

1969

Youth club wants film guidance—but no bans

TENTERDEN Youth Club members told the town council this week that they disagree strongly with them over film censorship—but for reasons which may surprise not only members of the council but many other adults.

They say that a ban, which is so easily broken, only brings the law into contempt.

Instead, they would like to see films given certificates of an informatory kind "as a guidance of a film's suitability for their age and taste."

They do not want any widening of the bounds of obscenity—simply that they should be allowed to make up their own minds on good evidence.

The club had a Sunday evening debate on the subject of film certificates, a day before the council decided to refuse to let a film they had seen be shown in the town.

In a letter to the KENT MESSENGER, Mr. R. Matthews, of Readers Bridge, St. Michael's, the club leader, says:

"It was agreed that the present set-up is positively bad, and that efforts should be made to have a change effected.

"This letter is not concerned with the obscenity or art of the film the council saw; it merely takes as a spring-board the remarks of some of the minority group of the council.

"The demarcation of the age of 16, as a dividing line in cinema audiences, is wrong; perhaps it always was; certainly it is now.

"The Government is recognising that revision of age limits is necessary by the reduction of the qualifying age for voting, marriage, etc. from 21 to 18 years.

"The material of a film which gets 'X' certification is generally likely to appeal particularly to young people. It is not surprising, then, that very many young adults, aged less than 16, want to see such films, and are forced by archaic laws to speak or pretend a lie to be allowed admission.

"The cinema manager has imposed upon him a completely impossible task—the division of prospective customers into those who are above or below their 16th birthday.

"The fact that large numbers of our citizens are thus forced to contravene, or condone contravention, of the law is bad, while their intention is merely to enjoy an entertainment which experience shows them to be completely harmless. Having experience of a law being made contemptible, are these people likely to be contemptuous of other law?

"The case for a change in the law is furthered by the fact that the law should represent the corporate will of the people. That which is habitually flouted by large numbers of citizens, should be changed, provided that harm to other people is not thereby caused or facilitated, and in dealing with 'X' and 'A' films this does not arise.

"The club members wanted retention of a film certification of an informatory, not mandatory, nature, so that prospective customers could have an indication from an unbiased source of a film's nature and suitability for their age and taste, but could make their own decisions about seeing it.

"The discussion did not touch on obscenity, and a widening of present bounds in this area was not proposed."

CLUB ON CREST OF A WAVE

THE attendance at Tenterden Youth Club now averages 100 over each of the three meeting nights. Mr. Bob Matthews, club leader, said that numbers had been rising for some time; this latest figure was the highest.

It is hoped that even more young people will attend in the New Year.

In the past year, members have been encouraged to take an active interest in civic affairs and Mr. Matthews hopes to maintain and develop this.

Some weeks ago, at a debate on censorship, it was considered that a certificate of an informative rather than of a mandatory nature should be retained so that filmgoers could have an unbiased indication of a film's content.

JOBS FORUM

With this in mind, Ashford's M.P., Mr. W. Deedes, and Mr. Norman St. John Stevas are to be asked for their support. This follows a broadcast in which some of Mr. St. John Stevas's views were found to resemble closely those of members.

The club is planning to send a group to the jobs forum at the Town Hall on January 29. The forum will enable youth to express its reasons for wanting more employment in the town. Members of other town groups will also attend.

Tenterden Youth Club