck added, "I say Mike Todd first because he furnishes the money—and that takes artistry, too."

Todd Disavows 'Humility'

In giving his report of upcoming plans, Todd prefaced with the remark, "Those who know me know I've never been accused of too much humility." He pointed out, too, that he had had a co-production offer made by an intermediary of de Laurentiis, "but I said no through Phil Reisman," Michael Todd Co. prexy.

Reaffirming his deal with the Yugoslavian government for the use of possibly 20,000 to 30,000 soldiers and other facilities required for picture, to be lensed in Eastman-color, Todd stated that the government there is establishing an agency to act as liaison in cooperating with production of picture. Government, to cement closer relationships, is going to turn over two small hotels to his company, Todd reported.

Recruits Free Army

The army and its maneuvers won't be paid, producer said, adding that during his last visit to Belgrade two weeks ago the Yugoslavian Supreme Council was emphatic about their not being paid. Todd likened the cooperation of government aid to our own Government lending assistance to Hollywood producers in making service pictures here. A unit man will go to Belgrade in 30 days to make preliminary arrangements.

Schenck declared, in opening press conference, that he is in sympathy with the Tolstoy book, since he was born in Russia, and believes the public should see it. Sherwood later said he was particularly interested in the political implications of the undertaking, of an American company going to Yugoslavia to make a picture "in no man's land between the free world and the Communist world." He said he felt it was extremely timely and "applicable to the lives we have to lead."

The use of Slavic faces in picture offers a "wonderful opportunity," according to writer, for a realistic drama. He added that he had talked to various producers about the book as long as he could remember. He expects to complete the first treatment in June, then he and Zinnemann will get together in Europe. Final script will be finished in September.

Writer Wins Megger

Sherwood, according to Zinnemann, was the "touchstone" so far as he was concerned, in explaining why he had taken over the assignment of directing. "In fact," he noted, "if any other writer was mentioned I would have been quite skeptical." Writer, he felt, was the only one who could take on a project of "such stature."

Present plans call for exteriors to be filmed in Yugoslavia, and interiors in Europe, probably London, according to Todd. Film will probably go out in release in about four-hour running time, counting intermission.

In enumerating his reasons for not being disturbed by the plans of others to film picture, Todd cited that the Todd-AO process helps to tell the story and is able to encompass the enormous ramifications of the plot. Moreover, he is to have the services of both Sherwood and Zinnemann, latter again handling a Todd-AO film

after having previously done "Oklahoma," and the all-out cooperation of the Yugoslavian government.

Todd documented the foreign government's offer of assistance with a letter sent him last Saturday by Leo Mates, Yugo ambassador in Washington, which expressed enthusiasm for the undertaking.

Credits Schenck For Todd-AO

Producer also said that Schenck made Todd-AO possible with his participation and encouragement, after first seeing the possibilities of what Cinerama could do to stimulate the film industry.

The question of outlets for the first Todd-AO picture, "Oklahoma," is resolving itself, Todd reported. Sufficient projectors are now being turned out by the Phillips Co. and American Optical to equip enough theatres for roadshowing of picture. Todd also pointed out that no physical changes in theatres are required for the process, only screens and projectors.

No exact figure can be set for the final cost of "Oklahoma," it was brought out. There can be no clear line of demarcation between actual production costs and costs of experimenting with the new 65m process. According to Todd, the final figure will be close to \$11,000,000, including cost of development of Todd-AO process. Schenck mentioned "over \$7,000,000," and Zinnemann declared that Rodgers and Hammerstein, who produced "Oklahoma," had put a figure of \$5,700,000 on its cost.

Todd's first picture under his franchise deal with Magna will be Jules Verne's "Around the World In 80 Days," to start "immediately," he reported.