

Censorship To Be More Drastic

Insistence Upon Sex is Deplored

34 Films Totally Banned During 1931

The much-awaited report of the British Board of Film Censors for the year ended December 31, 1931, is issued to-day. It shows that, while the amount of film viewed by the Censor during 1931 was the smallest submitted to the Censorship since its inception, the number of rejections and exceptions showed a marked increase over previous years.

The number of films to which the examiners took exception rose during the year to 17.83 per cent. of the films certificated. The total footage examined was 5,585,908 ft., embracing 1,951 subjects. This represented a decrease of 1,623,398 ft., or 324 subjects less than in 1930.

Thirty-four films were totally rejected, the reasons given including the following:—

- Materialised figure of Christ.
- Blasphemy and comic treatment of religious subjects.
- Travesty of religious rites.
- Treating marriage with contempt.
- Death treated with vulgar flippancy.
- Gross and brutal travesty of prison life.
- Hospital scenes treated with vulgar levity.
- Physiological enormities.
- Suggestive theme acted by children.
- Unrelieved sordid scenes.
- Prolonged and gross brutality and bloodshed.
- Scenes in houses of ill-repute.
- Lives of thoroughly immoral people.
- Collusive divorce.
- Stories in which the criminal element is predominant.
- Objectionable bedroom scenes.
- Habitual youthful depravity.
- Habitual immorality.
- Offensive political propaganda.
- Gross and objectionable dialogue.

Of the feature films censored, 44 silent and 254 sound films were given "U" certificates, and 18 silent and 317 sound films were passed in the "A" category.

The report states that "there has unquestionably been a tendency of late for films to become more and more daring. Subjects coming under the category termed 'sex' films, others containing various phases of immorality and incidents which tend to bring the institution of marriage into contempt, show a marked increase in number.

"It cannot be denied that this tendency is much to be deplored and that it is distinctly harmful to the best interests of the screen. Even when the story is not in itself wholly immoral, there appears to be a desire to stress the unpleasant aspect, which is best described as 'sex appeal,' with a wealth of details which is altogether prohibitive for public exhibition.

"The Board has always taken exception to stories in which the main theme is either lust or the development of erotic passions, but the President has come to the definite conclusion that more drastic action will have to be taken with regard to such films in the future. This opportunity is taken of notifying the whole trade of the standpoint he proposes to adopt... the Board is confident that it will have the full support of the cinema-going public in its attitude and that the President's note of warning will be loyally exploited by the trade."

"There are certainly some producers," the Report says, "who delight to show the female form divine in a state of undress, and during the year their numbers have appeared to increase. There has also been a move in a similar direction so far as men

are concerned. The objectionable aspect is the tendency upon every conceivable occasion to drag in scenes of undressing, bathroom scenes and the exhibition of feminine underclothing, which are solely introduced for the purpose of giving the film what is termed in the trade 'a spicy flavour.'"

When sound films were first introduced it was necessary that scripts should be submitted with films. The script is of very great assistance to the examiners, but in most cases recently it has not been available. The Board requests that in future scripts will be submitted with all films. The practice of the Board, with a view to prevent money being unnecessarily expended, has been to consider production material before films have been actually produced. Increasing advantage has been taken of this system, although expressions of opinion in the preliminary stage do not affect the decision of the Board upon the completed film.

It is noteworthy, however, that during the past year 46 subjects have been considered in this way, and of these only two have required modification afterwards.

The Report further deals with the attitude of the Ministry of Home Affairs for Northern Ireland and of Local Licensing Authorities in Britain, and states that the result of a Home Office inquiry by questionnaire into the situation affecting censorship locally, will be published shortly. It is suggested in the Report that from information received by the B.B.F.C. there can be little doubt that the number of complaints will be found to be exceptionally small.

After referring to the appointment of the Consultative Committee and to the approval of its activities by the Home Secretary the Report stresses Sir Herbert Samuel's remarks that interference in cinema regulations is a delicate and difficult matter and that the present censorship had up to the present time worked well.

Dealing with the question of young people and "A" films, the Report, which is signed by Edward Shortt, President, and J. Brooke Wilkinson, Secretary, describes this problem as "not one of censorship at all, but one of politics." "Whether a local authority has the right to take the position of the parent and accept all responsibility of the child, brings the subject purely into the arena of politics, and it is outside the province of the B.B.F.C. to express any opinion on the matter."

The Report deals at length with recent public criticism, much of which, it states, is based upon ignorance of facts or coloured by personal taste. It is pointed out that it is not part of the censor's duties to criticise films, but merely to decide what is, or is not, permissible as reasonable entertainment for the average members of the public. Reference is made to the fact that the Report of the Mothers' Union, published during the year, suggested that advertisements of films and titles are frequently more lurid and suggestive than the films themselves, and that a great deal of the criticism of cinema programmes is exaggerated. Of 618 films viewed on behalf of the Mothers' Union, only 21 were considered to be "below the code."