

A Raw Deal

IT is abundantly clear now that the film industry is on the brink of a major crisis. It is likely to be hastened by the interminable squabbles within the ranks of producers. The bitter wrangle for power and position witnessed during the recent IMPPA elections appears to persist. It is common knowledge that many members of IMPPA show scant respect for parliamentary language or procedure at its meetings, rendering the Association almost ineffective. More and more people, whose status in the industry warrants their inclusion in IMPPA, are deserting the organisation. The future looks gloomy indeed.

An analysis of the situation proves that much of the confusion which exists in the industry today is the result of the Raw Stock Control. In principle, everyone agrees on the need for control in times of emergency. But reason, rather than respect for the letter of the law, should be exercised in enforcing restrictive measures. As things stand at present, the regular producer is genuinely handicapped by the short-sighted system under which permits are issued for raw film. It is said that nearly two hundred and eighty licences have been issued since the Government imposed control. This figure is fantastic, considering the fact that in normal times the average number of pictures produced every year in Bombay is only about one hundred and thirty-five. A good many of these licences have not been utilised at all for lack of finance by the licence-holders. There is talk that quite a few producers who managed to secure licences but have not the means to go into production are hawking them surreptitiously. Because of the priority list, which assures licences to certain categories of producers, irrespective of their financial status or creative achievements, many regular producers, who have contributed substantially to the progress of the industry and have the capacity to produce more than one film at a time, are being deprived of the opportunity to do so.

As in the war days, shortage of raw stock and the inflated returns from pictures have once again attracted a number of speculators who are attempting to make films under banners which, for all purposes, are defunct. It is this element which is responsible for the sudden spurt in the membership of IMPPA. When demand exceeds supply, the climate is ideal for black-marketing, and some unscrupulous people are taking advantage of the situation to further their own ends. Though some of the new adventurers, who made their way into films looking for quick returns, may temporarily succeed in their efforts, their continued presence in the industry is bound to cause great harm.

Very few among them are aware of the pitfalls of film production, and it is quite likely that the majority will have to give up their productions half-way, thereby causing economic instability in the industry.

It is indeed surprising that licences were issued so indiscriminately in the beginning, in spite of the fact that there were two accredited representatives of the industry on the Regional Advisory Committee who, in their turn, were advised by the Steering Committee set up by IMPPA. It is not clear who is to be blamed for the present morass, but whoever is responsible for it has brazenly betrayed the cause of the industry and deserves severe censure.

Though sufficient damage has been done already, due to the ignorance or callousness of a few ill-advised persons, it is not too late to safeguard the industry's future interests. That the impending crisis was foreseen by enlightened men in the industry long ago is clear from the joint meeting of representatives of IMPPA and the Producers' Guild convened by the President of the Film Federation of India on the 19th and 20th of August. The meeting was unique, inasmuch as it was one of those rare occasions when members of IMPPA and those of the Guild met on the same platform in a very cordial atmosphere, the Federation chief acting as the harbinger of peace and unity. At that momentous meeting, procedure and principles for the distribution of raw stock were discussed, and it was finally decided to abolish the present elaborate system of classifications. The method of allocating stock evolved at the meeting was simple and effective, and it had even provisions for newcomers who are most important to an art industry like films. If the decisions arrived at the joint meeting had been carried out, there would have been a more equitable distribution of raw stock in the past few months. It is strange that such a good move should have been sabotaged before it was put into practice. In any case, it is never too late to reconsider the scheme.

The responsibility for bridging the gulf between the Guild and IMPPA rests with the President of the Federation. If he was able to rally round him the saner elements in the industry three months ago, he can still do it today when the situation is far worse. For it is absolutely imperative to bring about complete unity in the ranks of producers—privileged or unprivileged—as a prerequisite to any lasting scheme for the welfare of the industry.

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*a timely symposium presenting
the views of leading spokesmen
of the industry.*

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stars spend their leisure.*

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(Third Instalment)*

