

How *The Road to Life* (1931) Became the Road to Ruin

THE CASE OF THE WELLINGTON FILM SOCIETY IN 1933



THE FILM CULTURE practised by New Zealand film societies was still in its emergent phase when the United–Reform government took the Wellington Film Society (WFS) to court in 1933 for having shown an uncensored film. The society’s wings were severely clipped and the nascent film society movement brought to a limping halt when an already tenuous relationship with commercial film distributors collapsed in the aftermath of the WFS ‘scandal’; the trade distanced itself from the society and its now discredited cultural agenda. In the struggle to establish independent film exhibition and develop an aesthetic and cultural awareness of film, the film society movement in New Zealand encountered many obstacles: distance, dearth and demonization figuring prominently. The case of the WFS, which undertook pioneering work in the development of a local film culture, illuminates each of these impediments to cultural growth.

The events and analysis that follow are components of a cultural history that seeks to incorporate ‘high’ culture within a broader understanding of what culture is and does: ‘Rituals, symbolic systems, and the meanings and stories attached to everyday aspects of life are analysed in a rich array of topics that range from smells to carnivals, from promenades to reading, and everything in between’.¹ Film screenings organized by the WFS were monthly rituals charged with symbolic meaning and pregnant with expectation. That they were urban and tantalizingly urbane Pakeha rituals allows this study to contribute to the ‘scholarly — as opposed to popular — examination of cultural history, especially Pakeha cultural history’.² As well as describing the creation of the WFS, this article examines the political climate and cultural context that enabled the United–Reform Coalition government to prosecute, and effectively proscribe, a cultural organization whose aims it either wilfully misconstrued or was unable to understand. Through the government’s actions we can see the lineaments of a broader cultural pattern: a narrow, strict and relatively sterile vision more preoccupied with respectability than stimulation. In opposition to such sobriety, we can also see the formation of informal networks conducive to local expressions of cultural modernity during the interwar period, ‘a time of major change and upheaval’ in which ‘the cumulative effects of the social, economic, technological and demographic developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century became increasingly obvious and began to have a significant impact on New Zealand society’.³

The cinema of the 1920s and 1930s was but one of a number of relatively

new technologies that provided a distinctive electric hum to life. Whilst many wealthy New Zealanders were ‘early adopters’ of these new technologies, there were conservative voices that espied in them the harbingers of modern times and modern morals, neither of which was viewed favourably. Fears about the growing cultural invasion by Hollywood were vividly expressed in the *Mirror*.⁴ An editorial declared that ‘[i]nstead of [being an] ennobling and inspiring influence, the majority of present day pictures are calculated to arouse the primitive emotions which we are forever endeavouring to check, control and guide by a complex system of customs and conventions that are supported by the strongest sanctions of law and religion’.⁵ In ‘The Child and the Cinema’, Dr Mildred Staley demanded to know ‘what steps we have taken here in New Zealand to ensure — as the [League of Nations] report advises — that our children shall see only good films and be “protected from all demoralising influences”’.⁶ Another editorial, ‘Crime and Sex in Films’, spelt out the dangers likely to develop if the country’s moral vigilance weakened and allowed ‘the lowest phase of American life’ to enter New Zealand. It added: ‘If we were to believe the [film] producers, the United States would be a sink of iniquity, with people living a jazz life, depraved in morals, with minds and souls warped by sex instinct, corrupted by crime and depraved by drink.’⁷ For many of the *Mirror*’s writers, any sense of art in films was seriously compromised by film’s links with the vulgar clichés of mass-produced American popular culture. Isobel M. Cluett’s neo-Luddite article, ‘The Menace of Mechanical Art’, took issue with both gramophones and the cinema. She associated the latter with ‘crude, nasal American voices, the hideous argot of the Bowery slums freely flashed on the screen, the travesty of passionate emotion in long drawn-out embraces and provocative behaviour’. Cluett added: ‘For these and other reasons ... if we must have the pictures, the intelligent and artistic section of the public should make every effort to encourage the production of British films in British countries.’⁸

This fear of American cultural difference was also frequently a fear of anything perceived as extreme, including any form of cultural activity that might be labelled as élitist. Allen Curnow, in his persona of *Whim Wham*, cleverly summed up this New Zealand situation:

What did the Nation-builders build?
How was the World impressed?

Oh, Some went up and Some went down,
’Twas Life in the Looking-glass, Sir,
The same old Scenery back to front,
The Victorian Middle Class, Sir.

And What was the net Result, my Boy?
What became of the Plan?
What was the Fruit of the Enterprise
For the average Pig Island Man?

Oh, they crossed the Upper and Under Dogs
 To produce this Island Race, Sir,
 A Society neither Up nor Down
 With a puzzled Look on its Face, Sir.

Is This a very good Thing, my Boy?
 Or What do you think about it?
 Is it Civilisation's finest Flower,
 Or could we manage without it?

Oh, yes, it IS a very good Thing,
 A very good Thing indeed, Sir –
 Here's looking at Me, and looking at You,
 Of that identical Breed, Sir.⁹

According to Michael Bassett, the 1920s and 1930s was an era of 'political fundamentalism' where 'sex, alcohol, disloyalty and greater freedom for women all passed under the scrutiny of legislators', many of whom were 'fighting to stave off modern times, growing affluence for some and temptations to many'.¹⁰ Although not immediately apparent, woven into the cultural fabric of 1930s New Zealand was a xenophobic temperament and suspicion of difference that worked against the *raison d'être* of the film society. The nationality of the films screened in the WFS's inaugural season, for example, provoked an historical enmity into watchfulness. The 'Great War' may have ended in 1918 but many New Zealanders had lost their lives fighting in it and anti-German sentiment had not entirely disappeared from popular memory. In its first year of operation, in 1933, the WFS screened ten films, three of which were Russian and three German. Of the seven films in the second and final season, five were German.¹¹ The menace that such films held for God-fearing New Zealanders was demonstrated when theatres in Auckland were picketed for screening 'continental' films. Seventy-seven churches and social organizations sent a petition to government in 1935, requesting that 'All films that had their origin in Russia should be banned from the screens in New Zealand'.¹²

For those relatively few New Zealanders who sought to introduce the cultural forms of cosmopolitan modernism into a country still strongly rural in terms of its economy and self-image,¹³ the government's action represented an acute expression of cultural traits that already existed: an egalitarian suspicion of aestheticism; a strongly conformist culture; and an antipathy to Soviet cinema. One of the original organizers of the WFS, Read Mason, recollected the public perception of film societies in an interview given 50 years later: 'When the Society was started, uninformed and unthinking people assumed that anything like the Film Society must exist for communist or pornographic purposes and had to be stamped out.'¹⁴ Mason attributed this attitude to years of official and unofficial censorship.

Notwithstanding the sometimes latent, sometimes explicit hostility, some people desired the artefacts of a cultural imagery that were not exclusively of Anglo-American provenance. During the final years of the silent period of filmmaking, for example, New Zealanders had been able to see a few of the

most successful German feature films, such as F.W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926) and F. Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), when they received local distribution by Cinema Art Films, a company owned and run by Arthur C. Davis, who had secured the rights to the entire Ufa Studio's output for Australasia.¹⁵

The 1930s was also a period of positive cultural ferment that saw a vanguard of emergent cultural nationalists — local artists and intellectuals — question the cultural politics of an earlier generation of New Zealanders for whom England was 'Home' both physically and imaginatively, as well as being the centre of civilized values generally. It was against the straitened backdrop of the Great Depression and a still powerfully conformist society that Wellington's cultural and liberal élite sought to establish an institution for cultural development, with the aim of nurturing a discriminating audience and encouraging artistic and cultural expression in film. Wellington's example stimulated the formation of film societies in Dunedin (August 1933), Christchurch and Auckland (both in September 1933). Sister societies also formed in smaller towns such as New Plymouth, Wanganui and Hawera.¹⁶

In an attempt to formalize the relationship of the various societies around New Zealand, a conference was held in Wellington in November 1934, and a federation formed, consisting of one member from each film society. One of the proposals to emerge from the conference was that 'a circuit for programmes be followed to minimise freight charges and that the previewing of programmes be dispensed with as much as possible to reduce costs'.¹⁷ The federation did not last. A lack of co-operation from the commercial film exchanges and an inability to source suitable films independently hindered its development. The federation withered the following year, and it probably ceased to function in 1936, the year the WFS was officially disestablished.

Although it had a short life, attracted hostility from the commercial film exchanges, encountered a lack of understanding in government, and struggled to overcome a chronic problem of film supply, the WFS stimulated the establishment of similar societies throughout the Dominion, initiated the cultural programme for film societies that found more lasting expression in the post-World War II period, and made submissions to the 1934 Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into the Motion Picture Industry, which led to some relaxation of censorship requirements for film societies.

The WFS was the brainchild of '[t]wo gentlemen who were very earnestly and very seriously interested in filmic art'.¹⁸ They approached one or two 'of their intimate friends who they thought might hold similar views and suggested that something might be done in the way of creating a small private society in order to view some ... films'.¹⁹ In his unassuming way, James Tucker was the catalyst and driving force behind the formation of the society in March 1933. 'A sensitive, artistic person from Christchurch who worked in advertising for the Commercial Printing Company', Tucker had concocted the project with a journalist colleague, Read Mason, during conversations about films they had seen or wished they had seen.²⁰

One of the films Tucker and Mason discussed was a German 'mountain' film co-directed by Dr Arnold Fanck and G.W. Pabst, *The White Hell of Pitz Palu* (1929), which had had a brief screening in the capital.²¹ In this film the physical

effort and technical prowess of climbing were not mere sporting exploits; rather, they were means through which climbers could liberate themselves from the mundane toiling and moiling of the world. The symbolism of this may not have been lost on the pioneers of the WFS, who set out on their own adventure to carry film reception to heights not yet attained in New Zealand.

Tucker and Mason convened an inaugural meeting to discuss the formation of a society to screen films not released through commercial theatres.²² Through a circular they had secured the interest of a number of prominent Wellingtonians in the aims of such a group. Eight people attended the first meeting, on 29 March 1933, and three others, including Peter Fraser, the Labour MP for Wellington Central, sent their apologies and their support for the proposal.²³ Also at the meeting was John Robertson, former Labour MP, independent cinema manager in Christchurch, and 'eminent and popular member of the "trade" [who was then] first Dominion Secretary of the Motion Pictures Exhibitors' Association'.²⁴ Robertson's personal contacts proved to be a crucial link between the WFS, government and the film business. He was also a valuable and energetic advocate for the WFS throughout its short life. The first meeting was held in his offices on Courtenay Place, where 'he accepted the position of Chair'.²⁵ Reginald Franklin, a public accountant who became secretary/treasurer, was also at this inaugural meeting.

Mindful of the need not to antagonize the commercial theatres, the founders stated at their first meeting that the WFS would only use films 'not screened commercially, or films which had failed on a commercial circuit'.²⁶ This cautionary tactic was also adopted by other film societies in order to allay fears that the film trade might have about a declining revenue stream during the Depression. The founders foresaw that they could actually help the commercial film exhibitors by forming another public, an increasingly educated one, some of whom were interested in *film as film*. They even cherished the notion that, in time, 'they would enlighten many people on the potentialities of the film as a dramatic vehicle'.²⁷ The ten people nominated others for membership of the society and fixed the fee of one guinea for a member and a guest to attend between ten and 12 Sunday screenings in the inaugural season. To ascertain what interest there was in the project, Robertson agreed to secure a film for the society's first screening at Shortt's Theatre on 30 April.

The impetus behind the desire to form a film society was in large part an expression of the frustration some felt at the lack of films from countries other than the United States and England. The international reach silent film had enjoyed through the strongly visual nature of the medium had been reduced with the advent of sound; speech resurrected national and linguistic boundaries. Film society members still wanted, however, to see as much of world cinema as was available, and wished to experience the varied forms of narrative that innovative directors were making of this emergent art, with its singularly powerful expressive abilities. In contrast to the *Mirror's* writers, film societies welcomed technology as a means to reduce New Zealanders' powerful sense of isolation.²⁸ Read Mason felt that 'the world was moving forward to ... a time of artistic awakening in Europe. Although films provided by far the greatest source of entertainment in the early '30s, film-goers were

being prevented from participating in, and being stimulated by, one aspect of this movement in the older countries.²⁹ Innovative film style, thematic seriousness and occasional nudity differentiated much European cinema from Anglo-American films. The revolutionary Soviet cinema, exalting proletarian culture and extolling the virtues of the workers' state, also fired some film society members' imagination, not simply for its content but also for the form in which that content was shaped and expressed.

In its inaugural Sunday evening programme on 30 April 1933, the WFS screened a Soviet documentary on farm collectivization, *Gigant Farm*,³⁰ along with a feature-length film, *The Animal Kingdom* (aka *The Woman in His House*, 1932). The feature film followed the Hollywood tradition of adapting successful Broadway plays, and starred Ann Harding, Leslie Howard and Myrna Loy: 'Howard plays a wealthy publisher who decides to marry the socially prominent Loy, leaving his mistress Harding in the lurch. In comically convoluted fashion, Loy behaves like a callous libertine, while Harding is the soul of love and fidelity. The frustrated Howard declares at the end that he is going back to his "wife" — meaning, of course, the faithful Harding.'³¹ This initial offering — one Soviet and one Hollywood film, risqué fiction and non-sense documentary, stars and ordinary people — made it clear that the WFS would take an eclectic approach. Membership grew quickly, 'climbing to 166 within a fortnight of the first screening',³² and had to be capped at 280 largely because of the seating restrictions of Shortt's Theatre (remembering that each member had the right to bring a guest); there was a waiting list of 40 in the event of resignations. Another reason for limiting membership was a concern that the commercial exhibitors might take offence at the competition, and withdraw what tentative support they were prepared to offer.

A fortnight following the inaugural screening the Management Committee, comprising James Tucker (chair), Reginald Franklin (secretary/treasurer), Read Mason and E.R. Render (manager of the Aulsbrookes biscuit factory), met in Franklin's office and officially appointed the other officers: Professor T.A. Hunter of Victoria University College and Vice-Chancellor of the University of New Zealand (president); Peter Fraser, MP; Captain V.G. Webb; Miss Maud England; and H.E. Nichols (vice-presidents). From May through to December 1933 the WFS scheduled nine programmes.³³ Three dates had also been selected for 1934, following the mid-summer break. All screenings were to take place on Sunday evenings at Shortt's Theatre, Sundays being the only evening the WFS could hire a cinema with the necessary sound and projection equipment.

On Sunday 15 July, the WFS arranged for the screening of what it claimed to be the first Soviet picture shown in New Zealand. Presumably the society meant the first fiction film, as Soviet documentaries had been shown as part of the cultural activities of the Friends of the Soviet Union. Members of the WFS were informed that *The Road to Life* (Nikolai Ekk, 1931) carried subtitles, that it was well known in both Europe and America, and that it would 'afford members an opportunity of seeing Russian cinematic technique'. This was an exceptionally strong drawcard; Soviet innovations in film language had inspired many Western artists and intellectuals to write strongly in support of Soviet film

theory and film practice from the mid-1920s on.³⁴ *The Road to Life* explored the problems of rehabilitating delinquent and unemployed orphans thrown up during and after the civil war (1917–1920). This still constituted a major social issue at the time the film was made. *The Road to Life* met with immediate success both at home and abroad, and had a significant influence on later films based on the same theme.³⁵ The title, the message of the film and the figure of the teacher in *The Road to Life* were based on the pedagogy and practices pioneered by the Soviet educationalist Anton Makarenko. The significance of this outstanding educational pioneer was recognized at the time by Emeritus Professor John Dewey, whose filmed talk preceded the screening.³⁶

It was fortunate that members of the WFS had had the opportunity to see Ekk's film as the society's fortunes now took a turn for the worse. On Saturday 14 July 1933, the day immediately preceding the scheduled screening of *The Road to Life*, a memorandum from the Commissioner of Police, W.G. Wohlmann, was sent to the Wellington Superintendent of Police, informing him of the WFS's imminent projection of an uncensored film (Wohlmann seems to have ascertained this from the censor and evidently been given a copy of the WFS's advertisement of the film). Wohlmann described the WFS as having a fairly large membership, one of whose principals was 'a man named Robertson or Robinson, a former Labour M.P.'. In fact this was the aforementioned John Robertson, 'an advocate for the small or independent exhibitor against the monopolistic and empire-building theatre chains',³⁷ who had been elected to Parliament in 1911 as one of four Labour members from that election.³⁸ The ostensible concern of the Commissioner of Police was that as the film had not been submitted for censorship, it was likely to be in breach of Section 7 of the Cinematograph Films Act, 1928. Section 7 provided for the prosecution of any person who charged an admission price for entry into any place where a film (or any part of it) was shown which had not been approved by the censor. The commissioner suggested that it might be possible 'for one or two members of the Force in plain clothes to gain admission and witness the screening of this uncensored film'. Instruction to do so was made, but through an administrative blunder W.R. Murray, the detective given the task of infiltrating the WFS to witness the screening, put the file in the outward correspondence basket and did not get around to acting upon it.³⁹

Malcolm Fraser was at that time Under-Secretary of Internal Affairs, the department with responsibility for overseeing censorship. Fraser was informed of the situation on 17 July. Bureaucratic machinery was then set in motion, on his directive, which requested the commissioner to 'cause enquiry to be made and furnish details of (1) the control and objects of the club and (2) the titles and description of pictures that have been shown'.⁴⁰ It is unlikely that Fraser felt any personal vindictiveness towards the WFS when he caused the police and, later, the Solicitor-General's Office to investigate a possible breach of the Cinematograph Films Act. He may have simply got on with the routine administration of the department's many responsibilities. However, the speed with which Fraser had instructed Wohlmann to investigate the society (the day immediately following the screening) suggests that its activities were already known to officialdom and a cause for some concern, disquiet and, perhaps,

political advantage. Fraser's actions reinforce the idea that New Zealand was then 'an intimate society, where staff appointments to schools and university exam results were reported in the newspapers, along with traffic fines and art union winners. It was also a world of strict social controls.'⁴¹

The private screening of this uncensored Soviet film by the WFS prompted the Film Exchanges Association to seek an interview with the Minister of Internal Affairs, James Young, on 20 July. Messrs P.W. Maddock and R. Stewart represented the Film Exchanges; Fraser was also present. Stewart and Maddock wanted the minister to understand that their association had nothing to do with the Sunday screenings of the WFS, nor with 'those Russian pictures', and that this activity was 'affecting the theatre business generally, and they could not afford it'.⁴² At this stage Young was unmoved by their concerns. He had seen the film himself at a private screening (possibly organized informally by Robertson) and had asked Robertson whether or not it was necessary to submit the film to the censor.⁴³ Robertson had said no because the film was not for general exhibition, being reserved for members of a society which believed itself to enjoy a freedom that lay outside the parameters controlled by the censor.⁴⁴ After distancing themselves from any association with Russian pictures, Stewart then sought to bring the WFS's very *raison d'être* into disrepute by telling the minister that it was generally understood that one of the aims of the WFS was to screen films rejected by the censor; this misrepresented the society's position. He also expressed the Film Exchanges Association's fears that such uncensored screenings might spread. Having pointedly noted the suspect nature of the now-controversial society, Stewart and Maddock then spent the greater part of the meeting with Young complaining about the fees they were obliged to pay the censor's office for registering and censoring each of their films.

Meanwhile, police investigations into the WFS were proceeding. Of interest was the identity of the individual who had imported *The Road to Life*, using a company trading as L.J. Dufrou Ltd. Detective Murray, having recovered from his initial blunder, had discovered a WFS membership of 280 that included 'the names of well known citizens — Solicitors, Doctors, businessmen and such like. For instance, Dr R.M. Campbell, the Acting Prime Minister's Secretary, is one of the members.'⁴⁵

The origins of the false sense of security under which the WFS believed itself exempt from censorship came to light in the form of a letter from E.P. Norman, Town Clerk, which the society's secretary had given to Detective Murray. The letter stated that 'no permit was necessary from the Town Council for these Sunday night screenings, seeing that they were not open to the public'.⁴⁶ This decision had come back to the WFS via the City Solicitor's Office to whom the Town Clerk had referred the question. The society had also been given an exemption from the mandatory payment of 'amusement tax' by the Commissioner of Stamp Duties, who had 'attended on two occasions in his official capacity to satisfy himself that we are not admitting the public'.⁴⁷ Moreover, the high moral purpose of the society was evidenced in the office holders of the WFS who vouchsafed 'a clear indication that the Objects of the Society are educational rather than merely for entertainment'.⁴⁸ The WFS

also disclaimed any connection with 'subversive propaganda'. Nevertheless, fears of unchecked contagion marked Murray's final comment. Even though the 'bona fides of this Society [were] quite genuine', the idea of allowing the projection of uncensored films was unacceptable, 'for there would be nothing to prevent an unlimited number of similar Societies springing up in all the main centres whose objects may have more sinister purposes'.⁴⁹ Such a remark demonstrates an acute official sensitivity to the radical potential that such an organization presented.

The involvement of convinced socialists and liberal academics in the WFS added to the fear about the intentions of the Society. Professor Thomas Hunter, president of the WFS, had a passion for the social and liberalizing effect of education that drew him naturally towards activities outside Victoria University College. He became actively involved in the Workers' Educational Association when it was founded in 1915, and Peter Fraser and Harry Holland were among his students. His encouragement of independent thought in students led the conservative and conventional to distrust the college because of its radical reputation.⁵⁰ R.M. Campbell, Fabian socialist and member of Finance Minister Gordon Coates's 'brains trust' (along with William Sutch), was on the WFS committee.

Peter Fraser, soon to become Minister of Education, alongside his other portfolios in the Labour Ministry that came to power in the 1935 election, was one of the WFS's four vice-presidents. Another was Maud England, whose impact on her contemporaries after arriving in New Zealand from England in 1902 was considerable. E.H. McCormick described her as a 'beacon of erudition' and referred to her 'modest *salon* in Molesworth Street' where Wellington intellectuals gathered.⁵¹ Clearly, these were people willing to express political *and* cultural dissatisfaction with the established order. They were, in the terms of Peter Gibbons, 'cultural dissenters — that is, they disliked the colonial intolerance of creative experiments, the lack of artistic discrimination and aesthetic sensibility'.⁵² Obviously, cultural dissent need not imply political dissent, but in those days the two often went together.⁵³ We might conjecture that given the left-of-centre political sympathies of many of the official representatives of the WFS that the conservative government sought to taint by association its political rival — the Labour Party — and thus gain some slight electoral advantage in the upcoming 1935 election.

In a memo that accompanied Murray's report, which was sent to Malcolm Fraser, the Commissioner of Police pointed out that there was 'reason to believe that similar exhibitions of uncensored films have been given in Auckland. It is of course unnecessary to point out the danger of allowing these practices to continue unchecked.'⁵⁴ The precise nature of 'the danger', however, is difficult to fix but it meant most probably a general fear of any 'subversive' propaganda that positioned the Soviet Union in a favourable light.

Having perhaps heard rumours of possible trouble, the WFS submitted *The Road to Life* to the censor in late July. He found it unsuitable for exhibition and twice rejected it, on 26 July and again, after appeal, on 4 August.⁵⁵ Interestingly, of the first four WFS screenings at Shortt's Theatre, the Soviet film was the only one not submitted to the censor prior to its exhibition.⁵⁶ It

was also the only one that had not come to the society through contacts with the film exchanges which, in the normal course of events, had already had their films registered and censored, and paid the fees associated with this process, thereby saving the society from costs it could not at that stage have borne.

Besides believing themselves exempt from the usual regulations governing the exhibition of films, the WFS was also responding to the vagaries of continental and Soviet film supply. The chairman of the Management Committee of the WFS, James Tucker, suggested such a course of action when he spoke to a film audience prior to the court case which followed 'Screening dates must have an element of guerrilla warfare about them, both to suit the availability of film, and to seize any sudden opportunity that may present itself, as was the case with *The Road to Life*. We were able to procure this film while it was here for an appeal although we could not secure it for any other centre.'⁵⁷ This was disingenuous of Tucker, given that the film was shown on 16 July, while the censor rejected it on 26 July.⁵⁸ The film's New Zealand distributor, L.J. Dufrou, was not a licensed renter and may have been either an enthusiast or a so-called 'fifth columnist' for the Soviet Union.

At the end of August 1933 the Solicitor-General made his recommendation to Fraser that a prosecution of the WFS was likely to be successful, if pursued. His opinion depended upon a contentious point of legal argument that was later much debated. In the first instance he found that Shortt's Theatre could not be considered a place to which the public were admitted, as admission was limited to members of the society and their friends. However, he did find that 'the substantial purpose of the subscription is to confer on them the right of admission to a place where entertainment by exhibition of films will be provided',⁵⁹ and this seemed to contravene Section 7 of the Cinematography Films Act. Fraser informed the Minister of Internal Affairs of this opinion: 'There is no doubt that the action taken by these two Societies [Wellington and Christchurch] is contrary to the spirit and intention of the Act, and that it would be very inadvisable to allow uncensored films of the nature mentioned to be exhibited in this manner. It is therefore recommended that a prosecution should be instituted.'⁶⁰ The final decision to prosecute was not made by Fraser, who may have 'only been doing his job', but emerged from a ministerial Cabinet meeting; the matter was therefore one that accrued political significance.⁶¹ It may well be, as some contended then, that the political and cultural orientation of the film societies was antithetical to the United-Reform Coalition Cabinet of 1931-1935, which 'consisted of nine farmers and a lawyer'.⁶² This government of farmers was unlikely to appreciate the cultural pretensions of a film society that seemed to think it could thumb its nose at the common man by claiming to be exempt from censorship standards that applied to everyone else.

More concretely, the dire circumstances of the Great Depression were encouraging the growth of protest organizations of the Right, Left and middle. 'The New Zealand Legion, the Communist Party and Social Credit are examples in each category.'⁶³ Mass rioting had broken out in an intense spasm in the four main centres in April and May 1932, resulting in violent clashes with the thousands of 'special constables' recruited by the government. The riots were profoundly shocking to both Cabinet and the public at large: 'Some thought

they portended Red revolution', and Parliament passed draconian legislation, making arrest for 'sedition' easier.⁶⁴ 'Some 185 prosecutions resulted from the riots; 72 men were imprisoned.'⁶⁵ The prosecution of the WFS should be seen against this heated political background. 'With feelings running high, a lot of New Zealanders held that communists, who were influential in the Unemployed Workers' Movement, were threatening not just law and order but the very foundation of society.'⁶⁶ Seeking political advantage, the government and its supporters tried to lay the blame for the civic unrest and rioting on the Labour Party.⁶⁷

There are other cultural traits that can be factored in to help explain the relative ease with which a decision to treat the WFS harshly was made. It could be argued, for example, that New Zealand was particularly prone to the suppression of any emerging form of difference, something of which the parliamentarian satirized by *Whim Wham* has already given us a clear expression. James Belich has noted of the period that '[c]lots of difference, including the cream of society, were homogenised out; the bacilli of tight class, sin, racial "inferiors" and non-conformity were pasteurised out in practice, on paper, or both'.⁶⁸ New Zealand was a powerfully conformist and conservative society; even during the worst of the rioting the state's authority was never seriously in doubt. 'When Jane Mander returned in 1932 after two decades overseas, she was dismayed by New Zealand's conformity and Puritanism, its barren wastes of Victorian Philistinism.'⁶⁹ Several elements thus converged in the case against the WFS, which can be seen as a lightning rod for some of the concerns of the period, many of which had a powerful social resonance that echoed long after the court case, and culminated in the government's action.

The WFS had not resolved, however, to go quietly to court. It believed that a meeting with the Minister of Internal Affairs might still prevent drastic action being taken. The intimate and informal social network meant that the WFS had access to power and had not given up hope of speaking their truth to it. A deputation, made up of Dr Ivan Sutherland (who substituted for Professor Hunter), James Tucker, John Robertson and Reginald Franklin, 'waited' on the minister on 12 October, before the case went to court (and some two weeks after Cabinet had agreed to proceed with the case). The WFS committee had, however, apparently determined to come and see him prior to the news of the impending prosecution in order to explain the society's objectives. They were sure that the minister, once informed, would 'naturally be interested in the movement, or anything that tended to improve the standard of film entertainment in New Zealand, or would tend to improve the public taste in regard to [it]'.⁷⁰ That conviction was sorely tested.

Sutherland argued the WFS's case strongly.⁷¹ One of the first to enrol in the society, he thought that New Zealand had been slow in the creation of such societies in comparison with other countries, since the cinema was not only a form of popular entertainment but also an art form and a form of education. The chief problem for film societies, he explained, lay in a misunderstanding of their aims given that the cinema was also the most popular form of entertainment ever seen. Sutherland likened the experience of seeing a WFS film to that of going to an orchestral concert or to an academy exhibition. It was a form of

cultural activity that depended on cultural capital, acquired slowly through an educated exposure to what the Victorian cultural theorist Mathew Arnold had called ‘the best that has been thought and said in the world’.⁷² Sutherland also appealed to the example of ‘Home’ by producing a recent publication of the British Film Institute, *The Film in National Life* (1932), in which ‘special provision’ had been made by the London County Council for film societies; he ‘felt certain that the same would apply to New Zealand’.⁷³ This was a double-edged strategy in fiercely egalitarian New Zealand.

James Tucker read a prepared statement that expanded on some of Sutherland’s ideas. The rapid growth of the cinema meant that it had only recently been able to make a claim to a place in the pantheon of the arts. Also, the mass nature of the medium meant that ‘its place in the field of art or documentation [was] not so readily received or sympathetically understood’.⁷⁴ The WFS existed to raise the level of filmic taste, to act as a positive force in the development of public standards and to increase public appreciation over time to a ‘greater understanding and discernment of what is or is not true film art’.⁷⁵ The cultural worth of its social mission was manifest through the membership list, ‘recruited from educationalists, art connoisseurs, repertory theatre members, professional men and others of this type [who] represent every shade of thought, creed and nationality’. In a remark that may have offended the minister’s sense of democracy or reminded him of his meeting with Messrs Stewart and Maddock, Tucker declared that the WFS was not concerned with the question of censorship and that the censor’s opinion did not ‘qualify or disqualify a film as being suitable for our purposes’.⁷⁶ Such openly professed bohemianism or élitism was strategically inept, even if the WFS did see itself as David battling with Goliath.

The meeting with the minister became tense when it was suggested that a witch-hunt had been organized against the society. Robertson declared that some members of the WFS had found it suspicious that on this instance the police had been called in to examine the screening of an uncensored film when typically officers from Internal Affairs were entrusted with the work. This drew a sharp response from a punctilious Fraser, who claimed that Robertson was putting an unfair ‘spin’ on the affair, which had less to do with censorship than with a breach of the regulations. Clearly, there were bureaucratic rules involved, but the WFS was on a crusade to advance the cultural value of the society’s work and there were sufficient hints in the activities and utterances of the government and institutions of the state to indicate that more than mere rules were involved in the state exercising its authority.⁷⁷

The minister asked a couple of very direct questions. He wanted to know how such a small society screening films solely to its members was going to uplift the general public’s standards, and, secondly, by what right did the WFS think itself deserving of a special treatment denied to others? Evidently he did not receive answers that he considered satisfactory. As one of the legion of ‘ordinary’ Pakeha endowed with ‘common sense’, Minister Young had little need of the sophistication being offered by the WFS, whose aesthetic pretensions may have called forth a latent anti-intellectualism — the flipside of ‘common sense’.⁷⁸

A week after the meeting the censor, W. Tanner, gave his own opinion of the WFS to Under-Secretary Fraser. A spectre haunted him, the spectre of 'false ideals'. Films could be educational but 'it is right to remark that they can be educational in a wrong sense also. Professors can also be good teachers but they can, at the same time, inculcate false ideals and questionable theories into their pupils.'⁷⁹ It needs to be noted that Victoria University was at this time subject to both internal dissensions and attacks on the college from outside: 'In some ways it was not very different from the early 1920s; Victoria remained in the eyes of conservative citizens a hotbed of Bolshevism and immorality.'⁸⁰ While noting the high-minded ideals and objectives of the WFS's spokesmen, Tanner cast doubts on their relevance to all the members, some of whom may not have been 'actuated by the altruistic motives enumerated'.⁸¹

Of more consequence for the future of the WFS was the news he must have received from the commercial Film Exchanges Association, which had decided not to supply film to the society. If the WFS decided to press ahead with their fledgling film distribution and exhibition network, the associated costs would greatly increase: 'At a low estimate this would be at least £30 per annum provided there were no rejections or appeals' by the censor.⁸² The society would now urgently need a special dispensation from government to further its aims, which in Tanner's mind risked raising 'the cry of class distinction by those unable to obtain membership [Moreover] Russian films would probably form part of the importations, and, as I have had occasion to remark before, [they] invariably have a propaganda angle.'⁸³ Clearly, New Zealand's communitarian and egalitarian values were antithetical to the objectives of film societies, which, moreover, also promoted 'subversive' Soviet cinema.

The reasons that led Tanner to ban films are for the most part unknown because he was not required to explain his decisions. He did, however, leave some traces in the 'Weekly Return and Report of Films Examined'.⁸⁴ A Soviet documentary film, *The Five Year Plan*, that he examined on 18 June 1932, for example, was rejected on the ground that it was propaganda for Soviet Russia: 'It will be sent out of the Dominion' was his peremptory decision.⁸⁵

With regards to the English document, *The Film in National Life*, that Sutherland had put before the Minister of Internal Affairs, Tanner commented that as New Zealand did not produce films other than newsreels, its recommendations were ill-suited to this country. This was a very partial account of local film production. New Zealand was one of the first countries to use film — as early as 1922 — as a means of promoting its produce for consumption and the land as a destination for the privileged few international tourists who sought out the 'exotic'.⁸⁶ There were also many independent films made throughout the 1920s; most were technically competent and some exhibited a considerable degree of cinematic artistry, especially those made by Rudall Hayward.⁸⁷ On censorship in the United Kingdom, Tanner noted that while it was true that the state did not fulfil this function, local authorities did, and the London Film Society was still susceptible to censure by the London City Council.⁸⁸

The government took the WFS to court on 21 October 1933 in what amounted to a test case to determine whether or not the society's activities

circumvented the law. During the court case, P.S.K. Macassey, the Crown Prosecutor, argued that the work of the censor would be nullified if the society were permitted to screen whatever it wanted, and that many similar societies would spring up with no state control over their activities and no way to stop them 'spreading subversive propaganda'.⁸⁹ In a prescient remark, the lawyer for the defence, W.E. Leicester (a film society committee member himself), noted that the court's decision would have 'a very important bearing not only on the operations of such societies but also on *the cultural development of film in New Zealand*'.⁹⁰ The 'high art versus popular art' argument received further exposition in the course of Leicester's defence when he compared the aims of the WFS with kindred cultural organizations which sought to introduce distinctions where none had been before. The development of repertory theatre, for example, allowed for the expression of an 'aesthetic emotion' not found in most travelling players' presentations of plays that merely appealed to popular taste. In like manner, film societies wanted to promote a form of cinema unlikely to have sufficient popular appeal to warrant importation or screening by the film trade. This was the only way to see films of 'technical merit' that developed the 'cinematographic art in Continental countries'. The WFS was, Leicester also noted, modelled on its metropolitan mentor, the London Film Society, established in 1925.⁹¹

However, even the social and political standing of Dr R.M. Campbell who lent his *bona fides* to the cause of film as art could not win the case for the WFS. The law was (apparently) the law. Mr E. Page, Stipendary Magistrate, convicted the WFS on 3 November 'for exhibiting cinematograph films that had not been approved by the censor in a place to which a charge was made in respect of persons admitted thereto'.⁹² On the charge relating to the exhibition of *The Road to Life*, a token fine of £1.11s, the cost of the proceedings, was imposed. The public defeat, combined with the film trade's refusal to supply films, hurt more. The film supply obstacle proved insuperable. Making the society subject to the usual forms of censorship meant that it would incur financial costs it could not afford and further handicapped the procurement of films from private sources.

Undeterred by the court's decision, the society sent invitations to the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Under-Secretary to attend Fritz Lang's *Siegfried* (1924), pointing out that the film was regarded as 'a landmark in cinema history' that had yet to be screened in New Zealand. The minister was courteous enough to decline in writing.⁹³ Attendance figures do not exist so it is impossible to know what happened when the society screened *Siegfried* two days after newspaper reports of the case appeared under headings like 'Film Society Convicted' and questioning the suitability of the films shown to members.⁹⁴

Another consequence of the court case was the resignation of 21 members.⁹⁵ The 'scandal' had repercussions the following year, too, when membership for the second season fell significantly, with only 73 members renewing. There were 52 new members, but total membership was well under half that of the first season.⁹⁶ If many of the WFS's rank and file were lower middle class, then we might suppose that a need to be seen to be respectable was stronger than

the allure of the cinematic ‘sirens’ the society’s programmers were scheduling. An appeal against the conviction was initially considered by the WFS but soon discarded with the thought that: ‘even if we did win, the victory might be a short one, and that it would probably be followed by amended legislation. What we wanted was some way of regularising the Society’s position for we considered it was obviously wrong to impose the restrictions required of public entertainment on a private society.’⁹⁷

An opportunity to right a perceived wrong soon presented itself when a parliamentary committee of inquiry into the motion picture industry was established in March 1934. Set up to examine rather specific complaints of unfair trading, in which the monopolistic business practices of the major overseas production and distribution companies determined which films independent cinema owners could purchase for exhibition, the committee also heard from organizations with cultural rather than economic concerns; censorship became an important issue. The WFS took full advantage of this inquiry to present its case for legislation more favourable to film society objectives. Preparation of their submission involved careful research: ‘[A]ll available information was collected about the position of film societies overseas.’ During this process it became apparent ‘that what we were seeking was in line with enlightened opinion of the day’.⁹⁸ One of the WFS’s recommendations came from C. Palmer Brown, a solicitor and member of the Wanganui Film Society, who ‘submitted that the Societies be allowed to screen free of New Zealand censorship, provided the films imported had passed the London County Council for film society or general exhibition’.⁹⁹ It is interesting that loyalty to Britain in this case was associated not with cultural cringe but with a plea for greater freedom.

Hunter and Tucker presented submissions to the committee of inquiry on behalf of all the film societies in the country. They thought that ‘the existence of a strong film society movement, able to show a fair assortment of international films will prove a tremendously valuable link in keeping us abreast of world developments ... in helping remove the curse of distance from us New Zealanders’.¹⁰⁰ They informed the committee of the film society movement’s cultural and educational aims and objects. Such work included the printing of brochures and talks from the floor, which sought to draw attention to ‘the artistic, cultural, and technical aspects of film production rather than with the entertainment-value of the picture’.¹⁰¹ They also sought some special consideration with regards to censorship: ‘It was represented at the time the Cinematograph Films Act, 1928, was framed the Act did not contemplate the formation of these societies. It [sic] asked that the Act should be amended to permit of the exhibition, to approved film societies only, of films, which have not been approved by the Censor. The witnesses suggested that the Minister in charge should have the power to exempt a film society from the censorship provisions of the Cinematograph Films Act, by the issue of special licences[.]’¹⁰²

At the end of the inquiry the committee was of the opinion that there was no ‘reasonable objection to members of a film society, constituted as proposed, attending the exhibition of films which might not be suitable for general audiences as a public entertainment’.¹⁰³ All but one of the recommendations

made by the representatives of the film societies were adopted in new legislation, the Cinematograph Films Amendment Act, 1934. The exception was one that sought to exempt film societies from any form of local censorship as constituted by the Act. The Hon. J.A. Young rejected this suggested exemption from censorship on the grounds that 'all pictures released, for any purpose whatever, should be subject to censorship in some shape or form'. Young did not believe that film societies would be disadvantaged and thought that such a provision would give 'all parties that have pictures for exhibition confidence that they are all treated alike'.¹⁰⁴ That was the egalitarian impulse opposing any signs of élitism. Under the amended Act, the censor was only obliged 'to give special consideration to films intended for exhibition by film societies'. The censor would still examine the films available to film society members and report his findings to the minister, but the censorship fees for this control were reduced and made 'nominal'. This was a victory of sorts, but it depended upon the presence of a sympathetic minister, and censorship remained tight, making the victory rather pyrrhic. F.W. Murnau's silent-era adaptation of Molière's play *Tartuffe*, for example, was unable to be seen in New Zealand, even by film societies.¹⁰⁵

Twenty months after its last screening the WFS finally surrendered in June 1936 at an Extraordinary General Meeting called to close the society. The WFS had laid some important groundwork but it had not been able to overcome the existing financial and regulatory problems. It had suffered above all from a lack of public and government understanding of the very concept of a film society. Efforts to educate both the powers-that-be and the public through printed material and official deputations to government and Parliament came up against several insuperable political and cultural obstacles. Unfortunately, not enough progress could be made to sustain the WFS once its association with commercial exhibitors and distributors was sundered. New Zealand's small population and physical isolation made it extremely difficult to import enough cinematic variety (experimental, foreign language, 'classics') to sustain a film society programme. Though they had gained some legislative recognition in the amendment to the Cinematograph Films Act, its 'founding fathers' moved on to other fields (Tucker to Sydney, and Robertson to Parliament for a six-year term as Labour MP for Masterton). The film society movement would only recover from the court case and its aftermath in the immediate post-World War II period when like-minded energetic individuals with friends in high places would lay firmer institutional foundations for the development of film culture in New Zealand.

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NOTES

1 Bronwyn Dalley and Bronwyn Labrum, 'Introduction', in Bronwyn Dalley and Bronwyn Labrum, eds, *Fragments: New Zealand Social and Cultural History*, Auckland, 1999, p.2.

2 *ibid.*, p.3.

3 Danielle Sprecher, 'Good Clothes are Good Business: Gender, Consumption and Appearance in the Office, 1918–1939', in Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie, eds, *The Gendered Kiwi*, Auckland, 1999, p.142. See also Chris Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion: Cultural Life in New Zealand, 1920–1950*, Auckland, 2006, p.120, for more on the 'informal networks' that structured cultural life in the 1920s and 1930s.

4 Originally entitled the *Ladies Mirror*, this magazine was published monthly in Auckland from 1922 to 1963, and featured many successful writers of popular fiction such as Ruth Dallas, Dorothy Eden and Essie Summers. Others who later entered the canon of New Zealand literature — Jane Mander, A.R.D. Fairburn, Monte Holcroft and Robin Hyde — were also published in the *Mirror*.

5 *Mirror*, 1 September 1929, p.8.

6 *Mirror*, 1 August 1929, p.35. Staley had read a League of Nations Child Welfare Committee report.

7 *Mirror*, 1 September 1929, p.8.

8 *Mirror*, 1 July 1930, p.33.

9 Allen Curnow, 'Pioneer Stock', in *The Best of Whim Wham*, Hamilton, 1959, p.11. A fear of difference found proud expression in 1943: 'New Zealand's world leadership in social legislation was due largely to the quality of the people of the Dominion, where the proportion of British-born was higher than in any other part of the Empire. That position should not be jeopardised by the admission of aliens with different ideologies.' The Hon. T.O. Bishop, speaking in the Legislative Council about a clause in the British Nationality and Status of Aliens (in New Zealand) Amendment Bill, cited in *Whim Wham 1943*, Wellington, 1944, p.7.

10 Michael Bassett, *The State in New Zealand, 1840–1984*, Auckland, 1998, p.161.

11 Peter Cooke to Simon Sigley, personal correspondence, 2002. Cooke is the author of an unpublished manuscript on the WFS which includes eye-witness accounts of the events detailed in this article, the circumstances surrounding them and an interview he conducted with Read Mason in February 1984: Peter Cooke, 'Wellington Film Society, 1933–1934', unpublished MS, New Zealand Film Archive, 1987.

12 H. Hayward, 'The Churches and the Cinema', *Tomorrow*, 22 July 1936, p.13.

13 The broad belief in the moral superiority of the rural over the urban was displayed both politically and culturally; the political influence of cow-cookies was evident in the coalition Cabinet of the United–Reform government which consisted of nine farmers and a lawyer; their negative cultural influence, captured some decades later by Maurice Shadbolt in his novel *Strangers and Journeys*, was also disproportionate to their numbers.

14 Cooke, p.16.

15 Simon Sigley, 'Film Culture: Its development in New Zealand, 1920s–1970s', PhD thesis, The University of Auckland, 2003, p.55.

16 For a fuller account, see Sigley, 'Film Culture', ch.2.

17 Papers: Wellington Film Society, R.R. Mason, D0713, New Zealand Film Archive/Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhuā, Wellington (NZFA).

18 Notes on a Deputation, 12 October 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, Archives New Zealand, Wellington (ANZ). Read Mason appears not to have been related to R.A.K. Mason.

19 *ibid.*

20 Cooke, p.1.

21 Fanck, one of the earliest promoters of Germany's popular mountain films, was a professional geologist and a climber himself. After World War I he began a series of fictional and documentary films about mountain climbing. See www.allmovie.com (accessed 22 July 2003).

22 The WFS has been considered the first such organization established in New Zealand. There was, however, an earlier Auckland Film Society, established at least as early as 1929. It published regular film criticism in the *Sun* and the *Auckland Star* but did not (so far as we know) arrange for the screening of films to members. See 'First Stirrings: the AFS and the WEA, 1929–1935', in Sigley, 'Film Culture', ch.1, for a fuller account.

23 The identities of the people absent are not known but some idea may be had from the

composition of the 11-member committee that was subsequently formed: W.S. Wauchop, Alan T. MacAlpin, L.H. Rowntree, Victor Lloyd, R.M. Campbell, C.Q. Pope, W.E. Leicester, Dr I. Sutherland, Mrs E. Maslen, Mrs C. Mackenzie and Miss C. Smythson. The eight people at the inaugural meeting may have included Tucker and Mason; the number is based on Mason's recollection some 50 years later.

24 Cooke, p.1.

25 *ibid.*, p.2.

26 Papers: Wellington Film Society, R.R. Mason (DO713), NZFA.

27 Cooke, p.2.

28 Sigley, 'Film Culture', p.49.

29 *ibid.*, p.1.

30 There is some uncertainty over the correct spelling of the title of this film and extensive database searches have not yet dispelled this doubt.

31 www.allmovie.com (accessed 19 July 2003).

32 Cooke, p.3.

33 WFS screenings, 1933–1934: April, *The Animal Kingdom* (1932, USA, aka *The Woman in His House*), *Gigant Farm* (USSR); May, *The Windjammer* (1930, UK); June, *Keepers of Youth* (1931, UK); July, *The Road to Life* (1931, USSR); August, No screening due to lack of programme; September, *Old Vienna* (1931, Germany, aka *The Congress Dances*); September, *Turksib* (1929, USSR), *The Mystery of Life* (1931, USA); October, *The White Devil* (1931, Germany); November, *Siegfried* (1924, Germany); December 1933–February 1934, summer recess; March, Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into the Film Industry; April, *Metropolis* (1927, Germany); May, *Variety* (1925, Germany), *Java* (the country of origin and production date of this title are currently unknown, although a French film entitled *Une Java* (1927) might be a contender); June, *How He Lied to Her Husband* (1931, UK), *Hungarian Rhapsody* 1929, Germany); July, *Faust* (1926, Germany); August, *Peaks of Destiny* (1927, Germany); October, *Le Million* (1931, France).

34 The London Film Society (established in 1925 and model for the WFS) had even invited Soviet film-makers such as Pudovkin and Eisenstein to speak to the society in 1929. Jen Samson, 'The Film Society, 1925–1939', in Charles Barr, ed., *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*, London, 1986, p.311.

35 *Portrait of Innocence*, Loius Daquin, 1941; *Somewhere in Europe*, Geza Radvanyi, 1947; *Los Olvidados (The Young and the Damned)*, Luis Buñuel, 1950; and two, more sensational, American derivatives, *Wild Boys of the Road*, William Wellman, 1933, and *Blackboard Jungle*, Richard Brooks, 1955.

36 Although this film did not demonstrate the more innovative 'cinematic techniques' associated with Soviet silent films, it did contain some vivid scenes. The eminent film critic Catherine de la Roche, who emigrated from England to New Zealand in 1958 and played an important role as film critic, radio broadcaster and WEA lecturer in Wellington, was struck by 'the night scene on the railway where Mustafa was murdered: the metallic noise of wheels and Mustafa's carefree song, as he rides alone in a rail handcart; further along the line, the stillness of the night, broken only by croaking frogs and the light clinking of tools while the murderer loosens a rail; then Mustafa's distant song becoming louder and louder as he approaches danger.' Thorold Dickinson and Catherine de la Roche, *Soviet Cinema*, London, 1948, cited in Jay Leyda, *Kino*, 3rd ed., London, 1983, p.285.

37 Cooke, p.1.

38 He later lost his Otaki seat in the election held in December 1914. Michael Bassett and Michael King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song: A Life of Peter Fraser*, Auckland, 2000, p.57.

39 Russian film, 17 July 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ.

40 Cinematograph Films Act, 1928, 17 July 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ. Born in Scotland in 1873, Fraser had come to New Zealand after working in solicitors' and accountants' offices in London. Soon after his arrival he joined the public service, becoming Government Statistician in 1911. He impressed his minister, Sir Francis Bell, with his ability to understand complex questions rapidly and to summarize them both intelligently and concisely. Described as a 'personable man with curly hair and a fashionable moustache', he gained a reputation with the Public Service Commissioner's Office as 'an officer of the highest grade, full of energy, tact, and ability'. Michael Bassett, *The Mother of All Departments*, Auckland, 1997, p.98.

41 Bassett, *State*, p.255.

42 Notes of Interview, 20 July 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ.

43 *ibid.*

44 The Censor's Office had existed in New Zealand since 1916 when an official censor had been established by Parliament following 'agitation by women's and church organisations about the need to protect children from films of a "highly suggestive character"' (Bassett, *Mother*, p.88).

45 Report of Detective Murray, 29 July 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ.

46 *ibid.*

47 *ibid.*

48 *ibid.*

49 *ibid.*

50 Tim Beaglehole, 'Hunter, Thoms Alexander', in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (DNZB), Vol.4, 1921–1940, Wellington, 1998, p.243.

51 She had lectured to WEA classes from 1918 to 1928, mainly on literature, and was also the founding vice-president of the Women's Social Investigation League. She received Left-wing newspapers and periodicals sent by her sister, and imported books not easily found in New Zealand (Beryl Hughes, 'England, Maud', in DNZB, Vol. 4, p.161).

52 P.J. Gibbons, 'The Climate of Opinion', in Geoffrey W. Rice, ed., *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2nd ed., Auckland, 1992, p.328.

53 Rachel Barrowman, *A Popular Vision: The Arts and the Left in New Zealand, 1930–1950*, Wellington, 1991.

54 Memo from Commissioner of Police to the Under-Secretary, 3 August 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ.

55 Challenged about his motives in censoring the film at a meeting to discuss the types of film available, the censor Tanner replied that his position obliged him to make decisions according to the politics of the day, and at that volatile moment in 1933, 'taking into consideration the state of the public mind, he thought it unwise to release that film'. Notes of a Conference, 18 January 1937, IC1 27/1/2, ANZ.

56 Secret Memorandum, 33/435, NZ Police, 14 July 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ.

57 Cooke, p.11.

58 Memo from Tanner to Fraser, 8 August 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ.

59 The Wellington Film Society (Incorporated), Inwards Letters c.1933–c.1937, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ.

60 *ibid.* The uncensored film screened by the Christchurch Film Society was not named, but given the dates involved could have only have been the censor's rejected version of *The Animal Kingdom* or *The Road to Life*.

61 Memo for the Hon. Minister of Internal Affairs, 1 September 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ. Signed by the Cabinet Secretary, F.D. Thomson, this memo reveals that the WFS prosecution was considered and approved in Cabinet on 19 September.

62 James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000*, Auckland, 2001, p.256. The Prime Minister was George Forbes, about whom little positive has been recorded. 'Keith Sinclair predicted 25 years ago that some day a research student, desperate for a thesis topic, would find some good even in Forbes. That student has yet to emerge.' Belich, p.256.

63 *ibid.*, p.257.

64 Michael Bassett, *Coates of Kaipara*, Auckland, 1995, p.179.

65 Belich, p.258.

66 Tim Beaglehole, *A Life of J.C. Beaglehole: New Zealand Scholar*, Wellington, 2006, p.173.

67 Bassett, *Coates*, p.180.

68 Belich, p.121.

69 Neil Atkinson, 'The Rise and Fall of Happy Homes, 1918–1935', in Bronwyn Dalley and Gavin McLean, eds, *Frontier of Dreams: The Story of New Zealand*, Auckland, 2005, p.265.

70 Notes of a Deputation, 12 October 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ.

71 From 1924 onwards, he and a group of political activists, which later included Alister McIntosh, John Beaglehole, W.B. Sutch and R.M. Campbell, had become consultants and advisers to the government, providing 'intellectual fibre to politics and administration, through writing, broadcasting and public speaking' (James Ritchie, 'Sutherland, Ivan Lorin George', in DNZB, Vol. 4, p.506).

72 Mathew Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy' [1869], in S. Lipman, ed., *Culture and Anarchy*, New Haven, 1994, p.5.

73 Notes of a Deputation to the Hon. J.A. Young, 12 October 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ.

74 *ibid.*

75 *ibid.*

76 *ibid.*

77 The President of the Christchurch Film Society, Professor James Shelley, noted that ‘the censor would not, I think, have censored our films because they were purely of an educational nature. The police decided to ban *The Road to Life* for quite another reason than censorship’: *Sun* (Christchurch), 11 April 1934, p.10.

78 Deputation from Wellington Film Society, 18 October 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ.

79 *ibid.*

80 Beaglehole, *Life*, p.196.

81 Deputation from Wellington Film Society, 18 October 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ.

82 *ibid.*

83 *ibid.*

84 IA 1 1933/55/3, Inwards Letters c.1933–c.1937, ANZ.

85 *ibid.*

86 By 1917 tourist ‘promotions’ included films directed at the United States market, recognized as having huge tourist potential. Films later made by the Government Publicity Office, established in 1923, included *Glorious New Zealand* (1925), *Romantic New Zealand no.19: Golden Fleece* (1927), *New Zealand’s River of Romance: The Beautiful Wanganui* (1930), *Romantic New Zealand: The Land of the Long White Cloud* (a feature-length travelogue and successor to *Glorious New Zealand*, 1934), and *New Zealand’s Charm: A Romantic Outpost of Empire* (1935).

87 See Helen Martin and Sam Edwards, *New Zealand Film — 1912–1996*, Auckland, 1997, for a list of films made in the 1920s.

88 Deputation from Wellington Film Society, 18 October 1933, IA 1 1933/55/19, ANZ.

89 *Evening Post* (EP), 21 October 1933, p.12.

90 *ibid.* Emphasis added.

91 *ibid.*

92 Young to Franklin, 4 November 1933, IA 1933/55/19, ANZ.

93 *Dominion*, 4 November 1933, p.21.

94 Cooke, p.12.

95 *ibid.*, p.11.

96 Chairman’s Report, cited in Cooke, p.12; an earlier draft of the report reportedly spoke not of amended legislation but of ‘harsh and repressive legislation’.

97 Cooke, p.12.

98 *ibid.*

99 *ibid.*

100 *ibid.*

101 Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Motion-Picture Industry, *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1934, H-44A, p.14.

102 *ibid.*

103 *ibid.*

104 *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 1934, 240, p.1056.

105 H. Johnson, ‘Those Films’, *Tomorrow*, 15 August 1934, p.14.