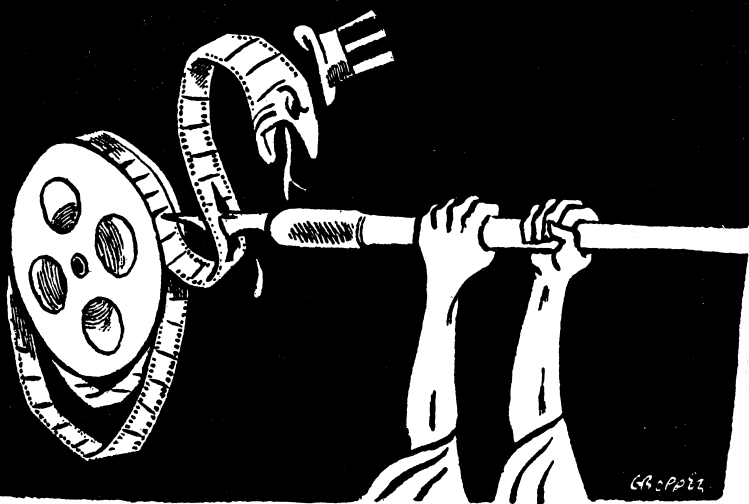


**THE EYES
OF THE
MOVIE**
BY
HARRY ALAN POTAMKIN



63-1212

INTERNATIONAL PAMPHLETS №38



HARRY ALAN POTAMKIN

Born at Philadelphia, April 10, 1900. One of the founders of the John Reed Club, delegate to Kharkov Conference of The International Union of Revolutionary Writers in 1930; frequent contributor to revolutionary press; poet, writer and outstanding film critic. At the time of his death, July 19, 1933, was secretary of the New York John Reed Club, member of National Committee of the Film and Photo League and member of the National Board of Review.

THE EYES OF THE MOVIE

BY HARRY ALAN POTAMKIN

THE movie was born in the laboratory and reared in the counting-house. It is a benevolent monster of four I's: Inventor, Investor, Impresario, Imperialist. The second and fourth eyes are the guiding ones. They pilot the course of the motion-picture. The course is so piloted that it is favorable to the equilibrium of the ruling class, and unfavorable to the working class. This is truer in the realm of the film than in the other arts, for the film more than the other arts is the art of the people.

As far back as 1910 a commentator recognized the movie as the entertainment of "the self-respecting petty-bourgeoisie and the working class." In 1916, D. W. Griffith, pioneer director of the film, called the movie "the laboring-man's university." In 1925, a well-known American writer called it "the laborer's art." The commentator of 1910, a Harvard philosopher, asked for a motion picture that would solve all problems for the audience in melodramas of right victorious over wrong—in short, hokum—because "there is no truth in the superstition that it is good for the public to think." He wanted "social stability." And that is what the makers of the movie want today, even though "social stability" means social stagnation.

The owners of this "art-industry" insist that "their" merchandise is merely entertainment, "passing amusement." They point the finger of reproach to the Soviet film, which is straightforward "propaganda," the urging of a positive and persuasive idea. Now, the movie is for the great majority of people the art to which they most impressionably respond. That has been admitted, as quoted in the first paragraph, and by the evidence of the movie's popularity. Most people are eye-minded. The things their eyes see become the things that affect them. The suggestion of the movie, because they are given in active dramatic images that seem real, with recognizable persons in recognizable settings, and because they are repeated in film after film, become the beliefs of the impressionable audience, whose mind receives the suggestions like wax and retains them like marble. The

movie is the modern ritual, and though its invitation—its benevolence—is “entertainment,” its influence is “propaganda.”

The owners of the movie industry know that the movie is “entertainment as propaganda”—in behalf of their class. Statesmen, churchmen and others serving capitalism have been aware of the effectiveness of the movie for reactionary propaganda ever since that art was invented. As far back as 1902, when the movie was just creeping out of the penny arcade peep-show stage, England was already talking about the “Americanization of the world,” in which process the movie was assigned an important part. Mention was made of how alert the missionaries were to the possibility of the “kinematograph” as propaganda for Christianity. By 1911, the very élite London journal, *Country Life*, in an editorial wrote that the cinematograph in England “soon became utilised for propagandist work. Missionary meetings were enlivened by moving pictures of the heathen in their blindness bowing down to wood and stone.” We see, however, how this same journal in the same editorial gets excited against the film-propaganda of another country, that of the United States.

The movie is the climax to the impressions of other forms of propaganda—school, church, press—and since these are controlled by the same class controlling the movie, the spectator is influenced by one driving class—propaganda implanted in his mind by the decisive impression made by the film. Direct tie-ups of magazine with motion picture go back to 1912, when the Edison serial film, “What Happened to Mary?” ran in the McClure magazine, *The Ladies' World*. Since then the newspaper, the magazine and the published book have worked hand in hand with the film. We find a capitalist like Hearst powerful in press, film,* and radio. The printed word helps to create the atmosphere of romance around the personalities of the players the movie-goer sees on the screen. A glamorous priesthood lures the laity and tells them “all about life.” And since that other great industrialized art—the radio—is joined with the movie, the impression is made even stronger. The sound film has made the movie seem more “real.” And television, because

* His outlets being Hearst Metrotone News, produced by Fox Film Corp. and distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Cosmopolitan Productions, released and distributed by M.-G.-M. Hearst specializes in making films for Marion Davies and in the so-called political films: the notorious “Gabriel Over the White House” which was serialized in the Hearst press simultaneously with its public release, and “Washington Masquerade” for instance.

it will pretend to come direct and untouched from the source, will add to the effectiveness of the propaganda.

To indicate the relative strength of the movie, I quote "from a teacher who overheard two of her high-school pupils discuss the merits of Joseph Hergesheimer's novel, *Java Head*." "One of the girls had read the book, the other had seen the film based on the story. The first referred to the Manchu woman as having given her new light in her conception of the Chinese. But, said her friend, you should have seen her in the movies! She was just like all the rest of them. It's all right to read about them; but I don't like to see them."

This is the medium that is in the hands of high finance. The independent producer hasn't a chance, except to stick close to the average merchandise. The independent distributor is being pushed out speedily, he is now negligible; and the independent producer is not independent in conscience or courage. He makes "horse operas"—cowboy pictures—fake Africans, cheap sex rot, to edge into a controlled market. By 1917, the popular serial actor and director, J. P. MacGowan, writing in a little-read highbrow magazine, could say: ". . . the day is passed when small capital, coupled with boundless presumption, is capable of creating a millionaire overnight. Daily it is becoming more substantially commercialized, which is but another way of saying the conservative element is coming into the ascendant." It would seem that today, with the movie industry at low ebb, an independent might risk a film of more honest subject matter, but the producer, the so-called independent, as well as the movie trust, is part of "the conservative element"—the middle-class that is becoming more and more self-protective. Only one independent can offer the necessary challenge: militant labor.

A glance at the composition of this "conservative element" is enlightening. First, there is the producer, who is also, dominantly, the distributor and the exhibitor. The three-in-one producer is a former small merchant, a manufacturer, a gambler or the like, under financial hegemony. Then there is the director and those pertaining to him, the scenarist, the cameraman, etc. The director, *et al.*, are seldom near to the social experience, the economic life, of the audience who is to be reached and touched. The actor is usually a conceited, glorified upstart without experience, or an actor whose experience in life is framed rigidly by the proscenium arch or the perimeter of the silver screen. Together they express the *nouveau riche* and gross

aspirations of "the conservative element." And it is the actor who especially colors the film, since he is the golden trade-mark of the movie-merchandise. All together they are concentrated in Hollywood, a circle of vested interests whose circumference does not go beyond the perimeter of the screen for a knowledge of life.

In 1914 an independent producer might possibly risk a film sympathizing with the plight of labor. In that year Upton Sinclair's novel, *The Jungle*, was made into a movie. The company that produced it was permitted to go bankrupt. We must not forget also that *The Jungle* has been persistently read down by the middle-class as a tract for pure food, and the middle-class has an interest in that. In the very same year, Jesse Lasky, always a leader in the reactionary film, produced "The Only Son," a film vindicating the strikebreaker and condemning the labor-agitator.

Upton Sinclair sold two other stories to the movies. One was an unpublished play, afterwards the plot-within-a-plot of *The Potboilers*. This was turned into a story of a lost will, having nothing to do with the original. Sinclair's novel, *The Moneychangers*, which describes J. P. Morgan as causing the panic of 1907, was sold to a personal friend, Ben Hampton, who bought it with the promise of respecting both letter and spirit. It appeared as a melodrama of Chinatown dope traffic. Sinclair sought to prevent the use of his name, but Pathé had the contracts, and ideas and names are merchandise in the courts of law, if the idea is *The Moneychangers* and the name is Upton Sinclair.* We have another instance in the case of *An American Tragedy*. Every year Sinclair gets an offer to picturize one of his stories, if he'll "leave out the Socialism." And "socialism" implies, to the American producer, anything that might remotely favor the viewpoint of labor.

In "The Little Church Around the Corner," the movie definitely asks labor to *believe* in the boss through the church. The scene is set in a mining town. An orphan-lad, whose father has been killed in the mine, has an itch for holiness; but he is derided by the villainous boy because he can't effect a miracle on a mute girl. The operator, persuaded by his young daughter, takes the young and frustrated saint under his wing. The boy becomes a clergyman. A

* Ben Hampton doesn't mention this incident in his *History of the Movies* (1931). In 1933, Upton Sinclair steps into Ben Hampton's shoes and refuses to eliminate Eisenstein's name from the distorted version of "Que Viva Mexico," made by Upton Sinclair and Sol Lesser. See *New Masses*, September, 1933, for elaboration on this point.

delegation of miners calls on the operator demanding safer working conditions. The hard-hearted boss refuses to listen. Since it is only a question of the heart, a way must be found to soften that organ. The clergyman goes back to his people. A cave-in takes place. The clergyman digs in and rescues the entombed men. The church, you see, is the saviour of labor. But the workers want revenge on the boss. "What," cries the young minister, "would you use violence?" Now really. . . . The mute girl, grown older and dumber, stands near him. He prays, she prays. The lips move. My God, she speaks. A miracle! The mute girl speaks and the boss sees the light. The men too. They are convinced. The boss's hard heart is as soft as a woman's now. All is honky-tonky (or is it honky-dory) and hotsy-totsy. Capital and labor embrace. To strengthen the religious appeal, the doughnut-damsels of the S. A. (Salvation Army) stand by to help. The war isn't over yet. . . .

But today the theme of capital-and-labor is carefully avoided. The laborer is either a clown or a romantic swashbuckler who gets the girl—"Should a riveter fall in love with an heiress?"—another gay racketeer hero. In this way labor is cajoled and flattered and diverted from the fact at hand, the fact of struggle. In the farcical comedy it is usually one of the lower classes who is the buffoon. He is a goof, a nut, "a classic hobo," "a Christian innocent," who, however, most often, like the "valiant little tailor," wins by the accident of wit at the lucky moment. Of course, the successful class cannot admit its success is entirely luck. It is wit turning accidents into account. So that in effect luck isn't luck at all. Dominance is due entirely to the "divine right" of quick thinking, inspired by the devotion of a pure maiden.

The Negro gets special Jim Crow treatment. He is not new to the American film. Long ago Bert Williams appeared in the movie. Before the war Sigmund Lubin produced all-Negro farces in Philadelphia. They portrayed the Negroes as indolent idiots. It was the film of the Jeffries-Johnson fight, in which the Negro pugilist won, that thrust the Negro out of the movie. The battle took place on July 4, 1910, and was the climax to the bitter racial sentiment that followed upon the panic of 1907.

The southern bosses had seized the opportunity and intensified the breach in the working-class as a way of deflecting the class-attack: a typical strategy. There was the Atlanta railwaymen's race war. In the popular theater, announcement had to be made, on the show-

ing of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," that "a completely white cast" was playing the Negro rôles. It is only very recently that this perennial has been filmed with Negroes, and then in a genial manner, hardly indicting the white masters of today.

The Negro

There have been films with so-called Negro themes. Years ago there was Edward Sheldon's play, *The Nigger*, filmed as "The Governor." Pretending to charitable sentiments toward the Negro, it was actually an attack on miscegenation, intermarriage. America's greatest director, David Wark Griffith, son of a Confederate officer, gave us "The Birth of a Nation," from the Reverend Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman*, which has served, in book and film, as the bible of the Ku Klux Klan! The rise of the twentieth century Klan was inspired by the revival of the picture. And today, when race feeling is so acute in the South, the film is again revived to circulate in provincial towns, as well as cities.

When objection was raised by Negroes and whites to this film, Griffith, behind the barrage of "free speech," issued a pamphlet and a film upon "Intolerance." He quoted from the press North and South in defense of "tolerance." The Houston (Texas) *Chronicle* said:

"The time has not come when the people of Houston are to have their standards of thought or taste set or fixed or regulated by the Negro citizenship. . . ."

The Negro is treated in the film as an amusement: a clown who sings all the time, dances, shoots crap and men, is dissolute, wields a razor, etc. He is the butt. Even films with children, like the Hal Roach *Our Gang* comedies, make the Negro child, "Farina," the receiver of the blows. This has a double insidiousness: it abuses the Negro, and it falsifies childhood relationships. If white children accept a Negro child in their play—as *Our Gang* accepts "Farina"—then the Negro is accepted on equal terms or not at all. Children are not naturally race bigoted. Such sentiment is instilled by adults who are themselves within the influence of a class society.

The southern upper class doesn't want even that much mingling. When the "czar" of the movies, Will Hays, sent out "feelers" to the press, L. F. Hart, reviewer for the Fort Worth (Texas) *Star*, wrote that he "would protest promiscuous mingling of races in such pictures

as Hal Roach comedies as Texas has Jim Crow statutes, and intermarriage of whites and blacks is punishable as miscegenation."

Griffith introduced another racial film. His "One Exciting Night," the parent of mystery farces, has a Negro as the "scary William" of the haunted house. But, since a part is a featured one, Griffith's southern tolerance cannot accept an authentic Negro; he blackfaces Tom Wilson, a white man, for the rôle, adding insult to injury. In his recent film, "Lincoln," our director employs Negroes in a Roxy setting, but keeps them remotely in the background.

"Hallelujah!" pretended to be a sincere picture of the agricultural Negro, but it was another revue-film, with all the trappings of the legendary Negro, as white men like to see him. He is held to blame for his own sorrows. He is his own nemesis—with the devil in him. The white exploiter is completely absolved. When this film was shown in New York, the Negro audience was segregated in a Harlem theater—to "keep them in their place."

The whites saw the film on Broadway, the Great White Way. The southern upper crust objected to "Hallelujah!" They did not like this relation of the Negro as "star," and themselves as "customers." The Negro was not ridiculous enough (no "Amos 'n' Andy"), a little too romantic for the southern boss, worried by signs of working-class solidarity. It must be noticed that the film took care to avoid Negroes too emphatically black; they had to serve "yaller" Negroes to the sexual pander of the white audience and to the "dignity" of the Negro upper class. No objection was raised by the Negro upper class to "Hallelujah!" as was raised to "The Birth of a Nation." The former did not offend the class dignity of the Negro élite—it was "so elemental," you know—although it falsified the Negro tenant farmer.

To make the Negro ridiculous, he is put into all sorts of situations that are out of keeping with the particular film. A documentation of a polar voyage intrudes a Negro to be frightened by a bear tightly bound. The animated cartoon contains "black" animals personified invidiously. The news-reels have shown Negro boys in battle royals and grease-pole fights, degrading sports, for the amusement of the guffawing Tammany clown, Al Smith. They have relished the demonstrations of frenzied baptisms, which are as common, certainly, among the southern whites as among the blacks. But white baptisms are not shown on the screen.

Negroes have produced films with Negroes as actors. These duplicate white productions. They avoid the real life of the Negro. They do not dare to criticize the society that produces racial antagonism, because that would mean issuing films on the life of the Negro worker as a worker.

The Jew

The Jew has had special treatment, too. He too has been a clown or a sentimentalized scarecrow. In 1912, the American Solax Company, in advertising their film, "A Man's Man," said: "Up to very recently the stage Jew was the only type which furnished universal amusement. Long whiskers, derby hat down to the ears and hands moving like the fins of a fish. His manhood, his sentiments and his convictions are not burlesqued (that is, not in this film, 'A Man's Man') but are idealized." The Reliance Company produced "Solomon's Son," so their notice read, "with dignity, minus the burlesque atmosphere usually attending the Gentile's version of a Jewish story." So that between the comic Jew and the idealized Jew there are no gradations. To find the real Jew we must turn to the Soviet film.* We hear no objection to this distortion of the Jew, but when the shoddy film "The King of Kings" appears, Jewish upper-class dignity is offended by the portrayal of historic (biblical) characters, and what a lamentation is heard! To these silk-hat Jews Cecil De Mille, the director replies, beating his breast, "Would I insult the Jews? I'm half-Jew myself." And so we get the Negro on the half-shell, the Jew on the half-shell, the worker on the half-shell, as an appetizer for middle-class attitudes.

In the meantime, the film evangel, political decoy, of the American art, Will Hays, in his ambiguous code of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc., says that "The History, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly." Not the foreigner or foreign-born worker in America, God and Wall Street forfend! but only the "prominent people" are to be treated with courtesy, people like an ex-Grand Duke, still called by his title, a Siamese king, a prince of Japan, the Prince of Wales—anyone high-hat enough. The news-

* The Jew and the Jewish problem has been dealt with in such Soviet films as "Cain and Artem," "A Jew At War," "Horizon," and "The Return of Nathan Becker"—the first Soviet sound film in the Yiddish language.

reel and dramatic picture present him as superfine merchandise. The Swede prisoner in "The Big House" devours all the prison swill that even the moral moron, the American machine-gun murderer Butch, revolts against.

"Give the Public What It Wants"

You see, we need the swell folk. The movie business believes in "Give the Public what it wants!" Which means: "Give the public what we want the public to want!" By "we" in this reference, I mean the dominant class. That oppressive stratum wants the public to react away from certain "prejudices"—they have been dealt with in this pamphlet up to now—and it wants the public to act toward certain illusions, vicarious experiences, distractions, glamorous falsehoods.

The "problem" that may be faced is that of the "restless rich," the love-irritations of those who are born to the purple. The audience is served these films on polished platters as experiences of witty folk, so lucky to have such tremulous heartaches and such easy access to liquor. The agonies of the social register. The Blue Book Blues. The audience feels the thrill of escape from the major problem of reality into a life of fancy which appears real. Repeated succession of such films makes the audience, "the self-respecting petty-bourgeoisie and the working-class," forgetful of their plight—that at least is the hope of the class serving this dish. As more and more doubt creeps into the audience through the pressure of circumstance and positive radical education, the illusions served will be augmented to overwhelm dissent.

"The Nouveau Riche"

The ideas of the *nouveau riche* are constantly fed the lower class audience. Distance in time, place and experience is offered as enchantment. There is the thriller, the carelessness of the slapstick, the boulevardier comedy of an Adolphe Menjou, the comedy of the glistening high hat. There is approximate rape—the thrill of it, and the compensation—rape with virginity preserved. There is the final kiss, the happy ending; and even the unhappy ending has its compensation, arbitrary redemption, the acquittal of social institutions or the tears of solace. There is the princess and the

serving-man, the prince and the serving-maid motif—a cat may look at a queen; “she got her man.” There is the good bad man—rural in the wild west film—cosmopolitan in the racketeer picture. The bluffs at exposing racketeering merely hide its basis in our competitive society. There is the picture glorifying the magnate as human: George Arliss in “The Millionaire”—“there’s no lace on his underwear.” The one picture on the life of a living American is prepared on John D. Rockefeller, Sr. It is to be called by the name of the paragon himself, and he has ok’d the scenario. It is announced on the occasion of the capitalist’s 92nd birthday anniversary, when the country’s press spends its talents in eulogy, and John D., Jr., writes to one newspaper saying how gratifying it is to know that though “Two or three decades ago he (John D., Sr.) was being bitterly assailed for the alleged predatory tactics of the great oil company with which he was identified; since that time sentiment toward him appears to have undergone a radical change.” A reactionary change. The process of bourgeois society is one of vindication, and how well the movie serves it. While the press and the pictures pretend to go thumbs down on racketeering, urging “The Secret Six,” the “vigilantes,” to get after the gangster (Pathé has even its newsreels serve in this racket), the racketeer *par excellence* is deified.

A number of these self-defense films pretend to be social criticism. We get epic subjects like “The Trail of ’98,” “The Covered Wagon” and “Cimarron” reduced into films that are narratives of attempted rape and the “eternal triangle,” personal enmity and personal vanity. We get prison films like “The Big House” that shift the social guilt from society to the individual and from the individual to nowhere. We get “An American Tragedy”* that debases a criticism of society to a justification of its vicious process by having justice redeemed—a tragic social document becomes a duplicate murder story and the Court says: “That’s fine! The people want to see justice prevail rather than the inevitability of a social process.”

War-Films

And we have the war films.

The film has served the war from its infancy. The American

* See H. A. Potamkin, “Novel into Film: A Case Study of Current Practice,” in *Close Up*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1931), 267-78, and S. M. Eisenstein, “An American Tragedy,” in *Close-Up*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1933), 109-24.

movie had its start in the Spanish-American War. Roumania used pictures of her troops in the Balkan war to stir enthusiasm for the World War. And Japan did the same with pictures of the Russo-Japanese War. In 1915, when we were ostensibly neutral, films like "The Treason of Anatole" were produced, sympathizing with French and German soldiery, but making of war a wistful attraction. That year England perpetrated films with a dual purpose: to stimulate enlistment and to encourage Anglophile sentiment in America. An English producer said to an American journalist at that time:

"Our days—and nights too—are spent in glorifying the British and showing the Germans up in an unfavorable light. . . . American exhibitors have no desire to violate Uncle Sam's admirable desire to be neutral."

The tone, as well as sequence, is ironical. "Fooling the Fatherland" became, for American consumption, "A Foreign Power Outwitted." "The explanatory matter of the play is to be so altered that it mentions either a nameless or fictitious power at war with Britain." But—"for all our scheming we fail to cover up the fact that the enemy wear German uniforms, and a 'doctored' photoplay may always be detected by others."

In September, 1915, Hudson Maxim's preparedness tract, *Defenseless Peace*, was filmed as "The Battle Cry of Peace." Ford attacked the picture in full-page newspaper ads. "He pointed out that Maxim munitions corporation stock was on the market." Thomas Ince served the quasi-pacifist dish, "Civilization," which strengthened Wilson's campaign on the "Kept us out of the war" ticket. The dubious pacifism of America produced "War Brides," provoked by the acuteness of feminism at that moment. It told "how a woman, driven to desperation by the loss of loved ones, defied an empire." Its romantic futility satisfied the uncritical pacifism that subscribed to, and was betrayed by, the Woodrovian slogans "too proud to fight," "watchful waiting," "he kept us out of the war." How simple it was to convert these into one glamorous "Make the world safe for democracy"! "War Brides" was suppressed. The suppression was justified thus: ". . . the philosophy of this picture is so easily misunderstood by unthinking people that it has been found necessary to withdraw it from circulation for the duration of the war."

Hearst, more interested in Mexico and Japan than in Europe, took

the serial "The Last of the Cannings," glorifying the Dupont family and American womanhood, and converted it into "Patria," an attack on Hearst's phobias. We were not yet at war with Germany but close to it, and Japan was an ally of Britain, an enemy of Germany. Woodrow Wilson asked that the anti-Japanese touches be removed. The Japanese flag was lifted out, and, by contiguity, the Mexican too. Preparations for the war-objector were part of the preparedness propaganda. In the last months of 1916, "The Slacker" told of the conversion of a society butterfly into a flag-sycophant. It should be indicated also that the soldiers in "War Brides," against whom Alla Nazimova rose, were out-and-out German.

Films appeared romanticizing British history and espionage; "The Victoria Cross," the English in India; "Shell 34," the heroism of a spy; "An Enemy of the King," the days of Henry of Navarre. In 1914 the outdoor war-news film-showings of the New York *Herald* brought counter-applause from Allied and Entente sympathizers. "We were neutral with a vengeance in those days." Germany tried to edge in for sympathy with "Behind the German Lines." But the interests were concentrating popular interest upon the Allies, and pro-British, pro-French films appeared. Geraldine Farrar played in "Joan the Woman," a Lasky picture. Pictures of our troops in Mexico, and the war abroad, had served to create an ennui for battle. The yearning was there, at first weak and confused, but steadily strengthened into violence by suggestion and direct hypodermic. The rape of Belgium was perpetrated in the studios of America, abetted by our Allies. An uninterrupted propaganda turned America about face, seemingly overnight. Actually, this propaganda had been increasingly at work, ascending toward a climax, and America had turned quarter-'bout, half-about, until full about, facing the Entente "squarely." The need was to create and sustain a war-temper, to eliminate all doubts, and to extract devotion, moral and material.

The impressionable directors set to. The Ince producers of "Civilization" emitted "Vive la France." Slogan films were plentiful: "Over There," "To Hell with the Kaiser," "For France," "Lest We Forget." Love for our brothers-in-arms was instilled by films domestic and imported, such as: "The Belgian," "Daughter of France," Sarah Bernhardt in "Mothers of France," "Somewhere in France," "Hearts of the World," D. W. Griffith's contribution to

the barrage. The strifes of France were presented to America: "Birth of Democracy" (French Revolution), and "The Bugler of Algiers" (1870). The vestiges of admiration for Germany were eliminated by films like "The Kaiser," "Beast of Berlin," "The Prussian Cur," "The Hun Within." German-American support was bid for in Mary Pickford's "The Little American," a tragicomedy describing "the German Cavalry of bestiality," "the hell-hounds" and "the repentant Kaiserman." Chaplin ridiculed the Kaiser in "Shoulder Arms." The fair sex was intrigued by films like "Joan of Plattsburg." As far back as 1916, "when everybody but the public knew we were going into the big fight overseas," a glittering Joan on a white horse, contributed by the movie people, had paraded in the suffrage march on Fifth Avenue. The movie stars—like Mary Pickford and Dorothy Dalton—became the symbolic Joans of American divisions in the war. A miniature Joan, Baby Peggy, joined the abominable harangue that children spat on fathers of families: "Don't be a slacker!" An insidious propaganda among children was instituted and developed. The "non-military" Boy Scouts had films made especially for them: "Pershing's Crusaders," "The Star Spangled Banner," "The War Waif," "Your Flag and My Flag," serials like "The English Boy Scouts to the Rescue," and "Ten Adventures of a Boy Scout." The objector was shamed by "don't bite the hand that's feeding you" movies: "My Own United States," "A Call to Arms (The Son of Democracy)," "The Man Without a Country," "Draft 258," "The Unbeliever," "The Great Love," "One More American," "The Man Who Was Afraid." German atrocities were insisted upon: "The Woman the Germans Shot." All branches of the service were gilded: "The Hero of Submarine D2."

Governmental organization found incentive in conjunction with England, citizen bodies and the film corporations. An American Cinema Commission went abroad. England had organized one with eminent individuals like Conan Doyle. D. W. Griffith not only was at work in England on "Hearts of the World," but he also cooperated with high society in recruiting British sentiment. The National Association of the Motion Picture Industry, William A. Brady, president, was organized but never functioned, although it served as a stimulant to the movie companies' enthusiasm. The Red Cross had begun to use films, but not satisfactorily enough. With Creel's Committee on Public Information, the Red Cross set

up the Division of Pictures, which released four films to one-third of the movie houses, "about the same number of audiences as Chaplin audiences." In New York there was the Mayor's Committee of National Defense, Jesse L. Lasky, motion picture chairman. The movie companies organized a War Cooperative Council. In 1918 the films were said to have put about \$100,000,000 into the war chest. Movie stars spoke and carried on for the Red Cross, the Liberty Loan and enlistment. A propaganda slide in the cinemas read: "If you are an American, you should be proud to say so." The sale of Liberty Loan bonds was helped by 70,000 slides. Douglas Fairbanks jumped from a roof for \$100 for the Red Cross, and Chaplin sold autographed halves of his hat. The movie actors joined the California Coast Artillery, others organized the Lasky Home Guards. Lasky received a title for his work in many divisions. His cooperation with the government was balanced after the war by the government's willingness to help in the aviation film, "Wings." The popular star, Robert Warwick, now a Captain, was quoted in the fan-press upon war's ennobling qualities.

The period since the war resembles in a general way the period before and during the war. There are films like "The Big Parade" and even "All Quiet on the Western Front" which explicitly condemn war, but implicitly, by their nostalgic tone, their uncritical non-incisive pacifism, their placing of the blame on the lesser individual and the stay-at-home, their sympathy with the protagonist, their excitement, their comic interludes, make war interesting. Their little condemnations are lost, amid the overwhelming pile of films in which war is a farcical holiday, or a swashbuckler's adventure. The momentary pointing of guilt is made so naive, so passing that it never gets across to the audience—"The Case of Sergeant Grischa," and "Hell's Angels." It simply serves as a betrayal supporting the bluff of disarmament conferences.

Carl Laemmle was suggested for the Nobel Peace Prize for "All Quiet." During the war he made "The Kaiser Beast of Berlin," after the war he wept upon the plight of his "Vaterland" in his advertising column in the *Saturday Evening Post*, and after "All Quiet" he issues a series of sergeant-private-girl farces in which one of the agonized Germans of "All Quiet" is starred. Well, he still qualifies for the prize; he is no less noble than Wilson or Grey.

We have also governmental cooperation. The Navy, however, has declined to cooperate in films kidding officers. It's all right to make

fools of gobs, but it's bad business to invite gobs to laugh at the officers. The class distinction is important in the capitalist army, more and more important today. Further cooperation between producers and military is found in the Warner Brothers' instruction in sound to officers. The battleships are being sound-equipped. How easily the movie can be put on a war-basis! And, of course, we still have the films glorifying individual branches of the service, from diving to aviation. Film-producers and impresarios carry honorary military titles.

Let us not be led astray by objections to pacifist films like "All Quiet" and "Hell's Angels." The neurosis of "national honor" is today so active in capitalist countries that the slightest abrasion sets it off. The fascist Germans find in these films insults to German officers. The fascist French accept them for the same reason. In the meantime, Germany issues a film like "The German Mother-Heart," in which a mother who has lost six sons is made to feel how exceptional was her opportunity. In America a similar theme is handled in "Four Sons." And with it all we have "educational" films flaunting patriotism; R.K.O. has a Patriotic Week that is praised by Vice-President Curtis . . . the total is rather threatening. Only the workers' movement is a potent factor against imperialist war.

Imperialist war is completely indicted in the films of the U. S. S. R. alone. The Soviet kino selects images at once real and symbolic that concentrate the horror of war and relate war to its source. Andreas Latzko, in his book *Men in War*, created a picture of war whose images are at once real, symbolic and relentless. No film-producer has proven his sincere condemnation of war by filming this book. Capitalism wants its pacifism delectable. The Soviet kino goes beyond Latzko. It sets war directly within the society producing it. A film developed entirely to war can do nothing else but make of war an ominous, therefore compelling, universe. The Soviet film makes war a portion of the film, the hideous peak of a competitive society.*

The movie is valuable as a merchandise in itself, to sell other merchandise, as a vehicle for the "national idea," and as an instrument of imperialist control. In an editorial—quoted at the beginning

* The best example is Boris Barnet's "The Patriots"—released in America by Amkino in 1933. See also, note by Irving Lerner in *New Masses*, August, 1933, p. 27.

of this pamphlet—in the November fourth issue of the *London Country Life*, 1911, we are told:

Some recent events in Canada have caused many of us to consider more seriously than heretofore the purposes to which the cinematograph can be used. The business in moving pictures was practically monopolised by two American firms, and they, moved no doubt, only by pecuniary motives, followed the practice which has long been that of our cousins of twisting the lion's tail. The particular twisting which appeared to find favour in the United States consisted in showing an American soldier in the performance of deeds of unheard-of gallantry, and a British soldier in an attitude correspondingly contemptible. This might very well pass as an amusement in some of the more remote and less enlightened towns of the United States. It does not concern us much here, because there has always been a considerable amount of raillery passed between John Bull and Uncle Sam. . . .

But a very different situation arose when those exhibitions were carried into one of the most important Overseas Dominions of the King.

England doesn't care what America thinks of her, but she's worried about what her colonies may think. However, in dealing with another power, diplomatic care must be taken. Therefore the Overseas Club handled the matter without, of course, criticising "the taste of the American manufacturer in pandering to the anti-British element in the United States." The Ottawa branch met and protested strongly against the exhibition of too many motion pictures—does this imply that a limited number were acceptable?—"showing deeds of valour performed by the Americans to the detriment of views exhibiting the glory of the British people." British war pictures were substituted in Canada. The New York press called the Canadian sentiment anti-American. Today, 20 years later, when the nationalist temper is hot and bothered, oh, what a lot of rancor in Ottawa! Some fifteen years after that pre-war strife, the same sentiment was expressed, with scurrility, by the British press, which saw before it the enormity of the American movie. A fascist journal, *The Patriot*, wrote on "American Film Propaganda":

"We hope, but do not expect, that the agitation over British films will arouse English people to the danger in their midst of American propoganda through the agency of American films. England is being suffocated by American films; they lead in East and West. . . . The historical films have for their motive the belittling of the Monarchy as an institution." Come now!

J. W. Drawbell, editor of the *London Sunday Chronicle*, said: "We are suffering from too much America!" But, he added, "We are fools if we delude ourselves that we have nothing to learn from these same people at whom we rather look down our noses." The Prince of Wales was called upon to urge an empire movie for England. The imperialistic motivation is easily read between the lines of Premier Macdonald to the House of Commons in 1927:

There is one serious reason why everyone of us is interested in British films being shown abroad, and that is that British films should uphold to foreign nations a better conception of the moral conduct and social habits of people who profess to belong to the leading nations of the world than, unfortunately, is the case with so many films that are being exported, for instance, to China . . . these people, who, a few years ago, regarded us as being a dominant and ruling people.

The Labor Party premier is worried about British financial prestige in the Far East. Two years previously, the Tory Baldwin had showed himself in accord with the premier to follow when he said to Parliament:

I think the time has come when the position of the film industry in this country should be examined to see if it is not possible, as it is desirable on national grounds, having regard to the enormous power which the film has developed for propoganda purposes, and the danger to which we in this country and our empire subject ourselves, if we allow that method of propoganda to be in the hands of foreign countries.

Mr. Baldwin is less ambiguous than his successor. England is most disturbed about the influence of the film in South Africa, where white hegemony is threatened by the increasing cohesion between black and white workers. Therefore the censorship is very severe in regard to the possible effect of films on the natives. Anathema are "all subjects which are calculated to wound the susceptibilities of foreign people, and especially of our subjects of the British Empire." These are "political" anathema: political hypocrisy. Among the "social" are "stories" showing any "antagonistic or strained relations between white men and the colored population of the British Empire, especially with regard to the question of sexual intercourse, moral or immoral, between individuals of different races." The divisions of the censors' code dovetail. Under "military" we discover that the movie may not show "officers in British uniform in a dis-

graceful light," "conflicts between the armed forces of a State and the populace," "reflections on wife of responsible British official in the East." These are quoted from specific restrictions. In 1928 films were censored on "political" grounds of "references to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales," "libellous reflections on Royal Dynasties," "British Possessions represented as lawless sinks of iniquity," "white men in state of degradation amidst Far Eastern and Native surroundings," and—always this reiteration—"equivocal situations between white girls and men of other races." How about white men and girls of other races? Was not a scene deleted from "Piccadilly" where the British star, Jameson Thomas, kisses the Chinese-American actress, Anna May Wong? Under "administration of justice," we find that no film coming into Britain or born in Britain may show police firing on defenseless populace." That, of course, has never happened in the magnanimous British Empire.

Lately the British press has been feverish in the demand for even closer censorship of films for South Africa. It protests the "deplorable impression of the morality of the white man, and, worse still, of the white woman," which American films convey. "The establishment of a Board in London . . . to censor all films for exhibition in tropical Africa . . . will readily commend itself to all those who have the best interests of the native races . . . at heart, as well as the prestige of the Europeans." ". . . the silly tosh . . . on American films does materially help to lower the prestige of the white man in the eyes of the unsophisticated native." "The increase in crime out here is in many instances due to the film, and anything that in any way decreases the prestige of white women in a black country is an abomination which should be firmly put down."

Yet the British film sees nothing deplorable in picturing an Arab resistance to British invasion as the act of a "dirty dog," in "The Lost Patrol." England may reply that it is competing with the American movie, which purchased a British novel, "Beau Geste," and put it under the direction of an Englishman, Herbert Brenon, to be made into a movie glorifying three Britishers in the Foreign Legion against the Arabs. Incidentally, a Frenchman is portrayed in the film as a "rat." France protests and prohibits the film. U. S. A. produces a sequel, "Beau Sabreur," in which the "rat" is not only a Frenchman but a rebel, too. To assuage France, Hollywood then issues "Forgotten Faces," wherein the Americanism for Frenchman, "Froggie," becomes, for French circulation, "Broggie,"

but the type, a crook, is a French stereotype of American idiom. What does Will Hays say about respect for the citizens of other countries?

England applauds film-making in India, as long as the makers are upper caste Indians, waiting on British approval and the films obsolete and meaningless legends around Indian princes. Under various other guises imperialism is supported, defended, vindicated, honored. England films Sir Alan Cobham's aeroplane tour of Africa. The "White Man's Burden" becomes lighter in the air, especially when the "burden" itself is kidded. France films the automobile expedition of the Henry Ford of France, André Citroen. The trek is recorded through the "black heart" in dances by the natives, but never are we permitted an insight into the imperialistic nature of this expedition and its meaning to these black dancers. America issues boastful "hunt" films in which the Negro is a coward and a lazy wretch. These films have become such a formula that they are patched up in studios from fragments and "shots" taken in zoological gardens. In such a film "Africa Speaks," the perpetrators dare to stage the slaughter of a Negro boy by a lion, and to mourn the death hypocritically. It is obviously a fake, but that a Negro and not a white man is chosen as the victim is itself significant. The two false "explorers" are most offensive in their enacted authority toward the Negroes, whom they would never dare to treat so in the open veldt. Their conduct is a commentary on the "white man's negro." Lions roar and the white men boldly face the beasts with their cameras. The Negroes dive into a cave and hide. The goateed white man remarks upon a Negro: "He is tired. L-a-z-y, tired." Will Hays threatened to expose the bogusness of this film. The Columbia company, its distributors, joined the Hays organization. The film is still circulating. . . . If it isn't contempt the chauvinistic film heaps upon the Negro, then it is patronage, the faithful slave, as in "Trader Horn."

The evasion of the human subject-matter in the films of colonial and semi-colonial peoples typifies most American pictures of that kind. We have a film around monkeys, "Rango"; or a film in which the native is an isolated unit, "Chang"; or a film in which the natives are "forgotten people," "Grass"; or a film of a remote and unimportant legend in which the imperialistic suggestion is safe in the background, "Tabu"; or lyrical studies of a ceremony like "Moana." In "White Shadows in the South Seas," the struggle is platitudi-

nously, abstractly, stated as between "civilization" and "romance," and concretely as between a gang of thugs and a derelict doctor romantically inclined. Never is this struggle depicted as the advance of imperialism, and never is the conclusion more than a wistful shrug of the shoulders: "It's very, very sad, but nothing can be done about it."

In reference to the Indian, since the tale is retrospective, we may see the film lamenting the "vanished Indian." This is the gallantry that slays and then forgives. Or it may idealize the "lost paradise" as in "The Silent Enemy," or vindicate the white man by having the hero or the hero's son marrying the chief's daughter—never, of course, the lowly Indian girl. This occurs in "Cimarron," where the hero murmurs distantly about the \$1.40 paid the Indian for his land, and the wife talks about the "dirty Indians," and the son marries the Indian hired-girl, who, I'll have you know, is no humble menial, but an Osage chief's daughter. By 1930, the marriage becomes respectable, even elite. And there are the innumerable films in which the Red Man is a vicious murderer, or a sneak. If he is a half-breed, well, of course, he's got to be a sneak. "Cimarron" has such a character. From the heights of his superiority the white exploiter may condescend to see the Red Man as a loyal person—loyal, that is, to the white Gentile, happy to be the "White Man's burden," along with Negro and Jew. It is interesting that in this one film, "Cimarron," the devoted Osage, the loyal Negro, who dies in his loyalty, the soulful Jew (whose soul grows from a peddler's wagon into a department-store) are assembled for the entertainment and education of the audience. In this way the imperialist, the oppressor, is complimented and his imperialism is redeemed and glorified. Other tactics are used to aid the machinery of white-washing and covering up the deeds of the imperialists.

In the last few years the screen has abounded with films glorifying American aggression. "Old Ironsides" dealt with the War with Tripoli. "The Rough Riders" makes an idyll of the Spanish American War and "Flight" says sweet things about our Nicaraguan occupation.

Nationalistic self-glory, to the disadvantage of the oppressed, fills the screens of the capitalist world. Italy anticipated the fascist "march on Rome" with pictures glorifying the Roman past: "Cabiria," "Quo Vadis," "Theodora," etc. Since the fascist coup, Italy has been producing films sentimentalizing her imperialist aspira-

tions in the love of an Arab for an Italian, and of an Italian for an Arab.*

Only one society dares to issue films exposing imperialism. That society is the land of the Soviets. "A Shanghai Document," "China Express," "Storm Over Asia," "Love in the Caucasus," "Salt of Swanetia," and other films, depict the suppression of autonomy, the aggression in the Orient, the contrasts in life between colonial or semi-colonial and the imperialist, between poor colonial and rich. Similarly the Soviet films are the only ones which expose the imperialistic motive of war.

The land of this cinema is the present target of the imperialists. When the Russian monarchy was destroyed, the event was seized upon by demagogues as a proof of the slogan that the war was being fought to "make the world safe for democracy." But at the same time Russia's defection was threatening. Brenon, who made the feminist-pacifist "War-Brides" before the war, and was to make the pacifist "The Case of Sergeant Grischka" after the war, directed "The Last of the Romanoffs," where Rasputin is the villain, the Tsar a duped innocent, and the *pogromschik* of Tsaritzin, now Stalingrad—the "mad monk," Iliodor, "in person"—is the hero, the saviour of Russia. The film was directed against the Kaiser, "the Rasputin of Europe," and the Bolsheviks. It was meant as a discouragement of the Revolution. "Anton the Terrible," a Lasky crime, admitted the guilt of the Tsarist officer, who apologizes for his cruelty, and it condemned the revolutionary. In the years before the war, America had issued films sympathizing with the revolutionary, usually a Jew. The films were made by Jews not as yet in established social positions and therefore not too suspicious as yet of the revolutionary suggestions of such films as "Nihilist Vengeance," "The Heart of a Jewess," "The Terrors of Russia," "The Black Hundred," etc. Moreover, in many of these films an effort was made to reconcile the persecuted with the persecutor in morganatic marriages or in the sudden "ennoblement" of the tyrant. The solution of the dis-

* One has only to follow the news of the German film industry since Hitler came into power for further confirmation of this fact. For some time before Hitler's regime, the government turned out pro-fascist and imperialist films. Two of them were distributed here: "The Rebel" and "Morgenrot," the former a fake historical film preaching nazi-nationalism with the help of Christianity against France. Universal Pictures Corp., Jewish owned and Jewish managed by father and son, Laemme, are the distributors, and they are now making a film in America for the Nazis. "Morgenrot" was distributed by an independent firm.

cord was carried very emphatically into the film that echoed to the February revolution and the threat of October. With this propaganda at work, America, through an official Bureau, let it be known that

. . . the American economic mission in Russia will use the motion pictures for the advance work of enlightening the uninformed people of the most remote parts, as well as Russians in general who have been entirely misled by German propaganda.

Because of existing conditions in Russia, and in effect of German propaganda, no amount of printed matter could possibly accomplish so much as the widespread showing of motion pictures. Films will open the way for effective later use of printed matter.

For the Great Russian film campaign the motion picture companies have been called upon for *forty miles of film*, providing not only the directly educational and news films which show America's war activities, troops in France and the German devastation of Belgium, but also a certain proportion of typical American screen dramas.

If Ivan laughs at Charlie Chaplin, and falls in love with Mary Pickford, he comes appreciably nearer to reaching a receptive state of mind for the subsequent work of the American mission.

*Anti-Soviet Propaganda **

Since the war, suggestive films have been issued in which the attempt is made to influence the mind of the audience against Soviet Russia by idealizing and romanticizing Tsarist days—the court, the love of an aristocrat for a girl of the people, etc. Other films, like "The Last Command," glorify a nobleman, the Grand Duke, and by direct contrast, degrade the revolutionary. In "The Last Command," a train carrying the revolutionists collapses through a bridge. I shall not go as far as to say that this is intended as a symbolic prophecy of the collapse of the Soviet Union, but it certainly excites an emotion prejudicial to it. Every land has been guilty of heinous film-propaganda against Soviet Russia. The Fox company of America, which has recently gone thumbs down on all newsreel "clips" showing unemployment lines and all that might even remotely be construed as "bolshvist propaganda," has recently issued a film

* Recently there has been another cycle of anti-Soviet films: "Clear All Wires" and "Rasputin and the Empress," both directed by Richard Boleslavsky, the Polish White Guardist. Other films have been "Scarlet Dawn" and "Forgotten Commandments."

called "The Spy" which hallows the Grand Duke and invites the assassination of the Soviet official. This film has had diligent circulation to family audiences. It relates of the emigres in Paris. "Cheka" spies listen in. The Grand Duke—never once visible to the audience—becomes more awesome by speaking and revealing his physical presence only with his arm and hand. This is a theatrical trick that was used in "Ben Hur" to deify Christ. Someone must go to Moscow to assassinate "Citizen X," the leader of the "Cheka," who, we are told, won't let the emigres' families leave the U. S. S. R. The sympathy is all with the emigres who, for no fault of their own, are being persecuted. The noble young Captain, whose wife and child are in Russia, risks his life to do the deed, which ain't, according to Fox, so dirty. A "Cheka" spy trails him; he beats the spy off.

Nobility just oozes out of the pores of this movie. The nobility of the invisible Grand Duke, the Captain, the wife, the son, the *bezprizorni*. These last, the homeless waifs, are presented so as to suggest they are still rampant in Russia, when, as a matter of fact, the Soviets have heroically solved their problem. In the film, the Soviet "police" pursue the waifs. Several fall to death from the housetops. Anything to increase the horror of the Soviet "régime." So noble, in contrast, is aristocracy that the Captain's wife willingly becomes the hostess in a state gambling-house because the money from the den goes to succor the waifs, with whom her child lived while she was purposely falsely imprisoned. You see, one of the aristocrats is now a "traitor" to his class. The "Cheka" uses him to trap the Captain because they know he loves the Captain's wife. And when he wants to do her further dirt, the waifs kill him—they love aristocrats so. How noble are the enemies of the Soviet Union; how ignoble are the friends! The film was made about the time Soviet Russia nipped the intervention plot of the Industrial Party, about the time Denikin's "history" appeared in English, wherein the interventionist of 1920 avows the emigres have not yielded their "ideals."

The immediate motivation behind the picture is explained by the identities of the members of the Fox directorial board. They include: the president of the Utilities, Power & Light Corp.; chairman of the governing committee of the Chase National Bank; the son-in-law of Andy Mellon who is, at the same time, a director of the U. P. Railroad; Corny Vanderbilt; the prexy of the Central Trust Co. of

Illinois; other bankers, industrialists, etcetera. The interlocking of control means a unity of purpose, and the imminent purpose is war—against the Soviet Union.

Every reactionary agency and institution in our society has its hand or wants its hand in the movie. The Daughters of the American Revolution has a Committee for Better Films. The National Chairman, in her annual report (1928) said: "I am sure that every one present will agree with me that the motion picture today holds what is probably the greatest power for good or evil in the world; and I am sure that you agree also that it is up to you and to me, and to our prototypes among the 116,000,000 citizens, which influence shall predominate." Under the hypocritical guise of "Better Films," the influence that shall predominate is apparent enough. The influence is to be borne by patriotic films of state and national history, with the emphasis on a "George Washington" picture. The D. A. R. coöperates with the Hays organization in the interests of this "patriotic service" to glorify the incidents and personages of American history, from the Battle of Saratoga to the imperialistic flights of Colonel Lindbergh. Among the ten films favored by the Chairman of the Committee are four pictures sentimentalizing military training, mother sacrifice in war, jingoism generally; two are of a religious nature; one romanticizes the subjugation of the American Indian; and one is anti-Soviet. The D. A. R. advertises itself in "patriotic trailers" taking "3 minutes for showing." The first of these reveals "our flag waving in the breeze, with a boy and a girl, either scouts or members of the Children of the American Revolution, properly saluting the flag and pledging allegiance to it, using the uniform flag salute adopted by the D. A. R. and 67 other patriotic organizations." We find the D. A. R. poking into other civilian bodies like the National Board of Review and the Amateur Cinema League, whose executive director sports the title of "Colonel." The various state chapters boast of having shown patriotic films on such occasions as George Washington's birthday anniversary—waving the flag ostentatiously. In the chairman's report care is taken to refer to the help the motion picture industry has given to the Red Cross, and to mention the Church and Drama Association, recently deceased, and the Religious Motion Picture Foundation. The former organization had the chairman at one of its luncheons as "a guest of honor."

The church has been thirsty and hungry for the movie. It has

found the film edging in on its province as distraction and ritual and has brought pressure on the industry and government in an attempt to control the "art of the lowly." Finding that it could not dispose of so powerful a folk-pleasure by calling it a "menace," and very early discovering how this medium could serve clerical propaganda, it went into the arena in two ways. First, it has sought to produce films—not too successfully. We have read above of the early missionary-films. One of the first pictures made was of the Passion. This was "duped" and repeated over and over again. One may find ads today for such pictures in trade journals like *The Billboard*. In 1925 the Religious Motion Picture Foundation was organized under the auspices of the Harmon Foundation. Its offices are appropriately in the financial district of New York, Nassau Street. As to the productions of this Foundation, we read "All controversial or debatable grounds have been avoided and the subject-matter of all pictures has been confined to simple and well recognized interpretations that have governed Christianity through the centuries." The Foundation wants the church "to compete" effectively "with the drawing power of golf-course, beach and motor," not only to lure "the young people of today, and many of the older ones" away from the movies and dance halls—of course, "if you are able to draw large crowds away you are to be congratulated," but to give them at the same time "a living and inspiring religion." The church was losing its grip over young people.

On March 20, 1914, Canon Chase appeared before the Committee on Education of the House of Representatives and opposed the unofficial National Board of Censors, now National Board of Review. Chase has been very zealous for a national censorship that would make it simpler for the church—his church—to control the film. For some time he issued in the joint name of the New York Civic League and the Lord's Day Alliance, his Catechism on *Motion Pictures in Interstate Commerce*. Today he is general secretary of the Federal Motion Picture Council which wants a government commission to control the movie. Similarly the Women's Christian Temperance Union endorses the Hudson bill which amid the usual decoys of moral supervision places the *real* aim of capitalist control: the suppression of films that "ridicule or deprecate public officials, or other governmental authority, or which tend to weaken the authority of the law, which offend the religious belief of any person or ridicule recognized leaders or symbols of any religious sect; which

'unduly emphasize bloodshed and violence.'" This is obviously class-legislation and really nationalizes the Hays code. The question is solely as to which reactionary agency shall directly benefit from the profits of control. Our fight against national censorship must be solely one to prevent further suppression of films made by the possible courageous independent, by labor, or the Soviet studios. We know that the censors of Pennsylvania suppressed "The Armored Cruiser Potemkin," and that "Seeds of Freedom" was emasculated beyond any possible showing. Since the latter film revealed the synagogue's betrayal of young Jews in the 1905 revolution, Jews of Philadelphia "society" refused to "pull strings" for its freedom from gross destruction. We know that while Hays wants to keep national censorship off, and control in his own hand, he was not averse to—in fact, induced—the suppression of the Sacco-Vanzetti newsreels and those of the March 6, 1930, unemployment demonstration in New York. We know that on that day, the police commissioner "requested" the Cameo, a house belonging to R. K. O. of the Hays organization, to remove the Soviet film "China Express," which had another week to run. The Cameo complied immediately with this "request."

We know, also, that various excuses are used in the suppression of a film of challenge. The British Board of Censors prohibited "Potemkin" because "it deals with recent controversial matters." Local bodies like the London County Council and the Middlesex County Council refused to pass it. When the agent tries to put it through other local councils, "he suddenly receives a visit, the first of several, from officers of the special department of Scotland Yard." The agent "wants no quarrels" with Government inspectors. He makes no further effort to show the film, and is even scared to let a Parliament committee look at it. The Pudovkin picture, "Mother," was not allowed "on the ground that its scene was Russia, that its action concerned a strike, and that forces of order were depicted firing on a mob. Reply by the agent that many films of American and other origin dealing with the Russian Revolution, or the events preceding it, often in a manner unsympathetic to authority . . . had been approved." "The Red Dancer of Moscow' and 'The Volga Boatman' as well as other films like 'Intolerance' and 'The Three Passions' showing the shooting of a mob. The exception taken was then altered and explained to cover rather the tenor of depiction of scene and action than the scene and action themselves. . . ."

We need not go on with this argument. This was a Soviet film—that was enough. Always does capitalism object, so it says, to the “controversial.” That’s what Fox said when it ordered unemployment and “bolshevism” out of its newsreels.* It said that a mixed reception to Mussolini provoked the thumbs down on “controversial” matter. But right after the order, Benito was on the Fox screen, and Fox was exploiting “The Spy.”

France, most fearful of the nations when Soviet Russia is mentioned, has suppressed the Spartacus Film League which exhibited Soviet pictures, and prohibited the best of these films, mutilating others and permitting those most negligible in persuasiveness or political theme. The English soldiers in “Stormy Over Asia” were vaguely called “whites.” In the meantime, French capital is invested in the movies of the bluffer buffer-states of Poland, Roumania and Czecho-slovakia and these pictures—jingoistic and most often wretched—are shown in Paris to exaggerated praise of the press. The stool-pigeon must be petted. It serves in the anti-Soviet attack. The poor exhibitor, having a bad Polish film forced on him, is frequently obliged to lure his patrons by calling it a Russian film. At the same time, the fascist youth of Les Camelots du Roi attack “The Golden Age,” the film of a young Spanish aesthete. The reasons assemble so: Bunuel, the director, is one of the super-realists, a friend of artists who have become communists; his picture, hardly direct, seems to make fun of the clergy; and—there’s a small man with a tall wife—he is mocking the king of Italy! That’s how acute “national honor” is. In Nüremberg the beautiful picture, “The Beggar’s Opera,” a film far from drastic in its satire, is suppressed because it broadly kids the clergy and the police.

The clergy are very sensitive you, know. Hays had to say: don’t laugh at a minister in the films. He even called in the sects to act in coalition with him. He has been especially close to the Catholics, even though he himself is a Presbyterian elder. The Catholics are internationally unified. They have their movie congress and they can use the sacred weapon of excommunication. In 1916 they placed a ban on “Power of the Cross.” A. M. Kennedy, its author and producer, was threatened with excommunication if he showed the picture. Today Hays has on his Committee on Pub-

* But it could launch a malicious attack on communism and communists in a Fox film, called “Shanghai Madness.”

lic Relations the National Catholic Welfare Conference and the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae, as well as the D. A. R., the Boy Scouts, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the Russell Sage Foundation, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, the National Education Association, the American Library Association, the Young Men's Christian Association, and the National Recreation Association—schools, church, playground, club, etc. "Less actively associated were representatives of various religious organizations, including the Federal Council of Churches," which recently had a skirmish with Hays, it wants to be heard more, "labor organizations, patriotic societies, and health, civic and welfare bodies." When the coalition was started, labor was "represented" by the A. F. of L. demagogue, Hugh Frayne, lately included by Matthew Woll in his 100 citizens to combat communism. But the A. F. of L. is perfectly content to let Hays do the job of making the worker a "100% American." It subscribes to Hays' address to German movie-men in Berlin in the summer of 1930, to veto all films containing "social, political or economic ideas." This was a suggested attack on Soviet films, the only ones whose "social, political or economic ideas" might consistently offend Hays or Hugenberg, the fascist owner of the German U.F.A., with whom Hays was so convivial. The attack is also directed against any "ideas" critical of the *status quo* that might even moderately be present in a film made outside of the Soviet Union. Hays has admitted that the movie is "capable of wielding a subtle and powerful influence upon ideas."

So do the proponents of national censorship. These include the Federal Motion Picture Council, launched in 1925. "Its first president was the . . . general director of the Department of Moral Welfare of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A." In this Council we find the "national motion picture chairman of the W.C.T.U., previously . . . in the Department of Moral Welfare" of the Presbyterian Church, and another member, "general secretary of the Women's Cooperative Alliance of Minneapolis," as well as church rectors. Other bodies favoring national censorship are: the Disciples of Christ, the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Woman's Missionary Council of the M. E. Church South, the North American Home Missions Congress, the Northern Baptist Convention, and the notorious National Grange.

All these are thundering on the right. We on the left must build both defense and offense to their reaction.

The answer lies with the audience of the movie, which D. W. Griffith called "the laboring man's university." The movie magnates are looking for a new audience. They cannot see that the new audience is the old audience with a new mind, a mind in advance of the reviewers and the producers. This audience can be directed to see the fraudulence of reactionary films. Showings of Soviet pictures and other revolutionary films are themselves initial arguments against the shallowness of the American film, which has only prejudice as its basis. The Film and Photo Leagues, the John Reed Clubs, and other workers' cultural organizations through revolutionary film criticism and through their own revolutionary films must instruct this film audience in the detection of treacherous reaction of the bourgeois film.

We must build—On the Left—the Movie!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ramsaye, Terry, *A Million and One Nights*, 2 vols. (New York, 1926).
Hampton, Benjamin, *A History of the Movies* (New York, 1931).
Sinclair, Upton, *Upton Sinclair Presents William Fox* (Los Angeles, 1933).
Beaton, Welford, "An Open Letter to the President of Chase National Bank" in *Hollywood Spectator*, Jan. 20, 1934, pp. 3-5. (Shows ownership or control of Chase National Bank of practically entire movie industry.)
Film in National Life (London, 1932).
"The Role of the Cinema in Social Life" in *International Review of Cinematography*, March, 1930, pp. 347-79.
Potamkin, Harry Alan, "The English Cinema" in *Close Up* (London, Vol. 4, No. 3) (1929), pp. 17-28; "The French Cinema" *ibid.*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1929), pp. 11-24; "The Afroamerican Cinema," *ibid.*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1929), pp. 107-17; "Who Owns the Movies," in *Workers' Theater*, February and April, 1932; "Eucalyptus Trees in Siberia," in *New Masses*, Vol. 7, No. 6 (1931), p. 27; "Tendencies in the Soviet Film," *ibid.*, Vol. 7, No. 12 (1932), p. 18; "Gabriel Over Roosevelt," *ibid.*, Vol. 8, No. 9 (1933), pp. 24-25; "Pabst and the Social Film," in *Hound and Horn*, Vol. 6 (1932), pp. 114-23; "Pudovkin and the Revolutionary Cinema," *ibid.*, Vol. 6 (1933), pp. 480-93; "Eisenstein and the Theory of the Cinema," *ibid.*, Vol. 6 (1933), pp. 678-89.

Editorial notes and bibliography were supplied by Irving Lerner.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE



THIS pamphlet is one of a series sponsored by the Film and Photo League and is published by International Pamphlets, 799 Broadway, New York, from whom additional copies may be obtained at 10 cents each. Special rates on quantity orders.

IN THIS SERIES OF PAMPHLETS

1. MODERN FARMING—SOVIET STYLE, by <i>Anna Louise Strong</i>	10¢
2. WAR IN THE FAR EAST, by <i>Henry Hall</i>	10¢
3. CHEMICAL WARFARE, by <i>Donald Cameron</i>	10¢
4. WORK OR WAGES, by <i>Grace Burnham</i>	10¢
5. THE STRUGGLE OF THE MARINE WORKERS, by <i>N. Sparks</i>	10¢
6. SPEEDING UP THE WORKERS, by <i>James Barnett</i>	10¢
7. YANKEE COLONIES, by <i>Harry Gannes</i>	10¢
8. THE FRAME-UP SYSTEM, by <i>Vern Smith</i>	10¢
9. STEVE KATOVIS, by <i>Joseph North and A. B. Magil</i>	10¢
10. THE HERITAGE OF GENE DEBS, by <i>Alexander Trachtenberg</i>	10¢
11. SOCIAL INSURANCE, by <i>Grace Burnham</i>	10¢
12. THE PARIS COMMUNE,—A STORY IN PICTURES, by <i>Wm. Siegel</i>	10¢
13. YOUTH IN INDUSTRY, by <i>Grace Hutchins</i>	10¢
14. THE HISTORY OF MAY DAY, by <i>Alexander Trachtenberg</i>	10¢
15. THE CHURCH AND THE WORKERS, by <i>Bennett Stevens</i>	10¢
16. PROFITS AND WAGES, by <i>Anna Rochester</i>	10¢
17. SPYING ON WORKERS, by <i>Robert W. Dunn</i>	10¢
18. THE AMERICAN NEGRO, by <i>James S. Allen</i>	10¢
19. WAR IN CHINA, by <i>Ray Stewart</i>	10¢
20. SOVIET CHINA, by <i>M. James and R. Doonping</i>	10¢
21. THE YELLOW DOG CONTRACT, by <i>Elliot E. Cohen</i>	5¢
22. THE INJUNCTION MENACE, by <i>Charlotte Todes</i>	5¢
23. THE AMERICAN FARMER, by <i>George Anstrom</i>	10¢
24. THE END OF THE FORD MYTH, by <i>Robert L. Cruden</i>	5¢
25. LYNCHING, by <i>Harry Haywood and Milton Howard</i>	5¢
26. CAN YOU HEAR THEIR VOICES? by <i>Whittaker Chambers</i>	10¢
27. WOMEN WHO WORK, by <i>Grace Hutchins</i>	10¢
28. TO AMERICAN INTELLECTUALS, by <i>Maxim Gorky</i>	10¢
29. NEGRO LIBERATION, by <i>James S. Allen</i>	10¢
30. WALL STREET, by <i>Anna Rochester</i>	5¢
31. THE BONUS MARCH, by <i>Felix Morrow</i>	10¢
32. ON THE CHAIN GANG, by <i>John L. Spivak</i>	5¢
33. CHILDREN UNDER CAPITALISM, by <i>Grace Hutchins</i>	5¢
34. DANGEROUS JOBS, by <i>Grace Burnham</i>	5¢
35. BANANAS, by <i>Luis Montes, illustrated by Wm. Siegel</i>	5¢
36. HOW MELLON GOT RICH, by <i>Harvey O'Connor</i>	5¢
37. HAWAII, by <i>Samuel Weinman</i>	10¢
38. THE EYES OF THE MOVIES, by <i>Harry Alan Potamkin</i>	10¢
39. SCHOOLS AND THE CRISIS, by <i>Rex David</i>	10¢

Printed in the U. S. A. (1934)

COMPOSED AND PRINTED BY UNION LABOR