

"PROPAGANDISTS WITH GOOD CONSCIENCES"

National Film Unit's First Year

ON the completion of the New Zealand National Film Unit's first year of working, we invited the producer, E. S. Andrews, to tell us what the venture has achieved up to the present and what it hopes to achieve in the future. Here is his comment:

THE National Film Unit set off 12 months ago full of high hope and a set of responsibilities, the full scale of which only became apparent as the months went by. The immediate job was—and still is—to inform New Zealanders of war-time developments in their own country and to provide, when possible, news of the men overseas. The medium was to be weekly four-minute newsreels and monthly 10-minute films which would give scope for more detailed statement.

Based on the material resources of the Government Tourist Department's Studios, and stiffened by the photographic craftsmanship of the remnants of that department's technical staff, the new unit soon got into its stride. The tangible result, to date, is upwards of 60 newsreels completed, a dozen longer films, and a miscellaneous group of "special appeal" trailers made to order in support of various patriotic campaigns. The ground covered has ranged from Dunedin to Kaitea and out across the oceans to the Middle East.

Aim And Achievement

The aim from the start has been to give straight information without propagandist dressing up. We have said in pictures, though not always on the soundtrack, that New Zealand has armaments—tanks, 'planes, guns, bombs; some, in fact, of all the paraphernalia of war. We have shown the change-over in factories from luxury production to munitions-making; we have shown the army at work and at play; we have turned a brief spotlight on other changes and growing points in this community's way of life.

Some things the unit has been unable to say for reasons of security. Dispositions of troops, numbers of tanks and guns, types of 'planes and all the other oddments of fact which might be of use to the enemy have been omitted where necessary. But no regular movie patron can now be ignorant of the general shape of the war in New Zealand. What the cameras see, is put on the screen. We would agree, however, that thus far we have shown only the surface shape of things.

This much we can say in gratitude as creative workers in Government employment: that no one, high or low, has con-

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we too understand that it is not only a war we are preparing to make together, but a peace we are proposing to achieve and that both the winning of the war and the achievement of the peace depend not upon charts and blue prints and learned treatises, but upon the success of the men and women of our two countries in coming to an understanding of each other as men and women.

strained our consciences or hindered our production but Tojo and Hitler and their like. In this fact lies our hope for the future. Neither we nor our audiences can rest content with four-minute reportage, however capably done. Constantly developing technical achievement creates finer subtleties of reporting, to the point at which the camera may cut under the merely photogenic surface to the fundamentals of social and economic change, and across national barriers to international understanding. When reporting thus bites deeper into the social and economic texture it becomes interpretative, i.e., propagandist. However studiously bias is avoided in this kind of film-construction, the finished job will influence its audiences towards change or towards the *status quo*. This is the inescapable dilemma of all information services, as it is also the absolute justification for placing those of national scope, as ours is, under the control of the people's representatives. It is a power too great to be left to private individuals, and a national function of far too much importance to be neglected. As propagandists with very good consciences, we can say from experience that audiences have nothing to fear from sectional interests in local films, and everything to gain from the long-range planning and organisation which Government sponsorship makes possible.

"Triumph of Commonsense"

These are some of the problems foreseen, some of the theories discussed before the National Film Unit was set up. To us, it seems that 12 months experience has set the seal of validity upon them, as it has on other problems and theories of internal organisation. It appeared from the first that the most effective organisation to produce film information for a democracy was a democracy of talents; and so it has proved in practice in spite of the Public Service hierarchy of salaries and other administrative oddities not possible to avoid when a creative organisation is wedged into the interstices of an entirely different type of structure. It is a triumph of commonsense and a considerable tribute to the elasticity of mind of the Public Servants concerned that the total output of the National Film Unit should be controlled by the Director of Publicity and the Prime Minister's Department, while the bills are paid in the first instance, and the administrative details attended to, by the Tourist Department.

It is the successful manipulation of these very oddities of administration and technique which makes the National Film Unit not only a successful information service but also a working model for any further Government excursions into the fields of creative work.

COME OUT AND FIGHT

Yes, this means you, and you, and you . . . the men and women of New Zealand with regular incomes and money in the bank. Come out and FIGHT! For the war is on in New Zealand—the war of money—the war of production. Everybody is in THAT war!

No matter what your job or your age may be, if you have any money you must put it into the fight.

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