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of ordinary citizens who own, or occasionally hire, a 16mm. projector and a supply of films and amuse themselves and their families and friends with periodic entertainments in the drawing room. To a greater or lesser degree, all these groups and individuals are, or could be, affected by this forthcoming conference.

THE film trade obviously imagines that it has a legitimate case. I must confess, however, that I cannot feel much concern on its behalf. The entertainment industry once had the opportunity to develop and exploit the 16mm. film to its own advantage; but the industry wasn't interested then, mainly because it could see no spectacular profits in the venture. On the contrary, indeed, the whole story of the documentary movement in general, and of the 16mm. film in particular, has been one of struggle to secure public recognition and support in the face not merely of indifference, but sometimes even of active discouragement from the established film industry. Distribution has always been the major problem for the maker of documentary films; the difficulty of securing theatres to show them in. It has only been by the persistence of a comparative handful of enthusiasts, and by the co-operation of Government departments and such commercial enterprises as Shell-Mex and British Commercial Gas Association, that worthwhile 16mm. libraries have been built up and the public has gradually been awakened to their value. Full credit should go to Shell-Mex and similar companies for sponsoring important films dealing with social problems and technical processes; all they get by way of advertising is a credit title, but they have realised that their financial support for films, which often have little bearing on the product they sell, will bring them long-term benefits in public prestige and good-will.

But the entertainment side of the film industry, as a whole, has shown no such public spirit. Some studios, admittedly, have made some very good documentaries and have screened them in 35mm. form on regular theatre programmes, but mostly they have fought shy of this type of entertainment, believing that the public did not want it because it was "too educational." Often the excuse has been that these films are too long to be treated as "shorts."

Now, however, that public recognition has at last been obtained for the 16mm. film, now that more and more people are wanting to see what it has to offer in the way of instruction and entertainment, the film trade shows signs of becoming agitated. I am afraid it is rather too late in the day; they had their chance and they missed it. If, as they seem to complain, too many people for their liking are looking at films in places other than their established theatres, that is largely because they forced them there. They could have imported such films as *Song of Ceylon*, *The River*, *The Plough That Broke the Plains*, *Battle of Britain*, *Battle of Russia*, and *World of Plenty*, in 35mm. form; they could have put them on in their theatres and many of us would have paid money to see them there. Instead, we have had to organise ourselves in little groups in the hope

that some of these pictures would come our way through non-trade channels in 16mm. form.

This fight for the freedom of the 16mm. film and the documentary has already been fought in Britain, and has been won; and one of the war-time methods used was for the Ministry of Information to place some 50 mobile film vans on the roads of Britain with full-length programmes of documentaries to be shown freely to audiences in town or village. What a howl might have gone up if that had been done here!

THE impression we are expected to get from that letter I have quoted is that the trade is primarily actuated by concern for the public safety. The implication is that it is worried about the fire risk when 16mm. screenings are permitted in unlicensed places. This, to my mind, is sheer pretence. Unlike 35mm. film, which is highly inflammable, 16mm. can be ignited only with great difficulty. In any case, if it is safe to hold a dance, or a concert, or a lecture in a church hall or schoolroom it is safe to show 16mm. films there; the risk of panic in the event of fire can be no greater for the one occasion than for the other. The mere taking out of a licence under the Films Act will make no difference; it will be merely an annoyance and an inconvenience. This idea of demanding a licence is, I would argue, no more than a device to limit the places where screenings can be held, and the absurdity of the suggestion about fire risk becomes even more apparent when one considers the comparable situation in Great Britain.

Censorship does not seem to enter into the question here, but the whole British censorship system largely depends on the fact that 35mm. film is highly inflammable, whereas the 16mm. isn't. The British Board of Film Censors is an unofficial body, whose rulings are given official weight only because local bodies are able to impose them on exhibitors through the granting of cinema-opening licences based on a fire-risk clause. The reason why private film societies in Britain have been able to show uncensored films (particularly Russian ones when there was a general censorship ban on them) is because the fire-risk clause does not apply to 16mm. copies, and so there has been no need for an exhibitor's licence.

WHAT probably lies behind this present move in New Zealand is the film trade's old argument that, since people cannot be in two places at once, if they go to see a special 16 mm. screening they will not buy tickets for one of the ordinary programmes on that particular night, and may not, indeed, do so for the rest of the week or month. The theory of the trade seems to be that there is a kind of pool of regular picturegoers, the size of which remains almost constant, and from which the current attractions draw their audiences; so long as the number of attractions is not increased, all the theatres get their fair share of patrons over a period. This is a silly sort of argument, and short-sighted too, from the viewpoint of the

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