

## THE FILM SOCIETIES

(continued from previous page)

However, although the New Zealand societies are concentrating on the 16mm. film, particularly documentaries, it was felt from the start that an attempt should also be made to hire from the film exchanges here certain 35mm. features which have long since disappeared from the normal theatre circuits, but which are of particular interest to the student of the cinema; films such as *Winterset*, *Grapes of Wrath*, *Fury*, *The Informer*, and French productions like *Mayerling*, *Un Carnet du Bal*, and *The Cheat*. All these films were at one time or another screened theatrically in this country, and copies of at least some are probably still in the distributors' vaults, even though the films have long since been milked dry of any general box-office value they may have once possessed.

It would appear, however, that the film exchanges are not favourable to the idea of helping the film societies in this matter. For when the Wellington Film Institute wrote recently to the New Zealand Motion Picture Distributors' Association seeking to hire old films of the type mentioned for the purpose of reviving them at non-public screenings, the following reply was received from the

Secretary of the Motion Picture Distributors' Association:

"Your letter was very fully considered at a meeting of this Association yesterday and I was directed to reply stating that instead of screening the old films mentioned for the study of your members, it would probably be better if your members were influenced to attend the theatres at which current films of a similar type were screened from time to time. If your Institute is particularly interested in any film listed in the current year's product, application to this Association would result in information regarding the theatre and screening date being supplied in sufficient time to enable arrangements to see it being made."

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WHEN this letter was read at a recent meeting of the Wellington Film Institute, together with that from the British Film Institute, some very frank criticism of the film distributors' attitude was expressed by members. Their letter was described as "a contemptuous brush-off, resulting either from ignorance, or poor taste, or perhaps a combination of both." The ignorance, it was said, was revealed by the fact that the Association was obviously unaware of the developments in the film society movement overseas and particularly of the co-operation between the film industry and the British Film Institute; and the poor taste was shown by the fact that "the distributors had simply tried to use the opportunity to sell some more seats for their current films."

It was pointed out that the Institute had not sought any special concession, but merely wanted to hire old films on a commercial basis to show to members. The aims of the film societies were not in the least antagonistic to the film industry: on the contrary, by drawing attention to the best that the cinema had to offer, by emphasising the artistic potentialities of the screen, and by seeking to encourage a higher standard of public appreciation, they were actually giving valuable assistance to the industry in its efforts to make better and better pictures.

One member pointed out that there had been an announcement to the effect that the industry was proposing to launch an intensive national publicity campaign in New Zealand "to combat injurious criticism levelled against the industry" and to emphasise the cinema's service to the community. "That's a good idea," he said, "but if the industry wants to draw public attention to the virtues of the cinema, the attitude shown in the letter that has been read seems a curious way to go about it."

Another member expressed the view that in this matter the New Zealand distributors were swimming against the tide of public opinion. It was decided to acquaint the Association with the

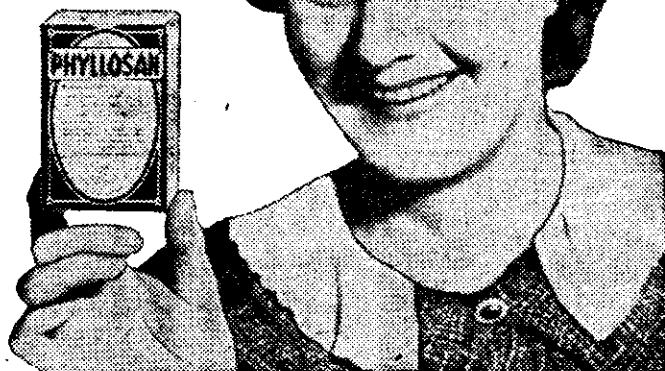
relevant contents of the letter from the British Film Institute.

The meeting also decided that an attempt should be made as soon as possible to form a federation of New Zealand Film Societies and to co-operate with the B.F.I. in investigating the possibilities of an Imperial Federation of Film Societies.

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IN the meantime, although it is not at the moment possible, because of the distances involved, to get films on loan in New Zealand from the Loan Section of the British National Film Library, the British Film Institute has expressed its willingness to make prints of classic films (such as *Potemkin*, *The Last Laugh*, *Dr. Caligari*, etc.), available to New Zealand societies at cost. And the cost, particularly for 16mm. prints, is remarkably small. The Wellington Film Institute is already in a position to purchase on its own behalf two or three of these film classics; it intends to get them here as soon as possible; more will come later; and the proposal is that after these copies of early screen masterpieces have done the rounds of the film societies they should be presented to the New Zealand National Film Library, where they will be widely available, particularly for use in schools if desired.

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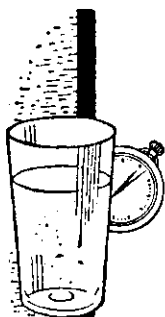
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