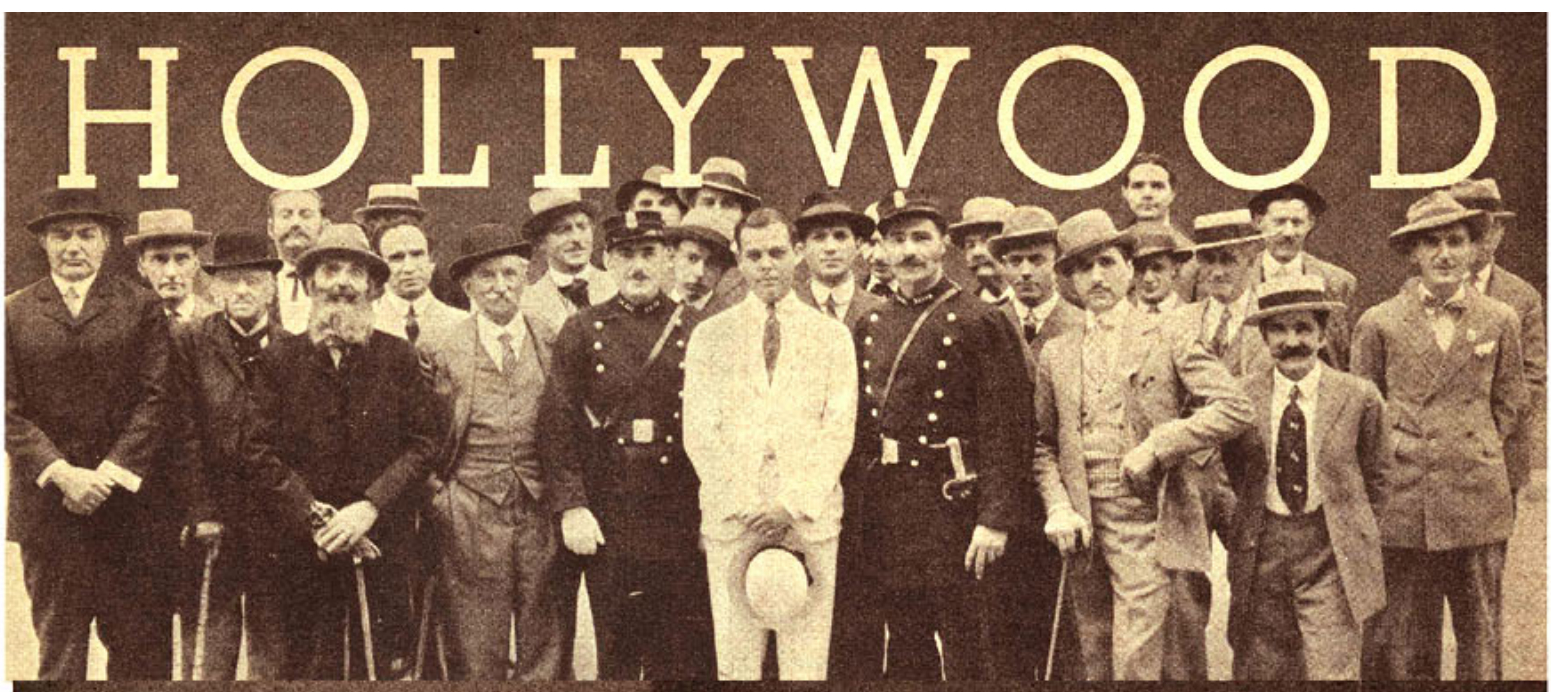

Above: "Extras" waiting to be checked in at a Hollywood studio. The man in white represents one day's work—the other twenty-six, the "extras" who are available for it. Above: "Dress people" showing, at the Central Casting Corporation's review, that they belong in their class.

If You're Movie-Struck, Forget It. DON'T Join the Ranks of the "Extras"—Here Is an Outspoken Warning from One Who Knows

by CAMPBELL MacCULLOCH

EDITOR'S NOTE: Campbell MacCulloch is general manager of the Central Casting Corporation, the Hollywood organization which the motion-picture studios established to select and furnish them with extra players. He was drafted from the United States government service to reorganize and humanize the work of "central casting."

IN Hollywood dwell some ten or twelve thousand misguided folk who cling tenaciously to a couple of really fantastic illusions, and their tenacity is shared by many other thousands elsewhere. These illusions are that it is possible today to make a living as an "extra" and that "extra" work is the way to "break into the movies."

Extra work in motion pictures is just what the word implies—casual employment on a daily basis. By no possibility can it be translated into steady occupation. The individual extra player is of small significance. When he appears he is one of a crowd or assembly. If individual work is needed a "bit" player or an actor is used.

There are several thousand people registered as extras at the Central Casting Corporation. In all studios each day there is work for an average of but 300 registered extras and approximately 300 more unregistered folk, atmosphere or crowd people. The wage runs from $3.20 per day up to $15. The chance that even the types most in demand will average three days a week is remote.

In twenty years it is improbable that more than twenty men and women have broken out of the extra ranks into the upper levels, while hundreds once prominent—even stars and directors—are now in the extra ranks. A competent pari-mutuel figurer would probably place the chances of advancement as five thousand to one against. My own estimate would double that chance. The Central Casting office keeps careful records of the earnings of extra people. There is a bottom earning level below which the records do not go. No record is kept of an extra player whose earnings are less than forty-five dollars a month. And there are just 1,400 people whose earnings reach that figure or better! There are not 200 whose earnings reach $100 a month, and there are perhaps fifty who, because of some special qualifications or good personal salesmanship, will reach $200! And these last few have invested from $1,500 to $2,500 in wardrobe and must spend from $500 to $750 a year in maintaining it!

This sort of thing is all too frequent: A few months ago two little girls, one twelve and the other eight, travel-stained and hungry, appeared at the Central Casting office and announced that they had come to work in motion pictures. Their mother in an Ohio town had scrimped and saved to give them dancing lessons. When she thought they were proficient enough—or when her money gave out—she put them on a bus, unaccompanied, and sent them two thousand miles to Hollywood. Two or three days after arrival, with the co-operation of the Travelers' Aid Society, they were sent back home. Later a letter arrived from the mother announcing that they were now ready to be sent back, as they had vastly improved. It was necessary to wire a social agency in the Ohio town to use every effort to stop them.

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"Extras"

The Central Casting office that gives out "extra" work.

The percentage of women in the extra ranks is almost double that of men, but—and here's an unfortunate fact—there is work for but half as many women as men! And we don't need a diagram to explain that the position of a destitute girl in a strange town is far worse than that of a destitute young man. In the motion picture of today mere beauty is a very secondary requirement, and usually the winner of a home-town beauty contest had better stay home, as ninety-nine times out of a hundred she's just " five dollars' worth of pretty girl."

Perhaps properly, the men and women who have come to extra work from the stage or former screen days believe they should have preference in extra work, but there are hundreds of people who have spent ten or even fifteen years doing extra work and know nothing else—people who by long experience know exactly what extra requirements are—and they think they should have preference.

The ideal solution is, of course, to divide the work evenly throughout the registered list. Unfortunately that is impossible, for certain groups are more in demand than others. What are known as " dress " people, for example, meaning those who have good wardrobes and are competent to portray ladies and gentlemen at smart functions, are more in demand than character people or other special types. And there is always the pressure from those outside the dress group to break into it.

Recently, so persistent was the demand for recognition as " dress " classification that Central Casting Corporation held a review at which any man or woman registered with us was eligible to appear before twelve judges and demonstrate his or her right to that classification. Nearly 1,000 women and some 600 men put in an appearance. As a result the dress classification was largely revised, the change being about 50 per cent—veteran dress people being dropped in favor of newcomers.

But to return to the economic situation. It can best be summed up by stating that there are at least twenty-six persons available for each single day's work as an extra! I'd say that there are seventeen women for each day's work for a woman, and nine men for each day's work for a man!

Of course it is impossible to spread work to cover a situation like that. We have established a daily reminder list composed of the neediest cases and from that we draw as many as we can—once or twice taking over 200 from it. But that is a drop in the bucket of the extra people's need.

The constant cry is " Give us work! " It can't be done to satisfy the need. Until recently, perhaps because of misunderstanding of the problem, the destitute and

"Extras" waiting to be checked in at a Hollywood studio.

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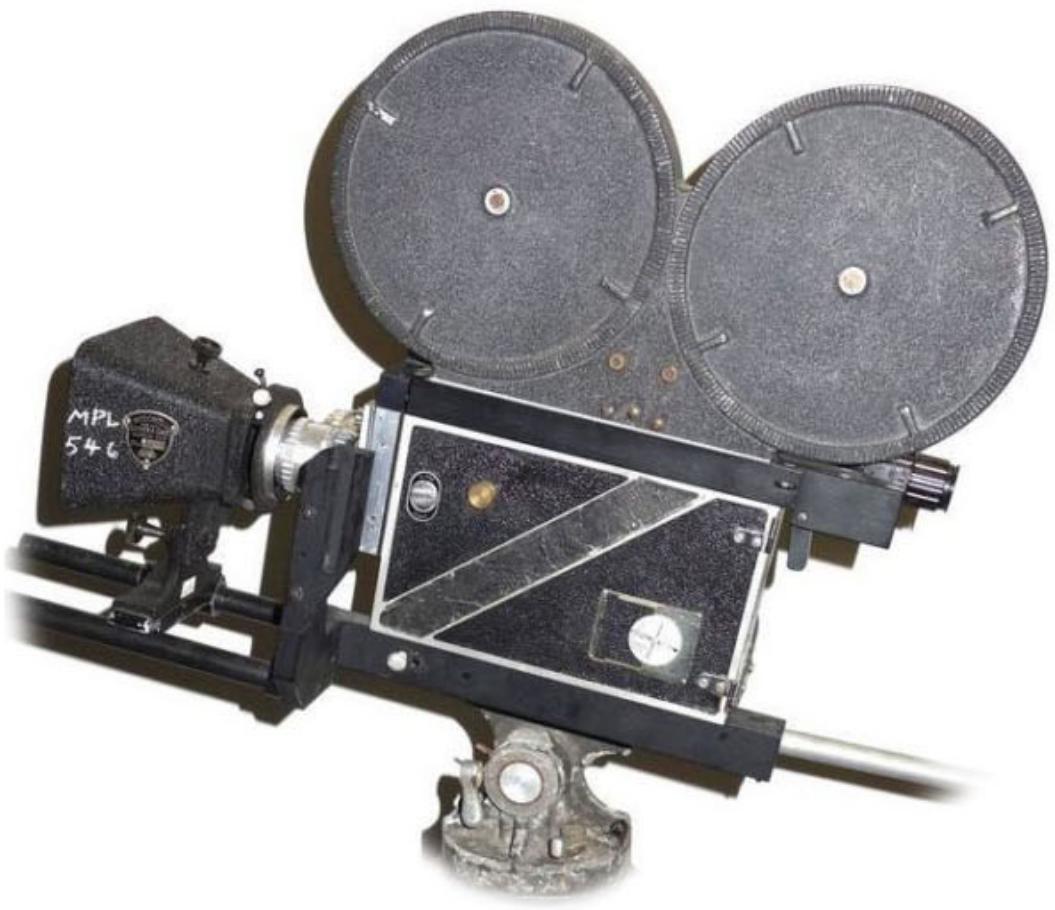
sometimes desperate extra people seeking work were not permitted even to discuss unemployment with this office. As a result, a bitter feeling against the office grew up.

Three months ago this writer established a complaint bureau which aims to explain as fully and patiently as possible what the conditions are; to meet such human needs as it is possible to meet. We have co-ordinated the possibilities that lie in 160 relief agencies in Los Angeles County and have been able to take care of some of the most desperate conditions imaginable. In all, 1,500 cases have come into the complaint bureau and have had some measure of relief provided.

Many a fond mother in the last decade, fired by the success of Jackie Coogan, Shirley Temple, or Jackie Cooper, has visioned her child as drawing a thousand dollars a week. Fifteen hundred have registered their children at Central Casting office. Actually this office can distribute 175 days of work each week to children, and the wage is small and the work hedged about with restrictions.

The situation in general is getting worse with each passing month, and some note of warning must be sounded for the people throughout North America who have their eye on Hollywood. To every man and woman, to every boy and girl everywhere in the United States, Canada, and Mexico: Do not come to Hollywood with the expectation of finding work in motion pictures!



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