

# THE CINEMA AND UNITED NATIONS

SOME weeks ago, it may be remembered, in discussing the activities of Mr. Rank I suggested that the real danger of his attempt to secure a market for British films in America was that British films would have to ape Hollywood ones, and so would lose their national identity. With reference to this, a reader has sent me an article by Philip Carr in the London *Spectator* for November 30, 1945. It is entitled "One Hollywood" (on the analogy of Wendell Willkie's *One World*) and discusses the "stark reality" of the fact that, in spite of developing local production in many countries, the enormous majority of the films which are presented all over the world come from Hollywood and, for various unchallengeable reasons, are likely to continue to do so.

"It is not necessary to be a political nationalist in order to be a convinced advocate of national individualism in thought and character and art (says Philip Carr). It is a commonplace that this national individualism is breaking down. What is less generally realised is that it is being broken down far less by improved communications, by international political ideologies or by direct propaganda than by the fact that most of the moving pictures shown, not only in Great Britain but all

over the world, come from a single place in the west of the United States. . . .

"One would like to think that what is being gradually imposed upon the mental habits and imaginations of the common people of the world really represents the best in 'the American way of life,' though even this uniformity would hardly be a good thing. But of course it is not so. What the average Hollywood film has to show is not, and does not even pretend to be, the best of anything, except occasionally of ingenious clowning. . . . It is almost always decorated with a meretricious exaltation of mere wealth and tasteless luxury. Nor is it genuinely American. It is not typical of American life, nor of organic life of any kind. . . . It is merely a jumble of the sort of inconsequent cheap effects and showy vulgarity—taking the word in its bad and not its good sense—which the uneducated but financially cunning showmen—some of them not even American—who put it together shrewdly imagine to be likely to appeal to the equally ignorant but simple mass of the big public."

After discussing and giving evidence of the universal influence of the American film, Philip Carr declares that in writing like this he is not attacking the cinema, or even the Hollywood form of it, because such an attack would be futile. For the cinema is irresistible, and Hollywood has become nearly, if not quite, irresistible also. "At the same time, serious people in all countries, including the United States, may perhaps ask themselves whether it is a healthy

thing to leave to a private monopoly in this one country such a powerful instrument in the formation of the character of all the peoples in the world."

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BUT if it is futile to attack, is there no way to find some remedy for this state of affairs? Rejecting the suggestion that Britain might protect her own film industry by excluding Hollywood films altogether, on the ground that it simply would not work, Philip Carr also rejects the idea of complete nationalisation of the industry, as in Russia, because he thinks this would place intolerable limitations on the freedom of artistic expression. This does not, however, mean that *laissez-faire* is the answer. French films, though made by private companies working under conditions of complete freedom, are artistically good for two reasons: because the people who make them are nearly all artists, and because the people they are made for, the French, happen to be an artistic people. "But they are not an artistic people because art has been left to itself. They have been educated by generations of State-supported art, imposing its traditions from above."

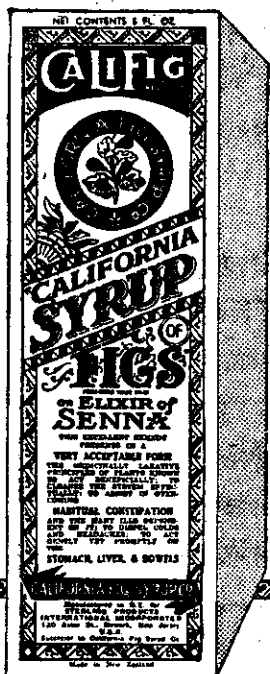
The writer then arrives at his conclusion, to which all these quotations have been building up. It is a statement with special relevance to what I wrote previously about Mr. Rank, but it has very much wider application:

*"I believe the solution must be sought in the fact that in this, as in so many other things, we have come to the end of what can be achieved on the national plane alone. It may sound absurd to say that the United Nations Organisation could usefully be employed in working out agreed artistic and moral and social standards for so apparently frivolous a thing as the cinema; but I am convinced that this is the truth, and that it is only by international understanding that the national character of films, as of many other things, can be preserved."*

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THAT is the crux of the matter. It is, of course, a conclusion that has been reached by a good many other persons, including that Dr. Viktor Fischl, formerly of the Czechoslovakian Ministry of Information in London, whose opinions on the world cinema were once quoted on this page. One of them is worth repeating:

"The film is an important weapon for democracy. Why not, therefore, include the arsenal of the films in any system of the international defence of world peace? And just as an international army demands an international staff, why not create, within the framework of the new international organisation, an international



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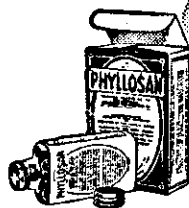
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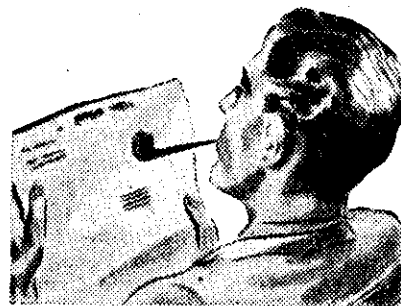
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