

Wanted: Central



The Artcraft Theatre, in Molesworth Street, Wellington, which, it has been suggested, could serve as a central theatre for the musical and dramatic societies of the Capital. The Artcraft, which is at present being used as a talkie theatre, is opposite Parliament Buildings.

THAT the time is ripe—and more than ripe—for the establishment of a theatre devoted solely to the interests of the musical and repertory societies of Wellington, was the view expressed to a "Radio Record" representative last week by various interested people. Enthusiasm for the project was expressed in many quarters, and it is hoped that the scheme will not be allowed to die a natural death.

The general idea is that a picture theatre in the city—the Artcraft Theatre in Molesworth Street, is the one most freely mentioned—should be acquired and turned into a cultural centre for the musical and dramatic interests of Wellington. The "Radio Record" inspected the theatre during the week-end and, apart from the limitations of the stage, it looks very suitable. The building is solidly constructed, is about 18 or 19 years old and has excellent acoustic properties. The seating capacity is about 700, the seats being comfortable and in good repair. There is a dress circle with ample lounge space on both the circle and stalls floors, while there would be no car parking problem in the vicinity of the theatre. At the present time the theatre is controlled by Kemball Theatres, Limited, but Mr. W. R. Kemball, junior, expressed the opinion that there has long been a need for a centre in Wellington with which the cultural interests of the city could be identified.

"There is no reason why a theatre in Wellington should not grow into a miniature Old Vic," said Mr. Leon de Mauny, conductor of the Wellington Symphony Orchestra, when approached on the subject. "The Old Vic was started many years ago by Madame Edith Conns, a wealthy woman who left a trust fund for the administration of the theatre. It is now in the hands of Miss Lillian Bayliss—and has grown into one of the biggest theatrical institutions in Great Britain. The

theatre has provided a wonderful training ground for young students, and, in the days when I lived in London, there was both an operatic and dramatic company performing. Grand opera was presented three times a week—two evening performances and a matinee—and the other four nights were taken up with Shakespeare. There were 27 people in the orchestra for the operatic presentations and a smaller number for the Shakespearean evenings.

"The enthusiasm was infectious and, although nobody was earning much, all the young students were as keen as mustard, doing all their own costume and scenery designing. Sybil Thorndike is one of the Old Vic graduates—and so is Tudor Davies. The locality—the Old Vic is in one of the most atrocious parts of London, almost in a slum area—hasn't detracted from its popularity one iota. The public has been attracted, and continues to be attracted, by the artistic worth of the programmes and by the cheapness of the seats. Some years ago the seats ranged from about five shillings down to three-pence. I think the prices are a little higher now.



MR. LEON DE MAUNY.
"Establish a theatre in Wellington along the lines of the Old Vic."

"The Old Vic is run on a big scale, of course, but there is no reason why Wellington shouldn't regard it as a model for a central theatre. There would, I think, be the need for establishing a fund of some thousands of pounds as a guarantee against loss. But there is little reason why there should be a loss with such bodies as the Wellington Symphony Orchestra, the Apollo Singers, the Harmonic Society, the Wellington Repertory Theatre, the Male Voice Choir, the Thespians, and the numerous smaller musical and dramatic societies to lend it support. I think a good idea would be to run seasons of music and drama on semi-professional lines until the theatre was firmly entrenched."

"The general scheme is very sound," said Mr. W. S. Wauchop, producer for the Wellington Repertory Theatre, "and I have felt for years that there is an opening in Wellington for a small theatre with up-to-date accommodation both on the stage and in the audi-