

# Write-in Vote Returns Rod Taylor to TV

## PORTRAYS NEWSPAPERMAN IN SAN FRANCISCO

By ERSKINE JOHNSON

HOLLYWOOD (NEA)—The letters of protest poured in as if Robert Young had beaten Lassie over the head with a crowbar—and the write-in vote is returning Rod Taylor to TV screens.

As the star of the "Hong Kong" series, Taylor could have answered all the protests with a Chinese fortune cookie note reading:

"Patience. Must first escape madhouse camouflaged as movie studio."

The letters—11,000 of them—were from fans, mostly feminine, wailing about the demise of the TV show on which handsome bachelor Taylor was clicking with the ladies like James Garner had done in his "Maverick" debut.

What was going on behind the scenes at the studio was like a madhouse. But first let us advise you that Taylor is returning to home screens in the fall. Yes, in the same role of the foreign correspondent with that wonderful sense of humor.

He will even have the same character name. But the show will not be "Hong Kong." This time it will be called, "Dateline: San Francisco."

It will be a good example of just how crazy television can get what with Taylor saying to his new San Francisco buddies:

"I've just been transferred from Hong Kong to San Francisco."

"Politics" is Taylor's diplomatic explanation for the sudden cancelling of the show after only 26 weeks.

But "madness" is more appropriate.

★ ★ ★

A BIG TALENT agency, which sold the show to the network, had a falling out with the TV bosses of the 20th Century-Fox Studio, where it was financed and filmed. To continue the "Hong Kong" series, the studio would be

required to make \$14,000 weekly commission payments to the talent agency. The big studio was so mad at the big talent agency that the show was scrapped in its 26th week.

The sponsor, of course, was howling mad. "Don't worry," said the studio, "we will film a new show starring Rod Taylor." So the new show, "Follow the Sun," was filmed, but without Mr. Taylor, who had ideas of his own. While all the bickering was going on, Taylor went to Italy to star in a movie for MGM.

In reply to public clamor, the 26 "Hong Kong" shows are on the third rerun and filming starts next month on "Dateline: San Francisco." The new show is slated to start in September, perhaps sooner. And in agreeing to move his office from Hong Kong to San Francisco, Taylor won a contract for three big-screen 20th Century-Fox movies as a bonus.

The movie Taylor made in Italy is a swash-buckler, "Sir Francis Drake," in the Errol Flynn tradition. As Drake, he also gets to San Francisco but that was long before there was a Top of the Mark.

The film also brought him romance. While on location in the Bay of Naples, he met Anita Ekberg—she saw him in her binoculars from aboard a passing yacht—and they have been dating ever since. She even flew from Rome to Hollywood to help him celebrate the recent holidays.

About dining out in Rome with blonde Anita, a favorite target of Italian photographers, Taylor grins:

"One night 12 photographers trapped us in a little cafe so we did a 'Hong Kong' out a rear window. But they spotted our car and chased us until we lost 'em by parking in an alley with the lights off. By the time we returned to Anita's villa, they were all out in front waiting for us. It was just like 'La Dolce Vita'—with 'Hong Kong' overtones."



ROD TAYLOR (pictured with France Nuyen in a 'Hong Kong' sequence) stars again as a newspaperman in a television series premiering in the fall. The new series will be called 'Dateline: San Francisco.'