



S. P. Andrew photograph  
E. S. ANDREWS  
Producer, National Film Unit

# A DREAM COMES TRUE

## New Zealand Films For The People, By The People

(Written for "The Listener")

AN official advertisement in the papers, one or two notices of staff appointments—these are all the news the general public has received so far of what may become a very important development of New Zealand's own film industry. This article reports what has happened and suggests what it is hoped will happen.



Spencer Digby photograph  
JOHN GRIERSON  
His arguments carried weight

THE story begins back in 1922 when the Internal Affairs Department, followed later by the Government Tourist and Publicity Department, hit upon the idea of using film as an advertising method. This was almost a revolution in itself. In those times, film meant the story picture, very silent, over-dramatic, mostly melodramatic, and, at its best, slapstick. To use film for showing real life, even if it were only scenic life was not a step forward, it was a leap, especially in New Zealand, where film was essentially an imported marvel. The proposal, however, was acted upon, and A. A. F. Mackenzie, a man of long experience since an apprenticeship to a photographer in Scotland in the days when even still photographs were a costly curiosity, was given a Government contract. He built the present Miramar studios, which were purchased outright by the Department in 1936. His services were retained, and his experience is still available at Miramar.

His staff were more capable than their duties allowed them to be. Film theory was not at that stage as far advanced as film technique, but H. H. Bridgman worked photographic miracles, and Charles Barton, another fine cameraman, brewed chemical mixtures which made a fine art of processing. C. J. Morton is now, and was then, one of those unusual people who can sit for the shortest possible time at a film cutting bench, surround himself with the greatest possible tangle of twining film, and come out of the mix with the best possible arrangement of sequences.

### Achievement From Revolution

It was a revolution that they began at all. It was an achievement that they kept going. During the depression, staff was cut, but only to a minimum. There remained at Miramar, and available for New Zealand, the equipment, and the nucleus of a staff capable of giving the country its own film industry.

Their main task throughout had been to put New Zealand into moving pictures. The film unit at Miramar began as a medium for tourist publicity purposes almost pure and very simple. It turned out travelogues by the mile, pictures of large tourists climbing out of larger cars

beneath large hotel porticos at the foot of large mountains or lakes with a dark red filter making sunset scenes at mid-day.

Now, Miramar is setting out to put a new sort of New Zealand into its pictures. The scenically beautiful New Zealand cannot be avoided in the process, and no one would wish that it should be, but the National Film Unit is going to bring the scenery to life by putting people and cities and factories into it, wars, and peace, work as well as play, humanity at large as well as nature run amuck.

### Sources of Inspiration

The Unit's inspiration comes from diverse sources. Almost two decades ago a man named Flaherty made pictures like *Nanook of the North* and *Man of Aran*, the latter most familiar to the run of New Zealand audiences. He had no cast, no studio, no long list of producers and directors. He had a camera, the Eskimos of the North or the 'people of Aran, where men and women struggled for a living against natural forces. His studio was the open sea, his sets the ice or Atlantic rollers, arctic blizzards, or the stormy coasts of Aran, the crude dwelling places of the people.

These were not story pictures, not newsreels, but something in between the two, with more real emotional power

than either. This was reality, and Flaherty's discovery was the discovery that reality could be made the star turn in romance.

Flaherty's first inspiration was more or less sunk on the rocks of Hollywood's extraordinary prejudice against doing the sensible thing. He influenced the big-business film industry, but only subjectively. He inspired a few directors to make life on the screen look more like life as it really is lived. The direction and photography of *The Iron Horse* or *Grapes of Wrath* were in a similar tradition. But the real job of developing the ideal of these "documentary" films remained in the hands of a few individuals who worked far from the lights of Hollywood or Elstree, with little monetary reward, but with the satisfaction of artists doing work that would survive a million star-spangled box-office wonders from the amusement factories.

### Grierson and His Group

Russian directors were doing the same sort of work, but real impetus was given the documentary film by a group of young, and not-very-well-paid director-producer-cameramen who worked for the British Empire Marketing Board's Film Unit. This was established to show the public how their food was handled. Its greatest success was in showing the

public how film could be handled. John Grierson is accepted as the leader of this group, which developed into the British G.P.O. Unit, and many of whose members now operate under the British Ministry of Information's control. Grierson and his fellows proved that the romance of reality can be far more effective than the romance of unreality.

The New Zealand public has not often been fortunate enough to see their work. But a good deal of it has been shown to semi-private audiences. A handful of organisations developed in this country and imported and screened the films they wanted to see.

A prime-mover of this movement was a young man by the name of E. S. Andrews. He was until recently editor of the New Zealand Educational Institute's Journal *National Education*. The few documentary films which it had been possible to secure for New Zealand showing excited his interest and, when Grierson himself came to New Zealand two years ago, Andrews was encouraged in his conviction that New Zealand should, and could, do work along the same lines.

### Support From The Government

The Government became interested in the proposal, as the only organisation supporting a permanently established film studio in New Zealand, and Grierson's forcible arguments in favour of the suggestion were just the support Andrews required for his idea that New Zealand people should make more and better New Zealand films about New Zealand. His enthusiasms were shared by J. T. Paul, Director of Publicity, whose interest made it practically possible for the dream to come true.

E. S. Andrews is now producer at Miramar, and under his wing has gathered additional staff to reinforce that handful of men who have been keeping alive through many discouraging years the idea that making films was not a magic trick exclusive to countries over the waters.

His film unit works within a studio organisation of which the business head is R. W. Fenton, lately returned from the Middle East, where he held rank as Major in an artillery unit.

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A SHOT FROM the National Film Unit's production "Wings Over New Zealand"