

Cutting from issue dated.....27.11.1944.....

FILMS by RICHARD WINNINGTON

Rank versus Rank

LAST year Two Cities Films, with the consent of Mr. Rank, produced a documentary film on the Abercrombie-Paton-Watson Plan for the rebuilding of blitzed Plymouth.

For a fiction-film-producing concern this was a bold step, the general aim being to replace with intelligent British celluloid on British screens some of the wilder nonsense of American B films.

The completed film, "The Way We Live," then went into the hands of General Film Distributors (the Rank distributing company), and was shown to the exhibitors. Fortunately for the Press and the public and Two Cities Films and the citizens of Plymouth, a distinguished critical colleague smuggled herself into the trade show. She was thus able, by forcing an issue, to prevent the sidetracking and suffocation of an important British film.

For the exhibitors were so disdainful and the distributors so apprehensive that it had been decided not to show the film to the Press at all until the critics raised their voices and were allowed to see it.

The Trade Press reviews, written for exhibitors, praise it as "intelligent, thoughtful, comprehensive," and sound the warning note, "its wider appeal will be restricted to thinking audiences."

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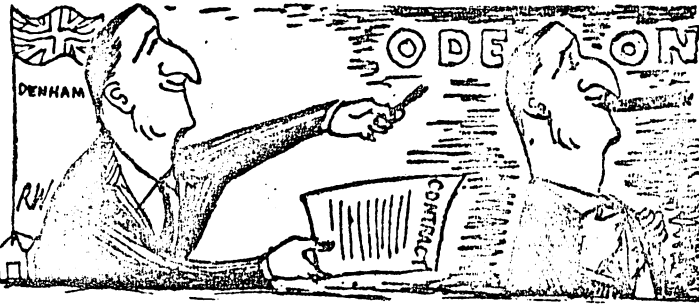
THIS interesting sequence of events at once displays two truths. First the irreconcilability of Rank the producer of British films with Rank the exhibitor of Hollywood films (through two of Britain's largest circuits), a contradiction that forces Mr. Rank to reject with the right hand what he has made with the left hand.

And second, that the critics are not, as Mr. Rank would have it, entirely useless and destructive.

"The Way We Live" has had two public showings at Warrington and Coventry and on Monday it will have its premiere at Plymouth. It has not yet been booked for exhibition.

Now let me say that this stimulating 64-minute film has far more of the attributes of entertainment, such as speed, tension, humour and humanity, than a dozen recent A films. It is not a political tract—all parties and interests involved in the argument are allowed their spokesmen—although it is a vivid social commentary.

Nor is it an impassioned, emo-



"We're not monopolists, are we?"—J. Arthur Rank to Joseph A. Rank

tional play for our sympathies or an illustrated lecture, though it perfectly explains the Plan and the obstructions that beset its fulfilment.

It is all that the London Plan film should have been and wasn't, and its faults are so slight and so obvious that they can be ignored. I think it represents the mature British social-fiction film, and I think, properly exploited, that it would succeed with almost any audience.

Thirty-year-old Jill Craigie, who wrote and directed "The Way We Live," has a valuable flair for characterisation and satire. The non-professional cast—councillors, sailors, engineers, mothers, fishermen, Sir Patrick Abercrombie, James Paton-Watson, Lady Astor, Michael Foot, M.P., the Lord Mayor and Corporation of Plymouth—have all a quick veracity.

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IN the fictional kernel to the film she has drawn an evacuated British working-class family without an atom of condescension or caricature. The adolescent daughter, restless and stirring, the father, sceptical and indomitable, the harassed mother and the mother-in-law are portrayed with a warmth of honesty not equalled in any film since "Millions Like Us."

Praise must be given to the acting of Francis Lunt, as the father, and to 17-year-old Patsy Scantlebury, as the daughter. She has already signed a contract with the Rank Organisation.

You will, by the grace of Mr. Rank, be stirred and moved by this film, which is wholly of the cinema and of Britain and of our times, which is lucid and hopeful and clear-eyed. And you will note once again, hearing the musical score of Gordon Jacob, that British sound tracks are ahead of any others.

If the topicality and intelligence of "The Way We Live" is considered by exhibitors too heavy a burden for your unthinking minds, then protest with all you have got.

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Arnold, Lewis Stone and Lionel Barrymore) who don't believe in Anything. That is, not until little Margaret O'Brien, the granddaughter of the girl they all three of them loved and lost a half century before, comes over from Ireland. Then they soften up and believe in Love and Fairies and they all have a cry together and the little people believe in humans and so, in spite of all that M.-G.-M. have done in this film, I do still. Glory be.

THE two fiction films of the week take us, in the pregnant phrase from one of them, right into "God's glorious kindergarten."

"Cluny Brown" (Odeon, Directed by Ernst Lubitsch) is the most fatuous film I have seen in years. A sort of serene arcness indicates the intentions to be in direction of satire, at the expense of moronic pre-war Englishmen who laughed Hitler off until he made them angry.

The vacuity lies not in the Englishmen, but in the script, the acting, the dialogue. At least Lubitsch could once supply the nudge in the ribs, the visual innuendo, the sprightly vulgarity.

"Cluny Brown" is something lower than an early British farce and the scamperings of Jennifer Jones as a happy-go-lucky skivvy and Charles Boyer as a carefree Czech refugee induced a state of melancholia that hung about me all day.

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"Three Wise Fools" (Empire, directed by Edward Buzzell) is all about a Tree inhabited by the Little People (leprechauns to you) some of whom don't believe in humans.

Nearby are some horrid greedy wicked old humans (Edward