

"THE ARTS BELONG TO EVERYONE"

Council's Work in Post-war Britain

THE Arts Council of Great Britain, known during the war as the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) has just issued its second annual report, and it's possible to get some idea now of the shape in which its services will remain—as a permanent arrangement, and a lasting necessity of the new order in Britain. CEMA's job in the war was to replace the normal sources of supply of aesthetic entertainment, which had been disorganised by the circumstances of the moment. That necessity has passed, but another remains, which is to supplement rather than to replace, and to encourage by setting a high standard; also to distribute, since the arts have been confined in the past to centres where they were commercially profitable. The continuance in peacetime of this State-supported service is an acknowledgment that the arts properly belong to everyone, and that if they are not put within everyone's reach through private enterprise, something should be done about it—as it was in wartime, when the need seemed much more

urgent. The publication of the report has been the occasion here for the Press to consider the Art Council's achievement and its future, and I made it the occasion to call, on behalf of *The New Zealand Listener*, and find out what was going on.

A good deal that's interesting is going on. E. W. White, Assistant Secretary to the Council, handed me a copy of the annual report (a fine piece of printing in itself) and explained some of the salient points of the Council's policy.

Direct and Indirect Action

It works in two ways: through existing organisations which can show that they are non-profit-making, and are ploughing back their takings into the particular art they are devoted to (for example, the semi-co-operative London Philharmonic Orchestra, but not the London Symphony Orchestra); and through new ventures, directly sponsored with full responsibility. Where these new ventures succeed, the organisation is handed over to local people, with advice and guarantees offered, but where there is not sufficient demand to sustain the venture, it is allowed to drop. Thus

By Airmail—Special to "The Listener" from London

the Council's Grant in Aid (now £350,000 altogether) is used where it will do most good. Yet there may always be under-populated parts of the country where this policy can hardly be applied, for instance, isolated parts of Scotland and Wales, where the number of people interested in the arts is bound to be few—perhaps even too few—and here the Council considers that it still has a mandate to make the arts accessible to them. In most cases, though, its chief function is to prove what could not be proved without the backing of a large organisation—just as the British Council, now working within the field of the Commonwealth as the Arts Council is working within Great Britain, has recently proved that it is practicable and worthwhile to send an orchestra (the Boyd Neel) to the Antipodes.

The policy of operating through existing organisations can be worked, in the main, in drama and music, but not in the visual arts—there was no organisation big enough to do what was needed. So in this case, the Council is still working by direct provision. It has

its own service for assembling exhibitions, packing them, routing them round the country, and supplying lecturers to go with them. As *The Times* says: "Though not everyone will approve equally of each exhibition, at least a body which has circulated works by Paul Klee, the Hickman Bacon collection of early English water-colours, and a superlative collection of Spanish old masters, cannot be accused of partiality."

Music Clubs

One point Mr. White made about the Council's peacetime work is that "workers" are not thought of separately. It wants them to be a part of the normal audience. Factory canteen concerts were run by CEMA and ENSA during the war, but with the coming of peace the special wartime conditions which had led to their enthusiastic reception had disappeared. At the same time, however, the Arts Council assumed responsibility for the continuance of the music clubs for war-workers which ENSA had started. These are now run on popular lines, and membership is not confined to the factories from which they started, but is open to all in the districts they serve. About 25 "Industrial Music Clubs" are in existence, meeting weekly or fortnightly after working hours, alternating professional recitals with gramophone evenings.

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