

LABOUR AND THE MEDIA IN BRITAIN 1929-1939.

A STUDY OF THE ATTITUDES OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT
TOWARDS THE NEW MEDIA, FILM AND RADIO, AND OF
ITS ATTEMPTS TO USE THEM FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES.

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ADDENDUM

Page 18 Topic 4

The following was inadvertently omitted during duplicating. Please insert it into the relevant space, at the end of Section A.

Features; activities of both sides.

Reasons for collapse; loss of nerve and leadership by TUC/Labour; strength of government and its measures; lack of support, role of media.

Results; miners' strike; government action against unions - Trade Disputes Act; decline and humiliation of unionism; effect on Labour Party.

ABSTRACT

The arrival of synchronised sound film in the late 1920's coincided with the introduction of political broadcasting in Britain and a further extension of the franchise, inaugurating a new political era. The mass communication of information assumed a more potent political form since these new media commanded vast audiences and were now potential channels of mass political persuasion. Widely accepted beliefs as to the vulnerability of the mass population to manipulation were sustained by the experience of the management of public opinion during the Great War. Drawing on this experience, and on the hostility of the press during the 1920's, the leaders of the Labour movement attributed to the cinema immense power to captivate audiences, disarm the critical senses, and exercise a near-hypnotic influence. In the content of newsreels, the workings of the censorship system and the determination of the National Government to prevent a critical voice appearing on cinema screens, Labour leaders identified evidence of collusion between the cinema industry and Labour's political opponents to maintain the status quo. Similarly, the simultaneous transmission of information into millions of homes across the nation raised the spectre of an all-pervasive instrument of mass control. In view of the techniques of dictatorship used in Europe, radio broadcasting could, in the Labour view, create an homogeneous culture; and the power of the BBC as an institution could prove irresistibly attractive for the establishment of authoritarian government.

During those years when cinema and radio were emerging as channels of mass political persuasion the Labour movement was undergoing profound changes. The Labour Party sought to become established within the political elite as the natural alternative Party of office; and the movement's industrial leaders sought full participation in the processes of consultation and decision-making of the State and industry. In this context these media appeared both dangerous and attractive: dangerous in so far as they could inhibit further democratic advance; attractive in so far as they offered opportunities for the movement to publicise its ideals and policies, and contribute to the general political education of the mass electorate. The production of films by the Labour movement arose from this ambivalent perspective: films could be used as a direct counter to the commercial cinema, as means of agitation and propaganda, and as a means of cultivating an authentic 'workers' culture',

one which could ultimately exercise an influence on the commercial values of the cinema industry itself. Similarly, the radio, informed by an ethos of public service, and committed to a broad educational role, was seen by Labour leaders as contributing to the further democratic development of the nation. But it was also seen as offering Labour unprecedented opportunities for reaching the mass electorate with its own point of view, particularly during moments of heightened political tension such as general elections. Where therefore film was used by Labour to perform an essentially cadre function, Labour's attempts to use the airwaves for political broadcasting had a more ambitious purpose. Labour's use of these media was never extensive in comparison with the activities of the Conservative Party and the National Government. But Labour film activities, particularly within the left wing of the movement, made an important contribution to Labour politics in the 1930's; and in seeking and gaining access to the microphone the Labour Party not only contributed to the broad political education of the listening public, but consolidated its own position within the two-party system at the expense of the Liberals, and bore some responsibility for the development of political broadcasting as such.

CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iv
Declaration	vi
Abbreviations	vii
Tables	x
Introduction	1
Chapter One	The Social Context of the New Media	8
Chapter Two	The Political Context in Which Labour Attitudes Towards the Cinema and Radio Took Shape	24
Chapter Three	Labour Attitudes Towards the Cinema	43
Chapter Four	Labour Attitudes Towards Radio Broadcasting	103
Chapter Five	Early Attempts to Use Film 1928 - 1932 ..	139
Chapter Six	Left Wing Film Agencies 1933 - 1939 (I) ..	199
Chapter Seven	Left Wing Film Agencies 1933 - 1939 (II) ..	306
Chapter Eight	Film and Social Democratic Organisations: the Cooperative Movement	345
Chapter Nine	Film and Social Democratic Organisations: the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress	381
Chapter Ten	Political Broadcasting: Labour's Attempts to Gain Access to Radio	440
Conclusion	520
Appendix	Filmography	525
Bibliography	548

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Declaration

A small amount of the material used in this thesis has been used by the author in the following:

'Films and Political Organisations in Britain 1929-39', in D. Macpherson (ed.), Traditions of Independence: British Cinema in the Thirties (London, BFI, 1980), pp.51-69.

"The New Road to Progress": The Use and Production of Films by the Labour Movement, 1929-39', in J. Curran, V. Porter (eds.), British Cinema History (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983), pp.113 - 128.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following list of abbreviations is divided into two sections:

(A) provides a key for organisations referred to in the text; and

(B) provides a key for abbreviated references to sources in footnotes.

(A) Organisations

ACT	Association of Cinematograph Technicians
BBC	British Broadcasting Company/ British Broadcasting Corporation
BBFC	British Board of Film Censors
BFI	British Film Institute
BFU	British Film Unit
BMN	British Movietone News
BPN	British Paramount News
BUF	British Union of Fascists
CFA	Conservative and Unionist Films Association
CI	Communist International
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CS	Cooperative Society
CU	Cooperative Union
CWS	Cooperative Wholesale Society
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
FOSR	Friends of Soviet Russia
FPL	Film and Photo League
FSU	Friends of the Soviet Union
FWFS	Federation of Workers' Film Societies
GBN	Gaumont British News
IB	International Brigade
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IPC	International Peace Campaign
ISF	International Sound Films
IURT	International Union of Revolutionary Theatre
IURW	International Union of Revolutionary Writers
KLPG	Kino London Production Group
LBC	Left Book Club
LCC	London County Council
LCS	London Cooperative Society
LDCP	London District Communist Party
LP	Labour Party
LPNEC	Labour Party National Executive Committee

LWFS	London Workers' Film Society
MOT	March of Time
MSWFS	Manchester and Salford Workers' Film Society
NACEC	National Association of Cooperative Education Committees
NATKE	National Association of Theatrical and Kinematograph Employees
NCL	National Council of Labour
NCLC	National Council of Labour Colleges
NEC	National Executive Committee
NFA	National Film Archive
NJC	National Joint Council
NJCSR	National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief
NMM	National Minority Movement
NPB	National Publicity Bureau
NUDAW	National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers
NUWM	National Unemployed Workers' Movement
PAC	Parliamentary Advisory Committee
PAP	Parliamentary Advisory Panel
PFI	Progressive Film Institute
RACS	Royal Arsenal Cooperative Society
RCVGF	Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism
RILU	Red International of Labour Unions
SFC	Socialist Film Council
SPFA	Scottish People's Film Association
TC	Trades Council
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress
WFA	Workers' Film Association
WFPL	Workers' Film and Photo League
WIR	Workers' International Relief
WTA	Workers' Travel Association
WTM	Workers' Theatre Movement

(B) Footnote References

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation Written Archive
BBC AR	BBC: Audience Research: Special Reports
BBC C.HM.	BBC: Contributors. Herbert Morrison
BBC N.GC.	BBC: News: General Correspondence
BBC N.PB.	BBC: News: News Bulletins: Political Bias

BBC P.APB.	BBC: Policy: Political Broadcasting: Accusations of Party Bias
BBC P.B.	BBC: Policy: Political Broadcasting: Budgets
BBC P.G.	BBC: Policy: Political Broadcasting: General
BBC P.GE.	BBC: Policy: Political Broadcasting: General Election Broadcasting
BBC P.ILP.	BBC: Policy: Political Broadcasting: Independent Labour Party
BBC P.MB.	BBC: Policy: Political Broadcasting: Ministerial Broadcasts
BEC P.PAC.	BBC: Policy: Political Broadcasting: Parliamentary Advisory Committee
BBC P.PAP.	BBC: Policy: Political Broadcasting: Parliamentary Advisory Panel
BBC P.PR.	BBC: Policy: Political Broadcasting: Parliamentary Reporting
BBC P.PPB.	BBC: Policy: Political Broadcasting: Party Political Broadcasting
BBC T.DD.	BBC: Talks: Discussions and Debates
BBC T.TP.	BBC: Talks: Talks Policy
BFI FPL	British Film Institute: Hugh Cuthbertson Papers
BLPES	British Library of Political and Economic Science
CUMCE	Cooperative Union Library: Minutes of the Central Executive Committee of the Cooperative Union
HMC	Herbert Marshall Collection of private papers
LCSCM	London Cooperative Society Library: Minutes of the Political Committee of the London Cooperative Society
LCC MP TMH	London County Council Minutes of Proceedings: Report of the Theatres and Music Halls Committee
LPAR	Labour Party Annual Report
LPNEC	Labour Party National Executive Committee Minutes
PRO HO	Public Record Office: Home Office Papers
TUC	Trades Union Congress Report
TUC GC	Trades Union Congress Library: General Council Minutes
TUC GC TCJCC	Trades Union Congress Library: Minutes of the Trades Councils Joint Consultative Committee of the General Council

Tables

Table I.	Growth of Potential Audience for BBC Broadcast Programmes	17
Table II.	Regional Distribution of Licences by November 1938	17
Table III.	Sound Newsreel Coverage of the Second Labour Government, June 1929 - August 1931	80
Table IV.	Coverage of Labour Party Politicians by Each Newsreel Company, October 1931 - August 1939 ..	81
Table V.	Sound Newsreel Coverage of Labour Party Politicians, October 1931 - August 1939	84
Table VI.	Newsreel Election Coverage of the Labour Party, 1931 and 1935	89
Table VII.	Films Distributed by Kino, 1933 - 1939	271
Table VIII.	Approximate Limits for Film Shows Organised by Kino, March 1935 - February 1936	278
Table IX.	Approximate Upper Limit for Audiences for Shows of Kino's Films, March 1935 - February 1936	280
Table X.	Kino Film Distribution. Evidence to the Home Office Committee of Inquiry, 1939	280
Table XI.	Summary of Labour Film Production, 1929 - 1939 ..	545
Table XII.	Summary of Labour Film Distribution 1924 - 1939 ..	546

INTRODUCTION

Within the space of fifteen years, between 1923 and 1937, the principal organisations of the Labour movement acquired national prominence. By 1929 the Labour Party had become fully assimilated within the political elite, occupying a central position in the political process, its status sufficient to enable the Party to take office with 37.1% of the total vote in the general election of that year. By 1937 the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, representing the largest and most powerful trade unions, had become the central and most important trade union organisation and exercised an important role in the process of consultation, policy-formulation and decision-making of the State. Almost in phase, the cinema and radio broadcasting became established as fundamentally important institutions in the country's social and political culture. Extensions of the franchise in 1918 and 1928, adding over twenty million people to the electoral register, transformed the political process, since by the time of the general election of 1929 well over half the entire population could vote (28.8 million out of 45.6 million), compared with less than eight million (out of a population of 44.9 million) prior to 1918. (1)

Considerable adjustment was therefore needed on the part of political parties, faced on the one hand by the dangers of a three party system, and on the other by the opportunities for expanding electoral support and capturing the newly enfranchised voters. The size and diversity of this electorate raised fundamental doubts as to the efficacy of traditional methods of political propaganda and party publicity. But more significantly, the emergence of cinema and radio as media of mass communication in the 1920's opened up new possibilities for political communication. It was not until 1929 however that both of these media were available as channels for mass political persuasion. Prior to 1928

1. D. Buntler, A. Sloman, British Political Facts 1900-1975 4th Edition (London, 1975), pp.182-3, 263ff.

there was no opportunity, except in cases of national emergency, to use the broadcasting facilities of the BBC for purposes of political communication. This situation changed on the 5 March 1928, when the Postmaster General granted permission for a moderate amount of political controversy to be broadcast. There had been a single series of three election broadcasts in 1924, but this was an exceptional case. Until 1928 the medium was essentially a medium of entertainment; thereafter it became also a medium of political communication.

Similarly, prior to 1929 film was a silent medium, and its facility for conveying political information and ideas was severely circumscribed by the need to include simple, short and frequent captions explaining the pictorial images. With the introduction of synchronised sound in 1928, and the change-over within the cinema trade to sound film in 1930, these limitations dissolved. Words and pictures could be integrated not merely to explain or describe, but also to suggest: sound and commentary could be used to heighten the emotional involvement of the audience, explicate the visual images, and even tell an audience what it was seeing. With the arrival of synchronised sound, film was transformed from a rather stilted medium of political communication into an effective medium of mass political persuasion.

At a time when the leading organisations of the Labour movement achieved national political prominence, and an expanded electorate offered immense opportunities for their further advance, the cinema and radio assumed an unknown but potentially massive political significance. Adjustments in perspective within the Labour movement necessitated by its own dramatic rise were paralleled by similar adjustments to a corresponding rise in the national profile of these media. In the context of almost universal press hostility to Labour, and the bitterness of the competition between the Conservative Party and the Labour Party for command of the uncertain territory of the newly enfranchised, the cinema and radio were quickly identified by Labour leaders as additional sites of political competition. To a large degree the positive appraisal of these media as additional channels for publicity and propaganda was contingent upon questions of self-definition. The use of radio for political purposes was regarded from the beginning by the Labour Party leadership as an essential requirement of a national party competing as the alternative party of office; such use symbolised as well as promoted its

its respectability and legitimacy. In the case of cinema this was, par excellence, the medium of the working class, and as such possessed an instinctive appeal for Labour leaders. There were however other factors which influenced Labour attitudes. The growing use of film publicity by the Conservative Party in the 1920's was in itself justification for experimentation in Labour film work. The 'effect' which the cinema was believed to be exercising, partly through the content of the films shown, and partly through the nature of the medium itself, warned of the dangers of the medium and suggested the necessity of utilising it to counter such dangers. With regard to radio, the apparent institutional bias of the BBC towards Labour's chief political opponent, the Conservative Party, was contrary to the terms under which the broadcasting of political controversy was permitted. But it was also contrary to the conception of public service to which Labour leaders subscribed: the Corporation was a national asset and not the preserve of the Conservative Party. There was therefore an essentially ambivalent attitude towards these media within Labour circles. Condemned as agencies functioning to assist Labour's opponents, they were also seen as potential sources of countervailing influence; and broadcasting in particular was identified as being ideally suited to performing a democratising function.

This thesis is concerned with the political response of the Labour movement in Britain between 1929 and 1939 to these new media of mass communication, cinema and radio. It examines the developing attitudes towards these media of the leaders of the Labour movement. The term 'leaders' is taken to include those holding formal positions within the hierarchies of the various organisations of the movement, and the lower level of cadres - intellectuals, publicists, propagandists and activists who were members of Labour organisations or who identified themselves with the movement's aims and aspirations. Secondly, this thesis examines the attempts made by Labour organisations to use film and radio for political purposes. In the case of film this involved a number of small, ad hoc, organisations with origins in the communist wing of the movement, together with other groups originating specifically from the mainstream of the movement. Attempts to use radio involved the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress, to the exclusion of most other Labour organisations, except on rare occasions. There is a narrowing of field therefore in relation to broadcasting, and this study

in the absence of sufficient documentation for the TUC and other organisations, focusses almost exclusively on the attempts made by the Labour Party not merely to secure access to facilities for political broadcasting, but equality of access with the Party's political opponents.

This thesis is not concerned with the development of Labour publicity methods, except in so far as such methods had a bearing on approaches to the use of film and radio. Moreover, this particular subject has already been thoroughly examined by Dr. Timothy Hollins. (2) The question of film censorship has also been dealt with tangentially. There is no detailed study of the censorship of the non-theatrical exhibition of films, based on extensive academic research. This would prove to be a subject too large to cover thoroughly in this particular work. Similarly, this thesis is not concerned with the Documentary Movement, certain members of which identified with the Labour Party and attempted to imbue their films with a reforming, social democratic ethos. Again, the Documentary Movement has been subject to detailed examination, in particular by Dr. Paul Swann. (3)

The broad finding of this thesis suggest that certain long established views concerning the Labour movement's use of film require modification. In his book Documentary Diary Paul Rotha maintains that the leaders of the Labour movement 'had an antiquated attitude to their public image', lacking the imagination and sophistication needed to appreciate the importance of using film for publicity and public service. (4) Certainly the majority of Labour leaders did not understand the medium, but they had neither the resources for sponsoring nor the means for showing the type of films which Rotha had hoped they would commission.

2. T.J.Hollins, The Presentation of Politics: The Place of Party Publicity Broadcasting and Film in British Politics, 1918-1939. (Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Leeds, 1981)
3. P.Swann, Aspects of the History of the British Documentary Movement, With Special Reference to its Place in the Social History of the 1930s (Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Leeds, 1979)
4. P.Rotha, Documentary Diary (New York, 1973), pp.280-1.

Moreover, there was amongst Labour leaders, as John Grierson has recalled, a fundamental mistrust of any information services other than their own.(5) In comparison with the Conservative Party the Labour movement may be legitimately judged to have been very slow to see the potentialities of the documentary idea. But Grierson's criticism presupposes that it was self-evident that the Labour movement would derive benefit from using the documentary film as a means of influencing the natural leaders of opinion within the movement at local level. This was a fundamental misjudgement, since this method of influencing opinion did not correspond with the political traditions and style of the movement, which focussed on an approach anchored in the work of the organisations of the movement itself and had little faith in well-intentioned groups of dubious political commitment which offered to service the needs of these organisations while producing films commercially and publicising the various activities of different branches of a Conservative-dominated State. What Grierson failed to appreciate were the reasons for the essential mistrust which he identified amongst Labour leaders.

In his book A Critical History of the British Cinema, described as 'a unique work of reference', Roy Arnes makes no mention of the use of film by political organisations during the 1930's.(6) Indeed, the use of film by the Labour movement during this decade was largely forgotten until 1976, and then overlooked as being of little more than antiquarian interest. Even the standard authority on British cinema history, Rachael Low, has provided a rather cursory and derivative account.(7) The problem is one of perspective. Approached from the point of view of cinema history no adequate view of the scope or importance of Labour film activities can be achieved. From the point of view of Labour history a quite different picture emerges. Two of the main conclusions of this thesis are that there was not only a sustained attempt to use film by Labour, but that such activities took place on a considerable scale, far in excess of anything previously envisaged.

5. The Times, 19 April 1966

6. R.Arnes, A Critical History of the British Cinema (London, 1978).

7. R.Low, The History of the British Film 1929-1939. Films of Comment and Persuasion of the 1930's (London, 1979), pp.166ff.

With regard to radio broadcasting, the broad conclusions of this thesis are firstly that the Labour Party, to the virtual exclusion of all other political organisations of the Labour movement, gained only limited access to the airwaves during the 1929-1939 period. Secondly, that in view of the importance which Labour leaders attached to the medium as a public service, a sustained attempt was made to secure equality of access to broadcasting facilities with the Conservative Party. Thirdly, that such pressure as was brought to bear on the Corporation achieved only limited success, fuelling a strong sense of grievance and a belief that the BBC was in large measure a publicity organ for the National Government. Such a belief was to have important consequences during the war, when the BBC came under the overall authority of the Ministry of Information. As Lord Reith recalled, Attlee, the Labour Party leader, was not convinced that the Ministry 'was not a part of the Conservative machine', and in the first months of war the Labour Party refused to cooperate with the propaganda work of the BBC intended to 'encourage the national will to victory'.(8)

This thesis is concerned with both organisations and individuals at national and local level. The absence of relevant source material for almost every individual trade union and political organisation has necessarily focussed the present work on the two leading organisations, the Labour Party and the TUC. The papers of these bodies provide an indispensable source, yet even here primary material is not to be found in abundance. At local level there is virtually nothing of relevance which has survived in the archives of Trades Councils, Constituency Labour Parties and related organisations in the Yorkshire area; and an examination of local organisational records in the Labour Party Archive and the archive collections in the British Library of Political and Economic Science has produced little of value. Further research in the papers of local organisations in other repositories across the country may well yield new and important evidence. On the whole this is unlikely, since, in regard to film use, the production and distribution of films centred on groups in London.

8. J.C.W.Reith, Into The Wind (London, 1949), pp.368-9.

With these qualifications in mind, this thesis is based primarily on the papers and reports of the Labour Party and the TUC, the private papers of Ramsay MacDonald and George Lansbury, the invaluable collections of papers at the BBC Written Archives Centre, the Cuthbertson Papers, now held at the British Film Institute, the personal papers of Herbert Marshall, of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (USA), and the business records of the Workers Film Association, in the TUC Archive. In addition, interviews and correspondence with the principal personalities involved in film production, distribution and exhibition, have provided a fund of information otherwise unavailable and unrecorded. An extensive search of the newspapers and journals of the period has provided information of both primary and secondary value; and the importance of these papers as primary sources cannot be overestimated. All the surviving films produced by the Labour movement in this period have been viewed, providing an invaluable insight into production techniques, political strategies and the atmosphere in which production and exhibition took place.

Lastly, there is a degree of imbalance in the thesis. The research for the Labour film groups involved far more time and energy than that for radio; and the description and analysis of Labour film activities, because there were several groups involved, has proved lengthy and detailed, and far longer than the treatment of Labour broadcasting. The imbalance is one of space rather than of emphasis.

Chapter One: THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE NEW MEDIA

I. Film

In 1900 there was not a single building in the country used exclusively for cinematographic exhibition; no cinema industry existed. Within forty years the situation had been transformed. 'The film industry', The Economist noted, 'ranks among the major British trades'.(1) As an industry, it was fully integrated by 1936 within the financial and economic structures of the country.(2) The dramatic rise of the industry in so short a period of time suggested how commercially attractive some aspects of it were, particularly exhibition. But it is evident that the social significance of the industry was equally appreciated. Michael Balcon described the industry as 'one of the most important' not only in the world of commerce, but in the world of entertainment.(3) What is striking however is that Balcon and his associates believed that the cinema performed a more significant function. Being highly influential in the 'propagation of ideas', the cinema, Balcon argued, 'has entered largely into the psychology of our generation'. It had not only altered people's perceptions and the way they thought, but could be used for social and political purposes. As Balcon explained:

its capacity alone for maintaining the morale of the public during a difficult time in world economics places it among the outstanding factors in our national life. (4)

Such a view can, of course, be attributed to the showmanship, ostentation and the propensity for self-advertisement characteristic of the cinema industry. But it is clear that the leading figures in the industry brought to their work a broader view - one which hinged on the positive role which the industry could perform at moments of crisis. In October 1937 Howard Gaye of the Associated British Picture Corporation, wrote to the Air Raid Precaution Division of the Home Office regarding the film The World in Revolt, which Gaye had

1. The Economist, 13. February 1937, p.344.
2. F.D.Klingender, S.Legg, Money Behind the Screen (London, 1937), pp. 23-60; Arts Enquiry, The Factual Film (London, 1947), Appendix A, 'The Development, Structure and Economics of the British Film Industry', pp. 197-202.
3. M.Balcon, in H.J.Schonfield (ed.), The Book of British Industries (London, 1933), pp. 151-2.
4. Ibid., p.157.

recently compiled. Appended to the film, which dealt with the internal crises of various countries from 1917 to 1936, was, as Gaye explained,

a British sequence, showing how, instead of internal revolt, Great Britain worked for recovery after the Great Depression. We end this sequence on a patriotic note, and touch on the necessity for adequate National Defence and re-armament in view of the unrest in the world today. (5)

Gaye requested the cooperation of the A.R.P. Division in the provision of suitable A.R.P. material for inclusion in the film. A publicity statement, attached to Gaye's letter, and intended for general circulation amongst the chain of ABC cinemas, revealed:

here is an unique opportunity, not often met with, of combining self-interest by way of box-office profits with the furtherance of our National Welfare and Security. (6)

Some months later Mark Ostrer, Managing Director of Gaumont British Picture Corporation, was asked by the Home Office if he would agree to show an A.R.P. trailer as part of the normal programme in his circuit of 350 cinemas. Ostrer, like Oscar Deutsch of the Odeon chain, willingly agreed, instructing his staff to contribute to the 'Gaumont British National Effort' with regard to A.R.P. (7)

Since the formation of the A.R.P. Division in 1934 several newsreel companies had made regular requests to the Home Office for A.R.P. material, and in 1937 a number of production companies requested permission for facilities to produce films dealing with the question of civil defence.(8) There were limits to this humanitarian and patriotic concern. A.S.Moss, General Manager of the ABC chain, refused to show

5. Public Record Office, Home Office Papers HO 45 17602/701028/57, Gaye to E.J.Hodsall, 21 October 1937. (Hereafter PRO HO.)
6. PRO HO, HO 45 17602/701028/57, Associated British Picture Corporation Publicity Statement, attached to Gaye to Hodsall, 21 October 1937.
7. PRO HO, HO45 17602/701028/108, M.Ostrer to W.Eady, 23 March 1938.
8. PRO HO, HO 45 17602/701028/7, Hodsall to Sir R. Scott, 29 February 1936, for details of one particular request.

the Government's 11-second A.R.P. trailer in April 1938 unless the Home Office paid production costs. Much of the enthusiasm for showing A.R.P. material can be attributed to keen competition between film companies and the high commercial value attached to footage which had official approval or was of government provenance. Nevertheless, some of the leading figures in the industry tried to cultivate an image of responsibility of a particular kind. The cinema did not simply provide wholesome family entertainment: 'educational', 'instructional' and 'socially concerned' films extended the social functions of the cinema. But, more significantly, Ostrer, Gaye and others appear to have run the industry on the assumption that they had a social responsibility to act on behalf of the nation and promote 'national welfare'. It is precisely this self-image within the industry, revealed so clearly in the correspondence in the Home Office Papers, which conveys so well the centrality of the cinema to the social and political structures of British society in the 1930's. Whether or not the cinema actually exercised an important function in this society, an overwhelming body of contemporary opinion concurred in the view that it did. This conviction derived in part from the rapidity of the industry's rise to social prominence; and the self-image of the industry can be taken as an indication of this prominence.

Other indices can of course be used to demonstrate more fully the ramifications of this high social profile: average weekly audiences, their social character, and regularity of attendance. There is a reasonable amount of statistical information available regarding exhibition and audience size, but the reliability of some of this information is uncertain. For example, the rapid growth and constant renewal of the exhibition sector of the industry made it difficult to calculate accurately the number of cinemas in operation and average weekly audience figures. The most reliable source, Simon Rowson's survey of 1934, has provided the basis of most other inquiries of a similar nature. (9)

Low and Manvell calculated that the average weekly audience of the cinema in 1914 was between seven and eight million people.(10)

9. S.Rowson, 'A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry in Great Britain in 1934', Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, v.99 (1936), pp. 67-129. (Hereafter, 'Statistical Survey', JRSS.)
10. R.Low, R.Manvell, The History of the British Film 1896-1906 (London, 1948), p.25.

In 1934 this figure had risen to 18.5 million, and by 1938, according to Rowson, had grown to 23 million.(11) Nicholas Pronay, using the findings of a Board of Trade Enquiry of 1941, concluded that average weekly admissions in 1939 were in excess of 21 million.(12) In a later study Browning and Sorrell revised Rowson's findings and provided estimates for cinema admissions for the years 1934-1952, according to which annual cinema admissions rose continuously from 903 million in 1934 to 990 million in 1939.(13) On this basis, the average weekly cinema audience in 1939 was 19 million.

Taking Rowson's estimates for 1934 and 1938, it is clear that these figures represent a significant proportion of the population. In 1934 the United Kingdom population was 46.66 million, and grew to 47.49 million in 1938.(14) Average weekly admissions for these years represent respectively 39.6% and 48.4% of the population, and were almost equal to the size of the labour force, which declined from 21 million in 1931 to 19.75 million in 1939.(15) These percentages are, of course, misleading: many people went to the cinema more than once a week, others went fortnightly or even less frequently. The Social Survey of Merseyside for example found that of those who went to the cinema, approximately 25% went twice or more in any one week. A Gallup public opinion poll in January 1938 discovered that 47% of those interviewed went to the cinema every week or ten days, 12% went more than once a week, and 38% went once or twice a month.(16) Seasonal

11. S.Rowson, 'Statistical Survey', JRSS loc.cit., p.70; The Social and Political Aspects of Film pamphlet (London, 1939), p.1.
12. N.Pronay, 'British Newsreels in the 1930's: I. Audience and Producers', History, v.56 (1971), pp.412-3.
13. H.E.Browning, A.A.Sorrell, 'Cinemas and Cinema-going in Great Britain', JRSS, v.117 pt.2, (1954), p.134.
14. D.Butler, A.Sloman, British Political Facts 1900-1975 op.cit., p.263.
15. Ibid., p.288.
16. D.Caradog Jones (ed.), The Social Survey of Merseyside v.III (London, 1934), p.281; G.H.Gallup (ed.), The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937-1975 (New York, 1976), p.7.

fluctuations in cinema admissions were considerable, and also need to be taken into account. Rowson discovered in 1934 that weekly admissions varied between 21.8 million in January and 13.8 million in June.(17) It is possible therefore that the weekly cinema audience for each winter between 1934 and 1939 was in excess of 20 million.

Be that as it may, the total seating capacity of the cinema provides a further indication of the scope of the industry as a social institution. With a total of 3.87 million seats available in 1934 the cinema could accommodate the entire labour force every week with room to spare.(18) Indeed, given two performances per day, six days per week, there were in effect enough seats in the cinema (46.44 million) to provide entertainment every week for virtually every person in the country. Equally significant is the social class from which the cinema audience came. Rowson discovered that the geographical distribution of cinemas was concentrated in the industrial areas.(19) Caradog Jones found that of the 40% of Liverpool's population which went to the cinema each week, the majority were from the manual working class; and that nearly all working class children went to the cinema at least once a week.(20) This sociological characteristic of the cinema is further emphasised by the statistics produced by Rowson regarding ticket sales: 43% of all admissions in 1934 were for seats costing 7d or less, and nearly four out of every five admissions were for seats costing 1s or less.(21) Although the cinema was not the sole preserve of the working class it catered largely for this section of the population, which made up the bulk of its audiences.

Regular attendance at the cinema arose from early conditioning and the social appeal of communal involvement. But it was also assisted

17. S.Rowson, 'Statistical Survey', loc.cit., Table III, p.74.

18. Ibid., Table IV, p.74.

19. Ibid., Table IV, p.76; Table X, p.84.

20. D.Caradog Jones (ed.), op.cit., pp. 280-1.

21. S.Rowson, 'Statistical Survey', loc.cit., Table II, p.71. These figures were later confirmed in Rowson's The Social and Political Aspects of Film op.cit., p.2. This pamphlet is an edited version of a paper delivered to the British Kinematograph Society in 1939. The full text is printed in Journal of the British Kinematograph Society, April 1939.

by the physical presence of the cinema. Rowson found that there were 4,305 cinemas in Britain in 1934.(22) Browning and Sorrell concluded that, as there were virtually no new cinemas built between 1939 and 1951, the figure for the later year, 4,597, provided an accurate guide for the earlier year.(23) As Rowson has shown, there was an average of one cinema for every 8,000 people aged 15 or over, and an average of 9 people (aged 15 or over) for every cinema seat.(24) Individual cities enjoyed a remarkable concentration of cinemas. In 1934 Liverpool had 69; in 1938 London had 291; and in 1939-40 Leeds had 71 and Bradford had 39 cinemas.(25)

The cinema was more than merely accessible however. As J.B. Priestley observed, the cinema was part of the back-drop of everyday life.(26) The cinema was not simply 'there': it was fully assimilated within the social and cultural life of the population. Revealing in this respect is the siting of cinemas. Cinema exhibition took place in the context of a constant process of building; in 1938 for example approximately 100 new cinemas were completed.(27) Much of this process of renewal involved a policy of acquiring prime sites in areas under development - shopping precincts, new housing estates, and other strategic points.(28) Integrated architecturally with the general design of the buildings around them, these cinemas were often far more than simply places for cinematographic entertainment. Conceived with a broader purpose, many cinemas built in the 1930's were an integral part of the fabric of social life, containing tea-rooms, restaurants, cafes, bars and ball-rooms, providing stage shows in addition to material on screen. It is not surprising to find therefore that cinemas were

22. S.Rowson, 'Statistical Survey', loc.cit., Table IV, p.76.
23. H.E.Browning, A.A.Sorrell, loc.cit., p.136.
24. S.Rowson, 'Statistical Survey', loc.cit., Table X, p.84.
25. D.Caradog Jones (ed.) op.cit., p.280; London County Council, London Statistics 1936-1938 v.XLI (1939), p.201; Kinematograph Year Book 1940.
26. J.B.Priestley, English Journey Jubilee Edition (London,1934,1984), p.300.
27. Annual Register 1939, p.362.
28. D.Sharp, The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies (London, 1969), pp. 140-3.

often used as meeting-places. Ernest Bevin spoke at an election meeting held at the Lyceum Picture House in Bradford; and Leeds Trades Council held meetings at the Rialto Cinema in the city centre in addition to its more usual venue, the Trades Club.(29) Similarly, many cinemas provided the venue for regular talks for the unemployed.(30)

While a visit to the cinema may have been commonplace, it was nevertheless something of a special occasion. For one newly married couple a trip to the Troxy Cinema in Stepney was their 'honeymoon'.(31) For some women, exhausted by the rigours of washday, a trip to the local cinema was not only a source of relief but an opportunity for sleep.(32) Indeed, the cinema appears to have appealed rather more to women than to men. Caradog Jones for example found that married women went to the cinema more often than their husbands. The cinema in this respect performed a liberating function, allowing women temporary respite from the claustrophobia of home, and providing new experiences and, for some, opening up new horizons.(33) The unemployed were also attracted to the cinema, which provided relief from boredom and a warm place to pass the time.(34)

It is evident that the cinema occupied a prominent place in the social life of the country in the 1930's. Physical proximity combined with keen showmanship and accessible films to cultivate a special relationship with a large and mainly working class audience which ^{sought} entertainment, relief and distraction in romance and high adventure. The rapidity of the cinema's rise, the substantial and regular attendance, the immersion of the cinema within the social and cultural fabric of working class life, these were the crystallising realities which confronted the leaderships of the Labour movement - leaderships which, with the development of sound film, adopted an increasingly critical attitude towards the industry and its products.

29. Kinematograph Weekly, 26 October 1933, p.3; Leeds and District Trades Council, Annual Report 1934, p.37.
30. Kinematograph Weekly, 2 February 1933, p.23; 9 February 1933, p.15.
31. J.Jacobs, Out of the Ghetto (London, 1978), p.304.
32. Colin Siddons, in an interview with the author, 10 October 1977. Mr. Siddons was a school teacher in the 1930's.
33. D.Caradog Jones (ed.), op.cit., p.281; R.Roberts, The Classic Slum (Harmondsworth, 1971), p.175; B.Seebohm Rowntree, Poverty and Progress (London, 1941), pp. 413, 470.

2. Radio

Between its inception in late 1922 and the outbreak of war in 1939 radio broadcasting under the auspices of the BBC grew rapidly. From a small organisation with an uncertain future and a geographically limited audience, it expanded to become a vast corporate enterprise with a national audience and a prominent and permanent place in the social, cultural and political fabric of the country. This growth took place during a period in which the free-time available to ordinary working class people increased considerably due to the gradual acceptance of the five-and-a-half-day week, and the proliferation of cheap domestic appliances, of which the radio set was one. The novelty attraction of live entertainment in the home at the turn of a knob on the wireless, or participation, through listening, in some emotionally charged national event, initially held audiences in awe. While wonderment at the 'miracle of radio' soon wore off, its appeal as a source of entertainment and information was broad and far-reaching, drawing together different parts of the country and creating a sense of national community. Radio may not have served effectively as an instrument of social integration in a divided community,(35) but it was certainly envisaged in such terms by its practitioners, and perceived to function as a 'unifying factor in national life' by contemporary observers.(36) On a more prosaic level it provided comfort for the isolated, and a way of spending leisure time cheaply.(37) The result, as Tom Burns has argued, was 'a cultural transformation', as listening became 'a major pastime for the majority of people'.(38)

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34. E.W.Bakke, The Unemployed Man (London, 1933), pp. 178, 181-3; C.Cameron, A.J.Lush, G.Meara (eds.), Disinherited Youth (Edinburgh, 1943), pp. 6, 100-9.
35. A.Briggs, The Golden Age of Wireless (London, 1965), p.8.
36. J.C.W.Reith, Into the Wind (London, 1949), p.136; H.Jennings, W.Gill, Broadcasting in Everyday Life (London, 1939), p.40.
37. B.Seebom Rowntree, op.cit., p.411; H.Llewellyn Smith (ed.), New Survey of London Life and Labour v.IX (1935), p.8.
38. T.Burns, The BBC: Public Institution and Private World (London, 1977), p.19.

The sociological characteristics of broadcasting in these years can be indicated in various ways. The number of licences issued, the most obvious starting point, conveys dramatically the growth in stature of the organisation. By December 1923, a year after commencing broadcasts, 595,496 licences had been issued. By the end of the Company's trial period, December 1926, this figure had grown to 2,178,259. By December 1931 the figure was 4,330,735; and grew within the next five years to 7,960,573. By the time war broke in September 1939 the total number of licences issued was 9,082,666.(39)

The geographical reach of transmission was steadily extended to cover the whole of the United Kingdom. By 1924 twenty-one low-power stations had been built in the main urban areas of the country, each with a range of approximately 30 kilometres, leaving rural areas beyond the reach of BBC transmitters. With the introduction of high-powered stations transmitting on long-wave frequencies this problem was overcome by 1934. By 1939 there were four national and thirteen regional transmitters, serving all parts of the country.(40)

From licence statistics the size of the potential audience can be ganged. In estimating this audience the BBC assumed that on average, for each family in possession of a radio licence, four people were potential listeners.(41) On this basis the potential audience for certain years is given in Table I below (p.17), together with the proportion of the total population for each year which these figures represent.(42) Such was the dramatic growth in the potential audience that within twelve years of the BBC's inauguration over half the entire population could simultaneously listen to a single broadcast;(43) and by the end of the period, nearly three people in every four could do so.

39. BBC Handbook 1937, p.59; 1938, p.9; 1940, p.10.

40. Ibid., 1939, pp. 106-114.

41. BBC Yearbook 1932, p.29.

42. Population figures are derived from D.Butler, A.Sloman, op.cit., p.263. Slightly different results are produced by Mark Pegg, Broadcasting and Society 1918-1939 (London, 1983), p.7. The difference arises from Dr.Pegg's use of family size as a variable.

43. BBC Yearbook 1934, p.11.

Moreover, while there was an uneven regional distribution of licences, there was, nevertheless, a majority of the population in each region with direct access to a radio in their own household, with the sole exception of Northern Ireland, (see Table II below).(44)

Table I. Growth of Potential Audience for BBC Programmes

	1923	1926	1931	1936	1939
No. of Licences Issued	595,496	2,178,259	4,330,735	7,960,573	9,082,666
Potential Audience (millions)	2.4	8.7	17.3	31.8	36.3
Total Population (millions)	44.5	45.1	46.0	47.1	47.7
Potential Audience as a % of Total Population	5.4%	19.3%	37.6%	67.6%	75.6%

*Note: For 1939 the figures refer to 30 September. For other years they refer to the position on the 31 December.

Table II. Regional Distribution of Licences by November 1938

Region	Licences Per 100 Families
London	75
West	80
Midland	80
North	69
Wales	63
Scotland	61
Northern Ireland	41
United Kingdom	71

44. BBC Handbook 1939, Appendix, 'Distribution of Wireless Licences', pp. 156-8.

The composition of the listening public in the 1930's is difficult to discern with accuracy. This is partly because of the structure of programming, which was designed to provide variety and encourage selective listening; and partly because of the existence of an alternative regional programme, from which listeners could choose. There was, therefore, no single audience for much of the time during the hours of transmission in any one week, but a number of audiences which were in a state of flux, changing during the course of each evening. Nevertheless, the enormity of the burgeoning potential audience, the relatively low cost (ten shillings per year) of a licence, and the variety of programmes broadcast, suggest that the social composition of the potential audience embraced all sections of the population. Briggs has shown that more than two-thirds of all radio licences issued in 1939, before war broke out, were to people with incomes of less than £4 per week.(45) However, the situation was not so straightforward. R.J.Silvey, the BBC's Head of Audience Research, has recalled that the listening public was not a cross-section of the population as a whole, but more representative of the middle classes.(46) The work of the Listener Research Section of the BBC tends to support this view. In 1938 this department began to use random sampling as a survey method to discern what differences, if any, existed between winter and summer listening habits. A report on the 'First Random Sample' drew the conclusion that 'the social grade composition of the listening public is radically different from that of the population as a whole.', and that 'the listening public consists of 40% middle class and 60% working class'. (47) Corresponding with the disproportionate representation of the middle classes in the BBC's audience was the

45. A.Briggs, The Golden Age of Wireless op.cit., pp.253-4.

46. Cited in M.Pegg, op.cit., p.99.

47. BBC Written Archives Centre, BBC Papers, Audience Research. Special Reports. Winter Listening Habits. 'First Random Sample', Appendix I, 1 September 1938. Included in this report is a discussion of the statistical reliability of the sample. All documents in BBC Papers are hereafter cited as BBC, followed by the abbreviation for the particular file in question, in this case AR. On first citing the title of the file will be given in full.

marked absence of receiving sets amongst the poor, at least during the first half of the decade. In the slum districts of Liverpool for example the radio was 'almost unknown'.(48) This was not universally true, as in some parts of the country the poor and unemployed did have access to sets, provided by the Carnegie Trust, trade unions, charitable and welfare organisations.(49) Be that as it may, the numerical preponderance of working class listeners can, additionally, be inferred from the results of the Listener Research Section regarding programme preferences. The 'Second Random Sample', conducted in July 1938, indicated a marked preference for Variety programmes (93%) compared with Plays (68%), Talks (53%), Discussions (49%), Light Opera (38%), Piano Recitals (21%) and Chamber Music (8%). (50)

The Corporation's audience research reports are also of value in indicating the scope of listening amongst - the listening audience. The day-time audience was 'never less than about 4,000,000 persons' between 10-00 a.m. and 6-00 p.m., and during lunch-time rose to about eight million. Between 5-00 p.m. and 6-00 p.m. 'it passes the 10,000,000 mark'.(51) The proportion of people listening at 9-00 p.m. who usually started listening at 6-00 p.m. was, during the winter months, 83%, and during the summer, 66%. (52) Moreover, of those listening at at 9-00 p.m. on weekdays, at least 92%, irrespective of the time of year, continued to listen to radio programmes up to 10-00 p.m. (53) It would seem therefore that throughout the year well over half the BBC's audience listened to the radio for at least four hours during any one evening. News Bulletins quickly generated a pattern of regular listening, and by 1939 at least 85% of listeners listened regularly to one or more Bulletins each evening.(54) As Seebohm Rowntree put it in his study of York, 'Whatever else is missed, one or other of the news summaries is generally listened to.' (55)

48. D.Caradog Jones (ed.), op.cit., p.274.

49. The Listener, 27 March 1929, p.388; B.Seebohm Rowntree, op.cit., pp. 406-12, 471.

50. BBC AR, 'Second Random Sample', Table I, 15 February 1939.

51. Ibid., AR, 'First Random Sample', 1 September 1938.

52. Ibid., Table IV; 'Second Random Sample', Table II.

53. Ibid., 'First Random Sample', Table Va; 'Second Random Sample', Table IIIa.

54. BBC Handbook 1939, p.56.

Other indices of radio's prominence in Britain are the growth of the radio manufacturing industry, and the BBC's relationship with the State. By 1931, during a period of national economic depression, the industry had an annual turnover of £29.8 million, and, in the view of the managing director of Marconiphone Company, 'radio must now be counted as one of the foremost industries in the country'.(56) The extensive advertising campaigns for radio sets suggest not only the growth of the industry, but the intensity of the competition and the size of the potential market.(57) The actual sale of sets in any one year conveys a similar impression. In 1931 for example, over 1.2 million sets were sold; and in 1932 this figure rose to over 1.4 million.(58) The public demand for sets, and eventually for radio sets which were aesthetically pleasing and virtually ornamental, not only provided a continuing source of growth for the industry, but suggests the degree to which the radio had become an essential aspect of family life.

But radio was more than just a source of entertainment and stimulation. As a developing medium of mass communication its possible effects and dangers were unknown; and the prevailing assumption that the medium had the potential for exercising an enormous influence, for good or ill, led to radio being subject, from the inception of the British Broadcasting Company, to a considerable degree of regulation by the State. In addition to the three major inquiries by the government of the day within a period of fourteen years, the evidence of this control is abundant.(59) Through a licensing system monopoly control

55. B. Seebohm Rowntree, op.cit., pp. 411, 471.

56. J.H. Williams, in H.J. Schonfield (ed.), The Book of British Industries op.cit., p.292.

57. See for example issues of the Daily Herald for the first week of October 1935.

58. M. Pegg, op.cit., Table 2.1, p.52.

59. A fuller discussion of the relationship between the BBC and the State is given below, chapter 4.

of radio broadcasting was granted to the BBC, thereby enabling direct regulation of broadcasting by the Postmaster General, who issued the licence. The Licence and Charter of the Corporation stipulated precisely what the objects of the BBC were, and gave the Postmaster General (PMG) authority to approve and monitor the output and the technical aspects of broadcasting. But equally importantly the PMG was empowered to take over broadcasting stations in case of emergency; and to request that the Corporation broadcast, or refrain from transmitting, any matter which any Government Department required.(60) This was not intended to provide for State manipulation of the organisation, as Sir William Mitchell-Thomson, the Conservative PMG, made clear in the House of Commons. But the limits of what was possible were very clear: there was to be nothing broadcast which touched upon matters of political, industrial or religious controversy.(61) This prohibitive policy was relaxed considerably in 1928, and Sir John Reith, the Director General, continued thereafter to resist Government pressures. But of necessity there were limits to the Corporation's ability to maintain a completely free hand. As Reith revealed in his diary in December 1934, the Government could desire opportunities to broadcast, and the mere indication that the Government would like to broadcast was sufficient; no official request was needed:

the National Government was misrepresented so much in the newspapers that the Cabinet thought they had better tell the public their point of view over the wireless..... I am quite ready to take a strong line with anybody on certain occasions, but to oppose the Government in a matter like this is of doubtful expediency..... the P.M. thought we ought to allow him to say the sort of thing he was going to say, so of course I replied that that settled the matter..... the P.M. was very grateful.. (62)

The PMG's powers of veto were never used between 1928 and 1939. Requests to broadcast certain messages of a potentially contentious nature were occasionally made, as were requests not to broadcast certain talks.(63)

60. Cmd. 2756 (1926) Wireless Broadcasting. Drafts of (1) Royal Charter and (2) Licence...
61. Hansard vol. 199, cols 1579-81, 15 November 1926.
62. C.Stuart (ed.), The Reith Diaries (London, 1975), p.119, Diary entry for 11/12 December 1934.
63. See, for example, A.Briggs Governing the BBC (London, 1979), pp. 198-201.

Generally however, the exercise of influence in these ways was not needed. The customary practice of the BBC could be crudely described as one of self-censorship, but was, more accurately, derivative of the requirements of public service broadcasting. A central aspect of this was of course the ultimate accountability of the Corporation to the Government. But of comparable significance was the Reithian principle of bringing 'the best of everything into the greatest number of homes', implicit in which was a commitment to raising public taste and encouraging specific values.(64) The influence of Reith was immense. As Peter Eckersley, the first chief engineer of the BBC, put it,

The form, content and influence of the broadcasting service as we know it today is the product of one dominant mind: it represents one man's conception of the role of broadcasting in a modern democracy. (65)

The concept of public service was taken by Reith to embrace 'educative influences', and the Director General imbued the Corporation with the ethos of 'high democratic purpose'.(66) In identifying the education of the nation as the path leading towards citizenship and the fuller development of democracy, the missionary role of the BBC had a distinctively political character. Irrespective of party considerations this was fundamentally an allegiance to the State, and the relationship has been summed up succinctly by Reith in a letter to the Prime Minister during the General Strike:

Assuming the BBC is for the people and that the Government is for the people, it follows that the BBC must be for the Government in this crisis too. (67)

The Strike was an exceptional event of profound political importance, but this does not devalue the general applicability of Reith's view as expressed in this letter: on the contrary, it was at moments of crisis

64. J.C.W.Reith, Broadcast Over Britain (London, 1924), p.147 and passim.

65. P.P.Eckersley, The Power Behind the Microphone (London, 1941), p.55.

66. J.C.W.Reith, Into the Wind op.cit., p.169.

67. Ibid., p.108.

that the full dimensions of the BBC's relationship with the State were revealed. Indeed, the close and regular, but largely routine, consultation with Government Departments which developed during the period after the General Strike culminated, in the pre-war period, in the full participation of the BBC in the preparations of the shadow Ministry of Information, at a time of growing international crisis.(68)

The BBC then, was a major national institution which provided entertainment for a vast and appreciative audience, commanding a social and geographical reach of unprecedented scope. It functioned as an agency of integration and stability, cultivating a position of social and cultural leadership and assuming the role of arbiter in the exchange of political ideas and opinions. For these reasons it was particularly attractive for the leaders of the Labour movement, who saw in the practical application of the concept of public service further opportunities for democratic progress.

68. See A.Briggs, The Golden Age of Wireless op.cit., pp. 626 ff.

Chapter Two: THE POLITICAL CONTEXT IN WHICH LABOUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS CINEMA AND RADIO TOOK SHAPE

The media have long been sources of mistrust and hostility for the Labour movement. From the earliest days of Labour organisation in the 19th century the press was seen as openly antagonistic, prompting the creation of Labour papers in defence of the movement's interests. With the accumulation in the present century of a broad body of experience of what was believed to be media misrepresentation and hostility, a deep-rooted tradition of suspicion and bitterness emerged within Labour ranks. 'Labour has long ceased', Kingsley Martin observed in 1928, 'to look for a fair statement of its case in the Capitalist Press'.⁽¹⁾ The broad context of this by now reflex response to media hostility was a concern, dating from the 18th century, for the impact of the media on the general character of society. This concern has largely taken the form of social commentary, appraising the press in terms of its negative effects. Typical of this view, John Stuart Mill expressed fears that differences in class were being eroded by the expansion of the press, and that in conjunction with popular education, it was producing moral and intellectual mediocrity, and through this, generating social disintegration. Similar themes appear in the writings of leading literary figures in the 1930's, such as T.S.Eliot and F.R.Leavis.⁽²⁾ In the context of the growth of mass society, and in the absence of any scientific research on the media, an increasingly apocalyptic view of traditional social and cultural structures emerged. Amidst a national culture where literary and cultural criticism have occupied a position of crucial ideological significance,⁽³⁾ this critical response was profoundly important in setting the framework within which Labour's response to film and radio took shape.

1. K.Martin, 'The Press', in H.B.Lees-Smith (ed.), The Encyclopaedia of the Labour Movement vol.III (London, 1928), p.59.
2. For example, F.R.Leavis, Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture (Cambridge, 1930).
3. P.Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', in A.Cockburn, R.Blackburn (eds.), Student Power (Harmondsworth, 1969).

There were of course other influences, in particular beliefs concerning the management of public opinion arising from the experience of total war; and the burgeoning presence of the new media. Equally fundamentally, the ideology of the Labour movement itself exercised a determining influence by providing a set of basic assumptions and a way of thinking which enable Labour leaders to identify the characteristics of these media, and the opportunities and dangers which they signified. Labour's attitudes towards cinema and radio were also anchored in direct experience and accumulated mythology, and tapped the complex of ideas circulating in the collective consciousness of the period. Such ideas were filtered through Labour ideology and given meaning through the gradual evolution of Labour policies and aspirations. This chapter will examine the context in which such attitudes developed.

I.

Despite the conspicuous sociological presence of the new media of mass communication in advanced industrial societies in the 1920's and 1930's, empirical communications research did not begin until the middle years of the pre-war decade.(4) The interest which grew in those years focussed largely on 'effects', and derived mainly from the functional interests of radio and cinema producers and a generalised concern for the possible harmful consequences of media transmission.(5) Within the academic disciplines of social science the character of media research was empirical, the only substantive attempt to theorise media within the social structure being the work of the Frankfurt School.(6) In Britain the academic culture was handicapped by its insularity, unable to develop a classical sociology within the European tradition, and lacking in consequence any theory of society as a whole, embracing all aspects of social existence - a prerequisite for any theoretical appraisal of the media.(7) The influence of the Chicago School and

4. R.L.Brown, 'Approaches to the Historical Development of Mass Media Studies', in J.Tunstall (ed.), Media Sociology (London, 1970), p.45.
5. D.McQuail, 'The Influence and Effects of Mass Media', in J.Curran, M.Gurevitch, J.Woollacott (eds.), Mass Communication and Society (London, 1977), p.72.
6. P.Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism (London, 1976), pp.21 ff.
7. P.Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', loc.cit., pp. 218-21.

Public Opinion Quarterly was crucial in laying the foundations for post-war British investigations into media 'effects'; and a small group of academics in Britain was beginning to examine the media in the latter part of the 1930's. But there was little of a systematic or theoretical nature in the material in journals such as The Sociological Review. Political and literary journals such as Roundtable, Political Quarterly, The Spectator, The New Statesman and Life and Letters Today devoted some attention to the media. But their interest was more polemical, concerned with specific items of media transmission and broader issues such as 'censorship', 'political broadcasting', 'newsreel bias'. While Labour leaders were unable therefore to draw upon academic models for considered opinion, recourse could be made to this more appropriate and accessible reservoir of ideas - ideas which had roots in practical politics. But the debate within these journals was informed by and contributed to a broader discussion involving Britain's cultural elite, concerning the significance of film and radio, in the context of the emergence of 'mass society', for traditional social and cultural structures.

The upheaval occasioned by the process of industrialisation was not, according to theorists of 'mass society', simply an economic revolution, but involved the disintegration of traditional community structures and affiliations, and long established beliefs and customs, creating isolated individuals existing in a state of moral anarchy, adrift with no anchorage in traditional values.(8) With the development of democracy, popular education and the mass media, ruling elites, it was argued, are no longer able to shape opinion and maintain standards, as their positions of dominance are challenged. Bereft of moral guidance, with few unifying values by which to live, and subject to the forces of economic rationalisation, the individual faces a crisis of status and begins to lose a coherent self-identity. In this situation the individual is vulnerable to anxieties and tends to search for new faiths in an attempt to restore meaning to life, and in so doing provides opportunities for the 'charismatic leader' to supply these unifying beliefs and rise to prominence.

8. L. Bramson, The Political Context of Sociology (New York, 1974), pp. 32-4; A. Giddens, Capitalism and Modern Social Theory (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 79 ff.

While industrialisation may have created an 'atomised' society, the isolated individuals lose, in this view, their individual consciousness when they congregate in 'crowds'. In so doing they develop a crowd mentality, described by William McDougall, an eminent British social psychologist, in the following terms:

[the crowd] is excessively emotional, impulsive, violent, fickle, inconsistent.....extremely suggestible, careless in deliberation, hasty in judgment, incapable of any but the simpler and imperfect forms of reasoning; easily swayed and led, lacking in self-consciousness, devoid of self-respect and of sense of responsibility.... (9)

Open to suggestion, manipulable, capable of releasing deep prejudices, people in crowds, it was argued, are open to rough associations of ideas and, preferring action to rational thought, are prey to the demagogue.

Such ideas provided further justification for the belief that the extension of democracy had resulted in cultural and political degeneration.(10) Mass society was characterised by a crude, vulgar, immoral culture corresponding with typical features of the individual in the mass. All forms of 'mass culture' were contemptuously dismissed as contributing to and sustaining this degeneration. But the media of mass communication exercised a crucial role in this process in so far as the atomized audience, consisting of uprooted and isolated individuals, was highly suggestible, prey to an all-powerful cinema or radio which could influence ideas and behaviour almost at will. There was assumed, in short, a direct equation of content and 'effect': audiences received transmitted messages uniformly and as intended, and responded uniformly, more or less as desired.(11) Significantly, crowd theory maintained that it was not necessary for people to be in physical proximity to produce the 'crowd' phenomenon: thousands of dispersed individuals may acquire the characteristics of the crowd under certain circumstances, such as an emotionally charged national event. W.W.Hill, for example, President of the National

9. W.McDougall, The Group Mind (Cambridge, 1927), p.45, cited in L. Bramson, op.cit., pp.55-6.
10. R.Barker, Political Ideas in Modern Britain (London, 1978), pp105 ff.
11. M.DeFleur, Theories of Mass Communication (New York, 1972), pp.114-5; L.Bramson, op.cit., pp.99-100.

Union of Teachers, spoke of his concern for the 'centralising tendency' of the media and the 'standardising of artistic and intellectual culture':

Mass psychology in the future will be generated not so much at the street corner as in the chimney corner. (12)

Mass society theory was never a unified body of thought; it was neither scientific, systematic nor even based upon empirical research. Rather than a type of social theory it was a form of social criticism the concepts of which were imprecise and assimilable by contradictory systems of thought. Because it tapped popular mythologies its basic ideas were recognisable and available for wide diffusion, and in the process, simplification and corruption. Consequently, while the mass society perspective derived from elitist, anti-liberal schools of thought, many of the ideas which it encompassed were give credence by people who espoused liberal, democratic ideals.(13)

In the era of mass society the erosion of traditional values and the challenge to established hierarchies could be contained, it was argued, through culture and education. Social control however would only be possible by new means appropriate to the new circumstances. This view has its antecedents in the work of Mathew Arnold and others, and constituted a deep vein of thought within established elites in Britain in response to the political implications of the enfranchisement of the masses.(14) The literati in particular were infused with the idea of 'improving' the masses and thereby generating a sense of responsibility and self-control. The media of mass communication offered the possibility of bridging this gap and cultivating the values essential for the perpetuation of the existing moral and political order. The press, increasingly, assumed an important role in structuring the relationship between political leaders and the mass of the population, and in so doing became a central agency in the maintenance of social and political cohesion.(15) Similarly, from its inception, radio broadcasting in Britain assumed a paternalistic function

12. Cited, The Times, 9 April 1928, p.16.

13. For example, C.Day Lewis (ed.), The Mind in Chains (London, 1937, reprint 1972), pp. 14-5, 17, 148, 150, 156; C.Madge, T.Harrisson, Mass Observation (London, 1937), pp. 18-9.

14. R.Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950 (Harmondsworth, 1963), pp.120 ff.

15. A.Smith, The Shadow in the Cave (London, 1976), p.44.

geared to the needs of the prevailing political and cultural elites. As Sir John Reith put it, reiterating the case argued by Mathew Arnold some ninety years earlier:

the responsibility as at the outset conceived, and despite all discouragements pursued, was to carry into the greatest number of homes everything that was best in every department of human knowledge, endeavour and achievement; and to avoid whatever was or might be hurtful. (16)

As a cultural process the edification and improvement of the masses de-emphasised the concept of the suggestibility of the masses and stressed the importance of the rationality of the individual. But it shared with the mass society theorists a recognition of the central role performed by the mass media in the social structure.

But it was probably the experience of war-time controls, and the management of news and opinion by the State, which led to the general currency of these ideas concerning the power of the media. The British political elite pioneered modern propaganda warfare during the Great War, and it was generally believed within this circle that the work of the Ministry of Information had brought the war to a successful conclusion a year earlier than would otherwise have been possible.(17) War-time propaganda generated a fear that the media had the power to influence the thoughts and actions of people almost at will.(18) The frequent publication in the following two decades of memoirs and academic studies of the use of deception and the manipulation of opinion served to harden and sensationalise these attitudes. But equally disconcerting was the possibility of future collusion between the Government and the media.

Co-existing and widely acknowledged, these themes provided key points of reference for Labour commentary on the media, forming the political and cultural backdrop which Labour leaders drew upon in their attempts to make sense of the radio and cinema, and their implications for the movement.

16. J.C.W.Reith, Into the Wind op.cit., p.101.
17. N.Pronay, Introduction, in F.Thorpe, N.Pronay (eds.), British Official Films in the Second World War (London, 1980), pp.2-4.
18. For example, N.Angell, The Press and the Organisation of Society (London, 1922), p.25.

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Of crucial influence in determining the way in which the Labour movement appraised the cinema and radio was the movement's ideology. Labourism, the ideology of the rank and file membership, was composed essentially of an acceptance of political and economic subordination, a rejection of the use of industrial power for political ends, and a commitment to change through parliament. The loosely formulated doctrine of the Labour Party leadership, Labour Socialism, was enshrined in the Party's programme Labour and the New Social Order in 1918. It corresponded with this general set of ideas, but gave it a wider social and political purpose, the transformation of society by gradual stages to socialism. As the most influential ideology of the movement, Labour Socialism commanded the central ground of Labour politics. This dominance did not go uncontested: in particular the revolutionary ideology of Marxist Socialism advocated by the Communist Party of Great Britain challenged the assumptions of the Labour Party leadership and influenced the left-wing of that Party. But this was a peripheral challenge, and the movement, irrespective of political and organisational fragmentation, possessed a large degree of ideological coherence.(19)

Drawing upon the positivist traditions of the 19th century and infused with a strong ethical conviction, Labour Socialism emphasised the progressive character of industrial development, assuming that humanity was advancing by definite stages towards a socialist commonwealth. While recognising class differences Labour Socialism disavowed class antagonism and invoked the 'nation' as its constituency. Its practical emphasis though, was on the gradual improvement of the conditions of the working class, through the acquisition of State power. As George Lansbury explained in his address to the Labour Party's Annual Conference:

Gradualism is only inevitable because our people have not yet developed sufficient wisdom, knowledge and understanding to enable us to advance more speedily to our goal. (20)

19. J.Saville, 'The Ideology of Labourism', in R.Benewick et al., Knowledge and Belief in Politics (London, 1973), p.215; Z.Bauman, Between Class and Elite (Manchester, 1972), p.172.
20. Labour Party Annual Report 1928, p.150. (Hereafter, LPAR.)

The key to change in this scheme therefore was the moral reform of the individual, to be achieved through education and propaganda.(21) The underlying assumption here was the rationality of the individual. As Ramsay MacDonald explained, Labour Socialism

strives to transform through education, through raising the standards of mental and moral qualities, through the acceptance of programmes by reason of their justice, rationality and wisdom. (22)

For Labour leaders the problem was not one of devising practical socialist programmes, but of communication: the moral validity of their case was believed to be transparently obvious; the difficulty was in getting people to see it. As Clifford Allen maintained, once people were aware of the facts, then all would be resolved:

the great majority of mankind have not yet woken up to the facts.....this awakening of the human race is all that remains to be done in order that the last remnants of the old system may be swept away.....(23)

Dan Griffiths, a prominent Labour Party propagandist, had earlier explained that because

Capitalism controls our mindsOur only hope lies in true education.....The only thing that stands between [the workers] and fullness of life, joy and beauty, is just their own ignorance and stupidity. A glorious, joyous world beckons unto them. (24)

Given these beliefs in the inevitable progress of society towards socialism, and the ultimate rationality of human action, the marked absence of a commitment to Labour Socialism within the bulk of the working class proved problematic for Labour leaders. Why, they asked, did people not realise where their true interests lay?(25)

21. R.MacDonald, Socialism: Critical and Constructive 2nd ed. (London, 1924), p.218. B.Barker, The Politics of Propaganda (Unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of York, 1972) provides a thorough examination of these issues.
22. R.MacDonald, Parliament and Revolution (Manchester, 1919), p.103. See also MacDonald's 'Forward' to D.Griffiths, The Real Enemy and Other Socialist Essays (London, n.d.,1923), p.7.
23. C.Allen, Socialism and the Next Labour Government (London,1925), p.6.
24. D.Griffiths, op.cit., pp.12-3. For the continuity of Labour ideas, see H.Morrison, 'Our Aim is Peace', Reynolds News, 6 March 1938, p.10.

The experience of war-time manipulation of public opinion, and the currency of ideas concerning the 'crowd' and mass society, convinced Labour leaders that the working classes were easily misled and confused. Sir Arthur Ponsonby, Parliamentary Secretary at the Foreign Office to Ramsay MacDonald during the period of the first Labour Government, wrote in 1925 that

The public can be worked up emotionally.....A sort of collective hysteria spreads and rises until finally it gets the better of sober people. (26)

MacDonald and Philip Snowden accepted the validity of the crowd theory, and that human action could be irrational. For MacDonald, this occasionally provoked contemptuous outbursts; in Snowden's case it led him to conclude that people were simply not intelligent enough to understand Labour's case.(27) Harold Laski, observing the situation at a comfortable distance from the front line of party politics, was able to take a more controlled view. But even he found the argument compelling. He wrote that although there was 'an astringent power in the facts of experience which propaganda is powerless to destroy', public opinion did not grow out of knowledge or reason, being susceptible to scaremongering and manipulation.(28)

For members of the Communist Party however, marxist theory provided a more rigorous explanation for the absence of class consciousness within the working class. Taking as their point of reference the 'Preface' to Karl Marx's A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, British marxists believed that human knowledge and beliefs were determined by economic conditions. The 'superstructure' of ideas

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25. P.Snowden, The Faith of a Democrat pamphlet (London, 1928), p.3; N.Angell, The Public Mind (London, 1926), p.21.
26. A.Ponsonby, Falsehood in Wartime (New York, 1971 reprint), pp.14-5. His views were not just applicable to war time conditions. See, 'Democracy and the Mob', Socialist Review vol.XXII (1923), p.60.
27. R.MacDonald, Socialism: Critical and Constructive op.cit., p.219; A Policy for the Labour Party (London, 1920), p.67; P.Snowden, Labour and the New World (London, 1921), p.50.
28. H.J.Laski, Democracy in Crisis (London, 1933), pp.68, 75. See also W.Citrine, 'The National Financial Situation', Trades Union Congress 1931, p.460. (Hereafter, TUC.)

and attitudes was a reflection of the 'base' of material circumstances in which people lived. As the ideas and attitudes of the working-class were not authentic to that class, but corresponded to the ideology of the ruling class, where a capitalist economy collapsed in crisis, the 'superstructure' of dominant ideas, representing the means by which capitalism legitimised itself, would collapse with it. In this event, the working class would develop a revolutionary consciousness which would enable it to overthrow the system.(29) In practice, the growth of revolutionary ideas predicted by this deterministic interpretation of marxist theory failed to materialise in the circumstances of post-war economic crisis and, in 1929, global depression. British marxists tried to resolve this enigma by recourse to a theory of conspiracy: the ruling class consciously sought to maintain its position of dominance by using the mass media to inculcate a particular ideology. The working class was 'impregnated' with a 'false consciousness' conducive to the interests of capitalism. As Emile Burns, head of the Communist Party's Propaganda Department explained:

the capitalist-controlled Press, the cinema, the wireless, all play their part in maintaining an unquestioning acceptance of the existing hierarchy, and with it, the existing system.....It is perfectly natural that the class which owns the means of production.....should strive to control every aspect of the life and thought of society.....(30)

Charles Mann, Editor of New Red Stage and a member of the Communist Party (CPGB), considered that the press, cinema and radio

are the instruments through the operation of which are manufactured thought and opinions. These are the sources of information through which the public obtains a picture of the world.....

The newspapers, the cinema, the theatre, the wireless (all carefully censored); [sic] day and night his mind is fed on the food provided by these instruments of the powers that be. His mind is not a free agent: it is made up for him. His ideas, his opinions, are all formed or suggested for him in an easily assimilable way by those that control these forces for the dissemination of news and thought. (31)

29. K.Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (London, 1971), pp.20-1. For an examination of these ideas in Britain, see S.F.MacIntyre, A Proletarian Science (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 111-124.
30. E.Burns, Capitalism, Communism and the Transition (London, 1933), pp.80-1.
31. New Red Stage, June-July 1932, p.1.

Consisting of 'false' values and ideas this ruling class ideology was assumed to obscure a pure, unmanipulated truth which was only waiting to be discovered. Reality was not seen as socially constructed, determined by a complex of social, political and ideological mediations, but as an absolute. The problem, according to Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the CPGB, was to penetrate through the layers of capitalist ideology until the bedrock of truth was eventually reached:

The people of this country are moved by intelligence and reason. On the facts they will make up their minds. When their minds are made up they are a formidable, overpowering force.

What is our difficulty? That we cannot reach them quickly enough with the truth, with facts. The menace that the truth is to the ruling class, is shown by their endless endeavours through the Press, through advertising, through the cinema and the BBC, to turn us into robots. It has always been so. The ruling class has never liked the truth. The truth hurts.....

And the ruling class does not like reason; it prefers cloudy, muddy, regimented minds. But we do rely on reason and understanding.....

When a case based on reason and fact is put to them, no nation is so willing, so ready to act. (32)

There were some left-wing observers who did not fully accept the conspiratorial role ascribed to the media by the CPGB. J.P.M. Millar, for example, of the National Council of Labour Colleges, argued that, strong though the influence of the media was,

anyone who imagines that it is responsible for creating the type of mind which votes for 'National' Government is profoundly mistaken.....The secret of the National Government's success lies mainly in the deadweight of tradition, in the school room and in all those educational institutions associated with it.

.....education is.....a tool, fashioned for the purpose of maintaining the existing social system..... (33)

Edward Conzé, a German emigré socialist prominent in the workers' educational movement developed a more sophisticated view of ideology than that put forward by the Communist Party, arguing that the ruling class did not impose their views on the masses in a conscious conspiratorial way. Their 'bias' was internalised and conveyed to the masses unconsciously through the normal practices of media production.

32. Report to the 15th Congress of the CPGB, 1938 (London, 1938), pp.86-7.

33. Plebs, December 1935, pp. 277-8.

The result was the same however: the real nature of the world was obscured.(34) But such refinements appear to have received scant recognition, and the marxist orthodoxy of economic determinism held sway, not only over the CPGB, but also over many members of the left-wing of the Labour Party and fractions such as the Independent Labour Party. For the majority of the leaders of the movement the 'false-consciousness' of the workers derived not from the 'base-superstructure' model of the determination of ideas, but from beliefs concerning people's receptiveness to media output, and the political support which these media gave to Labour's opponents. According to Labour MP J.F.Horrabin, the effectivity of media output stemmed not from

the definite inculcation of certain ideas; but in taking these ideas for granted, in going on day after day, year after year, assuming that certain facts of society cannot be questioned, and in avoiding all mention of inconvenient facts or questionings. (35)

The legerdemain by which this process was achieved was in effect a strategy of distraction - of encouraging people to take an interest in harmless pastimes. Hamilton Fyfe, political columnist for Reynolds News, and former Editor of the Daily Herald, put forward the view that the press devoted considerable space to sport, royalty, gambling of various sorts and other 'amusements' specifically to prevent people from thinking about the conditions under which they lived.

Sport has certainly become more popular.....forms of gambling have increased enormously, and political interest amongst the masses is at a very low ebb. (36)

The effect was achieved by a combination of constant emphasis within the press, 'daily exposure' of the mass readership to its subtle 'conspiracy of silence' regarding the important issues of the day, and the regimentation of thought which arose from monopoly control of the medium:

34. E.Conz , The Scientific Method of Thinking (London, 1935); 'Some Propaganda Tricks', Plebs, May 1939, pp. 120-2.
35. Plebs, March 1929, p.50. See also G.R.Michison, The First Workers' Government (London, 1934), p.469.
36. Plebs, November 1937, p.253.

The papers can and do control the thinking and talking of a very large part of our population.....Continual dripping wears away a stone; very few indeed are the minds that can resist daily exposure to the insidious drip-drip of the views the Press wants us all to hold. (37)

George Phippen, London Organiser of the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC), summarised the prevailing explanation for the distinct absence of class consciousness amongst the working class:

capitalist propaganda can persuade workers to act in a way hurtful to their ultimate, and often, immediate interest. (38)

It was the press, a medium which pre-dated the cinema and radio as a means of political communication, which provided the movement with its initial and most direct evidence of collusion between the media and Labour's political opponents. In arming Labour leaders with a well known catalogue of painful experiences, it was the press which sensitised the cadres of the movement to both the opportunities and dangers which radio and cinema held in prospect.

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There was no necessary correspondence of interests between the press and the Labour movement's opponents, and changes in the structure of the newspaper industry, initiated in the post-war period, gradually led to the decline in party political alignments.(39) Moreover, there were occasions where sections of the press were restrained in their treatment of Labour, and, at times, even outwardly sympathetic.

37. Plebs, November 1937, p.254; H.Tracey, Labour Magazine, February 1929, p.447; S.Elliott, Cooperative News, 18 February 1939, p.11 Tracey was the Labour Party's Publicity Officer; Elliott was the Editor of Reynolds News.
38. Plebs, November 1935, p.270.
39. C.Seymour-Ure, 'The Press and the Party System Between the Wars', in G.Peele, C.Cook (eds.), The Politics of Reappraisal 1918-1939 (London, 1975), p.255; S.Koss, The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain vol.2 (London, 1984), p.552.

The National Executive Committee of the Labour Party (NEC) resolved in January 1919 to send letters of appreciation to C.P.Scott (Manchester Guardian), A.J.Gardiner (Daily News) and Lord Northcliffe (Daily Mail, Evening News)

for the generally fair and accurate service that had been rendered to the Party during the General Election period, and in the case of Lord Northcliffe, for the offer of space he had placed at the free disposal of the Party in both of his journals. (40)

But with the rapid rise of the Labour Party in the immediate post-war period, from 63 MPs in December 1918 to 191 in December 1923, increasing its share of the total vote from 22% to 30.5% Conservatives and Liberals alike found a new unity of purpose in seeking to resist this fundamental political challenge, and initially based their policies upon this common threat. Labour politicians and trade union leaders identified an unwavering prejudice against the movement in the press, calculated to assist Labour's opponents.(41)

With the inception of the Labour Government in January 1924, sections of the press appeared to Labour leaders as implacable enemies. The Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, was 'hounded in campaigns of personal venom more widely than any other Premier', and his Ministers were subject to scornful treatment.(42) There ensued a furore over the Government's negotiations with the Soviet Union to normalise relations, and then over the Campbell case, in the wake of which the Government fell.(43) The most devastating blow delivered by the press was unleashed four days before polling for the General Election which followed. Referring wearily to the treatment he had received from 'the scoundrels of the press', MacDonald noted in his diary that as a result of the 'Zinoviev Letter', 'the personal vendetta which had been carried on throughout the election increased in fury'. Despising the 'class psychology' of the press, he detected in the patronising smugness of the press comment following the defeat of the Labour Party 'impressions of how they really hate us'.(44) These sentiments were shared by other Labour leaders such

40. Labour Party National Executive Committee Minutes 2 January 1919. (Hereafter, LPNEC.)

41. Labour Research Department, The Press (London, 1922); Independent Labour Party, The Capitalist Press (London, n.d., 1921).

42. J.Margach, The Abuse of Power (London, 1979), p.37.

43. D.Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald (London, 1977), pp.364 ff.

as Philip Snowden, (45) and Mary Agnes Hamilton, a close personal friend of MacDonald, later described the 1924 General Election as 'the first great example of the use of new mass-suggestion techniques'. (46)

The role of the press during the 1931 crisis confirmed Labour leaders in their view that for their opponents press manipulation was the deus ex machina of political victory. The General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress General Council, Walter Citrine, suggested in 1931 that the press had exploited the weakness of the Labour Government to force it out of office. (47) Pursuing this argument, Stanley Hirst, in his Presidential address to the pre-election Labour Party Conference in October 1931, was unequivocal:

a minority Labour Government is.....subject to continuous attack through a network of daily, evening and weekly newspapers, politically hostile to Labour, which exaggerate its shortcomings, belittle its difficulties, and misrepresent or ignore its achievements.

During the last two or three weeks the Tory Party and the Tory Press have been using the whole of their power to force an early General Election.....

.....
We need be under no illusion as to the kind of attack that will be made upon Labour by its opponents.....we need not be astonished if they touch new low levels of degraded electioneering.....The bulk of the Press will be at their service. They will seek by any and every means to stir up panic fears and to stimulate prejudices. (48)

A year later Hirst's successor, George Lathan, reminded the assembled delegates of the 'bitterly hostile attitude of the press' during the

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44. Public Record Office, Ramsay MacDonald Papers 30/69/8, Diary, entries for 28 October, 5 November 1924.
45. P.Snowden, Autobiography vol.II (London, 1934), pp.708-9.
46. M.A.Hamilton, Arthur Henderson (London, 1938), p.253.
47. 'Preliminary Statement on the Financial Situation', TUC 1931, p.78; 'Manifesto of the TUC General Council, the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party and the Consultative Committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party', LPAR 1931, p.5.
48. LPAR 1931, pp. 155-8.

General Election:

An attack of unprecedented magnitude and unparalleled intensity was launched against the Labour Movement. Our opponents embarked upon a campaign of calumny, misrepresentation, intimidation, and appeal to fear and prejudice. (49)

Such speeches were intended to raise morale and set the tone of the discussion to follow, but it is evident that they were by no means an exaggerated or unrepresentative view.(50) There were occasional dissenting voices. Fenner Brockway, Chairman of the Independent Labour Party, considered that this explanation for the Labour Party's defeat was 'superficial'.(51) But the mood was one of despair in which the more obvious factors in the political disaster gained greater credence.

The experience left a lasting impression upon Labour sensibilities. For George Lansbury, now Leader of the Labour Party, this press hostility was now part of the universe of Labour politics, as axiomatic as the inevitability of socialism:

newspaper proprietors.....in the political sense, only exist to support our opponents - and this of course means that in their own newspapers we get very little show except criticism. And we expect nothing else. (52)

49. LPAR 1932, pp.157-8.
50. LPNEC 10 November 1931, 'Report on the General Election', written by Arthur Henderson. E.Bevin, 'The Most Fraudulent Election Campaign of Our Times', Labour Magazine, November 1931, pp. 296-7; F.W.Pethick-Lawrence, 'The Lie Triumphant', ibid., pp. 302-4; ILP, How the Savings Bank Lie Deceived the Electors: The Truth About the General Election Scare of 1931 pamphlet (London, 1932).
51. Independent Labour Party Conference Report 1932, p.4.
52. British Library of Political and Economic Science, Lansbury Papers vol.10, f283, Lansbury to Reith, 20 October 1932. My emphasis.

But the press did not simply provide assistance to Labour's political opponents: 'the prodigious concentration of press power was at the disposal' of them.(53) The newspaper empires 'speak as one voice... to proclaim the menace of socialism', employing 'stunts', and the 'Tory Lie Factory' - in short, the complicity of the press in Conservative Party propaganda was taken as self-evident.(54)

This conspiratorial view was not derived solely from imputed political motives, but also from a general view of the position of the press as an industry within the structure of capitalism. Sydney Elliott argued that direct control of the press by industrialists was necessary 'to secure the propaganda power of the press as an agent of private enterprise'. As an institution its role had little to do with the presentation of news and independent opinion, but with promoting the interests of business. The practical effect of this, Elliott argued, is that

daily newspapers today give you anything but the news.... because they are too busy giving you what the advertisers think the public ought to know. (55)

This argument was developed in a detailed analysis of the press put forward in a pamphlet produced by the Labour Party, The Power of the Press. The key to understanding the press, it argued, is its position within the broader economic structure. The individuals and groups which control newspaper combines have diverse and intersecting commercial interests in all aspects of industry. In consequence, their power is used not only to promote the interests of the Conservative Party, but also to support 'industrial and economic policies and causes with which their allied businesses are identified'. As powerful 'organs of the capitalist point of view', the press function to preserve 'the private profit-making system'. This point of view is determined by 'controlling proprietors who exercise a rigorous supervision and censorship'. The selection and presentation of news is therefore structurally determined, and is quite independent of any overtly political intention. The outcome is the same however: 'the attitude, the influence, of the Group newspapers, is of an anti-Labour character'.(56)

53. LPAR 1936, p.82.

54. Labour Party, The Power of the Press pamphlet (London, 1936), p.4; Daily Herald, 15 October 1935, p.8.

55. Plebs, November 1936, p.264; Cooperative News, 18 February 1939, p.11.

56. Labour Party, The Power of the Press op.cit.

It is evident therefore that although Labour Leaders did not develop a sophisticated understanding of the organisational, technical or journalistic determinants of press coverage, they nevertheless identified broad economic imperatives as the essential foundation of newspaper content. Nor could they be unaware of the practical implications of newspaper economics. The direct relation between advertising revenue and circulation figures was never more clearly demonstrated than by the decline and dramatic regeneration of the Daily Herald.(57) From an arid Labour Party paper with a narrow definition of news and a leaden journalism, the paper was transformed under commercial direction by J.S.Elias into a lively paper ^{with a} circulation of over two million.(58) There was therefore recognition within some sections of the Labour Socialist wing of the movement that the bulk of the everyday output of the press was neither the product of conspiracy nor consciously contrived to confuse, distort, mislead or misinform. What general anti-Labour bias there was arose coincidentally from the pursuit of the industry's functional objectives, and was not a manifestation of some sinister fundamental or 'real' reason, the preservation of the existing system.

However, the threat of monopoly control loomed large to Labour observers by 1930, as four vast combines emerged to command a readership which had almost doubled over the previous decade; and Lords Beaverbrook and Rothermere appeared to be willing to openly abuse their power for political ends.(59) Such developments fired the imagination of Labour critics. For Hamilton Fyfe and others the possible combination of these newspaper empires for some political purpose which transcended their rivalry raised the spectre of a mass psychology, one which would create a servile population whose thoughts were homogenised, thereby completely undermining the democratic process and the prospect of a socialist commonwealth.

The consistency and perceived effectiveness with which the press actively opposed the Labour Party during general elections provided

57. G.Lansbury, The Miracle of Fleet Street (London, 1925); F.Williams, Dangerous Estate (London, 1957).
58. P.E.P., Report on the British Press (London, 1938), p.48.
59. F.Williams, 'Challenge by the Press Lords', in J.Raymond (ed.), The Baldwin Age (London, 1960), p.173.

sufficient evidence for Labour leaders to forgo the subtleties of economic analysis and notions of 'structural bias', during periods of political tension or national crisis, and resort to a theory of conspiracy as the most appropriate model of the press.(60) For marxists there were no contradictory points of view. Rajani Palme Dutt, the Communist Party's chief theoretician, put the case succinctly:

What is the purpose of the Capitalist Press? The purpose of the Capitalist Press is to deceive the workers, to lie, to confuse their minds, to inculcate slave and herd characters, to paralyse thought. (61)

It must be pointed out here that Dutt was not offering a glib formula for general consumption by a potential recruit or the party faithful. His statement was part of an intervention in a debate on 'worker journalism' within the Party, and was therefore an authoritative view.

This then was the context in which Labour attitudes towards the new media took shape. Prevailing notions about mass society provided a reservoir of ideas which were drawn upon through the filter of Labour ideology to make sense of human behaviour in general, and the political 'backwardness' of the working class in particular. The prominent role of the press at crucial stages in the political development of the movement served to reinforce basic fears about the manipulability of the electorate and signposted the possible dangers which Labour might have to face as radio and cinema acquired social prominence and began to occupy important positions in the political process.

60. For a useful if brief survey of the press during elections, see J.Curran, 'Capitalism and Control of the Press 1800-1975', in J.Curran et al (eds.), Mass Communication and Society (London, 1977), pp.222-6.

61. R.Palme Dutt, The Communist Review, July 1932, p.327.

Chapter Three: LABOUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE CINEMA

1. The Nature of the Evidence

With few exceptions the views recorded revealing Labour attitudes towards radio and film are the opinions of the leaders of the movement. Little attempt was made to develop a fully articulated theoretical understanding of these institutions. But their views were more than isolated statements of opinion. They alluded to a shared set of common-sense precepts, a popular mythology, and a reservoir of common accumulated experience. Those leaders who expressed views were clearly involved in a self-referential discussion which presupposed familiarity and a degree of consent with this nexus of ideas. Though they may appear trite and riddled with platitudes fifty years later, the historical currency of these statements is not devalued by their simplicity. The tone of moral outrage, the overt appeal to the obvious validity of the Labour point of view, suggests an assumed consensus on the subject which made elaboration unnecessary. Moreover, the expression of opinion on this subject was confined largely to Labour journals, annual conferences, organisational reports and political meetings, none of which were suitable for lengthy, detailed or theoretical discussion. There is little except passing commentary in the more substantive literature of the period. In part this was a reflection of the difficulties of intellectual adjustment to the rapid growth of the new media. In part it reveals that the subject of the media, contentious though it may have been, was not widely regarded as an issue intruding upon national policy, except in the most general and practical ways, serving short-term interests. There was therefore no systematic discussion of the cinema and radio. These media prompted heated discussion, but not the level of inquiry or debate commanded by 'the depressed areas' or 'fascism'.

The types of evidence available therefore have to be treated with caution. Despite an exhaustive search they may not give a fully representative account of Labour attitudes: the developing ideas of key personalities in the movement may not have been recorded. Views put forward in a speech or newspaper article, two of the most common sources for evidence, have to be considered in the context of the

specific requirements of the moment. Moreover, the general consensus of recorded opinion tends to convey the impression of a composite, and essentially static view. The journalistic, elliptical character of much of the evidence obscures differences of perspective and emphasis between sections of the movement; and people's views did change, becoming with experience more refined, particularly with regard to radio broadcasting. Lastly, care should be taken, when drawing conclusions from the statements of leaders of the Labour movement, about the bulk of people who comprised that movement and whose views have gone unrecorded. There may well have been an intuitive or gut-reaction amongst many ordinary trade unionists, corresponding to the ideas of their leaders. But that did not, in practice, prevent vast numbers of people going to the cinema or listening to the radio regularly. Whether or not those people who went to the cinema or who listened to the wireless were trade unionists is a moot point.

2. The Film Industry

As an industry the cinema was discussed in very general terms by Labour observers. Virtually no attempts were made to analyse in detail the economic and financial structure of the industry until 1939, when Ralph Bond produced a short study for the Association of Cinematograph Technicians. This was despite a large amount of information which had accumulated by 1937.⁽¹⁾ Such complacency may have been due to disdain for the industry. Where comment was made it was dismissive in tone, eschewing careful analysis as if the essential characteristics of the industry were self-evident. Typical of the few

1. R. Bond, Film Business is Big Business (London, 1939); S. Rowson, 'Statistical Survey' op.cit.; Cmd. 5320 Report of the Committee Appointed by the Board of Trade to Consider the Position of British Films (1936); F. D. Klingender, S. Legg, Money Behind the Screen (London, 1937)

recorded references to the cinema industry as an industry is the following, written by Peter Ritchie Calder, a journalist for the Daily Herald, who considered that the film industry

is one of the most powerful capitalist institutions today, not merely in itself, but in its ramifications. It is locked up, in intricate and inscrutable ways, with Big Business. (2)

It was apparently this mystifying inscrutability which allowed commentary to be confined to mere assertion and knowing references to Press Barons, foreclosing the need for further discussion: the industry's structural features were inferred from knowledge of the organisation of the press. Bond's pamphlet was intended to overcome this lacuna and demonstrate unequivocally that the film industry is 'governed by the same economic laws that govern capitalist industry as a whole'.(3)

Some internal aspects of the film business did of course attract attention, arising from attempts to improve wages and conditions of work.(4) But the greatest interest arose from the domination of the British cinema by its American counterpart. The effective control which American distributors exercised over cinema exhibition in Britain was potentially ruinous for British film production, and provoked concern not just for jobs, but the growth of American influence in Britain. This issue was raised by the National Association of Theatrical Employees in 1930, and the following year the TUC General Council, in conjunction with the Federation of British Industries, issued a list of recommendations to be presented to the Board of Trade with a view to amending the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 to provide further protection for the domestic industry. The General Council

2. 'We must learn to shoot', Labour, October 1936, p.35.
3. R.Bond, opcit., p.13.
4. For a brief discussion, see M.Chanan, Labour Power in the British Film Industry (London, 1976).

emphasised

the menace of Americanisation of the world by means of the film. In the widest economic sense, the necessity for a flourishing British Film Industry is obvious. The film is now one of the most potent means of publicity. Both directly and indirectly goods are advertised in films. As a result of seeing such a high proportion of American films cinema audiences are familiarised with American products of all kinds and this is a powerful aid to their sale in this country.....Even more important to many of us is the educational and cultural menace of Americanisation.....we think it vital to preserve the English character of film performances. (5)

Stressing economic power and national rivalry, and asserting the need for cultural independence, the TUC's position was a mild critique of American imperialism, identifying the combined threats of American financial institutions and the colonising tendencies of the Hollywood industry. These themes were reiterated in 1936 in a submission by the TUC General Council to the Moyne Committee, an official inquiry into the workings of the British film industry. The memorandum contained a series of proposals whose object

is to ensure the maintenance and development of a strong and intelligently conducted British film producing industry and to assist progressively to improve the quality and to extend the influence of British films. (6)

The following year T.O'Brien, the General Secretary of the National Association of Theatrical and Kinematograph Employees (NATKE) put forward a resolution to Congress calling for the adoption of policies which would strengthen the British film industry and free it from American control. O'Brien's concern was not just for a national asset which he believed was being neglected, but for the potential dangers which arose from the nature of the industry, under American control. In moving the resolution O'Brien referred to the incomparable influence of the 'movies':

The great leaders of industry are alive to all this, and to what it means. They are quite aware of the great propaganda

5. TUC 1931, pp. 299-301.

6. 'The Position of British Films', ibid., 1937, p.366.

value, apart from the financial interest.

.....the British film industry is a national necessity and a thing as vital to the country's protection and interests as any weapon of national defence.

.....America dominates the film industry.....It is conceivable that our Trade Union and Labour movement and a Labour Government may be seriously embarrassed and handicapped by this strong medium of popular propaganda and entertainment being in the wrong hands.

I appeal to the General Council.....to see that this great medium of propaganda and entertainment is thoroughly and adequately controlled by this country. (7)

O'Brien revealed here a theme which underpinned almost all discussion of the cinema within the movement. Such discussion, taking as given the structure of the film industry in capitalism, focussed on the power of the medium to influence people's attitudes and behaviour. The problem arose from the complete acceptance of cinema as an entertainment by the working class. The TUC General Council, and other Labour leaders were sensitive to the material which the British film industry was producing. But there appears to have been a tacit assumption that if the cinema in Britain was of largely British provenance, and the influence of Hollywood and American capitalism were minimised, then there was some prospect of improving the standard of films produced, and of reducing the dangers to the Labour movement identified by O'Brien.

3. Film as Entertainment

The appeal of the cinema as an entertainment was almost universal. As one of many investigations into the social conditions of the population in the 1930's put it, 'Certainly today the cinema is par excellence the people's amusement'.(8) Joseph Reeves, the dynamic Education Officer of the Royal Arsenal Cooperative Society, concurred in this view: 'The sound film is supreme today in the people's amusements and recreations'.(9) This attraction proved as irresistible

7. TUC 1937, pp.367-8.

8. H.Llewellyn Smith, New Survey of London Life and Labour vol.IX op.cit., p.47.

9. The Film and Education (Stoke, 1937), pp.2-3.

for some Labour leaders as it did for ordinary trade unionists and members of the Labour Party. During the period of the second Labour Government George Lansbury, First Commissioner of Works, was apparently a regular patron of the Broadway Kinema in West Ham; and Ramsay MacDonald and J.H.Thomas, respectively Prime Minister and Lord Privy Seal, were reportedly 'ardent believers in the kinema'.(10) Indeed MacDonald, according to Paul Wyand, a British Movietone cameraman, was 'one of the first people to appreciate the pack 'em in value of "talking" newsreels'.(11) Labour Cabinet Ministers regularly went to Fox Movietone's private theatre in Berners St. in central London to view newsreels; and some patronised the Avenue Pavilion cinema, the cinema in London in 1929-30 for non-commercial continental and experimental films.(12) There was no contradiction or embarrassment in this fascination for the atmosphere and excitement of the 'picture palace'. The question of reconciling moral and political convictions with objectionable films did not arise. Labour leaders were very conscious of the 'shoddy sentimentality, the mock melodrama and tinsel glamour' of the material being exhibited in the nation's cinemas.(13) They were also well aware from an early date of the propaganda potential of the medium.(14) Sensitised to the dangers, they went to the cinema forewarned and forearmed, with, it would appear, little expectation of seeing anything which remotely corresponded to a realistic or fair

10. Gaumont British News, August 1930, p.9. This was the House magazine of the Gaumont British Newsreel Company.
11. P.Wyand, Useless if Delayed (London, 1959), p.41. Correspondence in MacDonald's papers bears this out. See PRO MacDonald Papers 30/69/6/31, correspondence with British Acoustic Films and The Bioscope.
12. Kinematograph Weekly, 24 October 1929, p.26; 31 October 1929, p.23. Apart from MacDonald and Thomas, the politicians concerned were J.R.Clynes, Lansbury, Ellen Wilkinson, Sidney Webb and J.F.Horrabin.
13. TUC Library, TUC General Council Papers, Minutes of the Trades Councils Joint Consultative Committee, 17 November 1936, 'Trades Councils - Their Industrial Function and Activities'. (Hereafter, the papers of the General Council of the TUC will be referred to as TUC GC; the Memorandum of the Joint Committee will be referred to as TCJCC 'Memorandum'.)
14. For example, B.D.Vernon, Ellen Wilkinson (London, 1982), p.118.

treatment of 'our people'. To a large degree such a question, on an individual level, missed the point. For Labour politicians as much as for ordinary working class people, the sense of anticipation, the seductive surroundings, the magical combination of sound and moving picture, were a source of relaxation and amusement. As Ritchie Calder explained:

I am a film-addict, an impenitent 'fan'. In my more discriminating moments, I insist upon seeing good films. But to me, the average film is a caffeine poison, to be taken, like black coffee, at the end of a tiring day. (15)

It was of course much more than a form of relaxation for many people. The frequency with which they attended the cinema did not diminish its importance as a social occasion. Part of the attraction stemmed from the 'tenderly wistful interest in the vacuous doings of the upper ten thousand' which Egon Wertheimer, a German socialist intellectual, detected in the working class as a problem which the Labour Party found difficult to overcome.(16) This deferential attitude was seen as a source of dangerous naivety which conferred upon the medium an extraordinary power to influence innocent minds. Ernest Bevin, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, speaking at an election meeting at the Lyceum Picture House in Bradford, felt obliged to advise his audience on the best way to treat politicians on the screen:

Even when you come to such places as this for your amusement, you are faced with propaganda which is aimed against your own class, and I appeal to you to show your resentment against such tactics. When you see Lord Lloyds and similar people shown to you in newsreels, hiss them off. (17)

But it was the intrinsic qualities of the medium, as much as the fundamental attraction of the cinema, which aroused concern. For the TUC General Council there was

ample evidence of the unique influence possessed by films. The effect upon speech and dress of the preponderance of American films in this country is obvious. (18)

15. Labour, October 1936, p.35.

16. E.Wertheimer, Portrait of the Labour Party 2nd ed. (London, 1930), p.234.

17. Cited, Kinematograph Weekly, 26 October 1933, p.3.

18. TUC 1936, p.221.

For T.O'Brien of NATKE, the power of the cinema was unprecedented:

The influence of the movies on the minds of the masses of the people is far greater in the main than the influence exercised by either radio or the newspapers. (19)

At the TUC Congress in 1937 a resolution was passed stating that the General Council

recognises the increasing importance of the film in influencing the thought, customs and habits of the people, and its powerful potentialities for propaganda as well as for entertainment. (20)

One practical outcome of this influence gradually became apparent. The growth of the cinema, it was assumed, had changed the 'psychology of youth' and had 'tended to lessen the attractions of Trade unionism'.(21) It also appeared that commitment amongst trade union members was not as great as it had been:

it is much more difficult than it used to be to get Trade Unionists to take a keen interest in the activities of their organisations. The branch room.....has ceased to be the same centre of interest..... (22)

Three years later, at the Annual Conference of the National Council of Labour Colleges, a similar lament was heard:

It was made clear by a number of delegates that the competition of the cinema, of the wireless.....raised serious problems for the NCLC. (23)

It is difficult to suggest with confidence what such developments signified. There was for example no general decline in adult working class education: as the Annual Reports of the Workers' Educational Association reveal, both membership and attendance at classes continued to increase during the 1930's. But the real reasons for such changes, if

19. TUC 1937, p.367.

20. Ibid., p.366. See also, for example, F.W.Cox, Millgate, October 1936-March 1937, p.40. Cox was a member of the London Cooperative Society's Political Committee.

21. TUC GC TCJCC 17 November 1936, 'Memorandum'.

22. J.P.M.Millar, Plebs, September 1934, pp.193-4.

23. Ibid., July 1937, p.167.

they did take place, are not relevant to the issue. There was a commonly accepted belief that the cinema (and radio) were drawing people away from trade unionism and undermining the traditional control which Labour organisations exercised over independent working class education and over their members generally. In short, the support and involvement which these organisations could command, at a time when trade union membership was already comparatively low, were believed to be in doubt. The mass media, and the cinema in particular, were believed to be creating a gap between leaders and the rank and file, cultivating ideas and attitudes over which the leaders had little control and, potentially, drawing people away from trade unionism and the ideals of the labour movement.

4. Film as a Threat to the Democratic Process (I)

In his survey of life in York in the second half of the 1930's Seebom Rowntree described the 'leisure activities' of 'practically every working class family in York'. He organised his data in two categories: 'active leisure' and 'passive leisure'. Passive activities he described as 'forms of activity in which those concerned do not themselves take part'; and he included in this category radio and cinema amongst others.(24) This view of the passive cinema-goer was commonplace amongst the literati in Britain in this decade.(25) Little attention was given to the psychology of the mind in the construction of the meaning of a film; rather, the focus was on the intrinsic qualities of film and what was assumed to be the inherent vulnerability of the audience to the medium's powers of suggestion. Drawing upon common ideas concerning 'mass society', Labour observers attributed this passivity to the 'effects' of the cinema, and began to identify in the

24. B.Seebom Rowntree, Poverty and Progress op.cit., p.330.

25. For example, R.Herring, et al, Cinema Survey (London, 1937), p.29; P.Rotha, Films and the Labour Party pamphlet (London, 1936), p.7; C.Madge, T.Harrisson, Mass Observation op.cit., pp.19-20; A.Calder-Marshall, 'The Film Industry', in C.Day Lewis (ed.), The Mind in Chains op.cit., pp.72 ff.

normal operation of the cinema a potential threat to the fundamental processes of democratic government.

Siegfried Kracauer has observed in his study of film theory that

from the twenties to this day, the devotees of film and its opponents alike have compared the medium to a sort of drug and drawn attention to its stupefying effects. (26)

While the notion of the cinema as a 'drug' may not have gained much currency with ordinary working class cinema goers, the idea was shared, in retrospect at least, by people involved in the production of the films which were the cause for concern. Michael Balcon, recalling his long and celebrated career in films, considered that in the 1920's he and other film producers were 'making our contribution to the provision of what was no more than entertainment opium for the masses!'.(27) Amongst Labour leaders a belief in the effectiveness of the cinema in shaping attitudes and behaviour was the cornerstone of this notion of the cinema as a 'soporific'. Widely shared views were that people were accepting the vicarious experiences of the cinema either as a substitute for actually doing something to alleviate their problems, or as a means of 'escaping' from such problems, or, that the cinema 'distracted' people from the realities of life by cultivating false hopes, artificial values, and unrealisable dreams. The cinema was seen as a 'dream factory', peddling fantasies to the poor, whose everyday lives were vacant, miserable and full of despair.

For the left wing of the Labour movement such an idea was consonant with the theory of false consciousness to which the Communist Party subscribed. Ivor Montagu, a Party intellectual with a high public profile, suggested that the 'whole object' of the 'capitalist cinema'

is to be as unreal as possible, to create a dream factory wherein the workers can forget for a moment what the world and their lives are really like. (28)

26. S.Kracauer, Theory of Film (Oxford, 1960), p.159.
27. M.Balcon, Michael Balcon Presents....A Lifetime of Films (London, 1969), p.33.
28. 'Their Films and Ours', New Red Stage, June-July 1932, p.5.

F.J.Parish put the case more pithily in a letter to the Editor of the Sunday Worker, a nominally independent paper but under Communist Party control. His comments were prompted by criticism of the 'high brow' film reviews of the paper's film critic, Henry Dobb. The main concern, he wrote, should be 'the fact that hundreds of thousands of workers are doped week after week in the cinemas'.(29) Dobb himself believed the cinema was capable of exercising a 'mild hypnosis' over its audience.(30) Similarly Kino, a workers' film organisation formed by members of the CPGB, described the films produced by Hollywood as 'soothing syrup' used by the cinema 'to drug people'.(31) Statements of this type are legion in the communist and left wing periodicals of the period. But the 'drug' metaphor was not confined to the left of the movement. Ritchie Calder, speaking from the middle ground of the Labour Party, described the cinema in the following terms:

The dangers of the cinema are manifest.....it is an opiate to drug away unhappiness an escape from the grimness and desperation of real life. (32)

Similarly, Frank Cox, of the London Cooperative Society, believed that 'The cinema of today.....is a soporific and helps to keep the masses satisfied with their lot'.(33) It is evident that not all observers accepted this view with equal conviction; but even sceptics were drawn by the worst excesses of the American film industry to this idea as the most appropriate common-sense explanation. Fred Montague, Labour MP for West Islington, for example, in discussing the film Black Fury, reluctantly concluded that 'there are moments when the word "dope" begins to form itself in the critical mind'.(34) Writing in 1938 the Daily Worker journalist Robert Hardy accepted that there was now in distribution a number of Hollywood films such as Scarface, Dead End, Public Enemy, Zola and I Am A Fugitive From A Chain Gang 'claiming to

29. Sunday Worker, 15 July 1928, p.10.

30. Ibid., 9 September 1928, p.9. Interestingly, right wing writers subscribed to this concept. A.J.Mackenzie, Propaganda Boom (London, 1938) devotes a whole chapter to the 'Hypnotism of the Silver Screen'.

31. Daily Worker, 1 May 1936, p.5.

32. Labour, October 1936, p.35.

33. Millgate, October 1936-March 1937, p.39.

34. Labour, January 1936, p.113.

reflect ordinary life'. He approved of them for that reason; but there remained 'the deliberately narcotic aims of the average gorgeous Hollywood film'.(35)

While the metaphor may have varied between 'drug', 'dope', 'opiate', 'narcotic' and 'soporific' the central idea that film exercised a disabling effect on the critical senses was widely accepted. This view was certainly accepted by the leading members of the CPGB,(36) and the ILP (37), and the General Council of the TUC.(38) But to what extent it gained acceptance within the leadership of the Labour Party is difficult to judge in the absence of specific statements by Lansbury, Attlee, Cripps, Dalton, etc. The highly allusive style of commentary may provide a clue. Henry Dobb, for example, commenting on the content of Hollywood films, took offence at the portrayal of the workers as

either an associate of bootleggers and gunmen, or a hefty-paunched buffoon to be laughed at. In the knowledge that the backers of the American film industry are.....Standard Oil and Wall Street the reasons need no elaboration. (39)

Such comments suggest that it was taken as given that a broad consensus of views existed amongst the readerships of these papers and journals. In the absence of any tradition of film aesthetics from which to draw ideas,(40) Labour leaders had recourse to the journalistic commentary of the film critics of the movement, the main ones being Gary Allighan (New Leader), Monica Ewer and Pat Mannock (Daily Herald), John Ramage (Reynolds News), Marie Seton (New Clarion), Glyn Roberts (Tribune), Henry Dobb (Sunday Worker), Peter Galway (New Statesman), and Jane Morgan (Daily Worker). With the exception of Ewer and Mannock, all these journalists shared very similar views as to the 'narcotic effects' of the cinema. Moreover, film critics in left wing journals with no obvious connection with the movement, such as Elizabeth Coxhead (Left Review), Arthur Calder-Marshall (Life and Letters Today), and critics on independent newspapers such as Robert Herring of the Manchester

35. Daily Worker, 23 July 1938, p.7; Reynolds News, 14 November 1937, p. p.10.

36. H.Pollitt, Daily Worker, 6 January 1930, p.6.

37. Fenner Brockway, Hungry England (London, 1932), pp.33 ff.

38. TUC GC TCJCC 17 November 1936, 'Memorandum'.

39. Workers Illustrated News, 13 December 1929, p.13.

40. R.Low, The History of the British Film 1918-1929 (London, 1971), pp.22 ff.

Guardian held such views.(41) If individual leaders such as Attlee or Bevin had views on the subject, it would seem likely that their views would have drawn upon the commentary in these papers. This, of course, proves nothing. But in so far as these critics were the principal figures in the shaping of opinion on the subject, and in so far as their notion of the 'narcotic effect' was embedded in a broader view of the critical importance of the mass media in capitalist society, a view which attributed enormous influence to these institutions and, more importantly, one which people like Attlee and Bevin did share, then it seems likely that the leaders of the Labour Party did, albeit tacitly, concur in the proposition that the cinema, as a mass entertainment, exercised a soporific influence.

It is interesting to note that the concept of cinema 'dope' was given credence after the second world war by highly respected American academic sociologists. Robert Merton and Paul Lazarsfeld, no less, coined the term 'narcotising dysfunction' in 1948 to describe what they saw as a tendency for audiences to accept media experiences as a substitute for confronting and attempting to resolve social or political problems.(42) While it may be tempting therefore to regard the 'soporific effect' thesis of Labour observers as being purely derivative of political doctrine it would seem that it had some basis in personal experience.

For many of these observers the soporific nature of the cinema experience was not simply an 'effect', but a direct result of manipulation. While acknowledging economic motives, competition within the film industry and between the British and American industries, there was a common view that

the fundamental motive animating the policy of the cinema in capitalist countries..... is the maintenance of the profit-making system as a whole. (43)

41. For an interesting discussion of the 'trance factor', see Meyer Levin's review of The Charge of the Light Brigade in A.Cooke, (ed.), Garbo and the Nightwatchmen (London, 1937, 1971 reprint), pp.108-110.
42. R.K.Merton, P.F.Lazarsfeld, 'Mass Communication, popular taste and organised social action', reproduced in W.Schramm (ed.), Mass Communications (Urbana, 1960).
43. "Benn", 'The Cinema - An Instrument of Class Rule', Plebs, April 1931, p.90. "Benn" was the pseudonym of Gary Allighan.

A unified capitalist class with a coherent ideology was believed to have consciously used the cinema as a medium for purveying capitalist ideas. Functioning as a monolith, conveying a monolithic ideology, the effect was, as the 'soporific' concept suggests, a more or less complete correspondence between the ideas transmitted and the ideas held by the people who attended the cinema regularly. "Benn's" views were typical of left wing opinion within the movement:

The cinema is a commercial institution.....it is run for profit; it is part of the gigantic machine called capitalism. But the cinema has a special function which it does not share with motor cars and artificial silk, but which it does share with newspapers. Its special function is to develop in men and women a certain bias towards life, to give them a particular view-point, to crystallise in a certain definite way their attitude towards their fellows and towards their surroundings in general..... The cinema then is an efficient, an important, a universal instrument of capitalist propaganda. (44)

The limits set by the need to attract mass audiences ensured the constant repetition of successful themes,(45) some of the most prominent of which were identified by Frank Cox:

Films are made which show the ease by which the rise from obscurity to fame is accomplished by the right attitude towards one's employer, etc; the reward of virtue and the inevitable punishment of crime; the boosting of imperialism, and the glories of war. (46)

What caused particular offence was the consistent portrayal of the working class in a certain way. 'The most potent weapon of propaganda and instruction that has ever been fashioned' focussed largely on the 'propertied class'; but where workers were characterised, the argument went, they were usually cast as 'buffoons' - unless they were depicted raising themselves from poverty to become rich.(47) Where films showed working class characters in roles questioning or criticising the status quo, they were portrayed as 'bewiskered bolsheviks', 'wife-

44. New Leader, 17 January 1930,p.12. See also R.Calder,Labour, October 1936, p.35.

45. I.Montagu, 'Social Ideology in the Cinema', Plebs, August 1927, pp.263-6.

46. Millgate, October 1936-March 1937, p.39.

47. Plebs, March 1929, pp.51-2; March 1928, pp.67-8.

beaters', 'drunkards' or 'insane'.(48) Indeed, according to Glyn Roberts, the 'Comic Bolshie' was a 'rather steady standby of British films'.(49)

The strongest criticism was usually reserved for the newsreels. For Ritchie Calder, they were the Hollywood 'poison served up neat'.(50) Ralph Bond was uncompromising:

Of all the abominations that have afflicted the cinema since the microphone forced the camera into second place, the Sound News Reel is probably the worst. Anything less interesting and nerve-shattering than the average talking News Bulletin would be hard to conceive.....The newsreel, like its confrère the newspaper, is primarily designed for the purpose of doping the public.....Occasionally we get a little politics, but carefully selected so as not to offend the bosses.....In short, the newsreel is the most potent form of capitalist propaganda through the medium of the cinema. (51)

The 'continuous propaganda of Jingoism and flagwagging', 'sport and royalty, royalty and sport', in the newsreels

by the mere fact of their regularity, must play a large part in the forming of popular ideas and in the moulding of public opinion.....Its object is not to present news but to breed a race of society gossipers, sport-maniacs, lick-spittles and jingoes. (52)

Not all Labour opinion accepted this view as universally applicable. Hannen Swaffer, for example, not noted for his generosity towards Labour's political opponents, considered that occasionally the newsreel could actually provide a useful corrective to the press: British Movietone's coverage of Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia was a 'soul-rending experience' which, in showing him as 'mad with a lust for conquest', countered the 'favourable' press coverage of this event.(53)

48. Daily Worker, 20 January 1930, p.8; The Record, August 1937, p.2.
49. Tribune, 9 December 1938, p.15.
50. Labour, October 1936, p.35.
51. Daily Worker, 31 March 1930, p.8.
52. "Benn", Plebs, March 1929, p.53; New Leader, 31 May 1929, p.2.
53. Daily Herald, 10 October 1935, p.14.

Tribune's critic "Close Up" commented on the excellence of Gaumont British coverage of the Soviet North Polar expedition.(54) But such praise was rare. Members of the second Labour Government were enthusiastic towards the idea of gaining publicity for the Administration via the newsreels, but out of office senior Labour politicians quickly became disillusioned with the newsreel companies; although they do not appear to have indulged in the vitriolic criticism of Bond.

For the left wing of the movement the newsreels were part of a cinema conspiracy. There were a few dissentients from this view, who were not entirely convinced that manipulation was consciously pursued. Arthur Woodburn, for example, of the National Council of Labour Colleges did not doubt the propaganda value of the cinema for 'the ruling class', but argued that the cinema was effective 'because its purveyors and its victims alike are equally unconscious of its aim'.(55) Writing in the Daily Worker Francis Wilder conceded that

Behind the production not only of short film and newsreels, but also of at least 50 per cent of the feature films shown in cinemas from Sydney to Swansea today there lies a propagandist aim. This aim is almost always quite conscious, thoroughly reactionary in its emphasis.... (56)

Similarly, Ivor Montagu, moving from his earlier position, believed that 'A great deal of the propaganda in the commercial cinema was not deliberate', arguing that the main determinants of content were not political but financial considerations.(57) But this belief that the content of films was not consciously contrived for the ideological subordination of the masses was only occasionally expressed in the Labour journals of the period. There were of course some types of film to which the manipulation thesis was not applied. General approval was given to educational or instructional films such as the Secrets of Nature series. The March of Time 'newsreel' films provided an attractive alternative to the conventional newsreel format, since each issue concentrated on a particular subject, providing a more substantive coverage of controversial events. The fact that they were often censored made them all the more attractive as honourable and well-

54. Tribune, 11 March 1938, p.15.

55. Cited, The Record, August 1937, p.11.

56. Daily Worker, 18 February 1937, p.4. My emphasis.

57. Cited, Kino News, no.2, spring 1936.

intentioned cinema-journalism. In the same way, Hollywood films occasionally received grudging acknowledgement as honest attempts to deal with important contemporary issues, Blockade, for example. Similarly They Drive By Night was one of very few British productions which were regarded as remotely realistic in their portrayal of working class people. Generous, but not uncritical enthusiasm was given to the 'non-commercial' films of European directors such as G.W.Pabst. Soviet films were, in the early years, regarded as the ^mexemplary model, demonstrating the potential of a socially responsible cinema.(58) The far more accessible documentary films gradually gained acceptance, providing the dominant aesthetic of the Labour movement in its attempts to produce its own films.(59)

Such material was of course largely peripheral to the main body of cinema output, which provoked a contemptuous, dismissive attitude identifying a conscious attempt to obscure reality and cultivate a particular range of values and ideas for the purposes of social control. Whether the content of films was believed to be consciously contrived or derivative of unconscious ideological processes, the narcotic effect of the commercial cinema was a conclusion shared by virtually all recorded Labour opinion.

For some this had particularly dangerous consequences. The 'dope' paralysed the critical faculties of audiences, facilitating the inculcation of certain ideas over a long period of time, and rendering people vulnerable to mass suggestion. The scares and stunts used for overtly political purposes by Labour's political opponents were more effective because of this subversion of autonomous thinking. Thus, for example, the TUC General Council, not noted for a radical political posture, explained that the cinema

produces a restlessness, the urge for movement and change which may, in the not too distant future, prove of the greatest possible disservice to democracy, as it tends to develop a mass psychology which will make workers particularly susceptible to waves of emotionalism, produced by the combined 'loud-speakers' of the popular press. (60)

58. See below, Chapter Five.

59. See below, Chapter Nine.

60. TUC GC TCJCC 17 November 1936, 'Memorandum'.

In effect the commercial cinema was, on this view, undermining the sinews of liberal democracy in two related ways. By neutralising the rational basis of human action the Labour Socialist vision of a rational and inevitable progression towards full democracy was in jeopardy; and on a more immediate level, this disabling effect conferred upon Labour's political opponents greater power to manipulate the working class voters prior to and during elections: something which Ramsay MacDonald had recognised long before the advent of sound film - the extension of the franchise was double-edged.(61) Given the particular views common amongst Labour leaders concerning the role of the press in this issue, the connections between the press and the cinema industry did not go unnoticed. As Ritchie Calder explained to his readers:

Rothermere and Beaverbrook are 'in the game' - and not merely for profits.

British Movietone News - as you might guess from the 'dope' it dishes up - is largely a Rothermere concern. Beaverbrook, with large interests both in production and in theatres, is also behind a big group of news-cinemas which are to be spread all over the country.....

These people are no friends of ours. In a crisis or a General Election they are our open and ruthless enemies. Now, in the interests of profit, they may say they are 'giving the public what it wants'. Later, in the interest of Capital, they will give the public what Big Business wants. (62)

61. R.MacDonald, A Policy for the Labour Party (London, 1920), p.53.

62. R.Calder, 'We must learn to shoot', Labour, October 1936, p.35.

5. Film as a Threat to the Democratic Process (II)

Such broadly theoretical views were of course of only limited value for the essentially pragmatic political objectives of Labour politicians and trade union leaders. The value of the knowledge which such insights provided was certainly not underestimated, but little could be done, in the short term at least, to combat the problem. Attlee and Citrine were unlikely to complain to the directors of Twentieth Century Fox that their films were doping 'our people'. But where the course of practical politics intersected with concrete issues arising from the normal functioning of the cinema - censorship, newsreel bias, government interference - opportunities were taken to bring such matters to the attention of the public, to extract political mileage, and to exert pressure on the industry. Between 1929 and 1939 there occurred a number of episodes which Labour leaders interpreted as accumulated evidence of assistance on the part of the film industry to Labour's political opponents and, in 1938, of the Government's manipulation of the industry for party political purposes. There was, in short, a hardening belief that the democratic processes of the country were being undermined not simply by the structurally determined ideological function of the cinema, but by a sinister collusion between film industry and state. This illiberal conspiracy was given sharper definition by the political tensions generated in anticipation of a second total war and the preparations being made by the National Government in readiness for it.

(i)

One of the first acts of the new Labour Government in July 1929 was to approach the Soviet Government with a view to re-establishing diplomatic relations. The invitation of the 15 July was conditional upon recognition of the conventional rights of states under international law and the settlement of outstanding questions between the two countries, including 'those relating to propaganda'. On 3 October a Protocol was announced which revealed that agreement had been reached to confirm the pledge with regard to propaganda contained in Article 16 of the Treaty signed in August 1924 with the first Labour Government. On 20 December 1929 Gregori Sokolnikov was installed in London as Soviet Ambassador to Britain, following an exchange of notes in which both Governments declared that Article 16 of the Treaty, regarding propaganda,

was to have full force.(63) Immediately seeking to embarrass the new Government, Oliver Baldwin asked the Home Secretary on the 23 July 1929, whether he intended to remove the censorship of Russian films. Clynes replied that the powers of censorship resided with the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) and Local Authorities, and that he was not prepared to recommend interference with those powers. Nevertheless, steps had been taken 'to prevent the importation and exhibition of certain Russian films of a propagandist character'.(64)

During the previous six months twenty-two Soviet films had arrived in this country amid a repressive atmosphere following the Arcos raid and the political storm which arose from the banning of the film Dawn. With the election of the new Government hopes were raised in Labour circles that the heavy handed and reactionary style of Clynes' predecessor, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, would be replaced by a more liberal and sympathetic policy which would permit the showing of politically controversial films. Encouraged by the Film Society's screening of Battleship Potemkin, the London Workers Film Society (LWFS) and the Masses Stage and Film Guild (MSFG) were established to show Soviet and other films not generally available for public exhibition. As with Battleship Potemkin, Mother had been banned by the BBFC and subsequently shown by the rather exclusive Film Society with the permission of the London County Council. But requests to show these films to MSFG audiences of trade unionists were rejected by the Council in March 1930.(65) There erupted a heated debate about film censorship which had been rumbling for two years.(66) Labour MPs Ellen Wilkinson and George Strauss urged that a national inquiry be instigated into censorship; and J.F.Horrabin called for a national authority to be established to grant special licences for private showings of films banned by the BBFC from general exhibition.

63. Cmd. 3418 (1929) Correspondence Regarding the Resumption of Relations with the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

64. Hansard, vol.230, col. 1121, 23 July 1929.

65. These events are discussed below, Chapter Five.

66. See I.Montagu, The Political Censorship of Film (London, 1929); Programme, 25th Performance of the Film Society, 21 October 1928; New Leader, 29 March 1929.

Such was the strength of feeling within the House of Commons that Fenner Brockway asked the Home Secretary to receive a deputation from a Parliamentary Film Committee (an all-party group), to which he acceded.(67)

Meanwhile, at a meeting of the full Council it transpired that the London County Council had taken the advice of the BBFC, that Mother was likely to cause a breach of the peace and was therefore unsuitable for public or private exhibition.(68) Strauss, a member of the Council, opposed the ban, describing the policy of the BBFC and the Council as 'pure class bias'. J.H.MacDonald, another Labour Councillor, saw in the decision of the Council 'a trade censorship' dictated by the interests of the American film industry.(69) Shortly afterwards, the enterprising Ralph Bond of the LWFS sidestepped the BBFC and LCC bans by persuading West Ham Town Council to grant permission for a public showing of Mother. In response to demands from Conservatives for the Home Secretary to prevent this, Clynes stated that he had no powers to intervene. Again Ellen Wilkinson suggested that a committee of inquiry was needed to sort out the whole issue.(70) Over the next twelve months there followed barbed questions from the Conservative benches in the House of Commons as to whether Clynes would introduce legislation giving him the powers necessary to prevent propaganda films being shown. The consistent reply was that the Government did not propose to set up an inquiry as the present system was satisfactory.(71)

This whole affair, which has only been briefly sketched, suggests some of the difficulties which the Labour movement faced in

67. Hansard, vol.236, cols.1468-9, 13 March 1930; col.2075, 20 March 1930.
68. London County Council, Minutes of Proceedings 5 March 1930, Report of the Theatres and Music Halls Committee. (Hereafter, LCC MP TMH.)
69. British Film Institute, London County Council, Verbatim Reports 1929-30 11 March 1930, 'Sunday Cinematograph Exhibitions'. This is a record of the discussion of the full Council.
70. Hansard, vol.237, cols.896-7, 31 March 1930.
71. For example, ibid., vol.240, col. 972, 24 June 1930; cols.1587-9, 30 June 1930; vol.241, col.51, 7 July 1930.

coming to terms with the question of censorship. Above all it reveals the difference of perspective between Labour politicians in their capacity as Ministers of State, and influential individuals within the Labour Party not burdened by such responsibilities.(72) Clynes and Henderson (Foreign Secretary) were well aware of the power of propaganda and the need to exercise a political censorship which would prevent subversive material being shown in this country. Moreover, as Clynes' statements in the House of Commons repeatedly demonstrated, he was satisfied with existing censorship arrangements. Under the terms of the Cinematograph Act of 1909 control over exhibition was vested in Local Authorities. Their licensing powers enabled them to exercise a flexible control over cinema buildings and what was shown in them. The majority of Authorities attached to their licences a set of model conditions recommended by the Home Office. One of the most important of these conditions was that no film considered unsuitable by the BBFC for public exhibition could be shown without the express consent of the Authority concerned, and subject to any additional restrictions which it may impose.(73) The BBFC therefore exercised a remarkable degree of control over what was shown, based on an elaborate set of 'rules' or 'exceptions', as revealed in its Annual Reports. These rules were cumulative, and very specific, and comprehensive in their coverage, delineating precisely which political subjects or themes were not acceptable.(74) In all, they constituted an elaborate defence of the status quo, sifting out any material which could have been considered to question or criticise the prevailing values and institutions of existing society. This highly political role was further emphasised by the Board's close and regular contact

72. It is interesting to note that the sponsors of the MSFG included three members of the Labour Cabinet, including Clynes.
73. The most comprehensive legal and administrative account of film censorship in Britain is N.M.Hunnings, Film Censors and the Law (London, 1967).
74. For a thorough discussion of the political role of the BBFC, see N.Pronay, 'The First Reality: Film Censorship in Liberal England', in K.R.M.Short (ed.), Feature Films As History (London, 1981); 'The Political Censorship of Films in Britain Between the Wars', in N.Pronay, D.W.Spring (eds.), Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918-1945 (London, 1982)

with the Home Office. Its personnel were men of senior political rank with expertise in the fields of propaganda and counter-propaganda, and access to the most senior levels of government. In addition, where the BBFC refused to pass a film for public exhibition, and film renters tried to bypass the ban by appealing directly to the Local Authority, this was invariably, in the first instance, to the London County Council (LCC), which, in deciding whether or not a film should be shown, exercised considerable influence over the future prospects of the film nationwide.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The LCC naturally took the matter very seriously, as the verbatim record of the discussions of the full Council testify.

From the point of view of Clynes and Henderson therefore the existing censorship arrangements were essential for the elimination of subversive Soviet propaganda, the maintenance of public order and the conduct of liberal consensus politics. They were also sufficient and effective: had they been otherwise there were plenty of opportunities and much political support from the Conservatives which might have provided justification for legislation to be introduced. As it was, the State, by devolving responsibility for censorship to the Local Authorities and the BBFC, was able to deflect criticism and protest innocence when controversy over censorship arose. What served further to distance the State publicly from the processes of censorship concerning the type of films which groups such as the Masses Stage and Film Guild wished to show was the working of the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927. In effect the Act exercised a pre-censorship control for a particular category of film, the non-commercial import distributed by the small film renter. With no automatic access to cinema outlets, and only limited prospects for renting, the small renter walked a financial tightrope with such films. Under the terms of the Act a renter had to register a film with the Board of Trade as a pre-requisite of exhibition. But the film had to be trade-shown before it could be registered. A film could not be registered if the application to register was fourteen or more days after the trade show. Obviously, the renter could not register the film if no exhibitor would take it. Where a non-commercial film was taken up by an exhibitor it was unlikely to be shown widely, and there-

75. British Film Institute, British Board of Film Censors, Verbatim Reports (1931) 'Control of Cinematograph Exhibitions in England and Wales' n.d. (c. June 1931).

fore unlikely to be taken up by many exhibitors unless the rental charge was low. Given the costs arising from import duty, titling and registration fee, the likelihood was that few small film renters could afford to risk importing such films.(76) It would seem therefore that any small film renter who imported, or who had in their possession, a film of a political nature which exhibitors knew from past experience would prove neither acceptable to the BBFC nor commercially attractive, would find this film languishing in their offices unused and unwanted.(77) It is not surprising therefore that when Lieutenant Commander Kenworthy suggested that politically subversive films were stopped at the Customs, Clynes replied that such a practice was not necessary.(78) Furthermore, in regard to the importation of foreign films, the small renter was legally bound by the 1927 Act to acquire a proportion of British films to encourage the domestic film industry in the face of the almost irresistible American competition. As no large renter was likely to acquire the type of films to which the House took such strong exception, the small specialist renter was unlikely to find it easy, given the degree of control over distribution exercised by the larger film companies, to find outlets for the British films which they were legally required to offer for rent: many commercial cinemas probably could not take them, the few specialist cinemas would not want them. Film Booking Offices, one of the specialist renters at the heart of the controversy over Soviet films, discovered that it was extremely difficult to satisfy the Renter's Quota under the terms of the Act.(79)

76. Ivor Montagu, who ran a small film renting company, 'Brunel and Montagu' with Adrian Brunel, provides detailed figures to demonstrate the considerable financial problems faced by such firms in importing non-commercial films, as a result of the Act. See The Political Censorship of Films op.cit., pp.19-28.
77. Film Booking Offices had The End of St. Petersburg in their possession in December 1928. The film was shown by the Film Society in February 1929, but thereafter remained in FBO's vaults until April 1930.
79. For the year 1928-9 FBO only managed 6.5% instead of the 7.5% Quota, and was subject to legal action by the Board of Trade. Kinematograph Weekly, 21 November 1929, p.25. The firm subsequently abandoned its policy of importing Soviet films.
78. Hansard, vol.235, cols.2394-5, 27 February 1930.

Clynes did not need to intervene to change the system of censorship. It was functioning effectively, capable of adapting to cope with the thorny problems which arose following the establishment of the London Workers Film Society and the Masses Stage and Film Guild.

The Labour MPs and Councillors who took issue with the Home Secretary and the LCC were not opposed to censorship per se. Charles Latham, for example, recognised the need for vigilance over the question of subversive films, and accepted that the Police should have powers, provided by the terms of the licence issued to exhibitors, to be present at film shows.(80) George Strauss, acknowledging the power of the medium to influence people, believed that censorship had a vital role to play in shaping opinion and the views of audiences.(81) But they objected to what they believed was an inflexible and arbitrary system, at the heart of which was the BBFC, whose policies were determined partly by its own 'conservatism and orthodoxy' and partly by the financial interests of the American film companies. In effect, the practice of imposing an indiscriminate ban on all politically controversial films was preventing a legitimate interest of a minority audience from being pursued. In view of this political censorship these Labour politicians considered the status of the BBFC had been compromised. What was needed, explained Ellen Wilkinson in her submission to the Home Secretary, was a censorship body which could 'command the respect of an unquestionable and independent authority', one which would be subject to parliamentary scrutiny. Clynes' position remained unchanged: the work of the BBFC and the Local Authorities was not unsatisfactory, and he was not in favour of a national censorship body under parliamentary control - which would create more problems than it would solve.(82) For Wilkinson and her colleagues, the only recourse was to the LCC, which had the power to circumvent the BBFC's

80. British Film Institute London County Council. Verbatim Reports (1929-30) 4 November 1930, 'Exhibitions by Film Societies'.
81. Ibid., 27 May 1930, 'Exhibitions by Film Societies'.
82. British Film Institute British Board of Film Censors. Verbatim Reports (1930) 'Notes of a deputation received by the Home Secretary from the Parliamentary Film Committee, 15 July 1930'.

political censorship; and eventually the LCC gave way to sustained lobbying, granting permission for the MSFG and the LWFS to show films. But the Council imposed new and very strict conditions under which such exhibitions were to take place. Section 26 of these conditions stated:

No cinematograph film shall be exhibited by or on behalf of the society which contains subversive propaganda liable in any way whatsoever to endanger the tranquillity of any part of the territory of the British Empire, nor shall any cinematograph film be so exhibited which is likely to be injurious to morality or to encourage or incite to crime, or to lead to disorder, or to be in any way offensive in the circumstances to public feeling, or which contains any offensive representations of living persons. (83)

This reference to 'subversive propaganda' was at the core of the Labour argument. The arbitrary banning of all films which had a politically controversial aspect to them was considered inappropriate because such films could not be regarded as commercial films in the broadest sense, and would not be seen by large, impressionable and politically immature audiences. As A.E. Samuels explained, the audiences would already to a large degree be politically conscious, and to some extent politically unified. Any 'politically controversial' films shown would be less likely to inflame the passions of MSFG audiences than they would if politically uncommitted and largely apolitical Film Society audiences were able to see them. 'It is', he argued, 'merely a question of preaching to the converted'. (84) Strauss and Lathan took up the theme, arguing against the use of a term which could be open to such wide interpretation and applied differently according to the political complexion of the Council. Lathan attempted to persuade the Council to remove this phrase from the conditions attached to any exhibition in licensed premises by groups such as the MSFG, but the motion was defeated by 78 votes to 38. (85)

The affair fizzled out as ways of circumventing the various restrictions were devised. But also due to the scarcity of politically controversial films emerging from the Soviet Union: by 1932 the supply of all Russian films had virtually dried up. But the episode retains a

83. LCC MP TMH, 4 November 1930.

84. British Film Institute London County Council, Verbatim Reports (1929-30) 11 March 1930, 'Sunday Cinematograph Exhibitions'.

85. Ibid., 4 November 1930, 'Exhibitions by Film Societies'.

certain significance because it created an impression amongst sections of the Labour movement of a censorship system functioning both to protect the interests of the cinema trade, which were in their view dubious, and to confine the medium of film to the safety of non-controversial subjects, preventing the presentation of alternative visions of society or fundamental criticisms of the present one. Such an achievement was recognised at the time and public knowledge. In a paper given to the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association in June 1936 Lord Tyrrell, in his first year as President of the BBFC, observed:

Nothing could be more calculated to arouse the passions of the British public than the introduction, on the screen, of subjects dealing with either religious or political controversy. You cannot lose sight of one of the first regulations in your licences, which states that no film must be exhibited which is likely to lead to disorder.

So far, we have had no film dealing with current burning political questions, but the thin end of the wedge is being inserted..... (86)

Tyrrell signalled his intention to ensure that nothing controversial would be permitted; and the following year was again able to announce, with an air of satisfaction, that 'there is not a single film shown today in the public cinemas of this country which dealt with any of the burning questions of the day'.(87) By a system of pre-production vetting of scripts and the rigorous application of its rules, the Board was able, throughout the decade, to eliminate from the screen any controversial subjects which led to the expression of political views which conflicted in any fundamental way with those of the Government.(88)

In the dual context of an approaching general election and a deteriorating international situation the years after 1936 were a period of steadily heightening political tension. Events abroad had potentially immense domestic political repercussions; and film assumed an unprecedented importance in so far as it could contribute

86. Lord Tyrrell, Film Censorship Today (London, 1936), pp.6-7.
87. Lord Tyrrell, Review of Film Censorship (London, 1937), p.16.
88. J.Richards, 'The British Board of Film Censors and Content Control in the 1930's: images of Britain', Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television vol.1 no.2, October 1981. p.114;
N.Pronay, 'The First Reality: Film Censorship in Liberal England', in K.R.M.Short (ed.), op.cit., pp. 133-5.

to the formation of mass public opinion in a situation where the public was unusually sensitive to international events and the course of action which the National Government chose to pursue. In these circumstances the BBFC, under Tyrrell's uncompromising stewardship, was particularly vigilant in the censorship of contentious material. As Tyrrell himself explained

the British Board of Film Censors has never exercised a political censorship qua such. In view of the specific regulation, suggested by the Home Office, and embodied in licences issued by local authorities under the Cinematograph Act 1909, to the effect that no film must be shown which is likely to lead to a disturbance, the Board has always directed its policy to this end. Whilst allowing varying shades of opinion to be shown on the screen, I have made it quite clear to the trade that the Board will not permit tendentious propaganda.....Commentary, delivered without any sense of responsibility, which is likely to give offence, or excite violent political feeling, thereby leading to public disturbance, is also prohibited. After all, the mixed audiences attend the cinemas in search of entertainment and relaxation. (89)

The work of the BBFC, in this politically charged atmosphere came under increasing scrutiny as the decade wore on because the international situation prompted some film makers to examine and question aspects of Government policy. The list of controversial censorship decisions steadily grew, evincing a good deal of speculation as to whether the essential task of preventing the exhibition of material which might inflame passions or cause controversy was being interpreted in a less than disinterested manner. Labour leaders gradually began to take the view that in practice apolitical censorship was being perpetrated by the Board which in intention and effect removed anything from the screen which could provide a focus for criticism of the Government.

Pat Mannoek probably spoke for most Labour leaders when, in referring to the BBFC he wrote that 'The integrity and conscientiousness of the Board are beyond question'.(90) This faith in the good intentions of the BBFC was grounded in the belief that the Board was in fact protecting the British public from the lamentable excesses of the film industry which, given a free hand, would indulge in ever more sordid and distasteful fantasies to attract audiences. Moreover, the alterna-

89. PRO HO, HO 45 17955/474497/34, Tyrrell to J.F.Henderson, 21 February 1939.

90. Daily Herald, 22 June 1934, p.8.

tive being discussed at the time, of introducing a Government censorship, was far less palatable. Nevertheless, the Board's credibility had become somewhat tarnished by the middle of 1936. Largely, this was due to the fiasco over the short film Peace of Britain which, in response to the National Government's decision to rearm, urged people to appeal to their MP to support the policy of collective security through the League of Nations: a contentious issue in so far as it questioned the rationale of rearmament. The BBFC, probably taken aback by this unusual film, appears to have been uncertain as to what to do and, adopting the line of extreme caution, withheld a certificate until it had taken advice from the relevant Government Departments. The delay however provoked an uproar as it initially appeared that the BBFC had actually banned the film, and then that the Board was seeking guidance from the War Office, rendering the Board's claim to independence as rather hollow.(91) The Board granted a certificate on the 7 April, over a week after the film had been submitted, but this was too late to prevent coverage of the affair in the national daily newspapers. Not only had the BBFC appeared reactionary, it was implicated in the party political needs of the National Government. Moreover, it appeared later only to have given way in the face of public pressure to grant the film a certificate.(92) The film, sponsored by senior members of the Labour Party, Sir Stafford Cripps and D.N.Pritt, and wealthy sympathisers, was subsequently shown widely.

No 'censorship' therefore actually took place, but the integrity of the Board was somewhat diminished by the affair in the eyes of Labour observers. The BBFC's standing may have survived had the incident been an isolated one. However two issues of March of Time had already been cut at the behest of the Board: Ethiopia (October 1935) and Palestine (November 1935). These monthly American films were newsreel compilations with sequences of reconstruction. They developed

91. Daily Herald, 8 April 1936, p.9; Manchester Guardian, 8 April 1936, p.16.
92. P.Rotha, Documentary Diary op.cit., pp.164-70; J.C.Robertson, The British Board of Film Censors (London. 1985), pp.103-4.

a reputation not merely for covering controversial subjects, but for a forceful investigative film journalism. The appreciation within Labour circles of this material was summed up by Peter Galway in the New Statesman:

The March of Time which is now shown in twelve hundred cinemas in these islands, reaches an enormous public which never reads a serious newspaper and for whom the only facts are the facts they can see. (93)

The March of Time's Editors were keen to cover international developments and, as Edgar Anstey, Head of Production in London recalls, they were liberal in their approach, often putting forward views which either embarrassed or implied criticism of the National Government's foreign policy.(94) It is not surprising therefore that March of Time would not only report controversy, but create it, and the following issues were cut by the BBFC: Geneva (May 1936), USA-Rehearsal for War (November 1937), Crisis in Algeria (December 1937), Inside Nazi Germany (May 1938), Britain and Peace (October 1938). In addition, Arms and the League (April 1938) and Threat to Gibraltar, (September 1938) were banned. Details of the excisions required by the Board were well publicised.(95) The cumulative effect was to convince Labour leaders by late 1937 that a political censorship was in operation in which the Board prevented any criticism of Government policy from reaching the screen. Subsequent events in 1938, and the closure of March of Time's London operation the following year, merely confirmed these views.(96)

For all its attractions the March of Time was not considered uncritically by Labour observers.(97) This was in part because the company was a commercial operation and, laudable though its ambitions were, it was not fundamentally related to the movement. Far more significant therefore for Labour critics of the BBFC was the Board's treatment of two films produced by non-commercial left wing organisations with a distinctly political, anti-fascist purpose, and connections with the movement: Spanish Earth and Britain Expects. In dealing with

93. New Statesman, 30 April 1938, p.728.

94. E.Sussex, The Rise and Fall of British Documentary (London, 1975), pp.88, 103.

95. For example, Daily Herald, 22 May 1936, p.8; News Chronicle, 13 October 1938, p.1.

96. The Cine Technician, January-February 1939, p.145; Daily Worker, 6 March 1939, p.7. Richard de Rochemont, Director of March of

aspects of the Spanish Civil War these two film took issue with Government policy and engaged in a political debate which was central to the activity and consciousness of the bulk of Labour cadres. On one level this debate centred on the most appropriate strategy for forcing the Government to change its foreign policy; on another it was concerned with practical assistance to the anti-fascist forces fighting for their lives in Spain. Where these two areas of strategy coincided was in revealing what was really happening in Spain and exposing the policy of 'non-intervention' to be a dangerous sham.

The Spanish Earth, 'the first major blow to be struck on the screen against the menace of dictatorship'(98) depicts the struggle for survival in rural Spain on land formerly belonging to wealthy landowners. Following the establishment of the Republican Government this once barren land was being cultivated successfully with the help of an irrigation project. The food grown there is shown to be essential for the people in Madrid fighting for survival against Franco's rebels; and Republican forces must defend this land against the destructive forces of fascism. The film was submitted to the BBFC in October 1937 and was initially refused a certificate until, according to its director, Joris Ivens, 'all references to Italian and German intervention had been cut from the commentary'.(99) But further cuts were required to eliminate 'gruesome details', and swastikas visible on German planes shot down in Spain had to be erased.(100) The question of belligerent intervention in Spain by the Axis powers was of course highly controversial, and the National Government was unwilling to acknowledge publicly that foreign troops in Spain were anything other than individual volunteers. Last-minute prevarication by the Board prevented the film from being shown as planned at the International Peace Congress in London. The cuts and delays provoked tremors of protest. The Daily Herald, condemning the BBFC, claimed that the 'real purpose has been distorted' because 'the film, which set out to show a Spain beset by invaders, portrays only a civil war'.(101)

Time's European Division subsequently denied that the BBFC had anything to do with the decision. Cinema, 22 February 1939, p.1. Recent research supports Labour fears. See, J.Richards, 'The British Board of Film Censors and Content Control in the 1930's: foreign affairs', Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television vol.2 no.1, 1982, p.48.

97. Jane Morgan, Daily Worker, 14 June 1938, p.7, describes issue 12 as having 'very clear fascist tendencies'.

The film was eventually granted a certificate and Elsie Cohen of the Academy Cinema released it through her small distribution company, Unity Films. There was though a lingering suspicion that the Board had only passed the film in the knowledge that it would receive limited distribution through Unity, which was a break-even company with relatively few outlets for its largely art-film collection.(102)

Britain Expects was similar in intent to The Spanish Earth in so far as it sought, by showing the attacks by fascist forces on British ships in the Spanish war zone, to mobilise opposition to the Government's adherence to the Non-Intervention Agreement. The film was, according to the Daily Herald, 'a tremendous indictment' of the National Government's 'indifference' to German and Italian intervention in Spain and Franco's attacks on British merchant shipping.(103) The fifteen minute film was refused a certificate for public exhibition because of critical comments made about Chamberlain, Hitler and Mussolini.(104) The Progressive Film Institute, which produced the film, reduced it to 16mm gauge and gave it to Kino, a left wing film group, which distributed it non-theatrically, completely free of the Board's

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98. R.Manvell, Films and the Second World War (London, 1974), pp.21-2. For a detailed description of the film, see W.Alexander, Films on the Left (Princeton, 1981), pp.153-8.
99. J.Ivens, The Camera and I (New York, 1974), p.136.
100. PRO HO, HO 45 17955/474497/30, Tyrrell to Hoare, 13 December 1938; Daily Herald, 9 November 1937, p.8; Daily Worker, 6 November 1937, p.3.
101. Daily Herald, 9 November 1937, p.8; Reynolds News, 24 October, p.3.
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102. Manchester Guardian, 16 November 1937, p.20.
103. Daily Herald, 9 December 1938, p.5. See also The Seaman, 21 December 1938, p.5,
104. Ivor Montagu, in an interview with the author, 14 April 1978. See News Chronicle, 10 December 1938, p.7.

restrictions. Significantly, it was passed for public exhibition at the end of February 1939, when the entire Spanish coast was under the control of Franco's forces and only Madrid remained in Republican hands - that is, when attacks on British shipping had ceased. At the time of the ban however W.R.Spence, the General Secretary of the National Union of Seamen, one of the organisations which sponsored the film, complained that the ban was

an instance of that gradual encroachment on the liberty of discussion which, in this once free country, has been a feature of the past two years.....It appears from the prohibition that no film may be shown in this country which could offend the susceptibility of Hitler and Mussolini. (105)

Herbert Morrison speculated that the BBFC's censorship was 'indirectly exercised by officials of the Conservative Central Office'.(106)

George Elvin of the Association of Cinematograph Technicians argued that in the treatment of these films and the issues of March of Time there was evidence of the BBFC's complicity in the policies of the National Government:

The tendency during the past few years has been to censor or ban films criticising certain aspects of Government policy and, on the other hand, to impose no restrictions on films supporting Government policy. (107)

(ii)

The second major source of unease about the political character of the film industry was the newsreels. While many Labour leaders may not have vilified them as 'an instrument of class rule' they were contemptuous of this journalistic entertainment, dismissing it as a lost opportunity. The newsreel Editors were keen to promote their

105. W.R.Spence, letter, Manchester Guardian, 10 December 1938, p.20.

106. Hansard, vol.344 col.2342, 9 March 1939.

107. G.Elvin, 'This Freedom - An Inquiry Into Film Censorship', The Cine-Technician, January-February 1939, p.144. There were other films of a similarly controversial nature attracting the attention of the movement, which were proscribed or cut: Professor Mamlock, for example, which the Manchester Guardian, 20 April 1939, described as 'the greatest piece of anti-dictator and anti-Nazi propaganda ever made'.

creations as channels for public information, but never lost sight of the principal function, the provision of a news magazine which was first and last an entertaining interlude between features in the cinema programme. The role ascribed to the newsreel by Labour observers was similarly dualistic. On the one hand, there was an acceptance of the newsreel simply as an entertainment, if a rather shoddy and unimaginative one, trading on the endless round of sport, royalty, ceremonial, military spectacles, the exotic and the sensational. On the other, the newsreels' regular incursion into the realm of important events which had a bearing on the nation raised expectations which could never be satisfied. Moreover, in entering politically sensitive areas the newsreels were in effect inviting criticism, because the format, the style and the time available were not compatible with a fair, balanced and accurate presentation of those issues which were of a party political character and one which gave due gravity to their seriousness. Above all, there was a belief that as a medium for the communication of news the newsreel had to be seen to function impartially, that its personnel needed to be absolutely scrupulous in adhering to this principle, and that in practice they were failing to do so. Throughout the decade Labour commentary on the subject has an air of resignation about it, a weary acceptance that under present conditions little could be expected of the newsreels by way of improvement. By 1938 Labour leaders were no longer automatically dismissive of them: they were convinced that the newsreels were lending support to the National Government.

Specific criticism of individual newsreel issues has only rarely been recorded. The Labour Party NEC protested to British Movietone News and the President of the Cinematograph Association over a BMN item in which Austrian workers were described by their Chancellor, Dollfuss, as 'Bolsheviks', and recent disorders in that country as a 'Bolshevik Revolution'.(108) Herbert Morrison had earlier complained that one item 'had appeared to me to encourage Fascist mob militarism'.(109) Many complaints were received by the Labour Party and the TUC over the newsreel coverage of the Spanish Civil War.(110) Jane Morgan of the Daily Worker complained that a Gaumont British newsreel covering the Anschluss implied that the International Peace Campaign demonstrations

108. LPNEC 27 February 1934.

109. Cited, Kinematograph Weekly, 13 April 1933, p.43.

110. TUC GC National Council of Labour, Minutes, 22 December 1936.

in Trafalgar Square, shown in the item, were in support of the Prime Minister, quite contrary to the purpose of the meeting.(111) Again, the Aircraft Shop Stewards National Council took strong objection to the way in which working conditions at Handley Page aircraft factory were presented:

In the Press and on News Reel, the occasion of the christening of the new bombers now being produced at Handley Page, was used by the employing class publicity organs as the occasion for a lot of exaggeration and for misleading the public on the conditions at this factory.....References to streets of jigs which obviate the necessity for skill, the finest craftsmen in the world, and references to the happy and contented band of workers at Handley Page's, were among the effusive statements made in these organs. (112)

Frank Allaun of the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers summed up the general feeling: 'many of us are beginning to despair for the (newreel) film companies improving their products.'(113)

These aspects of newsreel output were drawn upon as evidence confirming the validity of a more immediate complaint, the readiness of the newsreels to lend support to the National Government and its policies. Labour's problem was in part of its own making. The critic Donald Fraser noted in 1933 that 'British Movietone strives after a BBC impartiality'.(114) From the threads of evidence available it can tentatively be suggested that the Labour Party leadership appears in the early years of the decade to have tried to apply the BBC model of

111. Daily Worker, 21 March 1938, p.7.

112. New Propellor, January 1937, p.3.

113. F.J.Allaun, letter, Manchester Guardian, 9 August 1934.

114. D.Fraser, 'Newsreel, Reality or Entertainment?', Sight and Sound, Autumn 1933, p.89. For a revealing statement of Movietone Editorial policy which bears this out, see G.F.Sanger, 'Star Values in News', Newsreels and Shorts Supplement, Kinematograph Weekly, 14 November 1935, p.11. Similar views were expressed by W.J.Gell of Pathe. See his comments in PRO HO,H045 17955/474497/8 'Verbatim record of the meeting of the Home Office Film Censorship Consultative Committee with Newsreel Editors, 15 June 1934'.

impartiality (and therefore the right of reply) to the newsreels. Senior Labour politicians seem to have believed that, despite their reservations about the medium, the newsreel could make a positive contribution to the democratic political process, and they offered opportunities for public communication which could be advantageous. Whether or not newsreels can be regarded as part of the public domain, and therefore subject to the obligations and constraints of the BBC, the newsreels' claims to impartiality, and their professed aspiration to perform a public role, could be used to justify access for Labour. This is however speculative, based more on what Labour leaders did than on recorded opinions. Be that as it may the experience of Ministers in the second Labour Government indicates their willingness to use the newsreel for public announcements and political statements.

Labour's period of office coincided with the emergence of the newsreels, through the acquisition of sound, as an eminently appropriate medium of political communication in the age of the mass electorate. Keen to experiment with live sound and establish their credentials as serious journalists serving the public, the newsreel companies gave the Labour Government unprecedented opportunities for communicating with the public. MacDonald, Henderson and other members of the Cabinet took full advantage of the facilities afforded them. But Editors, anxious to preserve a modicum of balance, were prepared to invite senior politicians of all three major parties to speak before the cameras. Consequently, Churchill, for example, spoke on India, and Lloyd George and Baldwin were able to discuss disarmament; both these issues were of major importance to the Government. It was this which, after the fall of the Government, raised expectations that in opposition Labour would still be able to use the newsreel as a means of reaching the people, but they were to be continually frustrated.

It is appropriate at this point to indicate that any conclusions as to the degree to which Labour politicians gained access to the newsreels need to be qualified by the limitations involved in the research for this aspect of the present work. The cost of newsreel viewing makes a comprehensive analysis of newsreels in this period prohibitive for anyone, including the present author, without a major research grant. It has therefore only been possible to view a small proportion of the

total output for the 1930's. The principal source of information regarding newsreel content has been the Issue Sheets for each company. These provide listings of the items included in each newsreel issue. The information is limited, providing only a brief indication of the nature of each item. For example, British Paramount News (BPN) issue number 470, 29 August 1935, included an item which is described on the BPN Issue Sheet as 'Lansbury Pleads For Peace'. An examination of these Sheets can provide therefore a reasonably accurate indication of the extent to which political events were covered. But this is not completely reliable since some items, not obviously apparent as political stories according to the listing on the Issue Sheets, have been discovered on viewing to be of a political character. In addition, there are no Issue Sheets for Gaumont Sound News between 1929 and 1933. The Gaumont British Ledger of Accessions provides a useful record of all footage acquired, but little indication of what was used.

A working list of items to be viewed is practicable, based on the information in the Issue Sheets. But even here problems arise. Paramount material was cut up for stock shots almost immediately after initial use, and the degree to which surviving footage preserves the integrity of the original items as issued is uncertain. In the case of the Visnews collection of Gaumont British and BPN, the transfer from 35mm newsreel film to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch video tape has caused further problems. Some items have been completely wiped off in order to get as many reels on the tape as possible. These items have not been permanently lost, they are simply not accessible in a form available for study. Titles have been cut to one frame to save space on the tape, and some material from the same reel has been split up and put on separate tapes. Consequently, although it is possible to record every Issue Sheet title in which a British politician is mentioned, and every strike, demonstration or political event referred to, not all such material is available for viewing. For example, Arthur Henderson's speech as newly elected leader of the Labour Opposition, commenting on the formation of the National Government in August 1931, has been cut out of the tape of BPN Issue 54, 3 September 1931.

The surviving scripts of the newsreels offer one means of minimising some of these problems. Unfortunately during the period in which this research was conducted, Visnews, the Library holding the

scripts for Gaumont British, Paramount and Universal was undertaking extensive rebuilding, and access to them was not possible. There are few pre-war scripts for British Movietone News at the Movietone Library, and those for Pathe at the EMI-Pathe Library are very patchy and of little use for this particular work.

With these qualifications in mind, it is possible to provide a reasonably reliable picture of newsreel coverage of political events and personalities. On the basis of an examination of the Issue Sheets for all five companies, overall coverage of serious domestic news by British Paramount News, the company which devoted more space than any other company to such news, was less than 18% of all BPN items. In the case of Universal Talking Pictures, the company least dedicated to this kind of news, the coverage was less than 4% of all UTP stories. In regard to serious domestic political news, Paramount led the field with approximately 4% of all BPN stories. Universal was again the least interested in this type of material and less than 1% of its stories were in this category.

It would seem therefore that political stories were low on the list of priorities for newsreel Editors. Nevertheless, during the period of the second Labour Government Ministers appeared on cinema screens, at least once per month for 21 of the 27 months of the Administration. Ministerial appearances for each year were: 10 (1929), 19(1930), 22(1931). The details are given below in Table III.

Table III. Sound Newsreel Coverage of the Second Labour Government
June 1929 - August 1931

Company	Date of Issue of First Sound Newsreel	Number of Reels which included items showing Government Ministers
Movietone	9 June 1929	26 (out of 115 issued)
Pathe	2 January 1930	13 (170)
Universal	14 July 1930	0
Paramount	2 March 1931	12 (51)

*Note: This table does not include figures for Gaumont Sound News, which relied almost entirely for its supply of material on other companies. Moreover, no Issue Sheets are available for this period, for Gaumont.

Following the formation of the National Government the Labour Party's access to cinema audiences was drastically reduced. (See Table IV below.) Regular visitors to cinemas showing Pathe newsreels would have seen nothing of the Labour Party after the 1935 General Election, and only on five occasions prior to it. For audiences accustomed to Universal reels the Labour Party all but disappeared from their screens, appearing once in the entire period between August 1931 and September 1939. For those who saw Gaumont British, Labour politicians appeared on seven occasions in eight years, excluding General Election coverage. For Paramount audiences they appeared usually two or three times each year, a level of presentation enjoyed by Movietone audiences, again excluding General Election coverage.

Table IV. Coverage of Labour Party Politicians By Each Newsreel Company, October 1931 - August 1939

	Movietone	Paramount	Gaumont	Pathe	Universal	Totals
1931	1	0	0	0	0	1
1932	3	3	0	0	0	6
1933	2	2	2	2	1	9
1934	0	2	1	1	0	4
1935	3	2	0	2	0	7
1936	2	3	1	0	0	6
1937	3	1	0	0	0	4
1938	1	2	3	0	0	6
1939	3	3	0	0	0	6
	<u>18</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>1</u>	

*Note: This Table does not include General Election Coverage. The figures refer to the number of issues in which Labour politicians appeared, not the number of occasions.

The dramatic change in the newsreel coverage of the Labour Party after August 1931 was not because of a decision on the part of the newsreel companies to forego political material. On the contrary, their presentation of political subjects became more refined. But it was the Government of the day which enjoyed the benefits of this policy. If we take the year 1933 as Labour's best year in terms of newsreel coverage - every company screened Labour politicians, and they appeared more often than in any other year - compared with the nine issues in which they appeared the National Government fared far better.

Gaumont British alone issued nine reels in which Cabinet Ministers were able to address the public; and Paramount, the most independent of the five companies and the one more likely to be sympathetic to the Labour Party compared with the rest, issued fourteen reels that year in which Ministers appeared.

Apart from this imbalance in coverage generally, there was the question of facilities to talk to camera on major issues of the day. Just as Neville Chamberlain was given the opportunity to comment on the Budget of Philip Snowden in April 1931 (HPN 18, 30 April 1931), and James Maxton of the Independent Labour Party (which had recently disaffiliated from the Labour Party) was able to discuss the problem of unemployment (BPN 172, 20 October 1932), so, it seems, Lansbury expected similar opportunities as Leader of the Official Labour Opposition. None arose during 1932, and there were very few occasions thereafter for political comments or statements direct to camera. It should be pointed out here that there are various categories of newsreel coverage. Newsreel items could be footage of people making speeches to live audiences; footage of people doing something, such as walking into a building, with a voice-over commentary; a combination of both of these; or footage in which people talk directly to a camera, or to a newsreel interviewer - that is, an event created by the newsreel unit. The vast majority of items showing Labour politicians fall into the first two categories. The occasions on which Lansbury was able to talk direct to camera as Party Leader were: a 'plea for peace' in May 1933, and again in August 1935, and an explanation of his resignation as Leader of the Party in October 1935 (BPN 233, 470, 482). Lansbury's request to Gaumont to be given the chance to reply to MacDonald's talk explaining the Government's White Paper on Defence (GBN 126, 14 March 1935) was refused.(115)

Attlee encountered the same problem on succeeding Lansbury as Leader. Excluding election appearances, it was two years between his first and second newsreel appearances as Leader, and in the latter instance he is simply seen walking into a hall for the Party's annual

115. TUC GC National Council of Labour, Minutes, 26 March 1935.

conference (BPN 482, 10 October 1935; BMN 435A, 7 October 1937). There was a small number of occasions where Attlee was filmed making a speech to a live audience or participating in some event, but, excluding the 1935 General Election, the only occasion where Attlee was invited to make a political comment on any issue of national importance, direct to camera, was when Paramount interviewed him over the question of Anthony Eden's resignation as Foreign Secretary in February 1938 (BPN 730, 24 February 1938). The unprecedented interview was subsequently withdrawn hours after release for reasons which are not entirely clear.

Attlee's earlier request to all the newsreel companies for 'better and fairer treatment for the Party' was less a criticism of the way the Party was being presented on the screen: rather it was an appeal for some coverage of the Party.(116) The newsreels were not forthcoming however, and very few opportunities arose for any senior member of the Party to gain access to cinema audiences. Attlee's abortive interview apart, the only occasion between December 1935 and September 1939 where a senior Labour politician made a direct statement to camera criticising an aspect of Government policy was Herbert Morrison's contribution to a discussion on Home Defence in which he suggested inadequacies in A.R.P. arrangements (BPN 796, 13 October 1938). Other 'political' items showed Morrison addressing the London Auxiliary Fire Service (BPN 838, 9 March 1939), Attlee and Arthur Greenwood, together with trade union leaders, going to 10, Downing St. to protest against the introduction of conscription (BPN 852, 27 April 1939), and Lansbury 'appealing for peace' (GBN 484, 18 August 1938). These items comprise virtually the whole of the newsreels' political coverage of the Labour Party in 1938 and 1939 (see Table V below, p.84).

The obligation to maintain impartiality, at least on a superficial level, informed the coverage by most newsreel companies of the General Elections of 1931 and 1935. Universal Talking Pictures appears to have sidestepped the issue by simply ignoring that of 1931. Pathe gave access to members of the National Government and Lloyd George, and ignored the Labour Party.(117) British Paramount News allowed

116. LPNEC, 19 January 1937.

117. From the arrangement of the Pathe Personality File at the EMI-Pathe Library it would appear that the Pathe Editors regarded MacDonald as the Leader of the Labour Party during the General

Table V. Sound Newsreel Coverage of Labour Party Politicians,
October 1931 - August 1939

		Appearances	Newsreel Companies Involved
1931	G. Lansbury	1	1
1932	A. Henderson	2	2
1933	G. Lansbury	4	5
	A. Henderson	1	1
1934	G. Lansbury	2	2
	H. Morrison	2	1
1935	G. Lansbury	3	3
	C. Attlee	2	2
	H. Morrison	1	1
	A. Henderson	1	1
1936	H. Morrison	1	1
	E. Wilkinson	2	3
	M. Bondfield	1	1
1937	C. Attlee	2	1
	(Members of the NEC)	1	1
	G. Lansbury	1	1
1938	C. Attlee	3**	3
	H. Morrison	1	1
	G. Lansbury	1	1
1939	C. Attlee	3	2
	H. Morrison	2	1
	A. Greenwood	1	1
	G. Lansbury	1	1

*Note: This table does not include General Election coverage.

** : One of these was withdrawn.

Conservative, National Labour, National Liberal, Lloyd George Liberal and Labour to put forward their views - although the Prime Minister drew rather more attention than any other Party Leader. Movietone's

117. Election, contrary to all the evidence that Arthur Henderson was the new Leader, MacDonald having been expelled from the Party on the 28 September. Accepting the 'logic' of this position, it would follow that coverage of MacDonald was coverage of the Labour Party; and therefore no address by Henderson was necessary. Alternatively, any film taken of Labour speakers may have been of such poor sound quality to be not worth screening.

coverage was unbalanced in favour of the National Government. Prior to Henderson's interview in issue 124 MacDonald had already made an impressive appeal (BMN 123), and BMN 123A publicised the new propaganda methods of the National Government. Henderson's stilted delivery, in which he mainly read from notes, hardly lifting his head to enable the audience to see his face, was uninspiring, lacking passion and conviction. His performance was followed by a statement from Lloyd George and 'election scenes' showing Herbert Samuel (Liberal), Miss Cazalet (Conservative) Leah Manning (Labour), Winston Churchill (Conservative) and the Prime Minister. Issue 124A (22 October 1931) presented a studio interview with Baldwin, shots of George Strauss addressing an open air meeting, very brief shots of James Maxton, Ellen Wilkinson and Jack Jones speaking before public meetings, and then a long speech direct to camera by Sir John Simon who, addressing the cinema audience, warned that anyone who did not vote for the National Government was a 'socialist'. As Gerald Sanger the Movietone Producer wrote, the Simon speech was 'propaganda pure and simple for the National Government'.(118) J.H.Thomas completed the National Government's electoral appeal in the next issue (BMN 125), prior to a very brief look at various personalities from different parties.

For Gaumont Sound News there is insufficient evidence to draw firm conclusions. From the Gaumont British Ledger of Accessions at the Slade Film History Register it is clear that film of election speeches by MacDonald, Baldwin (2), Sir John Simon, Lloyd George, Henderson and Sir Oswald Mosley were acquired, and that film of election day in Seaham (MacDonald's constituency) and Barnsley (Henderson's) was also obtained. Evidence in MacDonald's correspondence, providing an analysis of newsreel election coverage suggests that Gaumont issued three election reels, 191 with speeches by MacDonald and Baldwin 192 containing a speech by Sir John Simon, and 193 containing interviews with Henderson and Lloyd George. Issue 194 appears to have been devoid of any election items.(119) But the issue of 26 October (195)

118. PRO MacDonald Papers 30/69/5/42, G.Sanger to L.Landau, 22 October 1931. See also Ibid., Landau to Miss Rosenberg, n.d., c.25 October 1931. Landau was Movietone's News Editor, and Miss Rosenberg was MacDonald's Private Secretary.
119. Ibid., Landau to Rosenberg, c. 25 October 1931, enclosure, 'Comparative Statement of Newsfilms Relating to the Election'.

probably showed Baldwin speaking from a Pathe Studio.

Regardless of the fairness or otherwise of the newsreels' role in the Election, and there can be little doubt that there was a weighting of coverage and a style of presentation, which favoured the National Government, there were no specific criticisms from Labour ranks which identified bias or unfair treatment. Labour leaders made no reference to them at all. Henderson, for example, referred to 'electioneering deception' in accounting for the political disaster which befell Labour. Clynes criticised 'fraudulent devices' but, while citing broadcasting and press coverage, made no mention of the newsreels.⁽¹²⁰⁾ Where criticism did arise, it originated within the left wing of the movement. It was very general, and amounted to nothing more than the contemptuous dismissal of the medium common before the election. Such views, in the wake of the enormity of the result of the Election, became subsumed in an all-embracing condemnation of the 'organs of opinion' - one which, because it was self-evidently true to most Labour leaders, seemingly needed no detailed exposition of newsreel bias in order to justify. To some degree the absence of such an analysis may well have been due to lack of understanding of the medium of film, and in consequence a blindness to the nuances of meaning which can be conveyed by the ostensibly innocuous juxtaposition of sound and moving pictures. It may however have been due to a more prosaic reason: the people whose views were most likely to be recorded and subsequently used as historical evidence were the party activists and the candidates themselves, perhaps too busy canvassing, attending meetings, giving speeches and distributing propaganda leaflets to go to the cinema and see how the National Government was being promoted.

In 1935 every newsreel covered all the main parties, allowed their leaders a substantial opportunity to put forward their claims, and provided a survey of some of the more prominent candidates. The bias in this contest resided less in the weighting of coverage and rather more in the way each party leader was presented. The direct speech to camera of the party leaders was the centrepiece of the newsreels' election coverage. The film of Baldwin and Attlee, shot by

120. The Times, 28 October 1931, p.8.

Movietone cameramen, was issued by the newsreel companies simultaneously on the 31 October 1935 and, apart from demonstrating the degree of cooperation of which the newsreels were capable, provides the best example surviving of party political bias against Labour in a pre-war election. (121)

Attlee, appearing first, is seen in a cold, sparse studio set, sat on the arm of a chair in what looks like a small living-room. With a stationary camera set rather low, Attlee gives a wooden delivery, reading his notes (rather than using them as prompts) in a statuesque posture, barely moving except to look down occasionally at the camera. The reliance on close-up and middle close-up camera shots conveys his sense of unease, and emphasises his slightly swarthy complexion and bald head, and his generally poor physically unattractive presence. The use of an un-blipped camera provides a noticeable background whirring sound, and renders Attlee's enunciation difficult to discern in parts. An uninspired performance by a somewhat diffident public performer would have undermined the speech of any politician. The newsreels' presentation of this speech in this way emphasised Labour's claims to office as feeble and amateurish, and, as if to reinforce this impression, Attlee's image fades away before he has finished speaking.

By contrast we are introduced to Baldwin by means of the device of a moving camera, which enters the Prime Minister's 'room' to find him working at his desk. The studio set was sumptuous, with Greek pillars, a backdrop consisting of shelves of leather-bound books, a large, solid desk and various accoutrements of authority, creating a warm atmosphere and an image of experienced professionalism. Baldwin, 'interrupted' by the camera whilst pursuing his duties as leader of the nation, exudes a warm confidence in his physical presence and lively movements, and in the well delivered speech direct to camera. Unlike Attlee, Baldwin did not read from notes in his hand, but much more fluently from a roller-board, conveying the impression that he was speaking unaided, and enabling him to appear to be looking directly at

121. Pathe made their own film of Attlee, but used the Movietone film of Baldwin. Paramount shot their own film of both leaders. For a summary of election coverage of Labour politicians, see Table VI., p.89 below.

the individual in the audience.(122) The contrasting images of Baldwin and Attlee, of, respectively, solid, reliable authority, and over-ambitious amateurism, were given sharper focus by the assistance which appears to have been given by Movietone to the Conservative election managers by allowing Baldwin to see the text of Attlee's speech before his own was drafted, enabling him to counter Attlee's arguments point by point.(123)

Such unfavourable election coverage appears to have produced little specific criticism or complaints from Labour leaders. Paul Rotha, allegedly a witness to the filming of these speeches, later described them as 'a typical example of newsreel political bias'.(124) This material was certainly not typical of newsreel bias but rather in the catalogue of newsreel political bias quite exceptional. But this comment, from a film-maker sympathetic to the Labour Party, provides a clue as to why there was virtually no critical response within Labour ranks: it would appear that this newsreel coverage was nothing less than was expected. Alternatively, the absence of criticism may suggest that the bias, which was one of symbols rather than overt political commentary, was not actually noticed. The persistence of deferential attitudes within Labour ranks may have given rise to acquiescence in this partial presentation: it was part of the traditional order of things that establishment figures such as the Prime Minister were shown in the context of high office with all the trappings of authority. Nevertheless, within three years the tolerance of Labour leaders had been tested to its limits, and a trenchant criticism of newsreel partiality was substituted for the optimism of the early years of the decade.

The cause of this change of attitude was newsreel coverage of the events leading up to and including the Munich crisis. Jane Morgan in the Daily Worker considered that Gaumont British was giving full support to Chamberlain's policy in connection with the Anschluss, and urged her readers to protest vigorously to cinema managers.

122. In Pathe's film Attlee also used a roller-board and had a markedly better set. His speech was more fluent, but his delivery was still wooden, emphasised by his lack of movement, monotone voice, and small physical stature.
123. J.Ramsden, 'Baldwin and Film', in N.Pronay, D.W.Spring (eds.) op.cit., pp.136-7.
124. P.Rotha, Documentary Diary op.cit., p.112.

Table VI. Newsreel Election Coverage of the Labour Party, 1931 and 1935

		<u>Issues Giving Election Coverage</u>	<u>Issues Covering Labour Politicians</u>	<u>Issues Covering the National Government</u>
Movietone	1931	5	3	5
	1935	5	3	5
Paramount	1931	5	1	4
	1935	1	1	1
Gaumont	1931	4**	1	3?
	1935	4	4	4
Pathe	1931	4	0	3
	1935	3	1	3
Universal	1931	0	0	0
	1935	4	3	4

**See pages 79, 85.

to suppress this offensive material.(125) While she accepted that Movietone's coverage of the Peace March in Trafalgar Square on 20 March was 'fair' her general criticism remained:

For the most part newsreel companies.....know and express exactly what the National Government wants and leave unrecorded anything which the National Government would prefer unstressed or unsaid. (126)

Potentially disturbing in this respect was the curious affair of the Paramount interview with Attlee. Where the other companies had tended to play down the significance of Eden's resignation as Foreign Secretary, Paramount took the quite unusual step of inviting the Leader of the Opposition to comment on this development. Attlee's speech was highly critical of the Government, arguing that the resignation would be hailed as a great victory for Mussolini and that it indicated that the British Government was prepared to make any deal with the Axis powers to avoid war. Within hours of the reel being released 'urgent orders were issued that the item must be deleted'.(127) Paramount subsequently explained that, unable to include a statement by the Prime

125. Daily Worker, 21 March 1938, p.7.

126. Ibid., 28 March 1938, p.7; 3 October 1938, p.7.

127. P.W.Dennis, letter, Manchester Guardian, 25 February 1938, p.3. Dennis was the manager of the Tatler Theatre in Chester.

Minister, it had decided to withdraw Attlee's interview in the interests of impartiality. The incident was picked up by the Daily Worker whose correspondent suggested that the Government had decided not to make a statement to Paramount so that Attlee's views would have to be deleted.(128) There is no mention of the deletion in any other Labour periodical. Perhaps Attlee did not expect the interview to be shown because it was so extraordinary, and therefore he attached no great importance to the item's withdrawal. Nor was any mention of it made later, during the debate on censorship in the House of Commons in December 1938: it was not cited as an example of censorship or political interference.(129)

Whatever the truth of this minor mystery, it was newsreel coverage of the Munich crisis itself which caused most alarm. During those tense days Glyn Roberts noticed

profound and probably justified public anxiety exists that all news inconvenient to the Chamberlain Government is being suppressed. (130)

Ken Gordon, former cameraman for Pathe, member of Strand Films and Vice-President of the Association of Cinematograph Technicians, expressed concern that the performance of the newsreels during and after the September crisis could lead to them being censored:

The mixing of too much one-sided party politics with current events has not been popular in our houses of entertainment. (131)

George Elvin, General Secretary of the Association of Cinematograph Technicians (ACT) and a member of the Labour Party's Film Committee, was more forthright:

The majority of their [the newsreels] executives are government supporters, and their reels naturally tend to reflect that fact. (132)

- 128. Daily Worker, 26 February 1938, p.3.
- 129. In fact the only other occasions where the incident was referred to at all was, in passing, in Tribune, 28 October 1938, p.2.
- 130. Tribune, 23 September, 1938, p.2.
- 131. The Cine Technician, November-December 1938, p.131.
- 132. G.Elvin, 'This Freedom - An Inquiry into Film Censorship', ibid., January-February 1939, p.145.

So strong was this feeling that ACT members, while being prepared to reject a resolution at their annual general meeting proposing affiliation with the Labour Party, passed a resolution which stated that the union

views with concern the tendency towards a one-sided political partisanship in certain Newsreels. We believe that the introduction of political preferences is inconsistent with the honest and objective presentation of news to the public. (133)

The ACT as a whole could not be described as left wing; nor could Herbert Morrison, who urged the film industry 'to keep their newsreels free of unbalanced party political propaganda'. Referring to the Munich crisis, he went on to say:

Not all of the firms making cinema newsreels exploited the occasion for political ends, but at least one of them has done so.....(134)

Frederick Montague, Labour MP for West Islington, was 'appalled' at the 'Government propaganda' which he detected in the newsreels during the crisis.(135) Many complaints of this type were recorded, but the analysis was general, as if the object of the exercise was merely to identify bias, suggesting that they believed there was little which could be done to rectify the problem. Glyn Roberts warned of this shortly after Munich:

The whole question of nailing and scotching these clever, persistent and deliberate distortions is far too casual and disorganised. (136)

The implications were fully appreciated. As Stanley Robinson put it in a letter to the Editors of Tribune:

- 133. Association of Cinematograph Technicians Annual Report, 1938-9, p.5.
- 134. Cited, The Times, 11 October 1938, p.11.
- 135. Hansard, vol.342, col.1287, 7 December 1938.
- 136. Tribune, 7 October 1938, p.15.

It is obvious therefore that in the newsreels the Government has a willing and powerful propaganda machine for moulding public opinion, and that, unless something is done about it, it is likely that the next election will result in a debacle for Labour.....(137)

Roberts urged readers to petition cinema managers, complain to the newsreel companies, and contact projectionists and persuade them not to show offensive reels. He even suggested readers try and persuade cinema managers to take British Paramount News.(138) Somewhat belatedly, the Labour Party NEC decided to act, and issued instructions to constituency organisations:

to protest to local cinema proprietors against the strong National Government bias of the Newsreels. (139)

The growing party political role ascribed to the newsreels during the crisis of 1938 was further confirmation for Labour observers that the film industry as a whole was actively promoting the National Government. There were many films in circulation which publicised the achievements of various aspects of Government policy, often in glowing terms: for example, The Health of the Nation, One Hundred Years, The Great Crusade, Our Island Nation, Britain Today. The Government's sponsorship of such films was of course public knowledge. But the collaboration between Government and industry was viewed with some apprehension because some films were believed to be justifying or supporting the Government's defence and foreign policies: OHMS, The Gap, Our Fighting Navy, Crown and Glory and, notoriously, Chamberlain: Man of the Hour. Jane Morgan, for example, identified a sinister motive in this collaboration:

All the major companies, London Films, Wilcox Productions, Gainsborough and Gaumont British - whose OHMS is still scurrying through the provinces - have made pictures which either roar the responses to the litany of national defence or, more subtly, exhibit the attractions of a life under arms. (140)

- 137. Tribune, 30 September 1938, p.10.
- 138. Ibid., 14 October 1938, p.14.
- 139. LPNEC 14 March 1939.
- 140. Daily Worker, 10 May 1937, p.7.

Other productions were regarded as politically highly suspect, such as The Soul of a Nation, Sixty Glorious Years, World in Revolt and Whither Spain?, and even some of the films of the documentary movement were implicated.(141) But the most direct evidence of the industry's support for the National Government was in the activities of the National Publicity Bureau and the Conservative and Unionist Films Association. They publicised the National Government and the Conservative Party, using fleets of travelling cinema vans showing sound films across the country, particularly during pre-election periods.(142) The scope of their film propaganda activities was fully appreciated by envious Labour critics.(143) Nor was anything secret about the Bureau or the Association. In fact their work was even publicised in the newsreels.(144) What was of significance however was the close connection between the Conservative Party and the cinema trade. Movietone cooperated closely with the Conservative Party's Central Office and produced many of the films used by the Conservative and Unionist Films Association (CUFA).(145) The central figure here was Sir Albert Clavering, Organising Director of the CUFA, chairman of the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association, and owner of a chain of cinemas and news theatres. His position and influence were also public knowledge.(146) But the close contacts which Sir Joseph Ball, Director of the Research Department of Conservative Central Office and Deputy Director of the National Publicity Bureau(NPB),

141. For example, G.Roberts, Tribune, 21 October 1938, p.15.
142. T.J.Hollins, 'The Conservative Party and Film Propaganda Between the Wars', English Historical Review, vol.96, April 1981, pp.359-69.
143. See, Left Review, March 1938, p.852; Reynolds News, 11 December 1938, p.9; Cooperative News, 22 July 1939, p.6.
144. On June 18, 1934 both Movietone (BMN 263) and Paramount (HPN 345) gave publicity to these touring vans.
146. See Kinematograph Weekly, 19 April 1934, p.3; 'Electioneering by Film: National Government Campaign', ibid., 7 November 1935, p.27.
145. A.Beattie, D.Dilks, N.Pronay, Inter University History Film Consortium. Archive Series No.1: Neville Chamberlain (Leeds, 1974), p.19; T.J.Hollins, The Presentation of Politics: the Place of Party Publicity, Broadcasting and Film in British Politics 1918-1939 (Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Leeds, 1981), chapter one. (Hereafter, T.J.Hollins, The Presentation of Politics.)

had with the newsreel companies, and the support which Isidore Ostrer gave, through Gaumont British News, to the National Government were highly secret.(147) Nevertheless, the 'rather intimate relations' (148) which the film trade had with the National Government were by 1938 becoming transparent to Labour observers, who needed little encouragement to infer from the large numbers of professionally made, effective and successful Conservative propaganda films a politically motivated collusion. This special relationship assumed immense importance in the context of an anticipated general election.(149)

It followed from this perceived collusion that steps would be taken to ensure that nothing could reach cinema screens which would embarrass the Government or put forward a point of view critical of Government policy. The mainstream production companies of the industry were not the focus of attention, for on this view they would be unlikely to produce anything which might stir up political controversy of that particular kind. What drew Labour observers to this conclusion was initially the highly questionable role being performed by the British Board of Film Censors, which occupied a strategically vital position in the relationship between Government and industry. But what proved to be even more compelling was the alarming evidence of the Government's determination to intervene in the film industry and prevent anything to which it took objection from reaching the mass public. There had already been indications that the Government had issued warnings to the newsreel companies,(150) and that requests had been made not to issue certain newsreel items.(151) By late October 1937

147. T.J.Hollins, The Presentation of Politics *op.cit.*, pp.676-7.
148. PRO HO,HO45 17602/701028/48 , W.Eady to E. Bridges, 26 March 1938.
149. LPNEC 11 March 1938, H.Morrison, Memorandum on Labour Party Propaganda Associations and Regional Organisation.
150. Hansard, vol.293, col.339, 1 November 1934.
151. N.J.Hulbert, Kinematograph Weekly, 5 November 1936, p.17.
Hulbert was an MP and owner of a chain of news theatres.

John Ramage, one of the least likely of Labour film critics to succumb to conspiracy theories, noted in his Sunday column:

Suspicion is growing that the views of the War Office and other Government Departments are influencing decisions of the British Board of Film Censors. (152)

By the end of the following year it had become clear that the BBFC had demurred to Government wishes over the proposed film The Relief of Lucknow, having taken advice from the India Office that such a film would have seriously jeopardised the delicate political position in India, and retarded the process of acceptance of the new Indian Constitution.(153) But it was the events surrounding the withdrawal of an item in British Paramount News (BPN 790), released on the 22 September 1938, which had a catalytic effect. On that day Chamberlain returned to Germany to meet Hitler at Godesberg, with peace hanging delicately in the balance and the Prime Minister anxious to avert a German attack on Czechoslovakia, having already put pressure on Benes the Czechoslovak President to accept Hitler's demands. Paramount's issue, entitled 'Europe's Fateful Hour' described the course of recent events, setting the scene for the negotiations in Godesberg; and interviewed three people, Wickham Steed, former Editor of The Times, A.J.Cummings, foreign affairs correspondent of the News Chronicle and, 'for the man in the street's viewpoint', the taxi-driver Herbert Hodge, a familiar character to BBC listeners. A newsreel discussion of a topical issue of national importance was unusual, but not unique. What was peculiar to Paramount's item was that the subject of discussion was a matter of grave national importance, over which the Government was particularly sensitive, and about which, being unresolved, the Government believed nothing should be said publicly which could offend Hitler (and he was easily offended) if the negotiations were to be successful. Timing apart, what was also peculiar to Paramount's item was that the subject was one of party political controversy, each of the speakers was critical of Government policy, and no one was able to reply for the Government. Within hours of the newsreel's release a telegram was issued by Paramount

152. 'More Banning of Films', Reynolds News, 31 October 1937, p.3.

153. Hansard, vol.342, cols. 1303-4, 7 December 1938; Daily Herald, 6 December 1938, p.7.

to exhibitors saying

Please delete Wickham Steed and A.J.Cummings from today's Paramount News. We have been officially requested to do so. (154)

The excision of these interviews became public knowledge immediately. Moreover, Wickham Steed is reported as having seen the unadulterated reel in a London cinema prior to the request to delete them, and was quoted as saying that his comments 'were a very tame affair and only comprised about half of what I had said at the studio'.(155) The lesser issue of Editorial censorship was overlooked as the implications of an 'official request' to cut material from a newsreel were realised. Despite the explanation given by Paramount's Vice-President, J.W.Hicks Jnr., that these interviews were cut 'because a speech giving the Government view was also taken out'(156) Labour leaders remained unimpressed. Herbert Morrison urged the film industry 'to resist unofficial, irresponsible, political censorship', adding:

It is time that the film industry let us have the facts about this undoubted unofficial political censorship for it is monstrous that political interests should irresponsibly, and without public accountability, be exercising some sort of control over newsreels. (157)

The whole affair was subsequently discussed in the House of Commons on the 23 November 1938 following a question by Liberal MP Geoffrey Mander as to why representations were made by the Government to the American Embassy for the withdrawal from the Paramount newsreel of these interviews. In reply Sir John Simon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, said that the Government believed that the views expressed 'might have a prejudicial effect upon the negotiations' in Godesberg.(158) The American Ambassador contacted the Hays organisation to this effect, which brought the matter to the attention of Paramount, which 'decided to make certain excisions from the newsreel'. In the light of this

154. Manchester Evening News, 21 November 1938, p.8; Hansard, vol. 342, col.1275, 7 December 1938.
155. Daily Herald, 23 September 1938, p.5.
156. Ibid., 8 October 1938, p.3.
157. Cited, News Chronicle, 11 October 1938, p.4.
158. Hansard, vol.341, cols.1727-8, 23 November 1938.

revelation, Labour MPs. reconsidered previous episodes of censorship of controversial material, episodes which they believed to be evidence of the BBFC exercising its own political bias for the benefit of the Government. Philip Noel-Baker quickly saw his opportunity:

Is it not a fact that four films of the 'March of Time' have been suppressed in the last six months when there was no crisis, and that this Government censorship is very much resented in this country? (159)

This was more than merely scoring party political points, and W. Wedgwood Benn asked the Government to make a full disclosure 'of what has been the practice of the Government in the matter of censorship'. (160) The following week the Prime Minister was available to reply to questions on the subject, and Mander asked him to reveal any other occasion where action had been taken 'to ask for the removal of parts of cinema films on political grounds'. (161) Whereupon Chamberlain denied knowledge of any such instances and, prompted further by Mander, explained that no request had been made to the American Ambassador to take action on such lines. The unintended implication was seized on by Herbert Morrison, who expressed a suspicion common amongst Labour leaders:

Will the Prime Minister inquire and make certain whether the headquarters of his own political party do not take a hand in this unofficial censorship? (162)

But this line of enquiry was quickly smothered, as Chamberlain explained disingenuously that

The attention of the American Ambassador was drawn to certain items and he was asked to look into the matter. (163)

The Government's critics remained unconvinced however, and Mander put forward a motion for debate on 'Censorship and Restriction of

159. Hansard, vol.341, col.1728, 23 November 1938.

160. Ibid.

161. Ibid., vol.342, cols.583-4, 1 December 1938.

162. Ibid.

163. Ibid. The Ambassador did not, as Sir John Simon informed the House, contact the Hays Office, but contacted Paramount direct. See T.J.Hollins, The Presentation of Politics op.cit., p.658.

Liberty' on 7 December 1938. A Conservative amendment effectively emasculated the motion, but the detailed case put by Mander was an accurate reflection of Labour Party thinking.(164)

Shortly afterwards a resolution passed at the annual general meeting of the ACT expressed

alarm at any official or semi-official interference with the Newsreels, having in mind the pressure that was brought to bear on one Newsreel to withdraw an item solely on the grounds that it expressed a view contrary to that of the Government, although no exception was taken to a pro-Government item in the same reel. (165)

But as some politicians were quick to point out, this 'unofficial political censorship' had to be seen in the wider context. Anticipating the debate in the House of Commons Elwyn Jones argued that the National Government was dominated by an 'inner cabinet' of four who dictated policy and attempted to exercise an unparalleled degree of control over the communication of news and comment, in both press and cinema.

A powerful method of Government control is to bring pressure to bear on Conservative elements in the various [film] trades - distributors, film companies, exhibitors, etc., and get them to suppress information which may be inconvenient to the Government. (166)

Such methods, according to Jones, were commensurate with other repressive measures - the Incitement to Disaffection Act of 1934, and the Official Secrets legislation, the first report of an official inquiry into which was published in July 1938, and was the source of much discussion within the House of Commons. The inhibiting atmosphere which emerged after 1937 was not a phantom imagined by Labour politicians alone. Vernon Bartlett, the recently elected Independent member for Bridgewater, speaking in a debate on National Voluntary Service, warned of widespread suspicion that the Government was 'more than anxious to suppress criticism', and expressed fears that freedom

164. Hansard, vol.342, cols.1261 - 1322, 7 December 1938, for the debate.
165. Association of Cinematograph Technicians Annual Report, 1938-9, p.5.
166. E.Jones, 'Censorship over Britain', Tribune, 28 October 1938,p.4. See also New Statesman, 12 March 1938, p.398; 'Muzzled Britain', ibid., 12 November 1938, pp.756-7.

of speech was now 'seriously threatened'.(167)

If the newsreel companies needed much encouragement, then the experience of the Munich crisis and the political controversy which ensued from their coverage of it brought them very quickly to the conclusion that extreme caution was essential if they were to avoid incurring the Government's wrath, and thereby lose their last vestige of credibility as independent agencies of uncensored news. As S.G. Rayment, Editor of Kinematograph Weekly put it:

Censorship, especially in the matter of news films, is a question that has been raised once again. But as I have so often noted before, it would never have been heard about unless the perpetual danger to the Trade - politics - had by some means broken into a territory where it ought to be taboo, and in its train had involved questions of principle like the freedom of the screen and totalitarian propaganda.

The only efficient defence by the Trade against threatened attacks on its liberties is one which has proved effectual for a good many years; that is a strictly enforced self-regulation which strangles at birth any tendency toward politics. All our newsreels have to do is to adhere to this well-tried and effective policy; any departure from it means trouble, for there are plenty eager to seize on the first opportunity. (168)

Gerald Sanger of Movietone echoed these sentiments, but far more revealingly:

it is important that news should be unbiased. Newsreels contend that the best safeguard of their integrity is an editorial staff trained in the traditions of British journalism. Everything which a censorship might aim at achieving can be better secured by editorial responsibility.there is no alternative but to resist 'unofficial censorship' as strenuously as official censorship. And there is no alternative but to avoid subjects which might seem to justify 'unofficial censorship'. (169)

167. Hansard, vol.342, col.1069, 6 December 1938.
168. S.G.Rayment, 'Politics and Censorship', Kinematograph Yearbook 1939, p.11. See also New Statesman, 12 November 1938, p.769.
169. G.Sanger, 'The Newsreels want Freedom of the Screen', Daily Mail, 7 December 1938. My emphasis.

More significant than the oblique admission that Government pressure had been brought to bear on newsreel companies, (170) is the suggestion that the criterion by which an item of news should now be judged suitable for inclusion in a newsreel is whether it is likely to provoke the Government into a course of action which would lead to its suppression. This had always been the case, but on the 22 September the Government had demonstrated the limits of the permissible by taking such a course of action. Interestingly, Jane Morgan of the Daily Worker was surprised to find that 'Chamberlain is not being treated with the same holy awe he enjoyed just after Munich', and concluded that the newsreels were sensitive to criticism, although the situation was exceptional. (171) Nevertheless, the real danger for the newsreels was not in being too effusive in their coverage of the Chamberlain Government; rather, it was in allowing anything which could be construed as provocative.

The inhibiting atmosphere which seemed to weigh heavily on Sanger in December 1938 was still effective in April the following year. Paramount appears to have made another last-minute deletion from issue 846 of 6 April. The issue, devoted entirely to a survey of the international situation, included some comments by Vernon Bartlett. But his views were regarded as too strong in criticising Hitler and, implicitly, Chamberlain. Hours after release requests were issued to cinema managers for the item to be deleted. (172) The original source of the request was, apparently, the Hays Office in the USA. (173) Tom Cummins, Paramount's independently-minded Editor, was evidently prepared to try and bring to the screen a point of view which did not correspond with that of the Government. His superiors in New York were not willing to take the risk however: the inhibiting atmosphere so quickly and devastatingly created by the Government on 22 September remained to stifle criticism. Nor was the restraint confined to film-makers. The Cinematograph Exhibitors Association felt it necessary to convene a meeting with the newsreel companies on 9 November 1938 to request that they desist from including biased political commentaries in their reels. (174) J. Neill-Brown, a moderate member of the ACT, observed that cinema managers were affected by

170. Jonathan Lewis speculates that Movietone may have been subjected to 'unofficial' pressure to desist from including an item in one of their reels on the Eden resignation. 'Before Hindsight', Sight and Sound, Spring 1977, p.72.

171. Daily Worker, 24 October 1938, p.7; 16 January 1939, p.7.

172. Manchester Guardian, 8 April 1939, p.3. Bartlett's excised comments are quoted here.

the prevailing climate:

Their general policy is to do nothing to antagonise the Government in power in case it should bring a stringent censorship to bear on newsreels. (175)

The implications was clear: the system of censorship, or rather, the climate of inhibition, was so overbearing that even if a critical voice slipped through the newsreels' own net, cinema managers would be reluctant to show it on their screens.

Regardless of whether or not the Government intervened to suppress film material sufficient evidence accumulated from 1936 onwards to convince Labour leaders that: the British Board of Film Censors was acting in close conjunction with Government Departments; that its policy of 'no-controversy' was in practice a censorship of any political viewpoint which did not broadly correspond with that of the the Government where questions of foreign policy were concerned; that the film industry as a whole was on intimate terms with the Conservative Party and the National Government, and provided assistance in publicising its achievements and promoting its policies; that the newsreels virtually ignored the Labour movement, gave prominence to Government Ministers, and publicised in highly favourable terms Government policies; and finally, that the Government was prepared to intervene in the industry to prevent the presentation to the public of any criticism of Government policy on matters of grave national importance, creating thereby a repressive atmosphere in which an intimidated industry sought to retain its independent status. Something of the contempt which Labour leaders had for this party political control over the medium is conveyed in a resolution passed by the ACT in 1936 - before most of the controversy arose:

The attempt to limit the function of cinematography exclusively to 'entertainment' is outside the province and duties of censorship.....

The elimination from cinematograph subject material of every controversial question deprives the cinema of the possibility of playing any useful part in the life of the

173. News Chronicle, 8 April 1939, p.5.

174. British Movietone News Ltd., Minutes of the Council of the Newsreel Association of Great Britain and Ireland, 14 November 1938.

175. The Cine Technician, March-April 1939, p.200.

nation.....The underlying assumption that British audiences are incapable of witnessing material with which they disagree without riot is, further, an insult to the British people..... (176)

Bearing in mind the prevailing belief amongst Labour leaders that film exercised a narcotic effect, the cinema, confined to the role of mass entertainment, was identified as a political weapon of their opponents. In discussing in 1939 preparations for the next general election G.D.H. Cole did not even mention cinema as a possible medium of political communication for the Labour Party.(177) Kingsley Martin explained the position in the following terms:

A long series of incidents have created a very general impression that the present British government have been insidiously destroying the traditional liberties of Britain out of a desire to appease the dictators.....

The Government propaganda organisation was, in fact, able to arrange that films supporting the Government's policy were widely shown everywhere, and that films that challenged this policy were stopped. (178)

Much of the resentment against the Government's methods of direct and indirect influence stemmed partly from an intense dislike of its policies, and also, as Martin put it, from

a realisation that this method of control is a weapon in the hands of Conservatism which would not be available for their opponents should they be in office. (179)

In the same way that Attlee believed that the Ministry of Information was part of the Conservative Party's propaganda machinery during the early years of the war,(180) the cinema was seen in the three years prior to the war as an institution in collusion with, and manipulated by, Labour's political opponents for party political purposes; and, as such, was a threat to the democratic process of government because of its ability to influence the thoughts of millions of people and 'create bias against which neither reason nor rhetoric can prevail'.(181)

176. Quoted in G.Elvin, 'This Freedom - An Inquiry into Film Censorship', The Cine Technician, January - February 1939, p.141.
177. G.D.H.Cole, A Plan for Democratic Action (London, 1939), p.235.
178. K.Martin, 'Censorship During the Crisis', Political Quarterly, January-March 1939, pp.128, 134.
179. Ibid., p.134.
180. J.C.W.Reith, Into the Wind op.cit., p.368.
181. TUC GC National Council of Labour, circular, 'Labour Cinema Propaganda', April 1936.

Chapter Four: LABOUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS RADIO BROADCASTING

This chapter is concerned with the ideas which Labour leaders developed about the medium of radio and the institution of the BBC. It examines the development of ideas about the influence and importance of radio in Britain; attitudes towards the BBC's constitutional relationship with the State; and the broad political contribution which it was believed the BBC could make to the development of British society. The chapter concludes with an examination of Labour's response to one particular aspect of BBC output: news bulletins. Throughout, the focus of this chapter is the Labour Party. Where applicable the views of other organisations, or differing political perspectives, are included. But the overwhelming bulk of the surviving evidence relates to the Labour Party. It was this organisation which had by far the most contact with the BBC, became most involved in the different aspects of the work of the Corporation, and the greatest claim of all Labour organisations to access to the airwaves for political broadcasting. Other organisations such as the Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party showed an initial interest, but on receiving no encouragement from the Corporation gave up trying to use the medium. Where opinions were expressed by their members, it was almost wholly dismissive. Since they had no opportunity to make any contribution to the development of broadcasting, unlike, say, the TUC, they were not involved in the issues at stake, and their views tend to reflect this. They appear stunted, lacking any real negotiation of the complexities involved. The only significant exception was George Audit, radio correspondent for the Daily Worker, who had a remarkable source of information in Broadcasting House who kept him fully informed of the latest developments.

1.

In keeping with most Conservative politicians Labour leaders were slow to appreciate the power of broadcasting in its early years. This was probably due in part to the relatively small size of the listening audience (two million licences issued) prior to 1927. Broadcasting was additionally in these years very experimental, and the future of the

Company was uncertain. But more pressing matters preoccupied the Labour movement, not least of which were the problems in the coal industry, two general elections, and the Labour Party's struggle for ascendancy over the Liberals as the alternative party of office. Membership of the Sykes Committee in 1923 gave opportunities for Charles Trevelyan to inquire as to questions of censorship.(1) Ramsay MacDonald was at first indifferent to broadcasting, but later developed an enthusiasm for the elevating qualities of the broadcast entertainment provided by the BBC under Reith's paternalistic guidance.(2) But apart from occasional objections to individual items broadcast,(3) little general interest amongst Labour leaders, including Vernon Hartshorn the Postmaster General in the first Labour Government, was shown in broadcasting prior to 1928.(4) There was of course an awareness that the 'potentialities of broadcasting for propaganda purposes are so considerable'.(5) But in 1924 this was largely a theoretical view, infused with the mystique of broadcasting. What emphasis there was, was favourable and highly optimistic, but accepted that there could be dangers. J.R.Clynes typified the Labour perspective in these years:

Used rightly for the common advancement and recreation of the people, who is to set bounds to the positive good which may accrue from it? (6)

1. BBC Sykes Committee Minutes, third meeting.
2. R.MacDonald, Radio Times, 21 December 1923; PRO MacDonald Papers 30/69/6/30, MacDonald to Reith, 18 January 1927.
3. Hansard, vol.163, cols. 300-1, 24 April 1923; vol.164, col.238, 15 May 1923; vol.168, cols.585-6, 16 November 1923.
4. J.C.W:Reith, Into the Wind op.cit., p.96.
5. BBC Policy. Political Broadcasting. General., W.E. Euston (for Hartshorn) to Reith, 19 August 1924. (Hereafter this file will be referred to as 'P.G.')
6. Radio Times, 21 December 1923, p.452.

It was only with the use of the BBC by the Baldwin Government during the General Strike in 1926 that broadcasting fully registered as a serious factor in the political process. Yet the extraordinary nature of the Strike, the ambivalent attitudes of most Labour leaders towards the use of the tactic of a general strike, and their essential reluctance to adopt unconstitutional measures in pursuit of industrial objectives, led them to accept that the BBC could not be strictly impartial. While the BBC's role in this dispute was not forgotten, the unprecedented character of the conflict emphasised that this role was exceptional and unlikely to be repeated in more normal circumstances.(7) Following the Strike the absence of controversy on the air waves enabled the BBC to consolidate its position as a source of entertainment. But even when the ban on controversial talks was lifted in March 1928, and Churchill's highly tendentious broadcast Budget speech provoked an angry complaint from MacDonald, the focus was not the power of broadcasting, but the party political advantage which Churchill had unfairly gained.(8)

Arthur Greenwood identified the key event in Labour's awakening to the power of broadcasting as the 1931 General Election.(9) Typical of most Labour politicians Greenwood believed that a distant voice separated from the person speaking had little effect on the listeners. Radio lacked the atmosphere of the public meeting, and the Labour speaker needed to feed off a live audience in order to arouse their emotions.

'Listening-in' is easy; broadcasting to a politician who has been used to the public platform, the crowds, the hecklers, and the excitement of big gatherings is something which at first is terrifying. Imagine yourself in a studio, all alone, talking to a lifeless microphone, not seeing a soul, unable to weigh the effect of your words on the enormous audience who are 'listening-in' by the fireside. (10)

It was not MacDonald's idiosyncratic style which led him to insist on broadcasting at public meetings but the dependence of his oratorical skills

7. The BBC's role in the General Strike is discussed below, pp.133 ff.
8. BBC Policy. Political Broadcasting. Budget., MacDonald to Reith, 1 May 1928. (Hereafter this file will be referred to as 'P.B.')
9. A.Greenwood, 'Fireside Politics', Labour, December 1935, p.86.
10. Ibid.

on responding to a tangible audience.(11)

In 1926 there was an expectation that the BBC would be commandeered by the Government. In 1931 the expectation, amidst a General Election of exceptional intensity and emotion, was that the BBC would be impartial. Labour leaders were quickly disillusioned. The common view within Labour circles was not only that the National Government was given favourable treatment at the Labour Party's expense, but that the BBC went beyond the limits of impartiality in its news coverage. There was a 'cynical disregard of the principle of fair play', leading to a 'gross misuse of the monopoly', in which the BBC became 'virtually a Tory platform'.(12) Arthur Henderson concluded that radio was

perhaps the most effective medium of direct communication for political purposes, for it takes propaganda into the home circle in a more intimate way than does anything else. (13)

Moreover, by late 1931 the potential listening audience had almost doubled, with over 3.9 million licences issued. The BBC's contribution to the election was to transform Labour attitudes. A year later, embroiled in acrimonious discussion with the BBC over the question of equality of access to broadcasting facilities, Lansbury unleashed a bitter attack on the institution, in which he described the wireless as 'the most powerful and effective propaganda machine mankind has ever known'.(14) Thereafter, frequent discussion of radio broadcasting within Labour circles ritually referred to 'the enormous influence which broadcasting is already exerting', and accepted the view that it had 'become a force of unparalleled power in the community'.(15)

The power of broadcasting was believed to derive from several factors. The enormous size of the potential audience was crucial. But particular qualities of broadcasting were also emphasised. C.T.Cramp

11. Such broadcasts, incidentally, were not particularly successful, partly because of MacDonald's habit of walking up and down the platform. The primitive microphone picked up his words only when he was close to it, and their clarity was at times obscured by the thumping and shuffling of his boots on the floorboards.
12. Labour Magazine, November 1931, pp.298-301; Labour Organiser, December 1931. See also M.Cole (ed.), Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1924 - 1932 (London, 1956), p.297, entry for 4 January 1932.

of the National Union of Railwaymen explained to delegates at the 1932 Labour Party Conference that the reliance of the Labour movement on newspapers for publicity left large sections of workers who could not afford to buy them beyond reach. Yet such people were being reached by radio. Many of these people, he argued, would not in the past have read about or listened to any matters of public importance. But programmes dealing with such issues 'are sandwiched between entertainment programmes'.(16) For Cramp and many other, opinions on matters of political controversy were being disseminated by the BBC and absorbed by a substantial proportion of the electorate, almost unconsciously. Any bias which was present would, particularly for those not able to read Labour newspapers, be damaging to the movement. According to Ellen Wilkinson, pursuing a similar theme, the 'biggest danger of the BBC' was 'its assumed impartiality at ordinary times'. The 'subtlest form of propaganda' was to be found not so much in what was said, but in what was 'taken for granted'.(17) As the spoken word was assumed to carry further than the written word, 'and probably goes deeper', in its impact on the individual, its importance in the dissemination of political views was considered to be immense.(18)

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13. A.Henderson, 'Labour's Army is Unconquered', Labour Magazine, November 1931, p.291.
 14. G.Lansbury, 'Labour and the BBC', Labour Magazine, November 1932, p.293. For Attlee's views, see Hansard, vol,260, col.2313, 11 December 1931.
 15. 'The National Council of Labour and Broadcasting Policy', IPAR 1935, p.302. This document is a precis of the evidence submitted to the Ullswater Committee by the Labour Party and the TUC in July 1935. (Hereafter, 'Broadcasting Policy'.)
 16. Ibid., 1932, p.228.
 17. Plebs, March 1929, p.56.
 18. Labour, December 1935, p.86.

Beliefs about the power of broadcasting derived also from a fundamental conception of the suggestibility of the masses. George Lansbury put it quite bluntly:

whoever has control of this wonderful piece of mechanism in reality controls news, and by suggestion, controls the nation's thoughts. (19)

However such control was not simply the result of some mesmeric manipulation on the part of the BBC, but acquired through the Corporation's strategic position in the political process. The National Joint Council of the Labour Party and the TUC complained to the BBC that the Corporation's practice of deciding upon the issues which were to be the subject of broadcast talks

places in the hands of the Corporation the power to determine the electoral issues on which the public are to be invited to make up their minds. (20)

Lansbury believed that in exercising complete control over what was broadcast the BBC was abusing its monopoly of the air waves, and his persistent claim throughout his tenure as Leader of the Labour Party was for such control to be shared with the three main political parties.(21) It was not just the Labour Party however or the TUC which took exception to the agenda-setting tendencies of the Corporation. The Cooperative movement, long aggrieved over what it perceived to be its virtual exclusion from the air waves, was equally disturbed. While accepting that 'the voices of dissent' were occasionally heard, the BBC was seen to be defining the limits of debate, and suggesting a preferred reading of the issues:

through the selection and omission of material and the way in which programmes are presented.....A quite false impression of the meaning or purpose of some happening may be created if one aspect of it is shown out of focus with the rest. (22)

19. Labour Magazine, November 1932, p.293.
20. TUC GC National Joint Council Minutes, National Joint Council to J.Whitley, 22 November 1932.
21. G.Lansbury, LPAR 1932, pp.227-8.
22. 'A Cooperative View of the BBC', Cooperative News, 14 January 1939, p.14.

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Despite these various misgivings there was no fundamental objection within Labour circles to the BBC's monopoly status. It was partly this aspect of the institution which enabled the Corporation to exercise such a profound influence. But it was equally the BBC's power to influence which led Labour leaders to give full support to monopoly control. In the early years such views were obviously rarely expressed. But the opinions of two Labour politicians stand out. Charles Trevelyan's involvement in the work of the Sykes Committee in 1923 led him to conclude that the best safeguard against the abuse of broadcasting was for the establishment of a monopoly under public control.(23) Herbert Morrison took a similar view in his evidence to the Sykes Committee. He argued that if broadcasting was to retain the trust of the people, and make a positive contribution to the development of an informed democracy, then the unknown and largely mysterious power of the wireless should not provide a platform for commercial exploitation of listeners:

it is.....obvious that in view of the subtle and obscure character of modern commercial publicity the extension of that psychological treatment of political and industrial questions in connection with broadcasting work involves great dangers to democracy.....such a monopoly, in view of its character and importance, should be in public hands and,.....there should be public accountability either from inefficiency or for political or class misuse of the great publicity powers of modern wireless. (24)

Morrison later stated a more general view. He argued that neither of the alternatives to public control was acceptable. Commercial broadcasting as practised in other countries was of a very poor standard; and state broadcasting, in which the medium was used as a government propaganda agency, was contrary to democratic principles.(25) There was virtually no dissent from this view until 1939, when Kingsley Martin, following intense correspondence in The Times, suggested that it was time to bring the monopoly to an end in order to provide a 'better and less nationalistic news service'.(26) Despite some

23. Cmd. 1951 (1923) Report of the Broadcasting Committee, C.Trevelyan's Reservation, pp.39-41.

24. BBC Sykes Committee, 'Memorandum of evidence submitted by the Executive Committee of the London Labour Party to the Sykes Committee'.

25. The Star, 13 January 1933.

26. K.Martin, 'Public Opinion and the Wireless', Political Quarterly, April-June 1939, p.285

reservations about the use to which the BBC might be put under war-time conditions, Labour leaders were unimpressed by Martin's suggestion.

Once the precise form of public control had been established there was initially a general satisfaction with the formal relationship between the BBC and the State. Philip Snowden, for example, shortly to become the Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, envisaged, as Reith noted in his diary, the public ownership and control of industry 'on BBC lines'.(27) Herbert Morrison's detailed exposition of the structure and function of the public corporation owed much to the BBC.(28) The safeguards against the abuse of broadcasting by professional broadcasters resided in the extensive powers of the Postmaster General, and the specific objects of the BBC, encapsulated in the Charter and Licence. The safeguards against the abuse of broadcasting by the State resided in the all-party agreement that it was for the BBC to judge what was fit and proper to broadcast in general terms, and that any interference in the day to day running of the Corporation would, except during moments of national emergency, do lasting damage to a national asset. Thus, for example, the discussion in the Cabinet over the question of the undesirability of allowing Captain Hashagen to broadcast on his experiences as a U-boat commander involved in sinking British shipping during the Great War, concluded that

it would be very undesirable to have recourse to the statutory powers of prohibition in this case, as this would be represented as the exercise by the Government of censorship powers, which should be definitely reserved for use in cases of great national emergency. (29)

Moreover, the Board of Governors, a broadly representative body consisting of people of wide experience and a commitment to public service, provided the link between the government of the day and the BBC which

27. Cited, A. Briggs, The Golden Age of Wireless op.cit., p.416, Diary entry for 9 April 1929.
28. See H. Morrison, Socialisation and Transport (London, 1933).
29. PRO Cabinet Papers CAB 23, Minutes of Cabinet Meeting 42(32) Conclusion 1., 6 July 1932. See also, for example, Hansard, vol. 274, cols.1807-66, 22 February 1933.

precluded close ministerial involvement and preserved the independence of the Corporation. By the terms of the Charter all power and responsibility within the Corporation was vested in them. In practice, from 1932 onwards, they acted as trustees, safeguarding the broadcasting service in the national interest, with de facto authority being exercised by the Director General.(30)

Before 1932 there was general approval amongst Labour leaders for these arrangements. But the role of the BBC during the 1931 General Election disposed virtually all Labour observers to take a more critical view of the Corporation. This new sensitivity to the political importance of the BBC was reinforced by a number of developments which raised fundamental issues regarding the constitutional relationship between the Corporation and the State.(31) In essence such doubts centred on three issues: the style of management of the Director General, the role of the Board of Governors, and the powers of the Postmaster General.

The period of the second Labour Government provided the first real opportunity for Labour leaders, as Ministers, to deal with the BBC on an official level in the era of mass political communication, and gain a more intimate knowledge of Reith's managerial style. It was not long before a more critical view of Reith began to emerge. H.B.Lees-Smith, the Postmaster General, regarded Reith as a megalomaniac,(32) and it was only shortly after taking office that he told J.H.Whitley, soon to become Chairman of the Board of Governors, that 'We fear he's off his head and won't be at the BBC very much longer'.(33) By 1936 Lees-Smith was more forthright. In the wake of the Lambert v. Levita court case and the official inquiry into the affair, which revealed details of the BBC's staffing policies,(34) he launched into a scathing attack on Reith's style of management, which he described as 'the nearest thing in this country to Nazi government that can be shown'.(35) While

30. The precise nature of the Board's trusteeship was defined in the 'Whitley Document', presented to each incoming Governor by the Postmaster General. The document is printed in Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, The BBC From Within (London, 1953), pp.46-7.

31. These events included the Hashagen case, the Vernon Bartlett affair, and the Lambert v. Levita case.

32. A.Briggs, Governing the BBC (London, 1979), p.58. This was a view later shared by Conservative PMG Sir Kingsley Wood,

33. Cited, A.Boyle, Only the Wind Will Listen (London, 1972), p.234.

Lees-Smith may have been carried away by his own rhetoric in the heat of the moment, the extremity of his views was shared by others. Ethel Snowden, representing both the Labour and 'the female point of view' on the Board of Governors, came into frequent contact with Reith and consistently criticised him as a despotic character exercising an arbitrary rule over the Corporation.(36) Mary Agnes Hamilton, who succeeded Viscountess Snowden in 1932 as the Labour representative on the Board, admired certain of his personal qualities. But she confided in her diary that he was 'impatient, intolerant and for cooperation ill-adjusted'. Reith 'Says he believes in democratic aim, not in democratic method'.(37) Similarly, Sir Stafford Cripps, in the debate on the Ullswater Report in April 1936, described the BBC under Reith's management as 'an unlimited dictatorial autocracy'.(38)

There was, to summarise, a considerable body of opinion within the political wing of the Labour movement which took the view that Reith was exceeding his powers as Director General, that he was exercising an autocratic rule over his staff, that the basic right to membership of a trade union and the principle of collective bargaining were being denied, that the staff had no adequate opportunities for airing grievances, and that the Corporation made unwarranted demands of its employees to which there was no course of redress if they wished to continue their careers in broadcasting.(39) Moreover, there was a fear that, on the one hand, Reith was possessed of political ambitions, and on the other that he was sympathetic towards Labour's political opponents, compromising the Corporation's independence at the expense of the further democratic development of the nation in general, and the growth of the Labour Party in particular.(40)

34. See A.Briggs, Governing the BBC op.cit., pp.201-206.

35. Hansard, vol.318, col.2370, 17 December 1936.

36. A.Boyle, op.cit., p.227.

37. M.A.Hamilton, Remembering My Good Friends (London, 1944), pp.281 ff. Almost identical words were used by Reith himself. See Into the Wind op.cit., p.169.

38. Hansard, vol.311, col.974, 29 April 1936.

39. Cmd. 5091 (1936) Report of the Broadcasting Committee, Reservation by Mr. Attlee, p.49, which covers most of these points.

40. L.Woolf, 'The Future of British Broadcasting', Political Quarterly, April-June 1932, p.178; Daily Herald, 20 July 1938, p.8. See also C.Stuart (ed.), The Reith Diaries op.cit., pp.104, 110, entries for 15 July 1930 and 28 October 1931.

The danger therefore was that in running the BBC along 'semi-military lines', Reith was not only denying democratic rights, but, in being accustomed to autocratic methods was bringing into question the concept of public control of a public service which exercised such an enormous influence.(41) It should be added that notwithstanding the strong criticisms which Labour politicians levelled at Reith, there was a grudging respect for the Director General which privately acknowledged a debt of gratitude for his achievement in establishing a public broadcasting service of high moral purpose.(42)

Nevertheless, in evidence submitted by the National Council of Labour to the Ullswater Committee Sir Walter Citrine and Arthur Greenwood argued that in view of the part which broadcasting now played in the life of the nation the constitutional relationship between the BBC and the State was inappropriate: the Corporation's Charter and Licence 'require fundamental change'.(43) Given the prevailing attitude towards Reith it would be surprising if he was not one of the sources of Labour's demand for such change. The NCL's submission to the Ullswater Committee does not mention Reith in such terms, but the focus of the Labour argument is unmistakable: the BBC's 'policy and activities should be directly answerable to the legislature in a more satisfactory way than in the past'.(44) The submission identified two aspects of the constitutional relationship of the Corporation with the State where changes needed to be made: the powers and responsibilities of the Postmaster General, and the role of the Board of Governors.

From the earliest meetings of the Board ill-feeling between the Governors and Reith was apparent, due partly to clashes of personality but largely to differing interpretations of the role which members of the Board were to perform.(45) Lord Clarendon, the Chairman, wrote to Lord Gainford, the Vice-Chairman, in 1929 that Reith had 'given us all the

41. See for example, 'Who Shall Control the BBC?', New Leader, 11 October 1935, p.5. For similar views expressed by a member of the Communist Party, see G.Audit, The BBC Exposed pamphlet (London, 1937).

42. For Lansbury and Lees-Smith, see J.C.W.Reith, Into the Wind op.cit., pp.216, 248. Attlee's praise was deliberately made public. See Hansard, vol.260, cols.2312-3, 11 December 1931.

43. 'Broadcasting Policy', IPAR 1935, pp.302-9.

44. Ibid., p.302.

impression that he wants.....to override us', if the Director General 'does not agree with the Board'.(46) It was precisely this style of management to which Labour leaders took exception: the Board of Governors was envisaged as a means of preventing the monopoly power of broadcasting becoming the personal instrument of the Director General. Ethel Snowden, whose appointment infuriated Ramsay MacDonald (who had not been consulted), took her duties extremely seriously in a high-minded affirmation of dedication to public service.(47) By taking up various issues of procedure and principle, including the thorny question of staff grievances, Snowden attempted to gain for the Board some measure of de facto authority over Reith. That she failed was due to Reith's determination and the acquiescence of the remaining Governors who, from 1932 onwards, accepted the role of 'trustees' and exercised no executive power. Peter Eckersley, the former Chief Engineer of the BBC, later criticised the members of the Board for 'fitting in' too easily to the Reith regime.(48) They certainly appeared to Mary Hamilton to be more interested in Reith than in the subject of broadcasting.(49) But the view from the outside was more damning. As James Marcus of the Cooperative Party, which was not noted for political savagery, put it in 1938, it was essential

to end the scandal of successive Governments treating the BBC Board as a well-paid refuge for superannuated, incompetent and reactionary politicians. (50)

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45. The various conflicts are well described in A.Boyle, op.cit., pp.215-35.
46. Cited, ibid., p.221.
47. C.Cross,Philip Snowden (London, 1966), p.231.
48. P.P.Eckersley, The Power Behind the Microphone op.cit., p.18. See also L.Woolf, Political Quarterly; April-June 1932, p.177.
49. M.A.Hamilton, Remembering My Good Friends op.cit., p.285.
50. Cooperative News, 1 October 1938. p.8.

The view of the TUC and the Labour Party was that the autocratic style of Reith pre-empted full public control, and that the Board, as presently constituted, did not measure up to the task of representing the wider public interest. In its submission to the Ullswater Committee the National Council of Labour recommended that appointments to the Board should only be made by the Prime Minister and the PMG should take no part in it. Governors should be drawn from that generation of people who have matured with radio, and, being 'radio-minded', would have a greater understanding of and interest in the medium. They should also be drawn from a wider social sphere rather than from the exclusive circle of the 'well-to-do classes'; and that the Board should consist of people with areas of expertise which had some bearing on matters pertinent to the field of broadcasting.(51)

In addition to these attempts to strengthen the position the Board and make it more representative of public opinion, the NCL proposed that the Postmaster General should relinquish all his responsibilities for the broadcasting service except those of a technical nature, which had so grown in complexity that the PMG could not adequately represent the broader questions of broadcasting policy to the House of Commons. As with Reith himself the NCL preferred Ministerial responsibility for broadcasting to be vested in a member of the Cabinet who was not heavily burdened with departmental duties.(52) Their purposes however were quite different: the NCL believed that this would provide a greater measure of public control over the Corporation, something which Reith had successfully evaded for years.(53)

Finally, there was the question of Clause 4 of the Licence, sections (2) and (3) of which respectively required the Corporation to broadcast any matter which the Government may request, and empowered the Postmaster General to prevent, by notice in writing, any broadcast material being transmitted. The NCL did not object to such powers in principle, but the experience of the previous decade, and of the General Strike and the 1931 General Election in particular, demonstrated the dangers of abuse. As Attlee explained in his Reservation to the

51. 'Broadcasting Policy', LPAR 1935, p.303; Cmd. 5091 (1936) Report of the Broadcasting Committee, Mr. Attlee's Reservation, pp.48-9. Most of these points were recommended in the Report, para. 12.
52. 'Broadcasting Policy', LPAR 1935, p.302.
53. A.Briggs, The Golden Age of Wireless op.cit., pp.421-2.

Ullswater Report:

The control of the BBC by the State in an emergency is obviously necessary, but there is a point where it is difficult to decide whether the emergency is really that of the State or of the Government as representing the political party in power. (54)

The National Council of Labour insisted that in the interests of both the public and the BBC, it was essential that

the Corporation shall not become the mere instrument of the Government for the time being to be exploited for political party purposes. (55)

Apart from an obligation based on trust which this implied, the NCL suggested that where a Government does forbid the Corporation to broadcast any material, it should issue a public statement revealing its action. The Council proposed additionally that the limitations imposed on the BBC by sections (2) and (3) of Clause 4 should be removed. There is no contradiction here, although in the condensed record of the evidence submitted to the Ullswater Committee the Council did not develop its case to a point which would make it transparently clear what was intended. But it would seem from Attlee's acceptance of the need for the State to use the BBC in an emergency, that it was being proposed that the powers invested in the Government under these two sections should be transferred to Clause 19. Under Clause 4 the powers available for the proscription of broadcast material and the promulgation of government information were not conditional upon any particular circumstances obtaining - they could be used at any time, at the discretion of the Government of the day. Under Clause 19 the Government had the power to commandeer the BBC in the event of an 'emergency'. From the general construction of the submission of the NCL, and Attlee's Reservation to the Report, it appears that the Labour Party and the TUC wished to circumscribe the freedom of action of the Government under normal circumstances. Under existing arrangements, in view of Clause 19

54. Cmd. 5091 (1936) Report of the Broadcasting Committee, Mr. Attlee's Reservation, p.49.
55. 'Broadcasting Policy', LPAR 1935, p.303.

the mere possibility of being commandeered could be sufficiently intimidating to cultivate a cautious state of mind which over time could become transposed into institutional policy almost by default. The effect would be to create a prohibitive internal framework in which consideration of controversial material would take place. In consequence, the Government could achieve the desired result of prohibiting certain material being broadcast without the requisite notice in writing from the PMG.(56) The Government could exercise a censorship without being seen to do so. This was precisely what happened during the General Strike.(57) In the Hashagen case, all that was needed was an 'intimation' to Reith that it was undesirable both for the German U-boat Commander to broadcast and the Government to be seen to be using its statutory powers, for the statutory powers under Clause 4(3) of the Licence to have, in effect, been used.(58) The Corporation needed greater protection:

The BBC should have sufficient independence to resist being made the instrument of one side in a national controversy. (59)

Proposed changes in the Licence were intended to secure that protection.(60) Where there was a national emergency, and the Government took the fundamental step of commandeering the BBC, 'the listening public

56. 'Broadcasting Policy', LPAR 1935, p.303.
57. J.C.W.Reith, Into the Wind op.cit., p.108; C.Stuart (ed.), The Reith Diaries op.cit., p.97, Diary entry for 11 May 1926.
58. PRO Cabinet Papers CAB 23, Minutes of Cabinet Meeting 42(32) Conclusion 1., 6 July 1932.
59. Cmd. 5091 (1936) Report of the Broadcasting Committee, Mr. Attlee's Reservation, p.49. My emphasis.
60. It should be noted however that in his Reservation Attlee did not, in fact, make any specific point concerning Clause 4. When the new Licence was drawn up in 1936 it was clear that hardly anything of these proposals had been taken up. The PMG was required, in the event of the power of veto being used, to indicate whether or not its use could be made public.

should be informed that the Corporation is no longer responsible'.(61) What Attlee had in mind was the situation which might arise in the event of war; and he stressed the importance of allowing the BBC to broadcast opinions other than those of the Government.

There was therefore a fundamental concern within the leaderships of the main organisations of the Labour movement for the constitutional position of the BBC which arose in the early 1930's and stemmed from the rather sudden discovery of the immense power of broadcasting to influence the course of events. Retrospectively, the role of the BBC during the General Strike, together with its contribution to the 1931 General Election, began to haunt Labour leaders. In view of the Director General's autocratic style of leadership, and the ineffectual role of the Board of Governors,^{the} constitutional relationship of the Corporation with the State was considered to be urgently in need of change if the integrity of the BBC was to be preserved. The prospect of war added weight to the fears of Attlee and his colleagues, but in 1935 the more pressing question of re-establishing the Labour Party as the alternative party of office exercised a greater influence in shaping Labour attitudes towards the BBC. In this respect the broad democratising function which Labour attached to the BBC was seen as an important factor in the Party's resurrection.

3.

After the experience of 1931 the belief in the power of broadcasting to exercise a profound influence in shaping people's attitudes quickly occupied a central position in the political strategies of the Labour movement. However the precise nature of radio's effectivity was to some degree less important than the prospects which public service broadcasting held for democratic progress. Between 1922 and the outbreak of war the BBC acquired the image of 'a great British institution, as British as the Bank of England'.(62) Public identification of the organisation with authority and the Establishment stemmed not only from its Royal Charter, but from the impeccable style

61. Cmd. 5091 (1936) Report of the Broadcasting Committee, Mr. Attlee's Reservation, p.49.

62. A.Eriggs, The Golden Age of Wireless op.cit., p.12.

of language used by its personnel, the retinue of prominent personalities who were regularly invited to broadcast, the style of presentation of programmes and the careful nurturing of this image. Under Reith's guidance the principles governing programme output ensured that nothing was given prominence which could be construed as detrimental to the standards and values of middle class Britain.(63) Aware of the tensions coiled in the class structure Reith and his colleagues consciously sought, as Briggs has observed, to fashion the BBC into an 'instrument of integration in a divided community'.(64) Between working class life and the milieu of the BBC there existed a cultural disjuncture, regardless of the affection which many people had for particular radio programmes or personalities, which was underscored by the prevailing sense of 'us' and 'them' characteristic of working class attitudes.(65) For one observer, James Marcus, the arrival of F.W.Ogilvie at the BBC as successor to Reith provided an opportunity to bridge this gap:

Potentially, the BBC with its elaborate programme of talks and good music, is the greatest instrument of adult education in the country, yet everybody knows that apart from an important and ardent minority, much of this work misses fire among the masses. This is not as some would suggest, because the workers are incapable of appreciating intelligent talks and good music - that is a theory for autocrats and dictators - but because they are presented by persons with a middle class training and a fundamental ignorance of the ways of life and thought of the people. The very language used is too often above the heads of ordinary folk and a background of experience is assumed which is simply not possessed by most of us. (66)

The appeal of such programmes may have been due in part to the deference which helped sustain the prevailing social and political structures.

63. J.C.W.Reith, Broadcast over Britain (London, 1924), passim; BBC Policy. Programming Planning., A.Corbett-Smith, 'Memorandum on Policy', 2 September 1924.
64. A.Briggs, The Golden Age of Wireless op.cit., p.37.
65. Richard Hoggart, in his survey of working class life in a markedly different post-war context found the us/them syndrome to be 'strongest in those over thirty-five, those with memories of unemployment in the thirties', The Uses of Literacy (Harmondsworth, 1958), p.76.
66. J.Marcus, 'The BBC and the New Director General', Cooperative News, 1. October 1938, p.9. Hilda Matheson made similar observations, 'The Record of the BBC', Political Quarterly, October-December 1935, pp.507-8.

Culturally jarring though some programmes may have been they were part of the given world; and this outlook, a persistent and resilient feature of working class life, may have served to render the Corporation's programmes more acceptable than they might otherwise have been. Be that as it may, the unmistakable realities were the enormity of the listening public, and its access to a vast cultural heritage which had previously been available only to a privileged minority. It was in gradually realising this that socialist intellectuals began to identify in radio broadcasting an unprecedented opportunity for furthering the cause of social democracy.

In his work Equality R.H.Tawney put forward a more humane and optimistic view of industrial society than those espousing 'mass society' theory. Vital to the achievement of an egalitarian society was the evolution of a 'common culture'. The reorganisation of industry to serve a wider social purpose was the precondition for the 'common culture' to emerge, but prevailing class relationships could not be superseded through changes in corporate objectives and values alone; a common purpose and a common understanding could only arise from shared experience. Tawney's prescription was vague, attempting unsuccessfully to sidestep criticism by elite theorists that any move towards such a culture would involve a levelling-down and a diminution of the currency of culture:

it is necessary, not only to preserve existing standards of excellence, and to diffuse their influence, but to broaden and enrich them with an ever-widening range of emotional experiences and intellectual interests. (67)

Given that Labour leaders were concerned essentially with the general acceptance of their ideas and the absorption of the leaderships of the movement within the political and industrial elites of the country; and that their policies emphasised the areas of common interest and minimised differences of class, Tawney's ideas ^{were} broadly consonant with their perspectives. Indeed Tawney's influence within the Labour Party can be gauged by the fact that he drafted Labour and the Nation the new Labour programme drawn up in preparation for the 1929 election. It may have created dissension within the leadership, (68) but Tawney's position as an adviser and confidante of MacDonald during the election is a

67. R.H.Tawney, Equality rev.ed. (London, 1931), p.106.

68. H.Dalton, Call Back Yesterday (London, 1953), pp.173-6.

measure of his continued influence.(69) While Tawney did not put forward any theory as to the function of radio broadcasting in the development of a 'common culture', other socialist intellectuals developed his ideas to include the medium. Leonard Woolf, for example, argued that broadcasting could prove to be 'the most revolutionary invention in history' because

it is capable of being used to broaden the base of spiritual civilisation.....for the first time in the history of the world, society has in its hands an instrument by which millions can be given knowledge, opinion, literature, music or, in one word, culture. (70)

Those in control of broadcasting could create an 'educated democracy' by giving ordinary people 'the facts over the whole field of human knowledge' which, previously, had only been the preserve of the privileged. Such a democracy was only possible on the basis of 'an educated, informed, tolerant and rational public opinion', which in turn required that all shades of opinion should be broadcast on questions of public concern.(71) Charles Madge suggested that the BBC was bringing about a remarkable change in the intellectual life of the British public by providing common bases of opinion, cultivating a broad consensus of views.(72)

Not all Labour observers welcomed the prospect of a national institution generating greater social and political homogeneity. Beatrice Webb in December 1925 admired the way in which the BBC used the 'stupendous influence' of radio 'over the lives of the people', but added,

what a terrible engine of compulsory conformity in opinion and culture, wireless might become. (73)

- 69. PRO MacDonald Papers 30/69/5/40, MacDonald to Tawney, 9 April 1929.
- 70. Political Quarterly, April-June 1932, pp.172, 174.
- 71. Ibid., p.175.
- 72. C.Madge, 'Press, Radio and Social Consciousness' in C.Day Lewis (ed.), The Mind in Chains (London, 1938, 1972 reprint), p.158.
- 73. M.Cole (ed.), Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1924-1932 op.cit., p.81. In What to do with the BBC (London, 1938), pp.58-60 Raymond Postgate developed this idea and suggested a 'worst-case' scenario in which the technical innovation of 'rediffusion' would establish the BBC as a major factor in the emergence of a fascist dictatorship.

But such doubts were not typical. As early as 1924 J.R.Clynes suggested hopefully that 'Broadcasting is....certain to accelerate the widening of common interest'.(74) For the National Joint Council, representing the TUC and the Labour Party, the function of the BBC, as a public institution, was 'to make provision for the dissemination of knowledge and opinion',(75) the purpose of which was to 'assist in the progressive cultivation of the national thought'.(76) This was envisaged as operating on several levels. Broadcast talks would stimulate an interest in public affairs which would help 'to raise the general level of knowledge'.(77) This in itself was essential 'in the interests of good citizenship and in order to keep the people in regular contact with national issues'.(78) But democracy required involvement and it was the 'duty of the BBC' according to Attlee, to stimulate listeners to bring them 'face to face with realities so as to be fit to play their part in an epoch of rapid change".(79) There was of course a more specific task, of educating Labour cadres, which was regarded as a particularly important step on the path towards a socialist government,(80) and to radio broadcasting was optimistically attributed a vital role. BBC talks would

do a great deal to enable us to obtain our audiences for our propoganda meetings and possibly create a demand for our publications.....The more intelligent electorate will listen to our message and the rank and file member will be more keenly interested in our organisation and propoganda, because he will realise the full significance of our proposals...(81)

The 'common culture' to which Labour leaders aspired was one in which Labour views were fully integrated and legitimated within the wider

- 74. Radio Times, 18 July 1924, pp.133-4.
- 75. National Joint Council, 'Memorandum to J.H.Whitley, Chairman of the Board of Governors', 11 July 1933, TUC 1933, p.313.
- 76. Labour Magazine, February 1930, p.459.
- 77. Allen Young, 'Labour Agents and the BBC', Labour Organiser, January 1928, p.7.
- 78. 'Broadcasting Policy', LPAR 1935, p.306. See also BLPES Lansbury Papers vol.10, f277-9, Lansbury to J.H.Whitley, 27 September 1932.
- 79. Daily Herald, 14 November 1933.
- 80. See H.Laski, New Clarion, 4 March 1933, p.243.
- 81. Labour Organiser, January 1928, pp.6-7.

123

society - mirroring the basic Labour Socialist assumption that any further progress towards social democracy could only take place under the auspices of a Labour Government.

Similarly, as no 'common culture' could arise without the emergence of economic democracy, then a planned and regulated economy was a necessary preliminary step. The principal form of industrial organisation was to be the public corporation, 'which would place the public interest above all other considerations'.(82) Public ownership and control within industry was the major policy proposal of Labour and the New Social Order, the Labour Party's programme between 1918 and 1928. Rather than a scheme for the wholesale transfer of class power, such an arrangement involved organisational changes designed to improve efficiency and make public interest, not profit, the prime determinant of policy and administration. As public control was envisaged as an intermediary stage in the development of social democracy,(83) then the BBC was, as a public corporation accountable to parliament and imbued with the ethos of public service, an impressive example publicising daily the model which was to be the basis of socialist reconstruction. Indeed, as Coase has argued, experience of the public corporation in the form adopted for broadcasting 'was a major factor leading to its general acceptance as the proper method of organising public enterprises'.(84)

Fundamental to this conception of the democratising function of the BBC was a belief that the Corporation should act as a custodian of the public interest, acting as a broker of ideas and opinions on behalf of the public. The nineteenth century emphasis within the press on objective reporting had been superseded, in the twentieth century, by news values geared to mass circulation sales, and editors and proprietors, despite the ethic of social responsibility growing amongst journalists, were keen to put forward partial views aimed at particular target audiences.(85) Moreover, while there may have been no clear

82. 'Evidence submitted by the General Council to the Macmillan Committee on Finance and Industry', TUC 1931, pp.279-80.

83. Report of the Research and Economic Committee, Ibid., p.207.

84. R.H.Coase, British Broadcasting (London, 1950), p.63.

85. T.Burns, 'The Organisation of Public Opinion', in J.Curran et al, Mass Communication and Society (London, 1977), pp.51-2; A.Smith, 'News Values and the Ethic of Journalism - a View of the Western Tradition' in his The Politics of Information (London, 1978).

alignment of the press and political parties in the 1930's, there were direct and well-known associations in the 1920's, a decade in which attitudes towards broadcasting began to take shape. The press was widely believed to have abandoned any pretence at acting as the broker of ideas and information in the public interest. It was no longer seen by Labour leaders to be the 'fourth estate' acting as a counter-balance to government, as the voice of the people and grand inquisitor on their behalf. The emergence of vast newspaper empires had led to the control of the bulk of newspaper output by a small number of people, some of whom were politically ambitious. Herbert Tracey, the Labour Party's Publicity Officer, complained in 1929 that the monopoly exercised by the principal newspaper groups had been achieved at the expense of independent newspapers and independent opinion.(86) The desire for profit, he argued, had led to the near extinction of the notion of freedom of the press and a severe limitation on the range of opinions available. Such developments had made it necessary to safeguard freedom of discussion:

As things stand, the only apparent alternative is the extension of wireless broadcasting on the largest possible scale and with the utmost latitude of expression.....With proper arrangements to ensure fair-play and absolute impartiality as between the BBC and the parties in matters of current controversy, the dangerous consequences of newspaper monopoly can be counteracted. (87)

With more experience of both press hostility and the BBC's public service as an alternative source of news, Labour leaders became convinced that the Corporation was the most important 'medium for the dissemination of information and opinion', that political discussion and debate 'should be a normal feature of broadcasting programmes', and that it was the duty of the Corporation 'to present news impartially and objectively'.(88)

Additionally, as a public institution the BBC was particularly attractive to Labour leaders because there was access to it. Access to

86. H.Tracey, 'The Broadcasting Corporation and the Newspaper Combines', Labour Magazine, February 1929, p.447. My emphasis.
87. Ibid.
88. 'Broadcasting Policy', LPAR 1935, pp.302-7.

the cinema, as a medium of communication, would have involved immense capital investment in production, and there was no degree of certainty that had a single film been made for commercial exhibition sufficient cinemas would have booked it to justify the costs of production. The technical means of broadcasting already existed, the broadcasting outlets were in millions of homes, and there was an institutional imperative on the part of the BBC to provide facilities, completely free of charge, for mass communication. But 'access' per se was only one element, admittedly a crucial one, in the strategic thinking of Labour leaders. As Harold Laski put it, the central problem for an electorate in a developing democracy is that it must be led,

and in a capitalist democracy the main weapons of leadership are in the hands of capitalists. Its opponents are always on the defensive....(89)

The BBC, as a public service, offered the Labour movement unprecedented opportunities for using one 'weapon' of leadership to take issue with or counteract the policies and opinions, and techniques of manipulation of public opinion, of the 'capitalists' who controlled the press and the cinema. On one level access to radio broadcasting was regarded as essential for the further assimilation of the organisations and ideals of the Labour movement within the culture and processes of politics and industry. In so far as the programmes which the BBC broadcast carried what Tom Burns has called a 'special sanction', (90) the use of the radio by Labour leaders was a signal to the nation that the BBC considered the views of these politicians and trade unionists to be within the bounds of decency and therefore acceptable. But in using the radio to broadcast their views they were promoting their own legitimacy as future leaders of the nation, and their policies as viable alternatives to those of the Conservative and Liberal Parties. Such legitimacy could not be taken for granted in the wake of the 1931 election, and the strenuous efforts made by Labour leaders to use the medium can be taken as evidence both of their awareness of the need for its restoration and the importance which they attached to the BBC in the achievement of this objective.

89. H.Laski, Democracy in Crisis (London, 1933), p.76.

90. T.Burns, The BBC: Public Institution and Private World op.cit., p.149.

On another level, access to radio broadcasting enabled Labour leaders to provide a lead to the electorate in the context of a hostile and manipulative press. As Herbert Tracey explained:

The broadcast monopoly may conceivably be, in some conspiracy of silence on the part of the Press, the only means of guiding and informing public opinion in a period of national crisis. (91)

Where a Labour Government was in office such problems were more likely to arise, and following the experience of almost universal press hostility during the General Election of 1931 the power of the government of the day to have broadcast any matter which it saw fit was regarded by some Labour politicians as a vital safeguard for democracy.(92) The official view of the Labour Party however was that this power should be limited; although it is uncertain how Labour Ministers would have reacted had those powers been available to them after 1931. Such niceties of course were for the future, and no amount of praise for the democratising potential of broadcasting would assuage completely the deep sense of grievance which was felt by Labour leaders arising from the anti-Labour bias which they perceived in BBC News Bulletins.

4.

The radio was fundamentally a medium of entertainment, but the Charter of the BBC required the Corporation to 'collect news and information relating to current events'.(93) The News Service established by the BBC developed slowly and under considerable constraints, not least of which was the very close scrutiny to which news bulletins were subjected by the main political parties, sensitive to anything which could be construed as unfair treatment. Labour leaders were

91. Labour Magazine, February 1929, p.447.

92. For example, H.Dalton, Practical Socialism for Britain (London, 1936), p.102.

93. Cmd. 2756 (1926) Wireless Broadcasting. Drafts of (1) Royal Charter and (2) Licence, Clause 3(e).

from an early date quick to criticise the Corporation for its news bulletins, but their essentially favourable conception of the institution served to dull the cutting edge of their comments. By 1936-7 the News Service was generally regarded with admiration and gratitude, stemming from an appreciation of the professionalism of its personnel, but, more significantly, from the belief that broadcast news exercised an immense influence.

The BBC's News Service was initiated within two months of the Company being formed. The first news bulletin was broadcast on 23 December 1922 following an agreement with the press and the news agencies (Reuters, Press Association, Exchange Telegraph and Central News). News bulletins written and edited by Reuters at their offices were to be supplied at commercial rates based on a sliding scale according to the number of wireless licences sold. Fearing competition, the press organisations insisted as part of this agreement that such bulletins should only be broadcast between 7-00 p.m. and 1-00 a.m.(94) Moreover the Company's Licence, issued on the 18 January 1923, stated that the BBC should not broadcast any news or information except that obtained from the news agencies.

It was evident from the outset therefore that not only was the BBC entirely dependent for its News Service on these news agencies, but also that the Company was thereby employing the definition of news value developed by them. The BBC had no editorial function, and consequently no news staff: the bulletins were simply telephoned to the Company, typed up by clerical staff, and handed to an announcer to be read directly into the microphone.(95) The professional ethics of impartiality and accuracy embraced by these agencies were upheld by Government officials responsible for overseeing broadcasting. In his evidence to the Sykes Committee F.J.Brown of the Post Office, who had been instrumental in setting up a broadcasting service, admitted that since the BBC exercised a monopoly over the broadcasting of news, then the Post Office needed some ultimate power of control over the Company in order to maintain standards, and by stipulating in its Licence that the BBC should only broadcast news items obtained from the news agencies, such an arrangement gave the GPO 'some sort of assurance that

94. BBC News. Home News Policy., BBC General Advisory Council, 'The News Service', n.d., March 1939, provides a brief survey of the development of the News Service.

95. Ibid., News. News Bulletins: Political Bias, S.Carey Clements to A.R.Burrows, 26 November 1923. (Hereafter, 'N.PB'.)

the news was of the general type of uncoloured news'.(96)

It was not long before Brown used the powers of the Post Office to suggest to Reith that the BBC should not have broadcast a particular news item.(97) Reith drew the conclusion that an editorial role was required of the BBC:

I gather from your letter that although all news comes from a presumably impartial source, you would expect us to exercise discretion in the broadcasting of the items. I am having our Station Directors instructed accordingly. (98)

Editing was confined to simply excluding certain items adjudged likely to provoke controversy. Subsequent agreements with the press agencies extended slightly the scope of the News Service, but it was as a result of the General Strike that the service achieved prominence. Taking advantage of the opportunity the Company subsequently established a News Section, which dealt chiefly with topical talks and special news items from Government Departments.(99) By December 1927 three sub-editors worked in the News Section checking agency material, cutting out any unacceptable items, adding items to the agency bulletins from tape machines installed at Savoy Hill. Two years later a new agreement with the press agencies gave the BBC editors responsibility for the choice of news and the compilation of the bulletins; and the first bulletin which was prepared entirely by the BBC's own staff from agency material was broadcast on 10 February 1930. Thereafter the agency material was sifted, re-written, shortened and simplified for broadcasting. This enabled the news staff to apply more rigorously its own news values. The purpose of the bulletin, the BBC Yearbook explained, was

to give a sane and balanced account of the chief events of the day, and only to give prominence to those news items which deserve it. (100)

- 96 Cited in A.Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting op.cit., p.168.
 97. BBC N.PB., F.J.Brown to Reith, 12 June 1924.
 98. Ibid., Reith to Brown, 13 June 1924.
 99. Ibid., News. General Correspondence., K.Edwin, 'Home News Bulletins', n.d., 1939. (Hereafter, 'N.GC'.)
 100. BBC Yearbook, 1933, p.178.

There was a commitment to eschew the sensationalism of the press. As the Director of Talks, Charles Siepmann, put it:

We have a responsibility here to maintain an uncompromising standard of discrimination. I am convinced that our avoidance of sensationalism is appreciated and regarded as one of the distinctive contributions of broadcasting. (101)

Equally important was a responsibility to present 'an unbiased, accurate and balanced presentation of the significant news'; and where impartiality was not always readily apparent, listeners were urged to 'remember that it is certainly due to the incompleteness of the news received'.(102)

In 1934 a News Department was set up in its own right, under John Coatman, employing professional journalists and extending the scope of its coverage. The following year it began to do its own reporting, but the technique of 'on the spot reporting' was not used extensively until 1938. Indeed, few lasting developments in the News Service occurred during the 1930's. Where changes did take place they were usually in the size of the Department and the timing and frequency of bulletins. By 1939 there were 33 members of the News Department, and five bulletins every weekday, lasting about one and three quarter hours in all. The 6-00 p.m. and the 9-00 p.m. news bulletins gradually became national fixtures; yet there was no regular day-time bulletin until the outbreak of war in 1939, despite the Ullswater Report's recommendation that there should be fewer restrictions on the broadcasting of news. Nevertheless, between 1927 and 1939 the Corporation established an impressive reputation as 'the most honest purveyor of news in the world'.(103)

In the early years of broadcasting the leaders of the Labour movement may have been slow to catch on to the idea of broadcasting, but they were quick to spot what they considered unequal coverage of the three main political parties, at Labour's expense. An article in

101. BBC N.GC., Siepmann to Reith, 10 June 1932.

102. BBC Annual 1935, p.61; BBC Handbook 1937, p.43.

103. A.Briggs, The Golden Age of Wireless op.cit., p.153.

the Daily Herald in November 1923 complained that the political news in BBC bulletins had covered the Conservative and Liberal Parties but completely overlooked the Labour Party.(104) Recognising the justice of the complaints being received about this 'bias' the Director of Programmes, A.R.Burrows, requested that Reuters should give 'as near as possible equal attention' to the three parties.(105) The essential problem was the BBC's dependence on Reuters and the news agencies for its news bulletins. Thereafter complaints of unequal coverage of the Labour Party's statements and speeches on political issues of the day occasionally arose, and there is evidence to suggest that there was some justification for them. In a report on political broadcasting for the Labour Postmaster General, Reith revealed that in the year before the General Election of 1929 coverage of speeches of Conservative Ministers and supporters of the Government, calculated in lines of script, was more than double that for the Labour and Liberal parties combined. The news bulletins, Reith assured Lees-Smith, were carefully edited and balanced by the BBC News Editors^r, but it was only natural, he argued, that the Government of the day should make more public appearances and have far greater news value than leaders of other parties.(106) Under Reith's guidance this policy was maintained throughout the 1930's, inadvertently cultivating expectations which created problems for the Corporation. As only the Labour Party held political meetings on Sundays, the coverage of political news on that day was usually confined solely to Labour speeches, provoking a minor storm of protest at BBC bias in favour of the main Opposition Party. Nevertheless, for the whole of the particular week in question, attention was drawn in news bulletins to Government and Opposition speeches in the ratio of 5:2.(107)

Labour leaders gradually became aware that the BBC was not entirely a free agent in the compilation of news bulletins. But this was not before they had made attempts to assist the Corporation in its-

104. Daily Herald, 21 November 1923.

105. BBC N.PB., Burrows to S.Carey Clements, 21 November 1923.

106. Ibid., P.G., Reith to Lees-Smith, 30 October 1929.

107. Ibid., N.PB., Home News Editor, 'Sunday News - Political Speeches', 24 March 1938.

political coverage to ensure more equal treatment. Lansbury was convinced that Labour was subject to unfair treatment in radio news:

Whenever I listen-in I am always struck by the tendencious character of the political news and the Trade Union and Labour news. The inflexion of the announcer's voice, the emphasis of certain words which newspaper men know so well how to use when putting a tendencious statement in their papers, all seem to me to show that those who control the BBC consider it their duty to support whatever Government is in power. I think that this is more obviously so when Governments which are not Labour Governments are in office. (108)

Expressing his concern to the Corporation he had, in conversation with Reith, been encouraged to send manuscripts of his speeches on important occasions to the BBC in advance. Hearing the Prime Minister's speech summarised in the early evening bulletin Lansbury immediately dispatched a copy of his own speech, to be delivered that evening, for inclusion in the 9-30 p.m. bulletin. Not originating from the news agencies, the material could not, of course, be included, and Reith's subsequent letter to Lansbury explaining this conveys his acute embarrassment over the affair.(109) The experience gave Lansbury a deeper insight into the problem of gaining equitable coverage of Labour speeches:

On the question of speeches.....the BBC take it for granted that the Government's case should be much more fully stated than that of the Opposition....The BBC has no reporters of its own.....and therefore must be dependent on agencies. As these agencies in the main supply Tory and Liberal newspapers, it is not to be expected that they will supply the BBC with full information as to the Opposition view of any particular aspect of the Government's policy. (110)

With the development of news collection by the BBC's own reporters in 1936 a similar opportunity arose to test the good intentions of the

108. TUC GC National Joint Council Minutes, 25 October 1932; Labour Magazine, November 1932, p.293.
109. BBC P.G.; Lansbury to Reith, 17 October 1932; Reith to Lansbury, 18 October 1932.
110. Labour Magazine, November 1932, p.294; BLPES Lansbury Papers vol.10, f 283, Lansbury to Reith, 20 October 1932.

Corporation and W.W.Henderson of the Labour Party Publicity Committee invited the Home News Service to report on the Party's Annual Conference. The invitation was declined.(111)

A continual source of frustration and resentment was a conviction that, despite claims of balance and impartiality, the BBC's news was biased, misrepresenting Labour views. Fenner Brockway complained to F.W.Ogilvie, Reith's successor, that the broadcast report on the debate on the Munich Agreement had given a totally false impression of the views of James Maxton and John McGovern. Both had been critical of Government policy, yet in the report 'nothing was produced except their commendation for the Prime Minister'.(112) Of the complaints about misrepresentation, the attitude of the Labour Party is best revealed in the correspondence between the Corporation and Morgan Jones. Jones wrote to Reith objecting to a report on proceedings in the House of Commons in which he took part. The BBC employed independent commentators of national stature, such as Wickham Steed, to provide parliamentary reports; and Lansbury had already made clear his serious doubts as to the impartiality of Steed and his colleagues.(113) Jones took exception to several aspects of the report: comments on his manner in delivering his speech; the implication, by juxtaposition with a comment on another speech, that Jones was not 'rational', conveying the impression that he was 'a ranting, raving fool'; and lastly

the utter disregard shown concerning the Labour Party's attitude to the question under discussion in the Housethe Labour Party....was actually discussed without one word as to its point of view in this vital matter. (114)

This particular issue remained unresolved, with Jones receiving assurances from Reith, yet finding exactly the same thing occurring again.(115) The episode seemed to confirm what had already been widely believed for years, namely that speeches by members of the Government were given

111. BBC News. Labour Party., for the correspondence on this matter.
112. Ibid., Policy. Political Broadcasting. Parliamentary Reporting., Brockway to Ogilvie, 1 December 1938. (Hereafter, 'P.PR.')
113. Labour Magazine, November 1932, p.295. Even the news-readers found it difficult to steer clear of 'interpretation'. See L.Mitchell, Leslie Mitchell Reporting..... (London, 1981), pp.98-9.
114. BBC P.PR., Jones to Reith, 15 November, 4 December, 10 December 1934. Emphasis in the original.

undue prominence; that speeches by Labour MPs were usually overlooked; and that where they were covered, 'instances of bias and misplaced emphasis' ensured that bulletins were 'weighted against the Labour movement'.(116)

The General Strike had already demonstrated that at moments of crisis or national tension BBC news was suspect. The TUC General Council had issued a warning on the 1 May, two days before the Strike was due to start, that the BBC would be commandeered, and advised people not to rely on broadcast statements. Subsequent events confirmed these fears. In the absence of almost all national daily newspapers and many local ones the News Service of the BBC assumed a particular importance in informing people as to what was happening, quelling false rumours, spreading calm and maintaining morale. Placed in an impossible position during an exceptional emergency, Reith struggled to preserve the independence and integrity of the Company; and he convinced the Baldwin Government that the BBC could best serve the country if it was free of direct State control. Reith strove to give listeners 'authentic impartial news of the situation', and personally vetted 'every item of every bulletin'.(117) These bulletins were generally reliable, and there was no attempt to fabricate or distort news. Messages from the TUC General Council were included in news bulletins throughout the nine days; speeches by Labour leaders were quoted; articles from the British Worker were summarised; and a clear distinction was made between news from press agencies and official announcements from the office of the Chief Civil Commissioner.(118) But the presence of the Government in the background was unmistakable. Beatrice Webb noted in her diary that

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115. BBC P.P.M., Jones to Coatman, 14 January 1935. Similar complaints were made periodically throughout the decade. See for example, ibid., P.G., Middleton to Reith, 16 March 1938.
116. Ibid., P.G., Whitley to Lansbury, 14 November 1932; National Joint Council to Whitley, 22 November 1932.
117. Cited, A.Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting op.cit., p.365, Reith to Senior Staff, 15 May 1926; C.Stuart (ed.) The Reith Diaries op.cit., p.93, Diary entry for 5 May 1926.
118. J.Symons, The General Strike (London, 1959), p.180; M.Morris, The General Strike (Harmondsworth, 1976), p.244.

'directly the news began' it was clear that 'the BBC had been commandeered by the Government'.(119) Lacking news-gathering experience, the Company frequently gave inaccurate reports of strikers returning to work. These reports were corrected by the union organisations in the areas concerned, and the BBC was apparently informed, but such corrections were not broadcast.(120)

The use of the Company as a Government information service was in itself unacceptable to Labour leaders. But the belief that much of the information which was being broadcast in the news bulletins was inaccurate, and had to be corrected by the British Worker, coupled with the knowledge that a vast number of people listened to the BBC as their sole source of information and, trusting the veracity of the bulletins, relied on them to find out 'what was happening', revealed the awesome power which was at the disposal of Labour's political opponents.(121) Moreover, in some cases, local strike committee broadsheets were compiled using radio news bulletins as a source of information, despite repeated warnings and regular denials of statements in BBC news.(122)

Complaints to the Company at the time appear to have had little effect: Reith was able to convince Labour politicians that he 'was not entirely a free agent'.(123) The sense of grievance which arose was felt deeply.(124) Its intensity gradually diminished as Labour leaders realised that no broadcasting organisation could remain completely immune to Government pressure in such circumstances.(125)

119. M.Cole (ed.), Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1924-1932 op.cit., pp.91-2.

120. J.Symons, op.cit., pp.180-1.

121. The role of the BBC during the General Strike is examined in detail in A.Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting op.cit., pp.360-84; and M.Tracey, The Production of Political Television in Britain (London, 1977). For Reith's own account, see Into the Wind op.cit., pp.107-113.

122. J.Symons, op.cit., p.175; E.Burns, The General Strike, May 1926, Trades Councils in Action (London, 1926), pp.156-7.

123. C.Stuart (ed.), The Reith Diaries op.cit., p.96, Diary entry for 10 May 1926; J.C.W.Reith, Into the Wind, op.cit., p.110.

124. PRO MacDonald Papers 30/69/8, Diary entry for 10 May 1926; E.Wilkinson, Radio Times, 28 May 1926; 'Broadcasting Policy', LPAR 1935, pp.303-4.

125. A.Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting op.cit., p.378.

In fact such a view had been expressed during the Strike. 'In a news-less world', Robert Lynd commented, 'Governments must inevitably be almost omnipotent'.(126) Nevertheless, the underlying suspicion remained, a dormant influence which, during a moment of national crisis in 1931, was reactivated, and the memory of BBC news during the Strike served, retrospectively, as further evidence of the BBC's complicity in support of Labour's political opponents.

Initially the reporting of election news in news bulletins provided further evidence of a bias which Walter Citrine of the TUC described as merely a 'replica' of the press bias against Labour.(127) The very first election in which the BBC played some part prompted Ramsay MacDonald to complain that the Company was being unfair in providing news of Conservative and Liberal speeches but nothing relating to Labour candidates.(128) The coverage of election speeches in news was a thorny problem for the BBC. As E.C.Henty of the Talks Department observed:

We have found that the Conservative speeches are reported by the Agencies very much fuller than the Labour speeches, presumably owing to the fact that the Agencies cater mainly for Conservative newspapers.

So often the only extracts from Labour speeches reported are vitriolic remarks about Conservative or Liberal leaders, which we have had to omit. (129)

Calculated in terms of the number of lines of news broadcast for each main political party, the bare statistics for the period 9 April to 22 May 1929, Conservative 276, Liberal 226, Labour 204, reveal a degree of imbalance in coverage.(130) This was in part due to the Labour Party having started its election campaign much later than the other; and the difficulties under which the BBC News Department was operating, identified by Henty, were not fully appreciated by Labour at this time. In order to pre-empt criticism in 1931 the BBC confined news coverage of election statements almost entirely to summaries of

126. New Statesman, 8 May 1926, p.103; 15 May 1926, p.117.

127. Lord Citrine, Men and Work (London, 1964), p.269.

128. The text of MacDonald's complaint is given in an undated, incomplete, unsigned memorandum on the coverage of election speeches (presumably written for Reith, c.8 December 1923), BBC Policy. Political Broadcasting. General Election Broadcasting. (Hereafter, 'P.GE.')

129. BBC N.PB., Henty to Reith, 23 May 1929.

the manifestoes of the main parties and the TUC. From the point of view of labour the imbalance was just as evident however; and the statistical evidence, 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ pages devoted to pro-National Government statements, and 6 pages to statements from the TUC, ILP and the Labour Party, lends support to their claim.(131) Moreover, the TUC and the Labour Party took strong exception to

the partisan advice given over the wireless on the eve of the poll by the announcer of the news bulletin. (132)

In urging electors to vote the announcer had, in the Labour view, used the campaign slogan of the National Government; and Attlee, conscious of the 'tendenciousness' of news bulletins in 1931, felt it necessary to remind Reith of this embarrassing episode in the approach to the 1935 General Election.(133)

In evidence put before the Ullswater Committee the National Council of Labour stressed the unsatisfactory nature of BBC news bulletins and argued that it was the duty of the BBC 'to present news impartially and objectively', using their own reporters to supplement the service provided by the news agencies.(134) Whether or not such criticisms exercised an influence on BBC policy is difficult to determine. But changes were introduced in 1936 along these lines and suggested by Attlee in his Reservation to the Ullswater Report.(135) Thereafter, there appears to have gradually emerged a general satisfaction with BBC news. George Audit, the Daily Worker's radio correspondent, normally highly critical of virtually all aspects of BBC policy and output, praised the News Department.(136) In March 1938 a Labour

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130. BBC N.PB., Henty to Reith, 23 May 1929.
131. Ibid., P.GE., Memorandum, 'General Election, October 1931', n.d.
132. Ibid., Statement by the General Council of the TUC and the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party, 10 November 1931; 'Report on the General Election', LPNEC National Executive Committee, 10 November 1931.
133. BBC P.GE., Attlee to Reith, 17 October 1935.
134. 'Broadcasting Policy', IPAR 1935, pp.307-8.
135. Cmd. 5091 (1936) Report of the Broadcasting Committee, Mr. Attlee's Reservation, p.50.
136. G.Audit, 'Reith over Britain', Daily Worker, 13 May 1936, p.4.

Party deputation to the Corporation paid tribute to the 'admirable quality' of news bulletins, noting that 'it was not contended that any bias was shown in the news bulletins'.(137) Interestingly, between 7 and 25 February 1939 correspondence in The Times on the reliability of BBC news prompted the Talks Department to consider a broadcast on the subject. The Director of Talks however advised against it, believing that the allegation being made against BBC news, namely that it was 'Left' in tendency, would be 'harmful in its effect on the prestige of the Corporation'.(138)

The magnanimity displayed by the Labour Party was as much a measure of the Party's tolerance in these years as it was a sign of the considerable improvements in the BBC's News Service. The Party's appreciative attitude was anchored in a conviction that given all the problems which could arise in the work of the BBC the situation could be far worse than it was at that moment. Dealing with the BBC month by month evinced amongst Labour politicians a genuine sense of gratitude that the BBC's role was in many respects so satisfactory; and even where aspects of BBC policy became sources of dispute, there was a general assumption that the BBC was, unlike the film industry, receptive to the persistent pressure of a reasoned argument which was so evidently just. Yet Labour's eventual satisfaction with the Corporation's news bulletins belied a residual fear amongst the movement's leaders that the BBC could wreak havoc with the Party's political fortunes. The bitter experiences of the General Strike and the 1931 General Election were responsible for a profound mistrust of the BBC's putative role at moments of national crisis; and a palpable undercurrent of suspicion can be discerned in most Labour commentary on the Corporation.(139) This suspicion was informed by the difficulties encountered in trying to secure equality of access to the airwaves for general political broadcasts and electioneering. Typifying Labour feelings,

137. BBC P.G.E., Record of a meeting between a Deputation from the Labour Party and a Committee of the Board of Governors and the Director General, 30 March 1938. See also, for example, New Statesman, 1 October 1938, p.481.
138. BBC Talks. Debates and Discussions., R.Maconachie to B.Nicolls, 28 February 1939.
139. Labour Organiser, November 1936, p.204; Cooperative News, 14 July 1939, p.14.

Herbert Morrison complained in 1939:

I think the BBC has a very distinct tendency to broadcast Ministers on a large number of occasions without any corresponding consideration for members of political parties opposed to the Government. (140)

Similarly, Sidney Webb encapsulated the Labour view of the difficulties which the movement faced during elections:

The broadcasting service, a piece of Government machinery, was, without any nice regard to fairness between the combatants, used day after day to immense effect, the air becoming thick with all manner of insinuations aimed at producing panic among the indiscriminatory electors. (141)

The problems involved in obtaining equality of access to broadcasting facilities were never fully resolved in this period, and proved a constant source of frustration for Labour politicians. Labour's response to this issue is discussed in Chapter Ten, which examines the movement's attempts to secure equitable treatment in the broadcast of party political talks.

140. BBC Policy. Political Broadcasting. Ministerial Broadcasts., Morrison to Ogilvie, 27 January 1939. (Hereafter, 'P.MB.')

141. S.Webb, 'What happened in 1931: A Record', Political Quarterly, January-March 1932, pp.11-12.

Chapter Five: EARLY ATTEMPTS TO USE FILM 1928-1932

The development of the use of film by the Labour movement in the 1930's can only be fully understood in the context of early attempts to show and produce films between 1928 and 1932. These attempts had very specific origins within left-wing sections of the movement - the Communist Party and its satellite groups, and the Independent Labour Party. It is necessary therefore to examine the policies of the Communist International, and, briefly, political and cultural developments in Germany and the Soviet Union, since they had a direct bearing on the evolution of Labour film activities in Britain. Two organisations in particular were responsible for initiating film propaganda as a political weapon within the Labour movement, the Workers' International Relief and the Friends of Soviet Russia. Their work was designed to generate class solidarity and mobilise interest in and support for the Soviet Union. No organisational initiative directly harnessing their work to Comintern strategies has been discovered. But in so far as these agencies were controlled by Communist Party fractions within their leaderships, it is highly probable that such links were there. The principal source for the establishment of the first Labour film group, the London Workers Film Society, was a group of Communist Party members, led by Ralph Bond and Ivor Montagu. But the Society also had its beginnings in the 'film art' movement, the broader interest amongst the literati in Soviet society, and in the interest in politically controversial films which arose from the censorship of two Soviet films, Battleship Potemkin and Mother.

There is little primary source material for the Workers' International Relief (WIR) and the Friends of Soviet Russia (FOSR). In the latter case the records were destroyed nearly thirty years ago. For the WIR it is not clear what their fate has been. Probably they never existed as a 'complete' archive, but were jettisoned when no longer needed for administrative purposes. Principal characters in the organisation have proved unable to help. Isabel Brown, for

example, who was the National Secretary, has no personal papers or documentary material relating to the WIR. Similarly, for the London Workers Film Society and its distribution company Atlas Films, no organisational records have survived, and the leading figures in these bodies, Ralph Bond and Ivor Montagu, have no personal collections of relevant material. The same is also true of the Masses Stage and Film Guild; and the archive of the Independent Labour Party has in this respect proved almost totally barren. Leading participants, such as Lord Fenner Brockway, have nothing in their papers of value for the Guild. Consequently, there is a heavy reliance in this chapter on the journals of the period and interviews with participants. Where possible, this material has been matched with documentation arising from the work of other organisations, such as the London County Council and the British Board of Film Censors. There are therefore unavoidable gaps in the story, and at certain points conclusions can only be regarded as provisional.

1.

The first attempts by sections of the Labour movement in Britain to use film for political purposes arise from the activities of the Workers' International Relief and the Friends of Soviet Russia. Both of these organisations based their work on the policies of the Communist International, the British section of which was the Communist Party of Great Britain. Workers' International Relief was founded in Berlin in September 1921 on the instructions of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI). Its functions were to publicise the gravity of the famine which was sweeping the Volga area of Russia, organise relief, and generally mobilise the sympathy of the world. Other relief organisations, notably the American Relief Association under Hoover's chairmanship, and the Council for Russian Relief, were already active. But the WIR (also known as International Workers' Aid) was established to introduce a more political element into the organisation of relief. Under the inspiration of its Director, Willi Muenzenberg, the WIR adopted the technique of persuading workers to assist in such a way as to become emotionally involved in the cause: they were asked to donate money, food, clothing, machinery - even the products

of their factories, not as an act of charity, but as a gesture of international solidarity with the Russian people suffering the famine.(1) Its considerable success, in terms of raising money and other forms of relief, and in terms of the propaganda sustained through the operation, derived to some degree from the use of films. As soon as news of the extent of the catastrophe became known the Soviet authorities organised the production of three films, one of which, The Famine in Russia filmed by the League of Nations official Fridtjof Nansen, and consisting entirely of actuality footage, was made specifically for foreign audiences and was

perhaps the most devastatingly real and frightening of the three films. It was the one film made in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution that was shown throughout the world without a word of political protest. (2)

The value of the WIR to the Communist International was emphasised with its expansion after the famine crisis had subsided: sections were set up throughout western Europe to help workers in distress, provide relief for workers engaged in industrial struggle, and promote international solidarity. Confronted with widespread poverty, distress and illiteracy amongst the urban and peasant populations alike, the Soviet sections of the WIR set up a film department and, commensurate with programmes of economic reconstruction, engaged in film production

to help the WIR in its chief tasks of providing bread, tools and instruction for the people, for the film, even more than the school and the theatre, literature and art, was indispensable in educating the Russian peasants. (3)

1. R.N.Carew Hunt, 'Willi Muenzenberg', in D.J.Footman (ed.), International Communism (London, 1960), pp.75-6.
2. J.Leyda, Kino. A History of the Russian and Soviet Film (London, 1973), p.157. The film was shown in London at St.George's Church, Bloomsbury.
3. The Workers' Red Cross: The Work of the Workers' International Relief in the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics: Report of the English and French Delegations of the WIR on the Productive Enterprises of the WIR in the USSR (London, n.d., ?1925), p.12. (Hereafter, 'The Workers' Red Cross'.)

After forming a contract with Russ the WIR inaugurated a programme of film production, and in 1924 formed Mezhrabpom-Russ, with the WIR holding a 65% share in the company, and maintaining

for its entire production.....constant collaboration with the Commissariat for Public Instruction..... (4)

Outside the Soviet Union the WIR's activities were assigned considerable significance. Assisted by Moscow and Comintern funds, Willi Muenzenberg had, by 1924, set up WIR sections in 22 countries, predominantly in Europe, but also in Japan and Australia. The British section had nine groups based in Portsmouth, Cardiff, London, Doncaster, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh and Glasgow.(5) By 1926 Muenzenberg owned or controlled, through Aufbau an umbrella organisation, a number of enterprises, including two daily newspapers and a weekly magazine. In February of that year he founded, via Aufbau, Prometheus-Film 'to distribute and exhibit Soviet films in Germany'; and Berlin rapidly became 'the gateway for Soviet films into the outside world'.(6) The WIR, with its executive offices there under Muenzenberg's control, developed into a major Comintern front organisation, whose public activities were geared to the provision of relief and the promotion of international working-class unity.(7) It should be noted however that despite, or rather because of its status within the Comintern the WIR appears to have operated largely beyond the confines of the parent organisation. Muenzenberg, as head of the WIR, worked not for a Comintern Section, but for the 'OMS', the International Relations Department, which Krivitsky, the Soviet Chief of Military Intelligence, considered to be 'the heart of the Comintern'.(8) He managed to maintain a remarkable degree of independence from the Executive Committee of

4. Ibid., p.13. 'Mezhrabpom' was the acronym for the Russian words for 'International Workers' Aid', Mezhdunarodnaya Rabochaya Pomoschch. A number of films had been made by the end of 1925, including Peter the Great, The Fall of Satan, Miracle of the Soldier, Five Years in Soviet Russia, Father Frost, Aelita, His Call, The Station-Master and Chess-Fever.
5. Workers' International Pictorial, November 1924, p.11. Typical of Muenzenberg productions, this journal was the organ of the British Section of the WIR.
6. R.Taylor, Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany (London, 1979), p.150.
7. G.Nollau, International Communism and World Revolution (Westport, Connecticut, 1975), p.155.
8. W.G.Krivitsky, In Stalin's Secret Service (New York, 1939), p.79.

of the Comintern, of which he was a member, both for himself, the WIR and a number of organisations which he set up between 1921 and 1937.(9)

As for the British Section of the WIR, there is insufficient evidence to be able to draw firm conclusions, but it would seem that it had a measure of support within the mainstream of the Labour movement. Officials of the British Joint Labour Aid Committee of the Workers' International Russian Relief, for example, included George Lansbury and John Bromley, neither of whom was noted for his radical politics.(10) The WIR in Britain was

Devoted to spreading information about Russia....[and] the institutions and conditions in that country;[to persuade people of the] necessity of bending every effort to help fight the consequences of the Russian Famine and helping the Russian workers build the First Workers' Republic on a sure and firm foundation. (11)

By April 1924 a shift of emphasis in the work of the British Section occurred, corresponding to changes in the wider organisation. The work of the WIR

has been reoriented to concentrate upon the relief of the hunger and distress among the workers in Germany... (12)

and to promote international solidarity with the Soviet Union. The British Section was to help workers in distress in Britain, but its main focus of activity resided in Germany and Russia. In so far as this determined WIR policy in Britain, it can also be said to provide the basis for the coordination of Muenzenberg's activities in Germany with British operations. Insufficient information on this relationship

9. G.Nollau, op.cit.; A.Koestler, The Invisible Writing (London, 1954), pp.194 ff.
10. Soviet Russia Pictorial, January 1924, p.4. This journal was the predecessor to Workers' International Pictorial. For details of the activities of the WIR in Lancashire, see L.Webb, 'Autobiography' (typescript, 1957). A copy of this is to be found in the Working Class Movement Library, Manchester.
11. Soviet Russia Pictorial, January 1924, p.4.
12. Workers' International Pictorial, April 1924, p.2.

precludes any firm conclusions, but what evidence there is suggests that the British Section consciously operated as a part of a wider international movement. No doubt asserting some degree of independence from Berlin, the WIR in Britain nevertheless was influenced by developments in France and Germany, and guided by Congress decisions. Its Statutes and Rules, for example, state that it

shall carry on the work of the WIR in Great Britain in conformity with the decisions of the International Congress. (13)

The earliest report of WIR film activities is in the March 1924 issue of the journal Soviet Russia Pictorial, revealing that Shapurji Saklatvala addressed a meeting in Edinburgh in January at Pringles Picture House, at which a film was screened. In August 1924 the magazine advertised that the WIR had a number of films dealing with its work, and, in addition, Scenes in Soviet Russia, Vorovsky's Funeral, Polikushka, The Freemasons, Miracle of the Soldier, Ivan and 'others', including 'art films' dealing with Russian life. It invited Working-Men's Clubs, Miners' Lodges, Labour Parties and Cooperative Societies which possessed halls to inform them as to whether films could be shown there, suggesting that plans be made for showing films in the autumn to raise money for relief work during the winter. By November 1924 Polikushka was made available in Britain by the WIR for commercial exhibition to raise funds, but the British Section was 'loathe to leave it wholly to capitalist exhibitions', and urged trade unions and cooperative societies which had suitable rooms to show it.(14) The following year general interest within the WIR in the use of film increased, and the International Congress of the WIR in Paris

paid special attention to the results obtained by the French organisation uniting thousands of individual and collective members, running a cinema organisation, a library, and a workers' pictorial with a good circulation. (15)

13. Workers' International Relief British Section: Statutes and Rules (London, n.d., ?1924). (Hereafter, 'Statutes and Rules'.)
14. Workers' International Pictorial, November 1924, p.5. Polikushka was the first Soviet film to be shown by the Film Society, and the copy used was the well-worn print loaned by the London Branch of the WIR.
15. Ibid., May 1925, p.5.

There was also by this time considerable interest in Soviet culture and art within the circles of the British left, and its significance for the Labour movement. From 1925 onwards the level and intensity of the discussion progressively increased, reflecting the 'proletarian cultural revolution' heralded in the Soviet Union.(16) Not surprisingly this interest was present within the WIR. One delegate to the 1925 Conference of the British Section, held in Battersea in April, noted that

here in Britain we have not yet learned to socialize art, music and the theatre. These are still the playthings of the capitalist and the bourgeoisie. (17)

Another observed:

Music, pictures and the theatre - Capitalism has filched the lot, and made them into expensive toys to amuse its well-fed leisure. But it looks as if the workers are going to get a bit of their own back shortly. Already the Russian workers have socialised Art and put it back where it belongs - among the people. (18)

and an editorial in the WIR's journal pursuing this theme thundered:

The power of the press was never greater. The ability of the Great Newspapers to promulgate just the particular lie which suits them, and whose ends they serve, grows daily greater than ever..... and in its work it is supplemented by the capitalist controlled cinema.....Guns can be met by - other guns. But to beat the Capitalist Press and pictures Labour must develop Press and pictures of its own. (19)

It was therefore essential that 'proletarian artists, writers and all interested in the cultural side of the workers' movement', should be encouraged to join the WIR.(20) Such views crystallised sentiments

16. See, for example, the numerous articles in Plebs, the monthly journal of the National Council of Labour Colleges, which include translations of Soviet work on the subject, notably those of Anatoli Lunacharsky, Commissar for Public Instruction.
17. Workers' International Pictorial, May 1925, p.5.
18. Ibid., p.8.
19. Ibid., p.11.
20. Statutes and Rules, op.cit., p.3.

widely held within the Labour movement. There was, as has been shown in section one of this thesis, a mistrust of the 'mass media', combined with a growing and self-conscious desire within the left-wing of the movement to build up a 'workers' culture' in opposition to what was conceived as the 'bourgeois' culture 'peddled' by the educational system and the media. Increasingly this assertion of the independent identity of the working class was posed in terms which required the use of the press, radio and cinema by the working class for its own purposes. One of the most important of which was, as the Editorial cited above recognised, the need to counter the capitalist media 'conspiracy', to assist the political and social development of the Labour movement. Such reasoning was commonplace not only in Britain, but Germany and the USA, where, for example, workers' radio networks were flourishing.(21)

There is little evidence to suggest the scope of this early work. Nevertheless the first attempts by sections of the Labour movement in Britain to use film for political purposes are to be found in the activities of the Workers' International Relief. The WIR introduced Soviet films to working class audiences. More significantly, it did so within a specific political and cultural context. The Labour movement was sensitive to the hostility and 'manipulation' of the media, and to some extent receptive to Russian experiments in the 'socialisation' of art and culture, using these experiments as a model or source of inspiration for the affirmation of an authentic 'workers' culture' in Britain. While it functioned, the British Section of the WIR succeeded in building up a network of contacts with organisations in Germany, where the IR was a major political and cultural force.(22) The General Strike in Britain appears to have been a watershed however for the WIR. With the defeat of the Strike there was a drift away from political radicalism, and the Communist Party, and this must have had some effect on the WIR. It appears to have all but disappeared after 1926, and re-emerged in 1929. During this time the Friends of Soviet Russia, formed in 1927, appears to have tried to continue the film work initiated by the WIR, and laid the basis for the establishment of film distribution agencies in Britain closely related to the communist section of the

21. The Chicago Federation of Labor, for example, had its own radio broadcasting station, WCFL, from the mid-1920's onwards. Several European Labour movements were experimenting with radio networks, and by 1928 workers' radio thrived in most western and central European countries. See Trade Union Propaganda and Cultural Work, the Bulletin of the Agitprop Department of the Red International of Labour Unions, for details.

Labour movement.

The Joint British and French delegation of the WIR to the USSR had already observed, as early as 1925, that the Soviets recognised.

There was also an urgent need for films for exportation, in order to present a little of the truth about Soviet Russia to the workers of America and Europe. (23)

The formation of Prometheus-Film in 1926 by the WIR in Germany was designed to fulfil precisely that function, and in 1927 Weltfilm was set up to produce and distribute 'workers' films' for working class audiences through Labour organisations, workers' clubs and trade union and Communist Party branches in Germany, and was the first to popularise the use of 16mm film for such screenings.(24) Moreover, Mezhrabpom-Russ in Moscow devoted its resources to the production of films for foreign consumption, to be distributed via the WIR network, centred on Germany. As David Caute has noted, Muenzenberg

went into the film business in a big way.... His was the directing influence behind Meschrabpom-Filmgesellschaft, which employed four hundred people in its main studios in Moscow and sponsored such classics as The End of St. Petersburg, Mother, The Road to Life and Storm Over Asia. For such films the Prometheus-Filmgesellschaft acted as sole distributing agent in Germany: director, Willi Muenzenberg. (25)

Prometheus-Film embarked on a programme of joint productions with Mezhrabpom-Russ, their first, Superfluous People, being released in 1926; others included The Living Corpse and The Deserter. It also produced fiction films intended for a more commercial exhibition, ranging from themes of exploitation and misery (Hunger in Waldenburg), to social melodrama (On the Other Side of the Street). To reach such audiences Muenzenberg launched the Volksverband für Filmkunst, with the backing of a politically broad collection of intellectuals, writers and artists.(26) But these developments were not confined to

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22. J.Willett, The New Sobriety (London, 1978), pp.142 ff.
 23. The Workers' Red Cross, op.cit., p.12.
 24. R.Taylor, op.cit., p.150; R.Campbell, 'Film and Photo League, Radical Cinema in the 1930's', Jump Cut, no.14, March 1977, p.23.
 25. D.Caute, The Fellow Travellers (London, 1977), p.57.
 26. Close Up, May 1928, pp.71-5. See also D.Caute, op.cit., p.57.

Germany, as Rudolf Schwartzkopf, the managing director of Volksverband für Filmkunst revealed:

Outside Germany similar movements are afoot
We hope that in the near future it will be possible to
unite together the different national movements. (27)

Film was becoming an increasingly important aspect of WIR activity, and two of the principal sources for this emphasis were the 'proletarian cultural revolution' in the Soviet Union, and changes in policy of the Comintern, attendant upon the initiation of the 'third period' in Soviet global politics.

The cultural revolution in the USSR was officially inaugurated in 1925, and a series of Party Conferences on the arts specified the nature and dimensions of this transformation.(28) A wide body of opinion within the higher Soviet authorities already considered by 1925 that the cinema must be used by the State to promote Party policies - in particular to facilitate the development of the economy. In March 1928 the last of these Party Conferences, on the cinema, took a major decision: that the medium should assist in the work of the Party and the Soviet State to carry out the cultural revolution, the transformation of everyday life, and socialist reconstruction. In short, the cinema was to be closely associated with the Five Year Plan; and the Conference passed a resolution declaring that the film should, under the control of the Party, be 'the most powerful medium of communist enlightenment and agitation'.(29) Coinciding with this was, on the one hand, an increasing interest in the West in Soviet cultural experiments, and on the other, a Soviet 'export trade' in cultural artefacts, and prominent directors, actors, dancers musicians and writers were despatched to Europe and the USA to cultivate interest in and goodwill towards the Soviet Union.(30)

These developments were, in their later stages, in part a function of decisions taken at the 6th World Congress of the Comintern, July-September 1928. Comintern policies were by 1928 largely determined by and subject to power struggles within the Politbureau of the Communist

27. Close Up, May 1928, p.75. By early 1929 the Volksverband für Filmkunst was completely under communist control.

28. S.Fitzpatrick, 'Cultural Revolution in Russia 1928-32', Journal of Contemporary History, vol.IX, no.1, 1974, pp.33-52.

29. Cited, R.Taylor, op.cit., p.60.

Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Acceptance of 'Socialism in One Country' as the central strategy of the CPSU implied that the international proletariat, no longer possessing a revolutionary thrust, had a political responsibility to defend the Soviet Union against capitalism. From 1925 the development of Comintern Sections was important for Stalin principally in so far as they could assist the USSR; and the history of the Executive Committee of the Communist International was one of progressive subordination to the CPSU. By 1929 it was effectively under the control of Stalin's henchmen.(31)

The 'outstanding conclusion' of the 6th World Congress of the Communist International, reflecting Politbureau thinking, was, according to J.T.Murphy, a leading member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, that a period of increasing capitalist instability was approaching, that imperialist war was threatening, and that the fight against this war 'is the dominating issue of every day'.(32) The significance of this war resided, for the CPSU, in the probability that international antagonisms would inexorably degenerate into aggression against the Soviet Union. Dangerous though the world economic crisis was for the USSR, it also offered the possibility of a massive upsurge in class struggle. This in turn offered opportunities for challenging the dominance of Labour movements worldwide by social democratic leaders and ideas, by undermining their credibility and counterposing to their parliamentary approach the militant and revolutionary posture of the communist movement. Such reasoning provided the basis for the initiation of the Comintern policy of 'class against class', which attempted to build up mass revolutionary formations in direct opposition to the reformist organisations of the Labour movements of the West. The activities of one Comintern-controlled organisation, the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) give some

30. D.Caute, op.cit., p.53; L.Cohen, The Cultural-Political Traditions and Developments of the Soviet Cinema 1917-1972 (New York, 1974), pp.540-1.

31. G.Nollau, op.cit., passim.

32. Communist Review, August 1929, p.433. Stalin had concentrated on this theme at the 15th Congress of the CPSU in December 1927. See H.Dewar, Communist Politics in Britain (London, 1976), p.69; L.J.Macfarlane, The British Communist Party: Its Origins and Development Until 1929 (London, 1966), p.230.

indication of the extensive shift which communist agencies were prepared to make. From almost entirely political work at the point of production, in factories and workshops, emphasis shifted to more broad cultural and campaign work, in conjunction with such political agitation and propaganda, to promote the defence of the Soviet Union and build up a large body of opinion against war; and at the same time combine this with 'class against class' perspectives.

Formed in Moscow in 1920 to build independent revolutionary trade unions and split off militant elements from the social democratic International Federation of Trade Unions, RILU's work focussed almost entirely on 'industrial' questions. But its 4th Congress in 1928 resolved to organise mass trade union education work and

To organise and direct the workers' clubs and unity clubs, and to counter bourgeois cultural work by wholesome recreation and amusements, by arranging art evenings, concerts, cinematographs, plays, excursions, rambles, lectures on literature, art, natural history, etc., and making wide use of the radio.

Participation in the organisation of workers' choirs, musical and dramatic circles, and also the creation of various proletarian cultural-educational associations. (33)

An Agitation and Propaganda Department was accordingly established to assist the integration, within each Section, of industrial and cultural/educational work, and to coordinate this within the overall political strategy of the Comintern. Complaining that 'proletarian cultural work' had been neglected as a main channel for political activity, and that in cases where revolutionary organisations had attempted to do this they were working in isolation from each other, Heinrich Diamant, head of this department, asserted:

our tasks in the field of ideology are determined by the general tasks facing the working class at the present time. (34)

33. 'Regulations for Bureaus for the Directing of Educational Work, Initiated by the Trades Councils of Revolutionary Trade Union Organisations', Trade Union Propaganda and Cultural Work, no.1, October 1928, pp.2-3.
34. Ibid., no.2, November 1928, p.2; no.4, January 1929, pp.6-7; no.5, March 1929, p.1.

This attempt to broaden the basis of revolutionary trade union work and build up an authentic workers' culture within the field of operation of revolutionary trade union organisations was extended further with the formation of the International Workers' Theatre Movement (IWTM) in 1929 with the specific purpose of mobilising cultural workers (writers, musicians, artists, etc.) into a unified movement under the IWTM, and coordinating their activities with revolutionary trade unions through the Agitation and Propaganda Department of RILU.(35) These projects were successful. In so far as, by 1934 Diamant and Lozovsky, the Secretary-General of RILU and a member of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, had managed to establish 'international unions' of revolutionary writers (IURW), theatre (IURT), music (IURM) and cinema, the latter being subsumed within the IURT - with substantial influence in many western countries.(36)

There was therefore, as a direct result of the 'class against class' policy of the Comintern, a concerted attempt by the revolutionary organisations in Britain, Europe and the USA, to heighten the level of the 'class struggle', mobilise opinion against war, and generate a wider understanding of and goodwill towards the Soviet Union. A major element in this orchestration was the upgrading of educational and cultural work to build up an independent proletarian culture to provide greater access for revolutionary organisations to Labour and working class bodies and thereby afford facilities for communist education and instruction. In Britain, the Friends of Soviet Russia and Workers' International Relief were major channels for this activity. The WIR, for example, was considered on a par with the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, and took as the guide to the character of its work the decisions of the ECCI. As one senior member of the CPGB and the WIR observed:

The Sixth World Congress of the Communist International entrusted us with the task of raising the international consciousness and militancy of the working-class. The WIR can do excellent work in this direction....Class aid must be lifted to the international sphere. With it follows international education. (37)

35. 'The International Workers' Theatre', Trade Union Propaganda and Cultural Work, no.12, September 1929, pp.11-13; 'International Workers' Dramatic Union', ibid., no.14, November 1929, pp.12-13.
36. See, for example, Literature of the World Revolution, the organ of the IURW, and The International Theatre, organ of the IURT. Both are full of invaluable information on these developments.
37. L.Webb, 'The Political Importance of Relief Work', Communist Review, May 1929, p.309.

The 10th Plenum of the Communist Party of Great Britain clarified the significance of these bodies for the new 'tasks' of the Party:

The Party must link up all its campaigns, whether economic or political, with the struggle against the war danger, which remains the central point of all Party activity in the present period. The Party must, therefore, take up the struggle for the defence of the Soviet Union and against the anti-USSR and the anti-Communist policy of the MacDonald GovernmentThe achievement of the Soviet Union, the meaning of the Five Years Plan must be explained to the workers in order to enable them to grasp the relations between the construction of socialism in the USSR, and the successful development of the class struggle in capitalist countries. The Party must assist in the development of the Friends of Soviet Russia as a mass organisation..... much more guidance and support should be given to such sympathetic organisations as the FOSR, ICWPA, [International Class War Prisoners' Aid], the WIR, the Workers' Legion and the League Against Imperialism. (38)

The British Section of the Friends of Soviet Russia functioned to disseminate the truth about the Soviet Union, counter anti-Soviet propaganda, build fraternal solidarity between Russian and British workers, and mobilise British workers against the attempts by capitalism to destroy the USSR.(39)

There appears to have been close cooperation between the FOSR and the WIR, and a contemporary Soviet report reveals that WIR Sections specifically operated to assist the work of their respective FOSR organisations; and in the USA the WIR Section was known as the Friends of the Soviet Union.(40) There was a clear conflation of functions, and the two organisations, internationally, became principal channels for the distribution of Soviet films from Germany, France and elsewhere. As the official Soviet report of March 1929 referred to above records:

38. 'Tasks of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The 10th Plenum and the International Situation', Communist Review, September 1929, pp.532-4.
39. Russia Today, December 1932, p.4. The journal was the popular monthly of the FOSR, and claimed a circulation of 60,000 in November 1932. This is probably a massive exaggeration.
40. Cited, S.W.Sworakowski, The Communist International and its Front Organisations (Stanford, 1965), p.456. See also R.Campbell, loc.cit., p.23.

A special field of activity of the WIR is the production of proletarian movie pictures. For this purpose the WIR has its movie picture organisations in the USSR, Germany, Norway, America, France, Sweden, and other countries. The WIR has national sections in almost all countries. (41)

'By 1930 or a little later', film and photo sections of the WIR were also operative in Japan, Austria, Britain and Holland.(42) Amidst increasing controversy over the suppression or mutilation of Soviet films by the censorship bodies in Britain and other countries, the International Congress of Friends of Soviet Russia met to discuss 'ways and means of attaining concerted action in the fight against the war danger threatening Soviet Russia', and an international bureau was established for this purpose.(43) Shortly after this, the FOSR in Britain began to arrange film shows as part of its work. In The Country of Lenin was one of the first shown, in June 1928. A film record of an FOSR delegation from Britain to the 10th anniversary celebrations in Moscow of the Bolshevik Revolution, it had been impounded by Customs Officials but later released, and was given an exhibition in Tooting Cooperative Hall early in October 1928.(44) Thereafter the FOSR advertised the film (with two titles: Soviet Russia Today and A Journey to Soviet Russia) as available for hire by any workers' organisations for a fee of £3. The film had been passed by the BBFC, and could be shown 'in halls already fitted and licensed, such as Cooperative halls, Miners' Cinemas, etc.'. (45) Though information is scant it appears that from that point onwards FOSR branches began to show films as part of their routine activities. Glasgow FOSR arranged a show of Russian films in September 1930, Falkirk FOSR in December 1930 and January 1931; and by 1937 the use of films at meetings was a regular feature of many branches.

41. Cited, S.W.Sworakowski, op.cit., p.456.
42. R.Campbell, loc.cit., p.23.
43. Sunday Worker, 3 June 1928, p.9.
44. New Leader, 22 June 1928, p.13; Sunday Worker, 10 June 1928, p.7; 14 October 1928, p.9.
45. Sunday Worker, 25 November 1928, p.6. The film was also shown by branches of the Communist Party.

2.

By 1928-9 there was considerable interest in Soviet films from a number of sources. The Film Society had been trying to secure permission to show certain Soviet films, notably Battleship Potemkin, Mother and The End of St. Petersburg, and was engaged in a public controversy with the London County Council over its censorship rulings. The distributors of these films, Brunel and Montagu, Film Booking Offices and Pro Patria were involved in this wrangle. Similarly a group of art critics centred on Close Up, a prominent avant garde film magazine, were involved over the question of securing uncensored exhibition. Some Labour organisations, in particular the Independent Labour Party, provided political backing to the increasingly vociferous and self-righteous campaign promoted by this combination of interests, culminating in a sustained lobby against the political censorship of films. It was within this context that the first organisation of the Labour movement formed specifically to show and produce films was established.

The Federation of Workers' Film Societies (FWFS) was launched in late October 1929

In order to bring Russian and other working class films to audiences that cannot afford Film Society fees, and generally to arouse working class interest in films of special importance. (46)

In pursuance of these tasks, the FWFS set itself the following aims: to encourage the formation of local workers' film societies; to provide films and equipment for them; to offer general assistance and legal advice in their running; to encourage the production of films 'of value to the working class'; and to cooperate with other organisations having similar aims. (47) The first and leading member of the Federation was the London Workers' Film Society (LWFS), which opened its first season on 17 November 1929 with Two Days, Skyscraper Symphony and Garbage in Tooting Cooperative Hall with an audience estimated as 500. The response to the LWFS was 'magnificent' and 'several hundred members were secured in the first few weeks'. (48) In its first season the Society, with an annual subscription of thirteen shillings, gave nine shows. For its second, commencing September 1930, it gave approximately eight or nine shows; and for the period from September 1931 until its demise in March/April 1932 little information is available. Most of the films

46. Close Up, November 1929, p.438.

47. The Worker, 29 October 1929, p.7; Close Up, November 1929, p.438.

shown were of Soviet origin, though arrangements were made for an exchange of material with the German workers' film movement, allowing, for example, the exhibition of Jutzi's Hunger in Waldenburg at its second show, on 16 December 1929. The programmes were arranged to offer a digestible mix of 'heavy' and 'lightweight' films, with comedies included to add colour and make them more attractive.(49) Because of censorship problems there were considerable difficulties in not only showing particular Soviet films, but securing a permanent location for their exhibition. By March 1930 the London County Council had been persuaded to allow the LWFS to give a twice nightly performance once a month at the Scala Cinema in central London, but successive applications for permits to show uncensored and 'banned' films in cinemas licensed by the LCC were consistently rejected.(50) Only after a group of MPs, some of whom were members of the Society, lobbied the Council, was a concession granted, in May 1930, permitting bona fide film societies to exhibit uncensored films in premises which it licensed. Films which had been submitted to and rejected by the BBFC however, could not be shown by the Society.(51) The majority of exhibitors accepted BBFC rulings, and generally did not show films which the Board had refused to give a certificate. This was a particularly difficult obstacle to overcome in view of the Society's aim of reaching larger, working class audiences. According to Ralph Bond, the driving force behind the LWFS, 'we were determined to get some of our films into the commercial cinemas for a wider audience'.(52) The LWFS was consequently faced with the dilemma of wanting to secure commercial exhibition but reluctant to submit certain films to the trade censor should they, by being refused certificates, be disallowed private exhibition by the Society and subsequently by other members of the Federation. Opportunities for bypassing BBFC and LCC prohibitions on the private and public

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48. Close Up, January 1930, pp.67-8; R.Bond, 'Workers' Films: Past and Future', Labour Monthly, January 1975, p.27.
49. Daily Worker, 28 February 1930, p.11; R.Bond, loc.cit., p.28.
50. R.Bond, 'Acts under the Acts', Close Up, April 1930, pp. 278-83; ibid., November 1930, pp. 355-6.
51. LCC MP TMH, 27 May 1930. See also, D.Knowles, The Censor, the Drama, and the Film (London, 1934), pp.192-3, 199-205.
52. R.Bond, 'Workers' Films: Past and Future', loc.cit., pp.28-9.

exhibition of particular films existed in so far as other licensing authorities could be persuaded to permit exhibition within their areas of jurisdiction, irrespective of BBFC rulings, which had no legal authority; and occasionally the members of the Federation were successful. Banned in London The New Babylon was permitted in Liverpool. Battleship Potemkin, refused in London, was shown in Glasgow. Attempts were made in the London area to circumvent LCC proscriptions by moves to establish Workers' Film Societies in outlying districts, whose borough councils licensed local cinemas and halls; and by approaches to Labour controlled licensing authorities to grant permission for exhibition in cinemas licensed by them. The first to do so in the London area was West Ham Borough Council, which gave permission for Mother to be shown, and the Imperial Cinema in Canning Town booked the film for an exclusive week-long run.(53)

The widespread and enthusiastic response to the activities of the LWFS, and the rapid growth of provincial groups placed increasing demands on the London Society, and Atlas Films was established in March 1930 to import and register foreign films to ensure a regular supply, and distribute them throughout Britain on an organised basis. Bond had earlier been to Berlin and made arrangements with Weltfilm for the supply of Soviet and 'progressive' German films; and acquired the distribution rights in Britain for Atlas Films for 'most' Soviet films available.(54) There were other sources however for FWFS films: two small, entirely commercial organisations with no apparent political motivation regularly imported Soviet and continental films to Britain, Film Booking Offices and Pro Patria. Both supplied the Film Society with material, and the former had an option on most of the current Soviet productions available in 1928-9; although as a result of failing to meet its quota of British films Film Booking Offices abandoned its policy of importing Soviet films early in 1930. Lastly, Brunel and Montagu, 'the best editing and titling medium for foreign imports in the whole country'. Through Ivor Montagu's connections with the Soviet Trade Delegation in Berlin, and his contacts with Sovkino, the principal Soviet film organisation up to 1930, Brunel and Montagu introduced several Soviet and German films to Britain for exhibition by the Film

53. Daily Worker, 4 February 1930, p.10; 27 March 1930, p.8; 3 April 1930, p.8; Close Up, September 1930, pp.163-8; R.Bond, interview with B.Hogenkamp, Skrien, no.51 July/August 1975.
54. R.Bond, interview with B.Hogenkamp, op.cit.; Daily Worker, 27 March 1930, p.8.

Society and the FWFS.(55) There was therefore, as Bond revealed at the time, no real problem with the supply of Soviet films,(56) at least theoretically, and the LWFS generated much interest with its programme of Soviet material.

By the time of the first West End programme, at the Scala Cinema on 9 March 1930, which appropriately included Turin's Turksib and Workers' Topical News No.1, Atlas Films' first production, the Society had a membership, according to Bond, of 1200. The audience for the third show, 2 February 1930, reportedly numbered over 1000. The End of St. Petersburg, at the the fifth show, was screened before an audience of approximately 2000; and, as Bond recalls, there was a rapid response in the provinces, as people glamoured to see these films.(57) Workers' Films Societies quickly sprang up in other cities: Merseyside WFS, Cardiff WFS and Edinburgh Workers' Progressive Film Society were formed in February 1930; Bradford WFS in March; Manchester and Salford WFS in May; Glasgow WFS in September. Attempts were also made to establish societies in Sheffield, Birmingham, Newcastle, Middlesborough, Dublin, Dundee and St.Andrews. Though there is little information available on most of these groups, which, with the exception of Manchester and Salford WFS, had dissolved by the end of 1932, there is sufficient material to build up a sketch of their general activities.

The Glasgow WFS, surviving for one season (1930-1), gave monthly Sunday evening performances in the Louvre Cinema, Parkhead, showing almost entirely Soviet films. Its first exhibition, in a central hall, was Mother, and, put on for three days, it attracted a total audience, according to one report, of 12,000 people.(58) Despite a sizeable interest in 'workers' films' and a twelve shilling subscription, the Society succumbed to censorship and financial problems. That such an interest did exist in Glasgow is suggested by the appearance in late 1931 of the New Art Cinema Club, with a subscription of seven shillings and sixpence for ten shows. The Club showed mainly Soviet films and survived until January 1933; but it is uncertain whether the Club considered itself part of the workers' film society project, or (more likely) part of the 'unusual film movement'.

55. Sunday Worker, 30 December 1928, p.6; L.Montagu, With Eisenstein in Hollywood (Berlin, GDR, 1974), p.18; Programme Notes, The Film Society Programmes (New York, reprint, 1972), 21 October 1928, 10 November 1929, 5 January 1930.

56. R.Bond, 'First Steps Towards a Workers' Film Movement', Close Up, January 1930, p.68.

The Merseyside WFS was formed after a conference of 'socialist teachers' was prevented by local magistrates from seeing A Journey to Soviet Russia, the film made by the Friends of Soviet Russia. The Society apparently had a membership of 500 (with a subscription of ten shillings) and gave monthly performances on fifteen occasions, showing, as one organiser described, Soviet films in unlicensed halls

badly and uncomfortably it is true, with a single projector with its waits between reels, with a screen which gets itself into pleats, with hard seats on a level floor.... (59)

Other difficulties, notably hostility from the press and the cinema trade, and financial problems, jeopardised the development of the Society, but it appears to have survived, with the help of a local cooperative society, until 1932, and even commenced production of a 16mm 'documentary film' on Liverpool's dockworkers. This was eventually completed in 1933 and distributed by Kino Films under the title Liverpool: Gateway to Empire.

The Edinburgh Workers' Progressive Film Society, with a subscription of twelve shillings, gave its first performance before 250 people in Oddfellows Hall on 12 February 1930. It had over 100 'essentially working class members' within two weeks of its formation. A notable coup for the Society, which had 'an agreement with the local magistrates which protects it from interference', was its showing, despite an almost total prohibition throughout Britain, of Battleship Potemkin. (60)

The longest surviving of these societies, the Manchester and Salford, is also the one about which the most information is available.

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57. R.Bond, 'Workers' Films: Past and Future', loc.cit., p.28; R.Bond, interview with B.Hogenkamp, op.cit.; Daily Worker, 4 February 1930, p.10; 14 April 1930, p.8.
58. D.Allen, unpublished notes, Workers' Political Cinema in Scotland in the 1930's; R.Bond, 'Films and the Law', Close Up, September 1930, p.168. I am grateful to Mr. Allen for allowing me to use his research.
59. M.R.Roberts, 'Towards a Workers' Cinema in England', Experimental Cinema, no.4, February 1933, p.38; Daily Worker, 17 February 1930, p.6.
60. Daily Worker, 17 February 1930, p.6; New Leader, 2 January 1931, p.15; see also D.Allen, op.cit.

It was formed by Alfred Williams, Tom Kavanagh and other members of the South Salford Social and Democratic Land and Builders' Society, which had been established to buy buildings for use by local socialist groups. The organisation provided money for a film society to be set up as an extension of its own activities, and subsequently became a member of the Federation of Workers' Film Societies. Its purpose was 'to show and make films'. Known initially as the Salford Workers' Film Society, it was formed, as Alfred Williams explained, with the intention that

if we could get these Russian films.....in to trade union branches, and get trade union members talking about them, it would be a means of political education. Now that was my prime and only concern - using film as a means of political education. (61)

With over 400 members each paying a subscription of £1 the Society managed to remain solvent.(62) The original intention had been to attract workers, and although 'politically conscious workers were members' the majority were 'intellectuals' or members of the

professional classes.....who were sympathetic to the movement and liked to see these films..... constituting a pretty broad.....cross-section of the people that were interested in the socialist progressive movement. (63)

61. Alfred Williams, interview with Seona Robertson. The recorded interview is not at present available in transcript, but can be consulted at the North West Film Archive, Manchester Polytechnic. For a rather different view of the Society's origins, see E.Cordwell, Manchester and Salford Film Society: Twenty One Years (Manchester, 1951); 'Workers' Film Society', Labour's Northern Voice, April 1960.
62. Manchester Polytechnic. North West Film Archive, Cordwell Papers, Manchester and Salford Workers' Film Society Report 1930 - 1931; Report and Financial Statement, Year Ending 1932; Report and Financial Statement, Year Ending 1933. These Reports provide the only way of verifying claims as to the size of audiences at the performances given by these Societies. Using these financial statements it is clear that the MSWFS had a considerable membership. The inference can be drawn that it was possible for other Societies to attract similar memberships. In which case an audience of 500 for a single performance is probably not an exaggerated claim.
63. Manchester Polytechnic, Alfred Williams, interview, op.cit.

Performances, because of police pressure, were given in over eight different cinemas before a permanent location was found at the Rivoli cinema in Rusholme; and they were regularly given on Saturday afternoons between the early afternoon and the last performances. One of the consequences of this, as Williams explained, was that these took the form of an ordinary cinema programme - rather than a meeting:

occasionallysomeone would.....give a brief announcement but we didn't want to do anything that would interfere with the performance itself. We sort of relied upon the film to do the job. (64)

Allowing the film to 'do the job' was a common feature of much of Labour film activity, but this insertion of political films into a day's programme of commercial cinema was unusual, and indicative of the difficulties under which the Society operated, faced with unsympathetic Watch Committees in Manchester and Salford. The Society managed occasionally to show films on Sunday evenings in either cinemas or halls, and the audience consisted 'mainly of socialist organisations'. But, Williams revealed,

we never got to the stage of getting - that was my prime move - of getting these films into trade union branches. (65)

Despite efforts to build up a distribution network, the only real contact which MSWFS had was with Ralph Bond, who supplied all its films. Typical of its programmes were: 15 November 1930, Water and Waves, Glimpses of Modern Russia (a compilation of Soviet material by Ralph Bond), Harry and His Band, First Time in History and Two Days; 18 April 1931, Workers' Topical News (Atlas Films), Hunger in Waldenburg and The General Line. (66) By mid-1932 however the supply from Bond had virtually ceased:

all we could get was what I call arty films, arty crafty films, and that was no good to me - why, because I only wanted them for propaganda purposes. (67)

- 64. Manchester Polytechnic, Alfred Williams, interview, op.cit.
- 65. Ibid.
- 66. R.Cordwell, Manchester and Salford Film Society op.cit.
- 67. Manchester Polytechnic, Alfred Williams, interview, op.cit.

Thereafter the Society, dependent for its material on the Film Society network, began to lose its political thrust and became, after the departure of Williams and the more politically motivated members, increasingly oriented, under the influence of its secretary Reg Cordwell, towards film art, dropping 'workers' from its title and joining the Film Society movement.

As far as production was concerned there was from the beginning, because of widespread unemployment and poverty, an intention to 'get this on tape'. As Williams recalled:

Well, we realised the need to get it on film, to have some record of what was going on you see, and the need to let other people know what was going on see - that was the whole base of it. (68)

With little technical knowledge and no experience one member, Jack Brewen, shot some 16mm film in Rossendale 'of demonstrationsprocessions and protest marches'. The completed film was approximately 15 minutes long, and though 'the quality wasn't too hot....you could see what it was'. The film was shown to Society audiences, though with great difficulty, as it did not have its own 16mm projector. The expense involved, and the lack of basic technical knowledge, precluded further attempts at production.(69)

As suggested earlier, there were close links between the Federation of Workers' Film Societies and communist organisations. The FWFS was founded by a number of people politically active within the Communist Party or satellite groups: Ralph Bond, Ivor Montagu, Emile Burns, Henry Dobb, Eva Reckitt and 'some trade union lads'.(70) Burns, as a member of the Central Committee of the CPGB and National Secretary of the Friends of Soviet Russia, had recently been elected

68. Manchester Polytechnic, Alfred Williams, interview, op.cit.

69. Ibid.

70. R.Bond, 'Workers' Films: Past and Future', loc.cit., p.27.

to the International Bureau of the FOSR, which was entrusted, as already noted, with the task of coordinating action between and within FOSR Sections for the purpose of mobilising opinion in support of the Soviet Union.(71) Eva Reckitt was a Party stalwart who provided the funds necessary to launch the Federation.(72) Dobb, a CPGB member and cinema critic of the *Sunday Worker*, was an enthusiastic campaigner of long-standing for a 'workers' cinema'. Montagu, a central figure in the Film Society and the campaign against the political censorship of films, became a member of the CPGB in 1929, and quickly rose to prominence. By 1933 he had also assumed the position of Treasurer of the FOSR, which he maintained until 1937. Ralph Bond, member of the CPGB, former Secretary of the National Left-Wing Movement, and a member of the FOSR, was in an ideal position to organise the FWFS, having well established contacts with the official Soviet Press. Shortly after launching the Federation he became the official copyright holder for all Soviet photographs in Britain; acquiring at the same time distribution rights for Soviet films in this country.(73) Just as the American Section of the Friends of Soviet Russia established a film production unit from a workers' photo-league, and merged this with its own film distribution department, so the British FOSR, with an important photographic section, appears to have been involved in launching the Federation, a couple of months in advance of its American counterpart.(74) Finally, the presence, on the Provisional Council of the FWFS, of Willie Gallacher and Harry Pollitt, two of the most senior members of the CPGB, provided the Party with formal representation within the agency.(75)

The main activities of the FWFS correspond to a large degree with, or fall within the confines of the political strategies adopted by the CPGB. It will be recalled that the 'dominating issue'

71. Sunday Worker, 3 June 1928, p.9.

72. R.Bond, in an interview with the author, 2 June 1977.

73. Russia Today, March 1932, p.8.

74. R.Campbell, loc.cit., p.23.

75. H.Carter, The New Spirit in the Cinema (London, 1930), p.286.

for the CPGB in 1929-30 was the danger of international economic crisis leading to war breaking out, which would inevitably result in an attack on the USSR. Priority was to be given, firstly, to generating 'class mass action' in opposition to this drift into war, and in support of the Soviet Union. Secondly, to mobilising the anticipated increasingly militant sections of the working class around the National Minority Movement (NMM), the revolutionary trade union movement in Britain controlled by the Red International of Labour Unions. (76) Conscious of the 'conspiratorial' purpose of the media in preserving the status quo, and in particular of both the soporific effect of the cinema on working class audiences, and the anti-bolshevist hysteria which pervaded press and cinema, the FWFS was determined to use the cinema as a political weapon, not only in direct opposition to the commercial cinema, but as a means of mobilising political action and influencing general ideas. Soviet films therefore, because of their 'revolutionary' content (both in the sense of dealing with the overthrow of capitalism, and in presenting ordinary working people and their lives in a 'realistic' manner), and because of their use of 'montage' technique, were seen as capable of arousing class solidarity and militancy. At the same time it was expected that they would invoke a sympathetic attitude towards the Soviet Union by publicising the remarkable social and economic experiments which 'self-evidently' elevated the USSR to the vanguard of progress. Discussing some of these themes, Bond asserted:

The Cinema today is a weapon of the class struggle. So far this weapon has been the exclusive property of the capitalists. (77)

The cinema, he argued, has been used to obscure the real world by ignoring the realities of life, and

a plentiful supply of such dope keeps the workers' minds off the class struggle, of which the Soviet films are designed to make them aware.

.....we can and must fight capitalist influences in the Cinema

76. L.J. Macfarlane, The British Communist Party, op.cit., p.230. For information of the NMM and its relationship with RILU, see J. Mahon, Harry Pollitt (London, 1976), pp.171 ff; M. Woodhouse, E. Pearce, Essays on the History of Communism in Britain (London, 1975), pp.119 ff.
77. R. Bond, 'Labour and the Cinema', Plebs, August 1929, p.186.

by exposing, in a Marxist manner, how it is used as an ideological force to dope the workers. That can be done by exhibiting the films of the only country where the workers are the ruling class, and by making our own filmsto aid and encourage the workers in their fights against capitalism. (78)

Emphasis therefore was given to showing Soviet films. The London WFS advertised itself in the Daily Worker on the basis of their popularity: 'Russian Films - You can see them by joining the London Workers' Film Society'. (79) What evidence there is for provincial groups suggests that they considered their task in so far as they were to show films, to be mainly one of showing Soviet films. The Workers' Progressive Film Society in Edinburgh 'showed practically nothing but Soviet films'; the shows of the Glasgow WFS 'consisted entirely of Soviet films'; and for the Merseyside WFS:

The main policy will be to show all the Russian films as these become available, together with interesting films of working-class life from Germany and elsewhere. (80)

In so far as it was the London-based Atlas Films which distributed these films to the provinces most of those which provincial groups were likely to screen were screened by the LWFS. Nevertheless, these groups were vulnerable to 'cinema art' enthusiasts, and their involvement, as in the case of the Manchester and Salford WFS, tended to undermine the 'proletarian' programmes. As the MSWFS proclaimed in late 1932, after the demise of the London organisation:

Under no political control, its object is to bring before its members films of outstanding merit and films of profound educational and social import. (81)

78. Arthur West (Bond's pseudonym), Daily Worker, 21 March 1930, p.8.
79. Ibid., 7 March 1930, p.3. It is interesting to note the similarity of names of the two companies, suggesting that Weltfilm, the German supplier, was a model upon which the London group was based.
80. Ibid., 27 March 1930, p.8; 7 March 1930, p.3; 17 February 1930, p.6; Experimental Cinema, no.5, February 1934, p.58; D.Allen, op.cit.
81. Cinema Quarterly, Autumn 1932, p.4.

Lastly, it was precisely this dependence upon Soviet films which led to the dissolution of the Federation. In 1932 only two Soviet sound films were made available in Britain (The Road to Life and Alone). The supply of Soviet films 'virtually ceased', and, as Bond recalls,

Nobody wanted silent films anymore, and sound films of the type we wanted were just not available. So the movement was slowly dissolved. (82)

Apart from giving priority to Soviet films, the LWFS, at its first General Meeting, attempted to implement the decisions taken by RILU's Agitation and Propaganda Department in late 1929. RILU policy was to coordinate industrial and cultural activities as far as possible, around political nuclei within Labour organisations (that is, in Britain, sections of the National Minority Movement). The FWFS resolved

that every effort should be made to develop the Society on the basis of members and groups of members in the factories.(83)

Over a year later little had been achieved in this direction and meetings were convened with members of the NMM to discuss ways of extending the FWFS into the workplace.(84) The membership of the Federation from its inception to its gradual demise after March 1932 appears to have consisted largely of members of the CPGB, FOSR, NMM and other communist bodies such as the League Against Imperialism, together with left-wing sympathisers. There is however insufficient evidence available for the composition of the membership throughout the country, and therefore for the extent to which the attempt to build a foundation for the 'workers' film movement' at the point of production, in factories and workshops, was successful. The membership of the LWFS, and the audiences for its shows, appear to have been largely working class; similarly for Glasgow WFS. However, as is apparent from the membership of the Manchester and Salford WFS, there was no necessary basis for these societies within

82. Daily Worker, 6 February 1933, p.4; R.Bond, 'Workers' Films: Past and Future', loc.cit., p.29; R.Bond, S.Cole, 'Censorship, Workers' Movies, Popeye and Potemkin', Film and Television Technician, December 1975, p.6.
83. Daily Worker, 4 February 1930, p.10.
84. The Worker, 11 April 1931, p.6.

the working class, and where people did join them, they appear to have joined largely as individuals rather than as groups organised as local trade union branches or chapels. So far it appears that only one group of people organised as a trade union became affiliated to the FWFS. Formed in January 1929 'with the object of making propaganda films' the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries' Film Society was probably the only trade union film society in London at that time. By February 1930 it was a member of the FWFS and had produced a number of short experimental films. A measure of its artistic rather than political status is suggested by the list of speakers which it had arranged to address a film weekend school in March. This included John Grierson, Adrian Brunel, Henry Dobb, Oswald Blakeston, Ernest Betts and Stuart Davis. (85)

One source for speculation however is the character of the films produced by Atlas Films. From the beginning it was hoped to go into production, 'to aid and encourage the workers in their fights against capitalism', and as

the newsreel is the most potent form of capitalist propaganda through the medium of the cinema.
The production of a regular workers' newsreel to combat this propaganda is the obvious and the most immediately practical answer. (86)

Between March 1930 and October 1931 Atlas Films produced three 'workers' newsreels' covering events in Britain, compiled a 'documentary survey', Glimpses of Modern Russia, from Soviet material available in Britain, and produced an half-hour 'propaganda' film 1931 (also known as The Charter Film), all on silent 35mm film. The four authentic, indigenous productions were related specifically to either the activities of militant groups, or to particular campaigns based within the communist section

85. New Leader, 5 May 1929, p.16; Daily Worker, 12 February 1930, p.8. John Grierson: Film Officer, Empire Marketing Board and leading proponent of the 'documentary' film; Adrian Brunel: film director and founder member of the Film Society; Oswald Blakeston: experimental film-maker and a leading figure in the film-art movement; Ernest Betts: film critic; Stuart Davis: Manager, the Shaftesbury Avenue Pavilion - the pioneer cinema in London for the exhibition of 'art' films.
86. R. Bond, 'Labour and the Cinema', Plebs, August 1929, p.186; Daily Worker, 31 March 1930, p.8.

of the Labour movement. Workers' Topical News No.1, the first newsreel, was devoted entirely to a demonstration organised by the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM) on 'Unemployment Day' 6 March 1930 at Tower Hill in London, and the subsequent march to the Mansion House. The four minute film depicts a mass of demonstrators, a WIR food kitchen, Tom Mann speaking to the gathering, and the demonstrators marching; and it consists entirely of actuality footage with short series of shots, with little camera movement, interspersed with titles giving the briefest information. Workers' Topical News No.2, lasting twelve minutes, was a little more ambitious, recording in similar fashion two events. The coverage of the 1930 National Hunger March shows a number of scenes, some shot with warmth and humour, of marchers marching, eating, playing football, even having their hair cut, and of Wal Hannington, the irrepressible NUWM leader. Scenes of the marchers having arrived in London on April 30 provide a link with the second event, the May Day demonstration, which includes shots of speakers addressing the May Day meeting in Hyde Park, and of Mrs. Despard and the former MP Shapurji Saklatvala.

Both these films were cut and shown within three days of the events depicted, the first being shown on March 9 with Turksib; the second on May 4 with CBD and Berlin. One other issue of Workers' Topical News was produced, but has not survived. According to a Daily Worker report, it contained scenes of the Charter demonstration in Trafalgar Square, and the Lancashire weavers' dispute; and it was given its first screening on March 1 1931.(87)

Lastly, 1931 or The Charter Film, released in May 1931, was the first substantive attempt by a group within the Labour movement in Britain to produce a 'political propaganda' film. An FWFS conference convened to review the progress of the movement decided to embark on a more ambitious film production. Ralph Bond was instructed to

87. Daily Worker, 2 March 1931, p.4. B.Hogenkamp, Workers' Newsreels in the 1920s and 1930s pamphlet Our History no.68, 1977, p.34, 6ln., speculates that a fourth Workers' Topical News may have been made, but this is highly unlikely. Footage which survives indicates that someone was shooting film, but by that time Atlas was no longer in operation. Moreover, all the references to the productions of the Atlas film unit refer to three newsreels and the Charter film.

popularise filmically the Workers' Charter, the militant programme of the revolutionary workers. (88)

This programme was launched by the National Minority Movement as a last desperate attempt to establish its credibility and mobilise a revolutionary trade union opposition to the social democratic leaderships which dominated the Labour movement. The film discusses how workers are exploited through the rationalisation measures being introduced by employers, emphasises the imperialist character of British capitalism, and depicts

unemployed workers at the Labour Exchanges, and the slums where the workers' lives are contrasted with the luxury pursuits and wealth of the bourgeoisie.

.....The struggles of the colonial workers are cross-cut with those of the British workers and there is a symbolised sequence urging solidarity with the Soviet Union. Various shots of British workers in action, strikes, marches and demonstrations build up in a rising tempo to the fade out title..... (89)

The film, lasting 18-20 minutes, was 'entirely documentary' with 'colonial' and indoor factory scenes taken from other films; and it cost under £50 to produce.(90)

Clearly, therefore, Atlas Films was well attuned to the needs and priorities of the various sections of the communist movement in Britain. Its distribution work integrated with the campaigns of the CPGB and the FOSR; its production work was confined to subjects expressing working class 'opposition'. The newsreels were counterposed to the commercial newsreels, clumsily recording marches and demonstrations in contraposition to their 'royalty and sport', rejecting the 'utter worthlessness of their "news"'. Considering the commercial newsreel as 'primarily designed for the purpose of doping the public', Bond and his colleagues attempted to record what they considered to be the 'real' world for many workers, and in so doing 'expose' the falsity of the world which Movietone and Pathe depicted.(91) Moreover,

88. R.Bond, 'The Production of Working Class Films', Experimental Cinema, no.4, February 1934, p.42.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.

91. R.Bond, Daily Worker, 31 March 1930, p.8; 18 August 1930, p.5.

these 'workers' newreels' were a conscious affirmation of an independent authentic working class culture, and an explicit attempt to validate that culture and focus attention upon particular areas of working class life as a means of generating consciousness of class. They were also an explicit assertion of the importance of political activism, publicising the leading role of the Communist Party and its satellite organisations in the struggle of the working class against capitalism. The Charter Film was a new departure for Bond, in so far as there was a deliberate use of agitational and propaganda techniques to convey particular ideas; it nevertheless was more specifically geared to, and considered part of the NMM's campaign.

Care must be taken however not to overstate the character of the relationship between the FWFS and the CPGB/Comintern. Decisions taken in Moscow for global application in response to Soviet needs were not capable of translation into feasible policies and practical action without much modification for British conditions. The Executive Committee of the Communist International considered Britain was one of the weakest links in the Comintern. Though subordinate to the ECCI the CPGB had consistently failed to carry out ECCI policies to its satisfaction. Moreover, the British situation offered little prospect of substantive political progress, unlike Germany. As in many countries lacking a revolutionary tradition, the manner of the implementation of Comintern policies depended to a considerable degree on local initiative. This was particularly so with regard to the satellite bodies such as the FOSR and the WIR; and both of these, though connected through Willi Muenzenberg (among others) directly to the ECCI, appear to have operated much in the tradition of relative independence which Muenzenberg had established for himself and the international secretariat of the WIR in Berlin. In addition, though it is clear that decisions were taken in Moscow to produce films largely for foreign consumption as part of a wider political and cultural strategy, the history of the operation appears to be less than clear cut, and more research needs to be done in this area before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

For example, despite Bond's confident assertion in early 1930 that there were no difficulties with the supply of Soviet films, he was referring to the principle of availability implied in the agreement by which distribution rights for Soviet films in Britain were conferred

on him. However, Ivor Montagu has consistently expressed his exasperation that Soviet films were always handled in Britain by a commercial organisation, the Soviet trade delegation, Arcos, and were considered for many years by the Soviet authorities as goods to be sold, or exchanged for British and other foreign films; and therefore neither the Film Society nor the FWFS was able to procure Soviet films from Arcos without being prepared either to pay for them or offer like goods in return. The first distributor in Britain to secure an agreement for Arcos to supply films regularly, free of charge, was the Progressive Film Institute, in 1935, set up by Montagu.(92) Films were seen as a commercial commodity by the Soviet authorities; as Montagu recalled:

the idea that Soviet films are just for propaganda and that anybody can have them is absolutely false. We could never get the damn things. It was a very thankless task. (93)

The Soviet authorities, both in Britain and the USSR were so badly organised, bureaucratic and slow, that it was, even with commercial contracts and agreements negotiated, very difficult to acquire Soviet films.(94) As the Programme Notes for a Film Society performance of Mother observed (probably written by Montagu):

By some attributed to official discouragement, by others to lack of enterprise on the part of the English distributors, the scarcity of Russian films in England is in reality to be ascribed to the imperfect sales methods of the Sovkino agencies..... (95)

92. Ivor Montagu, in an interview with the author, 14 April 1978.
93. Ivor Montagu, in an interview with B.Hogenkamp, Skrien, no.51, July/August 1975; I.Montagu, The Youngest Son (London, 1970), p.301.
94. Herbert Marshall, in an interview with the author, 24 May 1978. Marshall lived in the Soviet Union from 1930 to 1937, studying under Eisenstein and acting as Anglo-American agent in Moscow for the International Union of Revolutionary Theatre and Cinema, which had been set up to organise more systematically the use of film (and theatre) for political purposes in the defence of the Soviet Union.
95. Programme Notes, The Film Society Programmes op.cit., 21 October 1928.

It was not surprising therefore that the Film Society (via Brunel and Montagu, and Film Booking Offices) and the Federation of Workers' Film Societies acquired their material mainly from Berlin, where the main Soviet Trade Delegation in Europe was located, and where Weltfilm and Prometheus-Film operated as the WIR outlets for Soviet films to Labour organisations and cultural bodies. Interestingly, it was the German titles given to Soviet films in their preparation for German audiences which were used in Britain, reflecting the reliance on the German source: for example, Pudovkin's The Heir to Jenghis-Khan was retitled in Berlin, Sturm über Asien, and subsequently known in Britain as Storm over Asia.

There were clearly problems in acquiring films, which undermined Comintern strategies in so far as they applied to the use of film politically; and there appears to have been an inability on the part of the Soviet authorities to coordinate effectively commercial and political operations, which may have been compounded by the rivalry between Mezhrabpomfilm and the Moscow State Studio, leading to the former's assimilation to the latter in 1934 and its eventual elimination in the wake of the xenophobia generated after the Kirov assassination. It must be recalled in this respect that it was not until 1929 that the first practical steps were taken towards harnessing the cinema to the purposes of the CPSU within the Soviet Union.(96)

Nevertheless, it is evident from the Board of Trade Journal, which provides a complete list of all films registered under the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 for distribution in this country, that Atlas Films registered ten Soviet films with the Board in 1930-31, the years of its effective operation. But it is also clear from the left-wing literature of the period that it acquired at least another ten for distribution. In all, no less than thirty four Soviet films were distributed in Britain between 1928 and 1932, by Pro Patria, Film Booking Offices, Atlas Films and the Film Society; and others were obtained, but returned as unsuitable for British audiences.

Yet the difficulties to which Montagu referred were not so apparent in regard to other Comintern Sections: forty-five Soviet films, for example, were obtained by Amkino and distributed in the USA in the

96. J.Leyda, Kino, op.cit., p.338; R.Taylor, Film Propaganda, op.cit., p.60.

1928-30 period alone as part of a sustained political and cultural campaign.(97) There is some confusion therefore as to the precise nature of the Soviet cultural and political assault on the West; that there was such an assault is not in doubt, but the discrepancy between formal decisions being taken and policies being carried out is apparent, at least in regard to Britain. Given the poor prospects in Britain for radical advance, it would appear that in the order of priorities Britain came some way behind France, Germany and the USA, and was left to pursue Comintern strategies, as far as film was concerned, on the basis of 'local' initiative.

Finally, a distinction needs to be made between the London WFS and other members of the Federation. Though the LWFS and the Federation were formed by CPGB members there is insufficient evidence to establish whether provincial groups were similarly organised from within local communist groupings, or more broadly based Labour organisations. If the history of the Manchester and Salford WFS is in any way representative it would appear that provincial societies owed their existence more to individual rather than organisational initiatives, and to the backing of local social democratic bodies rather than to communist groups. This measure of independence did not, it must be added, undermine the original conception of the project from the communist point of view, but it did raise the question of its feasibility, which is to be examined in the next section of this chapter.

3.

Wider sources for the development of the Federation of Worker's Film Societies include the activities of the Film Society in cultivating a growing interest in cinema art; the film art movement, based around Close Up, and the Shaftesbury Avenue Pavilion Cinema; and the public controversy arising out of the censorship or banning of Soviet films. Modelled on the Stage Society, the Film Society was

97. D.Caute, op.cit., p.53; V.K.Petric, Soviet Revolutionary Films in America 1926 - 1935 (Unpublished PhD. thesis, New York University, 1973), pp.1, 3, 25-36.

formed in 1925 by Ivor Montagu and Hugh Miller to exhibit films of 'intrinsic merit', which would otherwise be unable to secure an exhibitor in Britain, to a private audience in a West End cinema in London. The first of its kind in Britain, the Society was the pioneer in the exhibition of serious or 'non-commercial' cinema. Attracting an exclusive clientele, with subscription fees ranging from one to three guineas, the Society recruited its shareholders and guarantors from the intellectual and cultural elite of Britain, and by October 1929 had nearly 800 members.(98) By introducing art films from the European continent and elsewhere, and showing experimental shorts, the Film Society nurtured a growing interest in the cinema as an art form. It was successful because it was a product of its time, a manifestation of an intellectual and cultural milieu common to many European countries. As Ivor Montagu explained:

Success was achieved not because there was no opposition, nor arising from our personal deserts or merits, but as ever with success because of the backing we received from others, which itself was forthcoming because the time was ripe. (99)

The Society was also highly influential. Paul Rotha, a distinguished film-maker and historian of film acknowledged the 'great debt' which film-makers, critics and historians of his generation owed to the Film Society's performances; and Rachael Low, an authoritative historian of British film, has maintained that the Society's importance in the history of British cinema 'can scarcely be over-estimated'.(100)

Concerned 'not only with "art" but with every use of film that did not reach the commercial cinema screen' the Film Society was inevitably attracted to the Soviet cinema because, as Montagu explained:

The American cinema didn't know what it was doing....The Russians, who studied the science of cinema, tried to find out why things were good or bad or effective or non-effective. (101)

98. LCC MP TME, 29 October 1929. The founder members of the Society included Anthony Asquith, J.E.S.Haldane, Julian Huxley; Augustus John, E.McKnight Kauffer, J.M.Keynes, G.H.Shaw, John St.Loe Strachey, H.G.Wells, Dame Ellen Terry, Lord David Cecil, Iris Barry, Sidney Bernstein, Adrian Brunel and Frank Dobson. For an account of the Film Society by its leading member, see I.Montagu, 'Old Man's Mumble', Sight and Sound, Autumn 1975, pp.220-24, 247.

99. I.Montagu, 'Old Man's Mumble', loc.cit., p.222.

As most of the films exhibited in British cinemas were of American origin, there was a disinclination to show such material at Film Society performances. Long films screened at these performances were almost exclusively foreign language imports, largely from Europe. There was a structural tendency therefore to obtain Soviet films: they were not commercial, either in purpose or market value; they would be unlikely therefore to secure exhibition in Britain; they were constructed, on the whole, with a high premium on cinematic expression and experimentation, and therefore promised considerable artistic merit. Taking advantage of a pre-scheduled zoological expedition to the USSR, one of Montagu's first assignments, once the idea of the Film Society had been launched, was to negotiate with the Soviet film authority Sovkino for the supply of Soviet films to the Society, free of charge. Although Montagu failed in this mission he had, on his journey there, negotiated similar arrangements in Berlin for the supply of German films, and acquired a letter of introduction from Willi Muenzenberg to help him in Moscow.(102)

It was not until 1928 that, after repeated attempts, he managed to persuade Sovkino to agree to the Society screening its material, and the first Soviet film to be shown under the new arrangements was Mother, on 21 October 1928. Between then and March 1932, the period spanning the life of the FWFS, the Film Society showed fifteen Soviet films over thirty performances, none of which, at their time of showing, had been exhibited before in Britain, and several of which were subsequently ineligible for exhibition due to their banning by the British Board of Film Censors and local licensing authorities. Judging by the Programmes of the Society there was no discernible emphasis on the showing of Soviet films, and Montagu, as the principal programme builder during these years, clearly had a sense of responsibility to cater for the broader interests of the Society's membership.

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100. P.Rotha, Documentary Diary, op.cit., p.10; R.Low, The History of the British Film 1918 - 1929 op.cit., p.34. For Montagu's own view of this influence, see his interview with Peter Wollen, Alan Lovell and Sam Rohdie, Screen, Winter 1972, pp.83-4. (Hereafter, 'I.Montagu, interview with Screen'.)
101. I.Montagu, The Youngest Son op.cit., p.273; I.Montagu, interview with Screen, op.cit., p.85.
102. I.Montagu, The Youngest Son, op.cit., p.301.

But their general, public exhibition had by mid-1929 become something of a cause célèbre within liberal, progressive and left political circles. That this was so was due in no small measure to their private exhibition by the Film Society, their availability thereafter for screening (lying, as they did, in distributors' offices, untouched for many months), and the campaign against the political censorship of films in which the Society participated.

Parallel with the activities of the Film Society was the work of a group of avant garde film-makers and critics centred on Close Up, the first major magazine of serious film criticism to appear in English. The magazine's importance was, according to Low,

very great despite its small circulation.... performing an important job...of building up a nucleus of cineastes devoted to the development of the art of the film. (103)

Its contribution to this development consisted largely of providing film criticism, information on continental developments, a forum for discussion and statements by film-makers, advice on the problems of hiring and showing films of artistic merit in Britain, and problems of censorship. From the very first issue Close Up campaigned, in view of the paucity of art films available in Britain, and the scarcity of cinemas in which to see them, for the formation of film societies throughout the country to extend the audience for serious cinema.(104) Thereafter, the Editor, Kenneth Macpherson, and the Assistant Editor Bryher (Winifred Ellerman) made a sustained appeal to cineastes to form societies of their own and, in view of the inhibiting and uncertain censorship regulations governing public and private exhibitions in cinemas (even Film Society performances were frequently censored), to buy their own projectors and give performances in private in local unlicensed halls. To reduce costs, people were

103. H.Low, op.cit., p.22; B.Wright, The Long View (St.Albans; 1976), pp.54-5; P.Rotha, Documentary Diary, op.cit., p.33.

104. Close Up, July 1927, p.54.

advised to form cooperatives with other societies within their locales.(105) The point of departure for such schemes were developments on the continent, particularly the cine-clubs in France and the successful Volksverband für Filmkunst which had groups in many German towns and the backing of an array of film critics and film-makers, including G.W.Pabst, Andor Kraszna-Krausz, Karl Freund and Edmund Meisel. The Close Up project was not however merely an imitation of developments abroad, but an integral part of an international movement within intellectual and film art circles towards the establishment of a trans-national network of groups to fund the production of films unfettered by commercial demands, and provide a guaranteed audience and guaranteed exhibition in uncensored form. Pabst, for example, had proposed in early 1928 the formation of a joint stock company in which film enthusiasts and film-makers would purchase shares; the money raised, European-wide, would be used to fund production, the hiring of cinemas for performances, etc. The culmination of these developments (in this first phase of the film art movement) was the Independent Cinema Congress at la Sarraz in September 1929 at which leading figures of avant garde and experimental cinema agreed to form an International League of Independent Cinema, whose principal aims were the creation of a unified distribution network from existing cinema societies, and the cooperative production of 'films of note'.(106) Although very little in terms of concrete cooperation in either production or distribution materialised, the attempt to do so reflected the international character of the film art movement. It is not without significance that Close Up was published in Switzerland, regularly included articles by 'foreign' contributors, and these often in their original French or German.

Apart from encouraging the formation of film societies and their showing of art films, Close Up publicised particular films and

105. See for example, Bryher, 'What Can I Do?', Close Up, May 1928; 'How I would Start a Film Club', ibid., June 1928.

106. Ibid., October 1929, pp.306-7. The Congress is recounted by Ivor Montagu in With Eisenstein in Hollywood op.cit., pp.13-17.

the pioneer work of Stuart Davis and Leslie Ogilvie of the Shaftesbury Avenue Pavilion, which, starting in early 1928 was the first cinema in Britain to exhibit, as a matter of policy, 'unusual films' to public audiences. An indication of the support for this type of film is suggested in the Avenue Pavilion's ability to keep old classics such as Paul Leni's Waxworks (1924) and Arthur Robison's Warning Shadows (1922) on four-week runs, the former in July, one of the worst months for cinema attendance.(107) The success of this scheme was aided by Wardour Films' contract with Ufa, the main film concern in Germany, for the supply of German films to Britain: through his contacts with Gaumont British, which owned the Avenue Pavilion, Davis was able to secure a steady flow of German material, launching the project with Pabst's The Love of Jeanne Ney. This was of importance in so far as from the mid-1920's German cinema had been informed by the spirit of 'Neue Sachlichkeit', the 'new objectivity', which was characterised by an enthusiasm for 'reality', a quest for the objective understanding of materiality. Amongst the film-makers who subscribed to this view were Pabst, Bela Balazs, Karl Freund and Walter Ruttmann; and their work came to be associated with leftist and socialist viewpoints.(108)

By 1928, commensurate with a considerable leftward shift in German politics, a number of socialist-oriented films were produced, and non-commercial political-cultural cinema organisations were formed with substantial support both intellectual and popular - most notable of these being the Volksverband für Filmkunst. This interest in 'reality' was apparent also in Britain, within the Close Up group; and the opportunity to see German films of this period in the 'Neue Sachlichkeit' fashion at the Avenue Pavilion provided a platform for this group to emphasise the necessity for a realist cinema in Britain. (109)

107. For information on the Avenue Pavilion and the films it screened, see Close Up, December 1928, pp.42-5; 'The "Unusual" Film Movement: A Filmgoer Remembers', Documentary Newsletter, June 1940, p.13, (the filmgoer was Paul Rotha); and H.Carter, The New Spirit in the Cinema op.cit., pp. 387-92.
108. S.Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler (New Jersey, 1947, 1971), pp.165 ff.
109. See for example, Close Up, February 1928, pp.10-11; December 1928, pp.66-7.

This focus had an influence on left-wing film critics associated with sections of the Labour movement. Henry Dobb, for example, in a review of Ruttmann's Berlin - Symphony of a Great City, urging his (working class) readers to arrange for the showing of this film, discussed the aesthetic properties of a workers' cinema in Britain which were to provide some of the main themes of its subsequent development:

If we are going.....to use the film for our ends, to make our Art, we can begin with something of this sort.In the life of the worker there is ample material for experimental propoganda. With the rhythmic movement of feet going to the shops and factories, with the beauty of machinery and works' chimneys, with the contrasts of the unemployment queue and the crowd in Rotten Row, and the workers' bread and scrape and the food displays in Piccadilly, there is material enough for a film of contrasts that could be visually beautiful and socially true. (110)

As in Germany this fashionable interest in realist cinema was associated with left-wing sentiments. There was therefore a threefold interest in Soviet film within the British film art movement: in its artistic experimentation, its 'realist' approach, and to a lesser degree its 'socialist' content. The Close Up group was deeply influenced by Soviet productions, its contributors constantly invoking them in their criticism; it was impressed by the social possibilities of the cinema which the Soviets were discovering, and their value as a 'contribution to the progressive thought of the world', in opposition to the 'execrescent and reactionary strivings of talking films'.(111)

Performing an indispensable service for the film art movement in Britain, Close Up was highly influential in providing the guidelines for the critical reception of German and Soviet films in this country; and, 'particularly important as a source of information concerning films in Russia',(112) the magazine recruited to its pages a number of

110. Sunday Worker, 11 March 1928, p.8.

111. Close Up, December 1927, p.10; September 1928, p.13: See also I.Montagu, interview with Screen, op.cit., pp.101-2.

112. R.Low, op.cit., p.22.

individuals who were to play decisive roles in the establishment of the Federation of Workers' Film Societies: Henry Dobb, Ivor Montagu and Ralph Bond.

The Film Society and the Close Up group were instrumental in the evolution of a British 'section' of the international film art movement, not only laying the foundations for the growth of film societies for 'serious' cinema throughout Britain (by 1937 there were over 40) but introducing to British audiences and encouraging people to see, films of artistic merit in a non-commercial context, extending beyond the established boundaries of consumerist entertainment. Their enthusiasm for Soviet films had a distinctly political as well as artistic basis. The commercial cinema was seen generally within these circles as reactionary, pervaded with militarist and even fascist values, and dangerous in so far as it was assumed to be highly influential in determining the ideas and behaviour of the 'masses'. Identified as structurally aligned with the forces of conservatism the cinema industry was seen as not merely an ally of the ruling groups in society by virtue of the general character of its modus operandi, but a consciously political agency, functioning to preserve the status quo. In opposition to the commercial cinema Soviet films were identified as the 'arrow point of cinema progress', in the dual sense of introducing to cinema the craft and inspiration of art, and addressing themselves from a progressive perspective to 'real' problems and situations (rather than distracting or 'doping' audiences).(113) The film art movement in Britain rejected the commercial cinema from artistic and political perspectives which tended to coalesce in an aesthetic of realism. The debates focussing on this aesthetic were largely derivative of broader intellectual currents on the European continent, which in turn were heavily informed by Soviet developments.(114)

113. Close Up, September 1928, pp.5-13.

114. See, for example, J.Willett, The New Sobriety op.cit., passim.

The drive towards establishing film societies and alternatives (non-theatrical) methods of exhibition was a direct result of the difficulty in showing films of artistic merit in their original state in ordinary cinemas. Continental distributors were loathe to send their films to Britain because rigorous censorship practices either prevented their films being shown at all or only after crude mutilation. In the case of Soviet films, the operation of censorship regulations led to a general prohibition on their public exhibition. Under such circumstances the campaigning within the film art movement for the formation of film societies and alternative methods of exhibition became an anti-censorship lobby which assumed an increasingly political character as it became apparent that a 'political censorship', preventing Soviet films from being shown publicly or even privately, was in operation.

The activities of the Film Society, the work of Close Up, and the policy of the Avenue Pavilion cinema, in showing, discussing and providing information about Soviet films cultivated a growing interest within intellectual and artistic circles in Soviet culture. More significantly, they provided a small number of people within left wing sections of the Labour movement with an important and influential source of ideas. These were, essentially, the use of cinema generally for political and educational purposes; the non-commercial use of film, and the practical problems to be faced in establishing a practice of film use; and the political and educational value of Soviet and other 'workers' films'. It was the campaign against the political censorship of films which united worker and intellectual in their demand to be able to see Soviet films and which led directly to the formation of the Federation of Workers' Film Societies. The lobby was, from the point of view of the Labour movement, another medium for attacking and discrediting the Baldwin (and later the MacDonald) Government. Yet at the same time it provided both the impetus for establishing workers' film societies to show Soviet films, as part of a political-cultural strategy, and suggested its feasibility: there appeared to widespread interest, sufficient to justify and sustain such a project.

4.

As has already been suggested,(115) the film censorship system based on the powers conferred upon Local Authorities under the 1909 Cinematograph Act, and the work of the British Board of Film Censors, was extremely effective in eliminating anything of a politically controversial nature from the vast majority of cinema screens. The Act allowed Local Authorities, subject to Home Office safety regulations, to determine the terms and conditions of licences granted to exhibitors. By 1926 most Licensing Authorities had adopted the rules of management attached to licences granted by the London County Council, the most important licensing body in the country.(116) Of these, one of the more notable ones was rule eight, which asserted that

(a) No cinematograph film shall be exhibited which is likely to be injurious to morality or to encourage or incite to crime, or to lead to disorder, or to be in any way offensive in the circumstances to public feelings, or which contains any offensive representations of living persons.

(b) No cinematograph film - other than photographs of current events - which has not been passed for 'universal' or 'public' exhibition by the British Board of Film Censors shall be exhibited without the express consent of the Council.

(c) Nothing in the foregoing shall be deemed to relieve the licensee of his personal responsibility for any cinematograph film shown which may, in the opinion of the Council, be detrimental to the public interest. (117)

These rules not only conferred considerable authority upon BBFC decisions, but allowed local Licensing Authorities to exercise powers of control over the content of films far beyond the intended scope of the 1909 Act. Moreover, under the Act, inflammable films could only be shown in licensed premises. The Act allowed three exceptions to this: exhibition in 'moveable buildings', private dwelling houses to which the public were not admitted, or in premises used 'occasionally and exceptionally' and not for more than six days in any one year. For all these exceptions advance notice of the intended exhibition was required, and for the

115. See pages 62-7 above.

116. R.Low, op.cit., p.57.

117. Cited, G.Phelps, Film Censorship (London, 1975), pp.30-1.

latter case compliance with Home Office safety regulations and any conditions which the Licensing Authority wished to impose.(118)

There was a close working relationship between the BBFC and Local Authorities.(119) The BBFC tried to maintain a policy which corresponded to values which did not run counter to generally accepted social-moral and political attitudes, and Local Authorities were generally keen to leave the business of censoring films to the Board. A regular code of practice had been established by the BBFC during the Great War to maintain certain standards in films and, in protecting the film as an innocuous form of entertainment, acceptable to the largest possible number of people, maintain its profitability as a commercial product by avoiding problems with Local Authorities and appealing to a 'universal' audience. The Board was in the delicate position of needing to gain and keep the confidence of Licensing Authorities, of the film trade whose opposition to it could remove its raison d'etre, of private pressure groups concerned with the moral effects of film on vulnerable audiences, and finally of the Government, whose backing helped considerably to establish Local Authority support for the Board, and whose dissatisfaction might, in the view of the film trade, lead to its replacement by a State censorship system. Despite being entirely independent, financially and organisationally, these structural constraints prompted a cautious conservatism on the part of the Board. Moreover, the Board's members were convinced that film was or should remain purely a form of entertainment, yet which, by its very nature, was capable of influencing people's ideas and behaviour; that audiences were highly impressionable, consisting largely of the young, immature and those likely to imitate behaviour seen on the screen; and therefore that film was a possible source for the subversion of public morals. The BBFC saw itself principally as an agency protecting the interests of the film trade. But it also saw itself performing the role of protecting the public, commensurate with the paternalism of Governments of the day. As Rachael Low has argued, the Board 'assumed the position of an oracle and the custodian of society's moral sense'.(120)

118. The Cinematograph Act 1909, Section 7.

119. N.M.Hunnings, Film Censors and the Law, op.cit., p.133.

120. R.Low, op.cit., p.68.

The arbitrary and moralistic approach to commercial cinema was however applied with equal diligence and insensitivity to 'serious' cinema productions of the art film movement.(121) By the mid-1920's it was proving extremely difficult to persuade many distributors in Europe to allow their films to be imported to Britain, partly through an apparent lack of interest in these films in Britain as a whole, and partly due to the cuts which their films suffered at the hands of the BBFC. The Film Society was established to provide an intelligent public with a regular exhibition in private of serious film productions and from its first performance encountered difficulties with the Censors (over Leni's Waxworks). The Society was in a vulnerable position because it depended on the London County Council for permission, to be given annually, to exhibit films, many of them uncensored, on Sundays. Several of its subsequent performances included badly cut films; and the Avenue Pavilion suffered similarly.

This apparent display of paternalist philistinism provoked the film art movement into a discussion of the legitimacy of the censorship system, culminating in a self-righteous and vociferous campaign in 1929 backed up by a petition in March of that year, objecting to the mutilating cuts made in foreign films, and the high customs duties required for imported films, and calling for a special category of certificate for uncut films of artistic, scientific or educational value, for private or restricted showing.(122) It was

121. It must be pointed out here that many of the films acclaimed by this movement were in fact produced by the large commercial studios. Ufa in the early 1920's were the first major studios to support the work of individual film artists, notably Fritz Lang, F.W.Murnau and G.W.Pabst. Many such 'commercial' films were 'B' pictures or quota productions. Huttman's Berlin - Symphony of a Great City, for example, was a Fox-Europa quota production. See S.Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler, op.cit.; D.Curtis, Experimental Cinema (London, 1971), pp.8, 25-30.
122. See for example Close Up, December 1927, pp.8-10, 48-55; June 1928, pp.30 ff; December 1928, pp.45-51; February 1929, pp.5-16, 24-32; Sunday Worker, 24 June 1928, p.9; H.Carter, op.cit., pp. 284-92. Customs duties were so high that Bryher believed that 'only a film certain of many weeks' showing can possibly be brought in from abroad', Close Up, December 1928, p.48.

however the censorship and banning of Soviet films which gave considerable impetus to this campaign, caused a minor storm of political controversy and fuelled the awakening interest in Soviet cinema amongst some sections of the Labour movement out of which the Federation of Workers' Film Societies emerged.

Under the Presidency of T.P.O'Connor, the BBFC developed an elaborate set of restrictions based on his 'forty three' rules. Several were designed to protect existing authority and the social establishment, and avoid expressions of opinion which might, by their controversial nature, provoke divisions between sections of the population and jeopardise the tenuous political stability characteristic of a decade fraught with industrial conflict and political uncertainty. Specifically prohibited were 'references tending to disparage public characters and institutions', 'scenes holding up the King's uniform to contempt or ridicule', 'references to controversial politics', 'relations between Capital and Labour', and

subjects dealing with India, in which British officers are seen in an odious light, and otherwise attempting to suggest the disloyalty of Native States or bringing into disrepute British prestige in the Empire. (123)

During the 1920's and 1930's these rules were systematically refined and expanded.(124). With such restrictions, combined with the exaggerated fear common to local and central government alike of the power of Soviet films to sway malleable workers, some Soviet films made for export had little chance of being passed by the censors, even after extensive cutting. Brooke Wilkinson, Secretary of the BBFC, explained the Board's policy in the following terms:

Many films coming under this [propagandist] category have been passed by the Board, but so far as Russian propaganda is concerned, I would respectfully remind you that Mr. Henderson has stated definitely that Soviet propaganda is not permissible in this country. Only two Russian films

123. Report of the Cinema Commission of Inquiry, The Cinema (London, .. 1917), p.254.
124. See for example, British Board of Film Censors. Annual Report 1928, p.5; 1929, pp. 6, 8; 1930, pp.6-9; 1931, pp.6,8; 1932, pp.6-7.

have been rejected by the Board as unsuitable for public exhibition in this country, namely Potemkin and Mother, but exception to neither of these films was taken on political grounds. (125)

Nor was the LCC prepared to take a more liberal attitude. Rosamund Smith, Chairwoman of the Council's Theatres and Music Halls Committee, put forward the majority view of the Council in a discussion on workers' film societies:

In asking that these films shall not be shown we are supporting the decision of the Board.....I do not think that anyone could be more opposed to political censorship than I am.....But I think we are up against something quite different in these Russian films. I feel that Communism is a great deal more than the doctrine of a political party, and I am not prepared to give the authors of these films any right to publish their propaganda in this country. (126)

From the point of view of film art, this was ridiculously arbitrary. As Bryher observed:

in England.....it is not possible to discuss Russian films as art.....The present attitude to Russian films in England is dangerous on account of the inconceivable stupidity of the authorities. They are investing a work of art with terror and power....Say Potemkin and it appears that the whole British Army will go down one after another like ninepins. (127)

The prohibition of Battleship Potemkin and Mother from public exhibition prompted calls within sections of the Labour movement for the establishment of a 'workers' cinema' along the lines of the Film Society to show these and other 'workers' films' to working class audiences.

125. British Film Institute, British Board of Film Censors. Verbatim Reports (1930), Brooke Wilkinson to N.Brook (Home Office), 29 October 1930.
126. British Film Institute, London County Council. Verbatim Reports (1929-30), 11 March 1930, 'Sunday Cinematograph Exhibitions'.
- 127.. Bryher, Film Problems of Soviet Russia (Territet, Switzerland, 1929), pp.10-11. The music for some of these films was considered almost as dangerous, if not more so, than the visual images. In Germany some authorities banned the musical scores for certain Soviet films, rather than the films themselves, as staatsgefährlich.

Battleship Potemkin was banned in 1927 by the BBFC on the grounds that it had a bearing on recent 'controversial' events (the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, though the setting for the film is the abortive 1905 revolution in Russia). The distributor, Film Booking Offices, submitted unsuccessfully a cut version of the film to the LCC in May 1928 for permission to exhibit it publicly.(128) Thereafter, no further effort was made by the distributor to either re-arrange the film or secure its exhibition elsewhere. Ivor Montagu maintained that FBO had intended to submit the film to other local Licensing Authorities, but was intimidated by Special Branch officers into abandoning the plan and returning the film to the Soviet Union.(129) A complete uncensored copy of the film was imported by Brunel and Montagu from the Soviet Trade Delegation in Berlin over a year later, and was screened by the Film Society in November 1929.

Quickly taking advantage of the apparently permissive attitude of the LCC vis-à-vis the Film Society, the London Workers' Film Society was formed 'to bring Russian and other working class films to audiences that cannot afford Film Society fees', and sought similar permission not only to show Battleship Potemkin, but arrange regular exhibitions of films to private audiences.(130) The LWFS was unsuccessful in both requests, but later managed to persuade the LCC to allow it to use the Scala Cinema in Central London. The film however was subsequently prevented from being shown publicly or privately within the LCC's area of jurisdiction until January 1934, when a copy on 16mm stock (non-inflammable) was imported by Kino and exhibited in unlicensed premises. Some London boroughs with licensing powers did nevertheless grant permission for the public exhibition of the film - Walthamstow, for example, which was controlled by the local Labour Party.

In October 1928 the screening, in uncut form, of Pudovkin's Mother, by the Film Society had set a precedent, suggesting to advocates

Edmund Meisel, the author of the score for Battleship Potemkin, was refused entry to Britain in 1928.

128. LCC MP TMH, 30 June 1928; PRO HQ HO45 17067/671873/9, London County Council, 'Exhibitions of the Film Entitled "Potemkin", Report by the Clerk of the Council for the Entertainments Committee, 7 July 1934', Appendix A.

129. I. Montagu, The Political Censorship of Films *op.cit.*, pp.12-13. See also Bryher, *op.cit.*, pp.31-3; Sunday Worker, 27 May 1928, p.7;

of a 'workers' cinema' that performances of Soviet films under club conditions would be acceptable to the LCC. Banned for public exhibition by the LCC in November 1928, on the grounds that it depicted a strike in Russia, and the forces of established order firing on a mob, it was banned for private exhibition in February 1930, immediately after the formation of the LWFS and the Masses Stage and Film Guild, and the latter's application to show it privately.(131)

The banning of these films from public exhibition took place amidst a recurring debate on the censorship of films generally. This had been brought into sharp political focus with the proscriptive intervention of the Foreign Secretary, Sir Austen Chamberlain, regarding Herbert Wilcox's film Dawn, in response to German protests that it would rekindle bitterness relating to the war experiences between the two countries. In an atmosphere of caution, paternalism and political reaction, and resentment prompted by the industrial rifts which had culminated in the General Strike, there was a fear within ruling circles of manifestations of the political strength of the working class beyond its quinquennial electoral vote. There was also a heightened sensitivity to any activities which could possibly be construed Soviet or Soviet-inspired subversion. On the other hand there was an awareness within Labour circles of the powers of the State and what appeared to be its class-based operation, restricting the development of the movement and the working class generally. The Dawn affair, the occasional hysteria in the press about the subversive character of Soviet films, the frequent discussions in the House of Commons on Comintern propaganda,(132) and the admission by the Home Secretary,

Programme Notes, The Film Society Programmes, op.cit., 10 November 1929.

130. Close Up, November 1929, p.438. The LCC eventually granted 'conditonal consent' for its exhibition in October 1935.
131. For the full story of the banning of Mother so far, see I.Montagu, The Political Censorship of Films, op.cit., pp.13-14. See also British Board of Film Censors, Annual Report 1928, p.5; LCC MP TME, 5 March 1930; Independent Labour Party Conference Report 1930, p.47. It must be noted that some Soviet films were allowed general release in Britain at this time, including The Marriage of the Bear, The Postmaster, A Journey to Soviet Russia.
132. For the Government's handling of Dawn, see Hansard vol.213, cols. 1044, 1056-7; vol.214, cols.15-18, (1928). For the concern for Comintern propaganda in Britain, see ibid., (1928) vol.217, cols. 635-42; (1929) vol.224, cols.1407-8, 1926-7; vol.230, cols.1121, 1628; (1930) vol.234, cols.1474-8, 1865-7; vol.237, cols.896-7.

Sir William Joynson-Hicks, that the BBFC had banned Battleship Potemkin after consultation with himself, (133) created a widespread impression that a political censorship of films was in operation. The reaffirmation of Article 16 of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty of 1924, and Clynes' admission that

steps have been taken in a few instances to prevent the importation and exhibition of certain Russian films of a propagandist character. (134)

seemed to confirm this view. The Film Society's ability to secure permission from the LCC to show films otherwise proscribed provided the opportunity for Labour organisations to attempt similar schemes with the maximal aim of succeeding in bypassing this political censorship, or, failing that, the minimal aim of exposing it.

Left wing critics such as Henry Dobb had for some time been urging workers to persuade their local cinema managers to show The Love of Jeanne Ney and other films of the 'Neue Sachlichkeit' fashion. By early 1928 Dobb was stressing that the Labour movement must use films for its own purposes - for its own 'art' and 'propaganda'. (135) The Independent Labour Party's weekly paper, the New Leader, began an irregular column of theatre and film reviews in May 1928, and from the first review 'Benn', its critic, discussed films with regard to their importance as socialist propaganda. (136) In September 1928 the Close Up group, led by Macpherson and Bryher, attempted to launch a film society to show films to private audiences which could not otherwise be shown owing to BBFC prohibition. According to one report the main thrust of this scheme was to show Soviet films to British workers. The scheme was to be based in London, but if successful extended to other cities, wherever a demand was shown. The format of a private society was adopted

133. Hansard, vol.214, cols.1209-10, 8 March 1928.

134. Ibid., vol.230, col.1121, 23 July 1929.

135. Sunday Worker, 2 February 1928, p.8; 11 March 1928, p.8; 13 May 1928, p.9.

136. Lord Fenner Brockway, in a letter to the author, 6 July 1977, recalled 'Benn' (Gary Allighan) as 'one of our most brilliant writers'.

specifically to avoid censorship problems, taking as its point of departure the relatively successful Film Society.(137) Unfortunately little further is known of this venture. Presumably it never materialised because it failed to recognise that such an operation would require a level of finance which would preclude its target audience from membership. In order to be viable on a long term basis, it would unavoidably be dependent upon the generosity of the Film Society, and other importers of a commercial nature, in allowing the society to use their films virtually free of charge. Even so, there were discernible trends in London towards the formation of a film organisation to show films to working class audiences in late 1928; and in November of that year one such group did emerge: the South London Workers' Film Society, to show 'appropriate' films, and, if there was sufficient support, to go into production.(138)

In December 1928 Bryher in Close Up urged that a campaign be launched for a separate certificate for films of artistic merit to enable them to be shown uncut to private or restricted audiences, suggesting that readers of the magazine lobby their MPs. Two months later James Maxton and L.A.Plummer, both MPs and leading members of the Independent Labour Party, wrote on behalf of the New Leader to Joynson-Hicks, asking him to permit the distributor of Battleship Potemkin to lend the film for a private show to MPs and others. Their purpose was

to win the support of influential people for the removal of the prohibition on films which have been banned for political reasons. (139)

Thereafter, with the Home Secretary's admission that he could not comply, (he neither had the power to give nor withhold permission), the ILP's weekly journal held a regular forum on censorship;(140) and 'Benn' inaugurated a campaign urging the Labour movement to form its own film

137. 'Soviet Films for British Workers', Sunday Worker, 23 September 1928, p.9.
138. Ibid., 18 November 1928, p.7. The Society was launched by Michael Steuart of the Sunday Worker. Beyond the Society acquiring a hall and a projector for its shows, nothing further is known.
139. The text of this letter, and of the Home Office reply, is to be found in I.Montagu, The Political Censorship of Films, op.cit., pp.40-2.
140. It attracted contributions from Arnold Bennett, Hilaire Belloc, Basil Dean, G.D.H.Cole, Lawrence Housman, J.M.Keynes, Robert Graves,

societies, produce its own films and conduct its own shows. Warning that so far the Labour movement had tended to underestimate the influence which films had 'on the lives and on the outlook of the workers', 'Benn' asserted:

there seems very little reason why the Movement should not found its own Film Society with the object of producing and projecting its own films.

If.....we want the working class point of view in films, we can only get it, apart from Russian films, in films that we would make ourselves. A Workers' Film Society for production purposes is necessary. (141)

'Benn' subsequently discussed the type of films which needed to be produced, suggesting the format of a 'socialist newsreel'

that would act as a real educational weapon on behalf of Socialism and world peace, and a defence against the dope with which the cinemas are now flooded. (142)

In November 1929, almost immediately after the formation of the Federation of Workers' Film Societies, the ILP Arts Guild established the Masses Stage and Film Guild,

To bring plays and films of democratic and international significance within the reach of the workers....(143)

The Arts Guild was an important body within the ILP making a substantial contribution to the cultural life of the left in Britain - both intelligentsia and ordinary working people - arranging musical evenings, dramatic performances, discussion groups, weekend schools, etc., in London and other cities. In July 1928 it launched a 'workers' theatre' in central London in conjunction with the Everyman Theatre Hampstead; and the Masses Stage and Film Guild (MSFG) was an extension of this scheme. This accounts for the remarkable size of the MSFG membership by December 1929 - one month after its formation - of 700.(144) By

H.W.Nevinson, Miles Malleson, Edith Sitwell, Harold Laski, Barbara Wootton, Desmond McCarthy, Julian Huxley and George Bernard Shaw.

141. 'How Labour Can Use Films', New Leader, 26 April 1929, p.2; 'A Workers' Film Society?', ibid., 3 May 1929, p.16.
142. 'Why not a Socialist Newsreel?', ibid., 31 May 1929, p.2.
143. H.Carter, The New Spirit in the Cinema op.cit., p.285; see also New Leader, 15 November 1929, p.14.
144. New Leader, 13 December 1929, p.13.

April 1930 this had risen to 1300; and by October 1930 it had reportedly risen to over 2000.(145) Moreover, the MSPG had considerable support from ILP and Labour Party MPs. President was A.Fenner Brockway, Treasurer, F.O.Roberts (Minister of Pensions), and members of its Advisory Council (sponsors) included J.R.Clynes, George Lansbury (First Commissioner of Works), Sir Charles Trevelyan (President of the Board of Education), James Maxton and J.F.Horrobin.(146)

Although there was clearly a solid body of support within the Labour Government and within Labour circles in London for the scheme, it owed much of its character to developments in workers' theatre organisations on the Continent.(147) It arose from the mushrooming demand in London for a 'workers' cinema', fuelled by the controversy surrounding the issue of what appeared to be the political censorship of film contrived to confine the development of workers' political and cultural activities. Echoing Soviet developments the Guild was envisaged as contributing to a proletarian cultural revolution.(148) Plays by Ernst Toller, George Bernard Shaw and other 'socialist' writers were put on monthly at the Strand Theatre on Sunday evenings under the direction of Miles Malleon, and with the generous assistance of the Bourchiers, who owned the theatre. Films, acquired from Atlas Films and mainly of Soviet origin, were shown monthly at the Regal Cinema, Marble Arch, the scheme lasting for three seasons, probably folding with the demise of the supplier in early 1932. For its performances membership of the Guild was one shilling. Subsequent difficulties with the LCC over its credentials as a private society led to the establishment of a ten shilling subscription fee. Nevertheless, its intention to attract working class audiences as part of a political and cultural project is apparent, located within the well-established practices of the ILP Arts Guild; and in June 1930 this

145. Independent Labour Party Conference Report 1930, p.33; New Leader, 17 October 1930, p.14. It should be noted that the ILP was a sizeable organisation. In 1929 it had 748 branches; and even by 1934 it still had 353. BLPES, ILP Papers, ILP National Advisory Council Minutes, 8 November 1930, 10/11 February 1934.
146. H.Carter, The New Spirit in the Cinema op.cit., p.286.
147. See for example, R.Sedgewick, 'Workers' Theatre', New Leader, 20 July 1928, p.14. See also D.Bradby, J.McCormick, People's Theatre (London, 1978), pp.97-8.
148. Lord Fenner Brockway, in a letter to the author, 6 July 1977.

latter body discussed plans for showing specifically Soviet films throughout the country in response to the widespread interest in the London scheme.(149)

Despite 'Benn's' assertion of the need to produce films from the working class point of view there are no indications that the MSFG intended to go into production. There is evidence to suggest however that it not only saw itself performing a cultural role, but a distinctly political role as a pressure group to prompt an inquiry into the question of film censorship. ILP leaders had already attempted to do this over the showing of Battleship Potemkin in February 1929. As soon as the Guild was formed it applied to the LCC for permission to show Mother to its members. This would appear to be a move calculated, if it failed, to provoke a confrontation with the LCC and thereby provide the justification for calls for a parliamentary commission of inquiry to investigate the question of political censorship, on the assumption that the Labour Government would do all in its power to secure a favourable outcome. With the LCC's banning of Mother for exhibition by the MSFG in February 1930, and the subsequent intervention of the Lord Chamberlain to prevent the Guild giving the film an exhibition in an ordinary theatre, a concerted campaign was launched to persuade Clynes, the Home Secretary, to accept such an inquiry.(150) Prominent personalities were recruited to the campaign: Lawrence Housman, Bertrand Russell, George Bernard Shaw and Sybil Thorndike, for example, who were involved in the work of the MSFG, wrote a letter of protest to the press over the discriminatory distinction made by the LCC between the Film Society and the two Labour film groups.(151)

The campaign had a measure of success. By the end of May 1930 the LCC had resolved to raise no objection to (a) cinematograph exhibitions by licencees on behalf of any film society whose constitution and rules were approved by the Council, and to (b) their exhibition of films not submitted to the BBFC, provided that such films were not screened on more than four occasions within the LCC administrative area in any twelve month period. Films banned by the BBFC still required the

149. Independent Labour Party Conference Report 1930, p.33; New Leader, 6 June 1930, p.15. Reports in the New Leader suggest that despite 'much interest' this scheme never materialised.
150. Hansard, vol.231, cols.317-8; vol.232, col.2567; vol.235, col.636; vol.236, cols.1468-9, 2075; vol.237, cols.896-7. For the subject of the discussions with the LCC and the Home Secretary, see above, pp.62-8.

express consent of the Council, but progress had been made.(152)
 By October of that year the Council had drawn up a list of requirements for inclusion in the constitution and rules of bona fide film societies, as a condition of their acceptance by the Council. These requirements enabled the LCC to exercise greater control over all film societies. But more specifically, they enabled the Council to avoid entering the sensitive area of film censorship by calling into question the validity of the organisation, rather than the films which it may screen. Any contravention of these constitutional requirements would be sufficient to justify the Council's withdrawal of approval of the society concerned, thereby effecting its dissolution.(153)

Tight controls were subsequently applied uniformly to the Film Society, the London Workers' Film Society and the Masses Stage and Film Guild. Within the London area no further censorship difficulties appear to have arisen in connection with these societies; and the LCC was in a position to appear permissive, allowing many 'political' films to be screened. Both Labour film groups having been subdued, they appear to have been more concerned to survive, finding the supply of such films drying up. Despite its sponsorship by various members of the Labour Government the MSFG was unable to resist the LCC's controls. These politicians appear to have had an ambivalent attitude to the Guild and its censorship problems. Clynes in particular appeared to be unsympathetic to the calls for exemption from censorship, fearful of the Pandora's Box of administrative complications and political difficulties which might arise from any official inquiry animated with a political motive to amend existing regulations. Clynes and other members of the Cabinet were also extremely irritated by Comintern propaganda in Britain, which came under the close scrutiny of public and official attention during the tenure of the Labour Administration, due in part to the issue of Soviet films. They appear, notwithstanding their eagerness to encourage trade with the Soviet Union, to have been anxious to stamp out these embarrassing and hostile activities. Such

151. The Times, 5 March 1930.

152. LCC MP TME, 27 May 1930.

153. Ibid., 4 November 1930.

propaganda attempted to undermine the Labour Party's position within the Labour movement. It threatened to arouse sections of parliamentary opposition and provide opportunities, given their (Labour's) beliefs regarding the mode of operation and political disposition of the press, for a repetition of the sequence of events which led to the Labour Government's fall from power in 1924. Though backing the Masses Stage and Film Guild and its cultural schemes, senior Labour MPs appear to have been reluctant to press for changes in the law, or in its administration, to facilitate the unfettered exhibition of Soviet films. Whilst not sharing the obsessive anti-Bolshevism of their Conservative counterparts, and in many cases adopting pro-Soviet views, they recognised the vulnerability of the Government's position and, consistently seeking the cooperation and goodwill of the Conservative and Liberal oppositions, sought, in the words of R. Bassett, 'to endure'. (154) Moreover, the ILP, the political basis of the MSFG, occupied a tenuous position in relation to the Labour Party, suffering from a widening rift between the minority of 'left' MPs demanding a more positive socialist administration, and those anxious to avoid embarrassing the Government. (155) Clynes therefore was able to resist pressures for an official inquiry into film censorship, despite the vociferous nature of the reformist lobby and its support by a substantial section of the cultural and intellectual elite in Britain.

5.

Although the origins and character of the Federation of Workers' Film Societies are to be located in the perspectives and priorities of the Comintern, the CPGB and its orbital groups, the film art movement and the censorship controversy generated a much wider interest in the possibility of a 'workers' film movement'. The coincidence of interest between cineastes, Labour-based cultural groups, political and campaign organisations, not only in Soviet culture but in the exhibition of Soviet films in uncensored form, suggested the

154. R. Bassett, 1931. Political Crisis (London, 1958), p.40. Though having a majority in the House of Commons over the Conservative Party of twenty-seven, the Labour Government was thirty-eight seats short of an absolute majority, and was heavily dependent upon Liberal support for the success of its legislative programme.

155. See R. Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism 2nd ed. (London, 1975), p.166.

feasibility of such a project, despite the financial problems involved. The measure of its 'success' resides in the fact of its existence in the face of several forbidding obstacles, not least of which was a basic cultural practice widely shared and deeply rooted conceptualising film in terms of entertainment values. As the Labour Party's Press and Publicity Officer, Arthur Bax lamented, as late as 1948,

Our film audiences have been spoilt in every sense of the word. They have been brought up to regard the film as an entertainment pure and simple.....and there are thousands who resent the use of film for any other purpose but the "legitimate" one. (156)

A further measure of the project's feasibility was the almost simultaneous formation of the Masses Stage and Film Guild, with substantial backing from Labour leaders. Though Labour organisations appear not to have become involved in the FWFS, a body of individual support for a workers' film movement, or at least, use of film by Labour, clearly did exist, most notably in London. The decision of the majority of Labour politicians who became involved in the MSFG not to subscribe to the LWFS probably had a political basis. There are however reports of Labour Ministers attending LWFS screenings, and, according to one member of the Federation, Ellen Wilkinson and Charles Trevelyan being involved in the formation of workers' film societies federated to the FWFS, in, respectively, Middlesbrough and Newcastle.(157)

The LWFS and the MSFG survived for marginally over two years. Both suffered initially from censorship difficulties, but the intrinsic attractiveness of their film material, the publicity derived from the adverse discrimination of the LCC, in conjunction with the political perspectives of left sections of the movement, prompted considerable interest in their schemes. This interest was, in relation to the size of the movement, of extremely small proportions. One indication of this is provided by the returns from Licensing Authorities in response to a Home Office questionnaire in February 1931. There were twenty-four areas where permission was sought to show Mother, three in regard to New Babylon, two for Battleship Potemkin and one for Storm over Asia.

156. 'Can Films Win Votes?', The N.F.A. Journal, November-December 1948, p.14. (NFA: National Film Association)
157. Manchester Polytechnic, Cordwell Papers, R.Cordwell, undated. note to Seona Robertson, North West Film Archive.

Permission was granted in fourteen areas for Mother. Potemkin was refused on each occasion, as was New Babylon; and Storm over Asia was allowed to be shown.(158) Censorship clearly played some part therefore in inhibiting the development of what interest there was. But from the number of applications it would suggest that such interest was quite limited. Since it is not clear from whom such requests came it is possible that some applications to show these films were from film art groups. With such qualifications in mind though it would seem that some Soviet films had sufficient popular appeal to justify their widespread commercial exhibition. Turksib and The General Line were shown frequently before cinema audiences. Turksib, for example, was reportedly shown in over 200 cinemas.(159)

But the specific context needs to be considered in assessing the size of this 'interest'. Despite the revolutionary posturings of the CPGB the tenor of the Labour movement as a whole was one of conciliation, attendant upon the series of political defeats and the demoralisation dating from 1926. There was in this period a marked rightward shift within the ranks and the leaderships of the Labour movement. The launching of the FWFS, as with the 'class against class' policy of the CPGB, was against the stream, contrary to the general political climate of the Labour movement. The attractiveness of the Masses' Stage and Film Guild to Labour politicians testifies to the appeal of the notion of a 'workers' cinema', yet their reluctance to give full support to its activities reveals the fundamental ambivalence of their position, grounded in preoccupations with the far more substantial problems of Government, and of the survival of the Labour Administration. Just as with the Film Guild, so with the London Workers' Film Society. The potential recruits to a 'workers' cinema' appear to have been receptive to the FWFS showing Soviet films, but all the available evidence suggests that, much as they sympathised with the Soviet Union, they were unwilling to subscribe to the political perspectives of the organising bodies involved, in so far as no Labour organisations became affiliated to the Federation, and no organisational

158. British Film Institute, British Board of Film Censors. Verbatim Reports (1931), Control of Cinematograph Exhibitions in England and Wales. Summary of replies to a Questionnaire Addressed from the Home Office in February 1931, to all Licensing Authorities under the Cinematograph Act 1909, in England and Wales, n.d.
159. D.Knowles, The Censor, the Drama and the Film 1900-34 op.cit., pp.213-4. Paul Rotha, Celluloid: The Film Today (London, 1931), p.58, makes an identical claim.

basis for workers' film societies was established within factories or workshops. The principal industrial/political thrust of the Federation under the guidance of its communist leaders was completely unsuccessful: despite several attempts to coordinate activities with the National Minority Movement, and the production of a film focussing on one of its major campaigns, no evidence is available which suggest that a basis of support was built around NMM fractions. The only headway made by the Federation was with individual members of labour organisations, cineastes and intellectuals. In London this membership consisted of those who subscribed to the perspectives of the CPGB. Elsewhere workers' film societies had more broadly based political support.

After initial censorship difficulties these two film groups concentrated on showing films. In other cities FWFS groups were persistently dogged by such problems. Unable to secure regular screenings, or pay for film hire (as a result of summary banning by Watch Committees) provincial groups folded, and the revenue of Atlas Films declined steadily. By December 1931 it was in dire financial difficulties, with losses of £500 over the year.(160) Despite the resilience and optimism of the organisation - the LWFS published a journal, Workers' Cinema, during the last six months of its existence - it could neither sustain such losses nor find appropriate new films to screen.(161)

The central organisation of the FWFS ground to inertia under such circumstances, yet its leading individuals were already anticipating new possibilities with the eagerly awaited arrival of a satisfactory 16mm film stock. The three main problems restricting the development of the FWFS had been censorship, a weak financial basis and a reliance on foreign film productions. The arrival of 16mm film stock raised the possibility of overcoming all of these problems. Being non-inflammable, the Cinematograph Act of 1909 was inapplicable to screenings of films on this gauge of stock, and therefore local Licensing Authorities were powerless to intervene in exhibitions in unlicensed premises. Being considerably cheaper either to use for film.

160. Daily Worker, 21 December 1931, p.6.

161. At least two and probably three issues of Workers' Cinema were produced, but no copies appear to have survived.

production or for film hire, 16mm film reduced overheads and charges for small organisations with little money, removing the earlier dependence on foreign productions.

The immediate significance of these two film agencies of the Labour movement resides, firstly, in their conscious attempts to undermine or bypass the established censorship procedure and expose the operation of an invidious political censorship. That is to say, these agencies were vehicles for a political offensive against the conservative State. Secondly, they constitute the first attempts to establish alternative networks of film distribution and exhibition, based upon organisations within the Labour movement, and conceived as integral to the development of an authentic culture and politics of the working class, in opposition to the dominant culture and the 'manipulation' of the media. Lastly, they are important in the remarkable extent to which Soviet films, conceptualised as 'workers' films', were considered to be of relevance to British workers in the assertion of this working class culture. These factors were of long term significance in the context of the creeping fascination within the Labour movement, shared by intellectuals and rank-and-file members alike, for the Soviet Union, which peaked in the mid- to late- 1930's. In this later period Soviet cultural experiments were attributed credence by Labour groups heavily informed by 'workerist' perspectives; and cultural 'struggle' assumed an unprecedented importance. The film's facility, it was believed, for recording 'real events', and thereby being of supreme 'propaganda' value, inevitably raised its status in the armoury of publicity and educational media available to Labour. The realist aesthetic which had been introduced to British audiences from the Soviet Union and Germany by the Film Society, the Avenue Pavilion and the FWFS provided the starting point for the political utilisation of film, most notably with the documentary film-makers. The ultimate significance of the experience of the FWFS is that its origins, character and development were of considerable importance in influencing the subsequent development of later film agencies for the movement. The work of these organisations forms the subject of the following two chapters.

Chapter Six: LEFT WING FILM AGENCIES. 1933 - 1939 (I)

Between 1933 and 1939 a number of film agencies were formed within the Labour movement independent of the large national organisations but politically associated with the Communist Party or the left wing of the movement. They were a second generation of distributors and producers following the pioneer work of the Federation of Workers' Film Societies and Atlas Films. During these seven years three principal groups, Kino, the Workers' Film and Photo League and the Progressive Film Institute handled approximately 122 foreign films and 89 produced in Britain, either by themselves or local Labour groups. By far the majority of these films were distributed by Kino and the Progressive Film Institute; and the League was the most prolific production group.

This and the following chapter will examine the origins of these groups, the nature and scope of their activities, and the contexts in which some of their productions were made. The research for these chapters proved particularly difficult and time-consuming. All three organisations were run, technically at least, along business lines; but only in the case of the Progressive Film Institute (PFI) for the entire length of its existence. With the exception of the League their records have not survived. League documents were recently traced to two boxes in a garden shed in Sussex, and their original executors, Jonathan Lewis and Elizabeth Taylor-Mead, kindly gave me access to them. The Cuthbertson Papers, found in the possession of Hugh Cuthbertson, the Secretary of the League in the later years of the 1930's, are by no means complete: there are gaps in correspondence, minutes of committee meetings, and in administrative records, and a number of films are missing. Nevertheless the collection constitutes a primary source of some importance for this study, providing documentation on the activities of the League, Kino and other groups; and gives an excellent insight into the problems of non-theatrical distribution met by non-commercial organisations, the types of customers they attracted, etc., as well as valuable information on the contemporary political and cultural climate, preserving, for example, the opinions of local activists.

A second collection, a small folder of photostats, was kindly given to the author by Herbert Marshall who was at various times involved in Kino, the PFI and the League. The Herbert Marshall Collection consists of a few items of correspondence, minutes for one Kino committee meeting, a script for a film, one or two Kino memoranda, a large number of Kino publicity slips advertising the group's films, and a couple of catalogues detailing Kino's library collection with price lists, etc.

These apart, there are very few primary sources available of an organisational or administrative nature, despite strenuous efforts on the part of many people to trace them. For basic information recourse has been made in consequence to a large number of journals. A major source proved to be the 'What's On' column in the Daily Worker, and the paper generally was indispensable for a wealth of micro-information unlikely to found in organisational records. In this connection it needs to be stressed that the status of an historical document is not fixed by its internal properties alone, but also by the questions which are asked of it - journals such as Left News or Party Organiser can be of both secondary and primary value. Unverifiable claims, for example, regarding the size of audiences at Kino's shows, featured frequently in left wing journals, and can only be taken as a doubtful guide to the likely audience size at such meetings. But it is evident from advertisements by film users that Kino's distribution work was on a national scale, and from statements in these journals that certain organisations coordinated their activities with Kino for political purposes.

This chapter is essentially a study of independent organisations providing films for the Labour movement for various political purposes. One means of examining their activities would be to survey in detail their customers. These agencies provided for a large number of trades councils, Communist Party and trade union branches, working-class clubs and societies, campaign organisations and ad hoc committees. In the case of local Labour organisations, such a detailed study awaits further research, the scope of such an inquiry requiring far more time and resources than the present study permits. In cases where national organisations used the League's or Kino's films, their records and journals where possible have been consulted. In most cases little information of value to this study has survived. In many cases the records are either known to have been destroyed, are lost, or are not known to have survived.

The records of the Communist Party, the Friends of Soviet Russia, the Left Book Club and the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, organisations with which Kino closely coordinated its activities, do not exist. Their journals however contain a good deal of information relating to these activities, much of which is of primary value.

Additional information has been derived from correspondence and interviews with several former members of these groups, including Ivor Montagu, Eileen Montagu, Ralph Bond, Bill Megarry, Sheila Handel, Betty Bower, David Brotmacher and Herbert Marshall. On the whole their information and comments have been extremely valuable, clarifying obscure developments and filling in details which would almost certainly never have been recorded. There are of course limitations to oral history, and it was clear from some of the points made that old political disagreements were still strong in the memory of these participants. Where possible their information has been matched with that from other sources to establish general reliability; and no major point in the following discussion rests on their testimony alone.

Lastly, one of the most time-consuming aspects of this study has been the collation of information regarding the films which these groups produced and distributed. No single source exists containing titles for all the films which any one group handled. Few sources, the catalogues of the National Film Archive (NFA) apart, provide full details of the physical properties of these films (time-length, gauge, etc.) and their date of production and availability; and some entries in those catalogues are inaccurate. Also, the NFA only provides information on films which it has in its collection, and many films distributed by Kino or the PFI no longer exist. Others are in the sole possession of Stanley Forman of Educational and Television Films Ltd., successor to the PFI in the post-war period, whose protective concern for unique and irreplaceable material has on occasion made it difficult to obtain the required information - or even to know of the existence of certain films. All surviving films produced by Kino, the League and the PFI have been viewed with the exception of three (1) not only for purposes of description but for precisely these types of information. For prod-

1. They are all Kino productions: Blood Bank Service in Spain, Schools in Catalonia, Save Spanish Children. They are in the possession of Stanley Forman, but the author only became aware of their existence after completing the research for this thesis.

uctions which no longer exist the author has relied mainly on advertisements in journals and the publicity slips in the Herbert Marshall Collection.

1. Origins

Just as the initiating source for the formation of a Labour film agency in 1929 derived from political-cultural organisations within the communist section of the Labour movement, so, during the 1933-39 period, when 16mm film became the principal medium of Labour film work, Labour film agencies originated from orbital groups of the Communist Party, corresponding to decisions taken by international networks related to the Comintern and based in Moscow. As before, there was no 'control', but the presence of CPGB members as leading functionaries in them was sufficient to guide their development in directions broadly commensurate with Party policies.

Following the dissolution of the Federation of Workers' Film Societies in the spring of 1932 little film activity took place. There were occasional exhibitions by left wing groups such as the Friends of Soviet Russia, the New Art Cinema Club in Glasgow (successor to the Glasgow Workers' Film Society), the Scottish USSR Society run by Glasgow Independent Labour Party, and the Manchester and Salford WFS. All these groups acquired their films from either the Academy Cinema in London, run by Elsie Cohen, who gave generous assistance to all provincial film groups, acting virtually as their unpaid agent (2), or from the Film Society via Ivor Montagu, who was also Treasurer of the Friends of Soviet Russia. The interest created by the FWFS however had not waned, and production units were still active in London, Liverpool and elsewhere. Members of the Merseyside WFS commenced production of a documentary, using 16mm film, on 'life and work around Liverpool docks', and the film Liverpool: Gateway to Empire was completed in 1933. In Barnsley a group of miners established their own production company in mid-1932, Hammer productions, and made a 35mm film about coalmining and its dangers, Black Diamond.(3) By early 1933 film exhibition was becoming

2. Cinema Quarterly, June 1933, pp.133-7.

3. For details of this film, see R.Low, Films of Comment and Persuasion of the 1930's (London, 1979), pp.112-3.

more frequent, with Bond and Montagu acquiring, it would appear, a number of Soviet shorts and newsreels. In February 1933, for example, a show was organised by the 'Friends of the Daily Worker', at which were screened: The Invasion of Shanghai (a sound film record of the events of January-May 1932, made by the Government of Greater Shanghai and first shown in Britain by the Film Society), Workers' Topical News (a film compilation using the title given to Atlas productions, but shot after Atlas had folded, and including Against Imperialist War, May Day 1932), Red Sports in the USSR (probably a cut version of Spartakiade, a record of the Moscow 'workers' olympics'), Shots of the Class War (?), and others unknown.(4)

In July 1933 a seven minute silent Soviet film Soviet Russia: Past and Present was available on 16mm and 9.5mm stock from 'Cine.' via the Daily Worker (probably Montagu). There was a rapid response amongst Labour groups. Branches of the National Council of Labour Colleges reportedly gave 16 exhibitions in one month in the Midlands Area, 15 in the South Wales Area, 16 in Belfast, and 17 in the North East. The film was hired by each Area Organisation for one or two months and, as suggested by these figures, shown every other evening to NCLC groups. A copy of the film, in the possession of a member of the Manchester and Salford WFS was, according to one report, shown on 14 occasions to a total audience of 1900 people, and eventually over 55 shows were given in the area. In London the film was apparently shown on over 50 occasions to workers' groups, and 20 times in the Birmingham area. Audiences consisted of CPGB and FOSR branches, but also trade union branches. In Belfast, for example, bookings of the film were made by branches of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the Electrical Trades Union, the Transport and General Workers' Union, the National Union of Railwaymen, the National Union of Farm Workers and the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers.(5) There is of course no means of verifying these figures. But it should be noted that the information derives from reports on local branch activities, and not part of publicity material, and therefore there would be no need to exaggerate claims as to the number of shows or the audience sizes for them.

4. Daily Worker, 24 February 1933, p.3.

5. Plebs, November 1933, p.263; February 1934, pp.47-8; March 1934, p.72; May 1934, p.120; Daily Worker, 6 November 1933, p.3; 22 March 1934, p.4; Russia Today, January 1934, p.11.

This film was apparently so popular that by early 1934 copies were in the possession of several FOSR branches which had formed film groups: for example, Swansea and District Workers' Film Group, Manchester FOSR and West Wales Area FOSR. The Forum Cinema, Charing Cross, also run by Elsie Cohen, had its own Cine Department for distribution purposes, and acquired a copy for its library, advertising widely in the left press. It would appear, moreover, that Cohen had an arrangement with 'Cine' whereby she acquired copies of The General Line and Ivan and made them available on 16mm. These films were obtained by Montagu. In December 1933 Cohen was advertising them; and the following month they were available via Area organisations of the Friends of the Soviet Union (as the FOSR was now known). By February 1934 the Forum's Cine Department was advertising them as 'films of Working Class interest', available on 16mm and 9.5mm stock.(6)

The cost of importing and reducing 35mm films to 16mm was not inconsiderable. Duty was payable at the rate of one penny per foot of printed positive film. Battleship Potemkin, 5650 feet in length, would have cost at least £23 10s to import; and would have cost, according to one estimate, roughly £40 to print on 16mm stock.(7) Taking into account the cost of distribution rights which would have had to be paid on foreign films, any long-term scheme for importing 35mm films would have required substantial financial outlay. Quite large though Montagu's income was as an Associate Producer at Gaumont British Studios, it is unlikely that any individual income could meet these costs, particularly in view of the very low returns on exhibitions. There was clearly a need, in view of the growing interest in Soviet films, to establish a formal organisation for their importation and 16mm distribution; and such an organisation was formed in November 1933 - though Montagu's involvement was only indirect.

As before, developments in Moscow played a small part in the establishment of a new Labour film agency. In response to the deepening world economic crisis of the late 1920's, the Comintern, its perspectives determined principally by the needs of the Soviet Union, attached increasing importance to the need to build up mass revolutionary formations within the Labour organisations of the advanced industrial states. The aims were to undermine the dominant position of social democratic bodies,

6. Daily Worker, 29 December 1933, p.4; 15 January 1934, p.4; Plebs, February 1934, p.34.

7. G.M.Godden, The Communist Attack on Great Britain (London, 1935), p.77. Godden was a prominent Catholic journalist fanatically

and build a solid basis of support for the USSR sufficient to provide firm resistance to any moves by capitalist states to seek in military aggression solutions to economic problems - believing fundamentally that any capitalist war would degenerate into an attack on the Soviet Union. Emphasis was placed on trade union work through the activities of the Red International of Labour Unions, whose British section was the National Minority Movement. As discussed earlier, RILU, commensurate with the general emphases of Comintern policy, gave increasing priority to cultural and educational work. In May 1929 the Agitprop Department of RILU sent a letter to all affiliated bodies explaining their tasks:

Where the cultural organisations of the workers are under revolutionary proletarian leadership, the RILU adherents and Sections in the various countries must extend maximum help to their work. The revolutionary wing of the trade union movement must draw these organisations into the work of educating their members and effect ideological influence on the unorganised masses of the workers. Again, the cultural-educational organisations of the workers should help the trade unions in carrying out economic and political campaigns, catering to them during strikes and lockouts, as well as during workers' demonstrations, mass meetings, etc. (8)

As a result a number of national cultural leagues were established by communist organisations, with international coordinating committees to strengthen their organisation and operation, encourage an exchange of information and experience between groups, and improve contacts with groups in the Soviet Union, widely considered to be the vanguard of cultural activity. A Workers' Cultural League in Berlin, for example, consisted of the WIR, the International Federation of the Victims of War and Toil, the Free Thinkers' Association, the Federation of Proletarian Writers, the Association of Revolutionary Writers in Fine Arts, the Workers' Radio Federation, the Workers' Sports and Cultural Amalgamation, and several others.(9)

opposed to communism.

8. See Trade Union Propaganda and Cultural Work, June 1929, pp.9-12.
 9. Ibid., September 1929, pp.23-4.

The most important international cultural network was the International Union of Revolutionary Theatre, set up in Moscow in October 1929 and first known as the International Workers' Dramatic Union. The IURT was considered in Moscow to be most valuable because both cinema and radio were under-developed as media for political use by the revolutionary Labour movement,(10) whereas theatre was not only long-established as a medium for Labour political work, but made a substantial contribution to working class cultural life. Already, before the formation of the IURT, workers' theatre groups in Europe were heavily influenced by Soviet 'agitprop' techniques, adopting an increasingly utilitarian conception of theatre and art. By 1929 most workers' theatre groups had become 'agitprop', performing political revues, satires, cabaret, etc, on street corners, on lorries, by the side of demonstrations and at political meetings. The IURT's first conference in May 1930 in Moscow gave 'official' backing to these techniques. It encouraged the British Workers' Theatre Movement (WTM), whose origins were in the communist rather than the social democratic section of the Labour movement, to emulate its German and Soviet counterparts, which had pioneered them. The WTM occupied an important part in Communist Party life, as a political and cultural focus.(11) Through the coordinating activities of Tom Thomas, who was on the Organising Committee of the IURT (together with Willi Muenzenberg), and Charlie Mann, Editor of Red Stage, the WTM gradually built up a network of 18 troupes across the country, and held its first national conference in September 1932.(12)

The annual IURT Olympiad held in Moscow to bring foreign sections together and exchange ideas was also used to focus more closely the attention of foreign sections on the specific needs of the Union. Heinrich Diamant, General Secretary of the IURT and Head of RILU's Agit-prop Department, explained the purpose of the IURT and the Olympiad:

10. C.D.Innes, Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre: The Development of Modern German Drama (Cambridge, 1972), pp.51 ff.
11. R.Samuel, Editorial Introduction to 'Documents and Texts from the Workers' Theatre Movement (1928-36)', History Workshop Journal, Autumn 1977, pp.104-7. See also, D.Bradby, J.McCormick, People's Theatre op.cit., pp.97-8.
12. For information on these groups. see the WTM's journal, Red Stage.

the theatre is visualised as an instrument of propaganda, as an instrument for the mobilisation of the masses against the new imperialist war now being prepared, as an instrument for explaining the consequences of this war to the great masses of the population. The task of the theatre includes as well popularisation of the enormous construction being carried on in the Soviet Union at present when the whole capitalist world is writhing in the convulsions of the general crisis. (13)

The Olympiad held in May 1933 was different from previous occasions in so far as by then a Cinema Bureau had been attached to the IURT's Organising Committee. A Cinema Conference was convened there, at which the two principal organisers, Leon Moussinac and Bela Balazs, stressed the need to combat the capitalist cinema. Emphasis was placed on using small gauge (16mm) film to show Soviet productions and produce local material. There being few revolutionary film leagues operative,

it was decided that the theatre section of the IURT in each country was to be held responsible for the building up of a revolutionary film movement. (14)

The Conference resolved to build up links between each national film section and to arrange an exchange of films and knowledge. A member of the Bureau was Herbert Marshall, a member of the CPGB, who had been in Moscow since 1930 studying under Eisenstein at GIK, the State Institute of Cinematography. Placed in charge of the 'Anglo-American Section', he was responsible for firstly building up workers' film units for production, cine clubs for exhibition, and a national film league for distribution. Secondly, his was the responsibility for encouraging the evolution of a workers' film culture, by arranging film schools, both for appreciation and production, promoting a film journal, organising public meetings to discuss 'bourgeois' films and workers' films, developing the 'theoretical struggle' against bourgeois

13. International Workers' Theatre Olympiad, Bulletin, no.1, n.d.,
?May 1932, p.1.
14. M.Baker, New Theatre, September-October 1933, p.24. This journal was the organ of the Workers' Theatre and Dance League of the USA, the American Section of the IURT; and after 1933 was also the organ of the American Film and Photo League.

and fascist films, and generally organising action against reactionary films (pickets, sabotage, publicity), and arranging for the use of films in general educational work with workers' study groups.(15)

In practice Marshall appears to have performed only an intermittent role in developments, being in the Soviet Union until 1937, making annual trips to Britain. But the British WTM returned from Moscow and quickly formed a Film Section, consisting of two people, probably Charlie Mann and Ivan Seruya, Party members active in the FSU as well as the WTM. They gave their first show at the end of July 1933, using a small screen with back-projection powered by a car battery. Excerpts from Soviet Russia: Past and Present were shown to crowds outside their homes in the East End of London.(16) In late November, after a series of appeals for members, support and apparatus, Kino was formed from the WTM Film Section, and established an office at 33 Ormond Yard, WC 1, the address for the WTM national headquarters and the national offices of the FSU and the WIR.

Initially Kino considered its principal tasks to be the provision of Soviet films and the development of a network for their distribution and exhibition, and the production of 'workers' films'.(17) Raising loans from members, which had, by May 1934 apparently grown to over 60, the 16mm distribution rights for Britain for Battleship Potemkin and The General Line were acquired almost immediately.(18) Within a year Kino had acquired five Soviet films (all silent), made arrangements for obtaining a further fourteen,(19) and its production unit had produced three newsreels and a short fiction film, all silent,

15. Herbert Marshall, in an interview with the author, 24 May 1978; 'Programme of the International Cinema Bureau. Summary of the Decisions of the Film Conference held in Moscow recently to plan a programme for the Cinema Bureau of the Revolutionary Theatre', New Theatre, May 1934, pp.15-16.
16. Tom Thomas, 'A Propertyless Theatre for the Propertyless Class', a transcript of an interview, in 'Documents and Texts from the Workers' Theatre Movement(1928-36)', History Workshop Journal, loc.cit.; Daily Worker, 3 August 1933, p.4.
17. Cinema Quarterly, Summer 1934, p.262.
18. Amateur Cine World, May 1934, p.45.
19. Cinema Quarterly, Summer 1934, p.262.

lasting 10 - 15 minutes each. Pressures created within the group due to the demand for Kino's Soviet films led to the formal separation of the Kino London Production Group (KLPG) from the distribution side, which wished to run the agency along business lines.(20) The twenty-strong KLPG considered the move politically backward and, in joining with the Workers' Camera Club to form the Workers' Film and Photo League in November 1934, reaffirmed its commitment to the decisions taken at the Moscow Cinema Conference. In its Manifesto, issued probably in December that year, the League announced its determination to

produce its own films giving a true picture of life today, recording the industrial struggle and living conditions of the British workers and the struggle of the employed and unemployed to improve these conditions.

It will produce news-reel magazines of current events of working class interest.

It will popularise the great Russian films and endeavour to exhibit them to the widest possible audiences.

It will carry on criticism of current commercial films in the Press and in its own literature, and expose films of a militarist, fascist, or anti-working class nature. (21)

The League intended to arrange photographic exhibitions throughout the country, organise photographic competitions, arrange a supply of photographs to the press, hold schools and classes on film and photography, assist local groups in film production, provide technical advice, and generally coordinate film and camera activities.

Early in March 1935 Kino registered as a non-profit-making company. The same month Montagu formed a registered non-profit-making company, the Progressive Film Institute, to distribute 35mm films. The registration articles of both agencies were identical in one respect, namely, that both had been established 'To promote sociological education by means of the kinema'.(22) The PFI was formed to distribute films of

20. Kino Films, First Annual Report, 1936.
21. British Film Institute, Cuthbertson Papers, file (2), 'Manifesto of the Workers' Film and Photo League', n.d., ?December 1934; Cinema Quarterly, Winter 1934-5, pp.127-8; Daily Worker, 27 November, 1934, p.4. (Hereafter, the Cuthbertson Papers will be referred to as 'FPL (x)'.) At the time of writing these papers had not been catalogued. File numbers refer to the provisional sorting made by

a 'social' and 'progressive' nature which could not otherwise secure a distributor in Britain. The Film Society had already a well-established practice of importing films to Britain, titling and editing them for British audiences, and then offering them to the cinema trade for renting. As few commercial renters (distributors) were willing to take these films the Society registered them with the Board of Trade and acted as a distributor for them. Several of these foreign films were Soviet and were usually given runs at the Academy, Forum or Everyman cinemas in London, and hired by provincial film societies. Many Soviet films of a more overtly political character were not however acquired for the Film Society, and the PFI was formed specifically to ensure that this material was imported and, if no commercial renter would take them, made available for showing in cinemas by PFI release.(23)

As Chairman of the Film Society Montagu had had long experience of negotiations with the Soviet import/export agency Sovkino, (now known as Soyuzintorgkino). But, conducting its operation strictly on business lines the Soviet organisation was unable to do anything more than 'buy and sell', thereby restricting the amount of Soviet material which the Film Society acquired to those it could afford. Negotiating on behalf of the embryonic PFI in February 1935 - a couple of weeks before the Institute was formed - Montagu was able to secure an unprecedented agreement with Soyuzintorgkino whereby it supplied material completely free of charge. It was further agreed that in all cases the PFI would pay import duty and, in event of commercial exploitation, (that is, these films being taken up by commercial renters) PFI would be repaid by the renter concerned. Where the PFI distributed these films 50% of any revenue forthcoming would be returned to Soyuzintorgkino, and the Institute would meet its duty, titling and editing expenses from the remainder. This was clearly a strictly commercial arrangement. Two further agree-

Victoria Wegg-Prosser, whose article, 'The Archive of the Film Photo League', Sight and Sound, Autumn 1977, pp.245-7, provides a short but useful introduction.

22. Kinematograph Year Book, 1936.

23. Ivor Montagu, in an interview with the author, 14 April 1978.

ments granted PFI 35mm distribution rights for all Soviet films in Britain - if the Institute wished to take them; and similar rights for Kino for 16mm distribution.(24)

The immediate sources for PFI's formation were firstly that Kino was proving successful, its Soviet material in demand from Labour organisations all over the country. A regular importer of Soviet material on 35mm stock was needed to enable Kino to expand its 16mm operation. Kino's finances were far too small to meet the cost of importing a large number of Soviet films and reducing them to the smaller gauge; nor did it have the equipment or the organisational base to show or distribute these 35mm films, which would have consequently gone unused. Secondly, there was a need to distribute Free Thaelmann, a film on the life, work and imprisonment without trial of the German Communist leader by the Nazi Government. Ernst Thaelmann's imprisonment, like that of Georgi Dimitrov the Bulgarian Communist leader, provided the Comintern with a platform for world-wide anti-fascist recruitment and campaign work within the ranks of progressives and liberals.(25) This compilation film had been commissioned by the World Committee for the Relief of the Victims of German Fascism, an immensely influential organisation established by Willi Muenzenberg in Paris. Muenzenberg was at this time Propaganda Chief of the West European Bureau of the Comintern. The Relief Committee, formed shortly after the Nazi takeover in Germany, provided cover for the Comintern's propaganda operations. These focussed increasingly on encouraging an anti-fascist opinion transcending existing class boundaries, appealing to the broadest possible audience.(26)

The New York Film and Photo League, the principal American Section of the Cinema Bureau of the IURP, was commissioned to produce the Thaelmann film, known in the USA as Ernst Thaelmann: Fighter Against Fascism. The film was given its first showing in October 1934, and copies were quickly issued to branches of the World Committee in North America and Europe. Ivor Montagu was prominent in the campaign work of the British Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism (RCVGF),

24. I.Montagu, in a letter to the author, 6 May 1979; Daily Worker, 28 February 1935, p.2.
25. See, D.N.Pritt, From Right to Left (London, 1965), pp. 41 ff; C.H.Rolph, The Life, Letters and Diaries of Kingsley Martin (Harmondsworth, 1978), pp.193-4; B.Gross, Willi Muenzenberg (Michigan, 1974), pp.235 ff.
26. A.Koestler, The Invisible Writing op.cit., pp.194, 198; G.Nollau, International Communism and World Revolution op.cit., pp.119-21.

and he acquired a copy to edit for British audiences. As the 35mm film could not be exhibited commercially without a distributor's registration and no commercial distributor would take it, Montagu, already planning to establish a left wing distribution unit, immediately launched the Progressive Film Institute to release Free Thaelmann.(27) The fifteen minute silent film was submitted to and banned by the British Board of Film Censors and the Labour-controlled LCC Licensing Committee. Unable to secure a commercial showing in London (which, propaganda value apart, would help pay for titling and editing costs)) the PFI gave the film to Kino, who reduced it to 16mm and arranged a premiere exhibition at an RCVGF meeting in July 1935.(28)

All three film agencies clearly evolved from decisions taken by communist controlled organisations. Throughout their subsequent histories Kino and the PFI maintained close associations with the communist wing of the Labour movement. Only the League moved away from the orbit of the Party, but even then remaining distinctly left wing in character until 1938. Kino and the PFI operated effectively as Party units, their personnel almost entirely Party members. In 1935 Kino's Council consisted of H.Thomas(Chairman), Albert Pizer (Treasurer), Sam Handel (Secretary), Charlie Mann, Charles Gralnick, Ivan Seruya, A.Marshall, and Joseph Reeves, all but the latter two being CPGB members. In 1938, while Kino's Council had expanded to include an impressive array of cultural and political figures,(29) corresponding with the CPGB's 'popular front' strategy, the agency was run by Basil Burton (Chairman), Frank Jackson (Secretary), R.D.Wood (Treasurer) and David Granville (Manager), all of whom were Party members.

Similarly, the Progressive Film Institute had a number of prominent figures on its Directorial Board,(30) but none made any

27. Ivor Montagu, in an interview with the author; I.Montagu, letter, Sight and Sound, Spring 1980, pp.130-1.
28. Daily Worker, 24 July 1935, p.4; 30 July, p.4.
29. The full Council included Professor J.D.Bernal, Aneurin Bevan, the Bishop of Birmingham, Alberto Cavalcanti, Sir Stafford Cripps, Maurice Dobb, Havelock Ellis, Victor Gollancz, Viscount Hastings, Lancelot Hogben, Julian Huxley, Hyman Levy, Ivor Montagu, D.N.Pritt, Joseph Reeves, Paul Rotha, Bertrand Russell, Lord Strabolgi and H.G.Wells.
30. They included John Jagger MP, Joseph Reeves, Wilfrid Roberts MP, Dorothy Woodman, Alan Bush, Dudley Collard, The Earl of Listowel, D.N.Pritt, Louise Morgan and Geoffrey Vevers.

contribution to the day-to-day running of the agency.(31) For all practical purposes the Institute consisted of Eileen Hellstern (to whom Montagu was married) and Bill Megarry, the one handling bookings and administration, the other editing, titling and repair work. Montagu acted as 'consultant', providing funds for its initial launching, raising money from various sources to finance its productions, and generally keeping the Institute solvent by regular donations from his own income. All three of course were Party members, as were most of the others who at various times were hired by the PFI for production work, Herbert Marshall, Alan Lawson, Philip Leacock, Arthur Graham, Ray Pitt, Sidney Cole and Christopher Brunel.

The Film and Photo League was a less centralised, less well defined organisation, with at various times upwards of a hundred members and approximately thirty affiliated groups. Nevertheless, the bulk of League activity sprang from the central coordinating committee in London, several members of which formed a Communist Party fraction: Jean Ross (Secretary 1935-6, and to whom Claud Cockburn was married), Sime Seruya (who had been involved in the international suffrage movement since at least 1912), Ivan Seruya (her son), Sol Freedman, Sam Serter, Frank Jackson, David Stein and Albert Pizer. The fraction was not unchanging, but consisted of a number of these at any one moment. Other members of the core of activists were socialists, almost certainly to the left of the Labour Party, including Hugh Cuthbertson (who was involved in the socialist christian 'Thaxted movement'), Frank Cox, Leonard Peto, Norman King and Channon Wood.

The presence of Party members in leading positions in any of these groups does not imply that they were 'tools' of the Party or under Party 'control'. On the contrary, the Party, as a national organisation, realised only late in the decade the value of cultural/political groups such as Unity Theatre or Kino, and left them largely to their own resources.(32) These film agencies operated independently. Their activities coincided with or corresponded to the broad sweep of the Party's policies and strategies, reflecting the adherence of their

31. Ivor Montagu, in an interview with the author.

32. This opinion was confirmed by Herbert Marshall, in an interview with the author, 24 May 1978.

personnel to the Party line rather than Party manipulation. Party campaigns provided the basis for film work, and these groups, as will be shown, attempted to integrate their activities with campaign requirements, sometimes with encouragement from the Party leadership. Moreover, their highly specific origins effectively determined the long-term character of their work: in the case of Kino and the PFI, the concentration on the exhibition and distribution of Soviet films; in the case of the League, the production of 'workers' films' and the cultivation of a 'workers' film culture'. They could not be confined in their functions as mere publicity units of the Party. Nor could they be characterised as front organisations of the Comintern. Having been established as a result of broad policy decisions in Moscow, these film groups were guided only by the individuals who ran them. There is nothing to suggest that the Comintern played any direct part in their activities; and there is no evidence of Comintern funding.

2. The Progressive Film Institute

The Progressive Film Institute was formed in 1935 to import and distribute non-commercial films which no other distributor would take and which would not otherwise be available in Britain. In practice this meant films mainly of Soviet origin. The PFI attempted to encourage independent exhibitors to take this material but, as with the other importers of continental films, the Institute found exhibitors generally reluctant to book foreign films (other than American) because, with audiences apparently unenthusiastic, they were considered unprofitable.⁽³³⁾ This tendency was reinforced by the structure of the industry itself, and quota requirements under the Cinematograph Act of 1927. Prospective distributors and exhibitors of Soviet productions were likely to incur quota obligations on films which were not as profitable as American ones, and in so doing would reduce profit margins further, with British audiences preferring American films to the homegrown product. They were therefore doubly reluctant to take non-commercial foreign material. Consequently there were only a small number of distributors handling continental imports - the main ones being the Film Society, Elsie Cohen of the Academy Cinema, and the Progressive Film Institute. Throughout

33. Ivor Montagu, in an interview with the author.

the 1930's there were probably no more than five or six specialist cinemas in Britain: in London the Academy(1930), the Forum (1932), and the Berkeley (1938), all run by Cohen, and the Everyman, Hampstead; and in Glasgow, the Cosmo (1939). Film societies provided the main custom, and these numbered no more than fifty during the peak year, 1937.(34)

In view of these circumstances, the PFI's role vis-à-vis the commercial cinema was never likely to be its most important one. A unique service was performed in making available for those cinemas and film societies which wished to see them a sizeable library of Soviet features, documentaries, newsreels and travelogues - 45 films at least - between March 1935 and September 1939. The Institute was keen to promote the exhibition of 'non-commercial' films in the ordinary cinema to influence critical tastes and raise audience standards, as a means of bringing pressure to bear on the cinema industry regarding, firstly reactionary films, and secondly, the poor quality of standard Hollywood and British fare. The PFI subsequently collaborated with Kino in various moves intended to cultivate a demand for non-commercial films in the cinema, including the production of films and ownership of a specialist cinema, which eventually led to the building of the Cosmo cinema.(35) Nevertheless, the PFI's principal function was the distribution of 35mm film for non-theatrical exhibition, providing a film service for the wider Labour movement corresponding with the needs of the Communist Party and its auxiliary organisations.

The activities of the Progressive Film Institute were heavily determined by its positioning within the configuration of communist organisations in Britain. Thorold Dickinson, Norman McLaren and Harold Elvin (a member of the TUC General Council) apart, all its employees were members of the Communist Party, and Montagu, a senior Party propagandist, was its driving force. One indication of its close involvement in communist politics was the Institute's cooperation

34. Arts Enquiry, The Factual Film op.cit., p.155. G.Hardy, 'Censorship and Film Societies' in C.Davy (ed.), Footnotes to the Film (London, 1938), pp.273-4, claimed that there were over 100 film societies in Britain by 1938, but this is probably a considerable over-estimate.
35. Ivor Montagu, in an interview with the author. These moves are discussed below.

with the Friends of the Soviet Union - although the full extent of this relationship must remain uncertain, as FSU records have been destroyed.

By mid-1935 Comintern and CPGB policies had crystallised unambiguously around the strategy of the 'popular front'. With specifically Soviet needs taking precedence, priority was given to the mobilisation of the widest possible support beyond existing class and political boundaries for an alignment of Britain and France with the Soviet Union to contain the latent expansionism of the Nazi regime.(36) This had the dual attraction for the communists of generating support for the Soviet Union, and thereby helping to improve its security, and of casting the Communist Party much nearer the centre of traditional British political life. Revolutionary postures were abandoned in favour of broad class alliances, forged on the basis of widely held clusters of ideas whose common factors were anti-war and anti-fascist sentiments. Popular front activity materialised in many forms and used a wide variety of organisational channels. Peace and anti-fascist campaigns became the focal point of much CPGB activity in the mid- and late-1930's. Central to both, in Party publicity and policy statements, was an invocation of the USSR as a guardian of peace and the vanguard of resistance to fascist aggression, albeit through the medium of collective security. The CPGB strove not only to improve its own image, but that of the Soviet State, as the indispensable conditions for any progress towards achieving the popular front.

Of crucial importance in this exercise was the Friends of the Soviet Union. The FSU functioned in exactly the same way as the FOSR, to disseminate information about the USSR and counter anti-Soviet propaganda; build fraternal solidarity between Russian and British workers; and mobilise the latter against any attempt by British or any other capitalism to attack or damage the first socialist State.(37) The FSU arranged publicity, exhibitions, cultural evenings, discussion groups, classes and weekend schools, trips to the USSR. It distributed literature, and was generally in attendance at Party and left wing gatherings in cities and large towns. From 1935 onwards, corresponding

36. A.B.Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence: the history of Soviet foreign policy from 1917 to 1967 (London, 1968), p.216.

37. Russia Today, December 1932, p.14.

with the adoption of popular front tactics, it attempted to attract to its ranks prominent members of Britain's scientific, cultural and political elites, and use them effectively as cadres for popular frontist ideas. The climate was certainly favourable. The apparent ability of the Soviet economic system to avoid the otherwise global economic collapse of the 1929-33 period attracted a body of sympathetic opinion in Britain, some impressed by the certitudes of marxist-leninist doctrine, but others, far more, possessed of a strong will to believe that a new world, exorcised of capitalism and its corrupt ways, was being built in the USSR. This body grew with the publication of a stream of glowing reports by western intellectuals, writers and journalists of their sojourns in the 'first workers' state'.(38)

The FSU made its own contribution to this atmosphere through its photo-journal Russia Today, touring photographic exhibitions and, routine activities apart, in regional and national gatherings, culminating in massive and prestigious events such as the Congress of Peace and Friendship with the USSR, held annually in London. People as politically diverse as Robert Boothby, Joseph Reeves, Harold Laski, Sir John Maynard, D.N.Pritt, Oliver Baldwin, Andrew Rothstein, Viscount Hastings, the Duchess of Atholl, P.M.S.Blackett, Geoffrey Mander, Lord Marley, Margaret Cole, Dr.Edith Summerskill, the Earl of Listowel, Hyman Levy, Robert Vaughan Williams, Hamilton Fyfe and Harold Macmillan attended such conferences and meetings, and frequently contributed articles to the FSU's journal.(39)

An important aspect of all FSU activities was the exhibition of Soviet films. As early as 1928 it had been organising film shows of material acquired through the constant traffic of CPGB personnel to and from Moscow, and later from Atlas Films; and continued to do so when Atlas folded, probably acquiring the Soviet films which Atlas had in its possession. By 1934 16mm copies of Soviet Russia: Past and Present were being shown nationwide in Labour halls by FSU branches,

38. B.Jones, The Russia Complex: The British Labour Party and the Soviet Union (Manchester 1977), pp.11 ff; D.Caute, The Fellow Travellers op.cit., part one, passim. See also A.Boyle, The Climate of Treason (London, 1979) and P.G.Werskey, The Visible College (London, 1979).

39. Russia Today, November 1935, pp.4-6; January 1936, pp.4-5; April 1936, p.12; September 1937, p.12; December 1937, p.14; November 1938, p.14. For details of the 1935 Congress, see the official report, Britain and the Soviets (London, 1936).

no longer constrained by the censorship regulations applicable to 35mm film stock.

Leading officials Ernest Brown and Ivor Montagu were particularly keen to popularise socialist construction in the USSR through the medium of film. In December 1934, Montagu having acquired three Soviet shorts, the FSU National Committee announced that it was

taking all possible steps to make these available.....the films will be an important feature of our future plans. (40)

By the autumn of the following year the FSU was preparing a winter campaign of film shows as part of a major effort to 'break down all barriers to the truth about the Soviet Union'; and in early 1936 set up a Film Department to distribute Soviet material in conjunction with Kino. The FSU built up its own collection of newsreels, newsfilms and travelogues, obtained from both Kino and the PFI, including In the Land of the Soviets, a record of the May Day 1935 FSU delegation to Moscow, and Heroes of the Arctic, a documentary of a remarkable rescue in the Arctic Sea.(41)

By late 1935 film exhibition had become an integral part of FSU activities, used not only to publicise Soviet achievements and life in the USSR, but specifically to attract new members.(42) The PFI's role in connection with this publicity work was important in two respects. Firstly in introducing Soviet newsreels, etc., to Britain the Institute enabled Kino to make this material available on 16mm stock, facilitating thereby a far greater level of exhibition by FSU branches and other sympathetic bodies, than would otherwise have been possible. Secondly, Kino's 16mm films would not have been entirely suitable for the large prestige meetings such as the various Congresses of Peace and Friendship, and the larger FSU and CPGB public meetings held in town halls or large auditoria such as Kingsway Hall (Central London) and the People's Palace (Mile End Road, London). The Institute's larger gauge films were more appropriate for such meetings, rendering larger images and with greater definition. They could also be shown in cinemas: the Cambridge Theatre,

40. Russia Today, December 1934, p.15.

41. Ibid., July 1935, p.15; November 1935, pp.4-6; March 1936, p.3; April 1936, p.12.

42. See for example, ibid., January 1937, p.10; February 1937, p.15.

Seven Dials, in London, regularly arranged performances of the PFI's Soviet material for the FSU, which held meetings there.

The scope of the PFI's work is difficult to assess as no organisational records have survived. Recourse to the range and number of films handled by the Institute gives a general indication of the nature of its activities, but there is no information available to suggest how many cinemas took which PFI films and for how long, or which organisations, local and national, were regular customers. Nor is there any complete list of material made available by the Institute. An invaluable source for compiling such a list has been a checklist produced by the National Film Archive shortly after Montagu had deposited the entire PFI library with the NFA in 1951. The list is by no means fully reliable however, providing little more than titles of films, several of which were either not actually completed, or were released in composite form as newsreels, or were out-takes intended for re-editing.(43) From advertisements in left wing journals and papers, and film magazines, it has been possible to build a reasonably accurate picture of the range of films which the PFI handled.

Between 1935 and mid-1939 the PFI imported at least 45 Soviet films. The bulk of these were features such as Pudovkin's The Deserter and the Vasiliev brothers' Chapayev. The rest consisted mainly of newsreels, a few travelogues, cultural films such as Piano Prodigies and Dances of the People of the USSR, and documentary or interest films such as Port of Five Seas, Work and Play in the USSR. Another important source of foreign films was the Spanish Republican Government.(44) At least thirteen and probably several more films were acquired by the PFI from the Spanish Ministry of Public Instruction. Re-edited in London, with fresh commentaries, newsreels such as Madrid Today (1937, the city under air attack and preparations for its defence), Non-Intervention (1938, the defeat of Italian troops at Guadalajara in March 1937), and Latest News, April - June 1938, were released by the PFI for commercial and non-theatrical exhibition. Longer, reportage-documentary and newsfilms included News From Spain (1937), (45) The Health of Spain (1938) and Sunshine in Shadow (1938). Several films of Spanish provenance distributed by the PFI were produced by Laya Films of the Spanish

43. National Film Archive, Progressive Film Institute, Acquisition File.
44. Ivor Montagu, in an interview with B.Hogenkamp, Skrien, op.cit.
45. Isabel Brown, in an interview with the author, 9 December 1979, recalled that this film (for which she supplied the English

Commissariat of Propaganda, such as Refugees from Catalonia and a news-film series News from Spain.

Of the other foreign sources Garrison Films in New York was probably the most important, providing approximately seven American and Chinese productions, such as Millions of Us (1936), Tenants Rent Strike (1939), China Strikes Back (1937) and The Bombing of Canton (1938). A few were obtained from Paris, including La Vie Est À Nous, Renoir's film for the French Communist Party. Surprisingly, in view of the number of left wing and Labour film groups in France, Belgium, Holland and the USA the international contacts of the PFI were few and intermittent, (46) although the Institute did distribute internationally some of its own productions - copies of Behind the Spanish Lines were apparently sent to India, New Zealand, Canada and the USA.(47)

In accordance with popular front perspectives Montagu and the PFI attempted to secure as wide a distribution of the Institute's films as possible, aiming at Labour organisations, campaign groups, film societies, specialist cinemas and the commercial cinema generally. In practice distribution was never very successful.(48) The Communist Party and its auxiliary organisations were probably the PFI's most frequent customers, using films as an important part of their campaign work. The larger public meetings in large halls convened by the Party usually involved the showing of PFI material, with Montagu frequently in attendance providing an introductory talk. Campaign organisations such as the Relief Committee for the Victims of Fascism, the China Campaign Committee, the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, the Dependents Wounded Aid Committee (of the International Brigade), etc., regularly used PFI material for exhibition at meetings in large halls such as Kingsway Hall or the Prince of Wales Baths, St.Pancras. Indeed, Montagu acted as 'film adviser' to the RCVGF and the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (NJCSR), the latter having considerable organisational strength in the country, claiming over 150 branches in mid-1938.(49) The Institute often arranged premiere shows to publicise

commentary, and was present during its editing) originally had a Soviet soundtrack. Herbert Marshall, who was also present, has made a similar claim. Both Montagus deny this.

- 46. I.Montagu, in an interview with B.Hogenkamp, Skrien, op.cit.
- 47. I.Montagu, in an interview with the author.
- 48. I.Montagu, in an interview with B.Hogenkamp, Skrien, op.cit.
- 49. I.Montagu, in an interview with the author; Spanish Relief, June 1938, p.3. This journal was the official bulletin of the NJCSR.

its films and raise money for particular campaigns. In April 1937 for example, it gave the first show of News from Spain, a compilation of Spanish and Soviet footage with some shot by Montagu and Norman McLaren while in Madrid in late 1936, at the People's Palace in aid of the RCVGF.

Labour organisations generally took PFI material for large meetings and the same material was hired from Kino for smaller ones - although the source of supply was often determined by which size of equipment was available (rather than suitable) for the hall booked. No evidence is available however to give an accurate indication of the extent to which Labour organisations hired PFI films. Advertisements in the Daily Worker and elsewhere suggest that in London at least, 35mm film exhibition was not confined to the CPGB and its orbital groups, with bodies such as North Kensington Labour Party, Doorman Long Shop Stewards, Islington Labour Party and Trades Council and the Electrical Trades Union arranging film shows and meetings at which films were shown. Furthermore, on the inception of the Workers' Film Association (established by the Labour Party and the TUC in 1938) its Manager, Joseph Reeves, arranged for the Institute to handle the Association's 35mm distribution work.(50) Though no evidence exists to suggest the full extent to which Labour groups hired PFI material via the Labour Party/TUC film service, a channel clearly existed for the provision of material to divisional Labour Parties and trade union branches.

Montagu recalls that most exhibitions of PFI films took place in cooperative halls and public auditoria. Relatively few cinemas took its films, and these were mainly cinemas in mining villages such as Morpeth Miners Hall and Bedwas Workmen's Hall, run by the local community, which was often left wing in outlook.(51) Film societies were regular if infrequent customers; and a number of cinemas in London showed PFI films frequently. Occasionally one of these would book a film for longer than a week, thereby providing the Institute with much needed

50. Workers' Film Association, Annual Report 1939. Reeves was a member of the PFI Board of Directors.

51. I.Montagu and Bill Megarry, in interviews with the author, respectively 14 April 1978 and 22 September 1977. For the political character of many mining villages in South Wales, see E.Francis, 'Welsh Miners and the Spanish Civil War', Journal of Contemporary History, vol.5, no.3, 1970, pp.177-191.

revenue. The Forum ran Chapayev for a season and Alexander Room's controversial Bed and Sofa for seven months. Provincial cinemas occasionally took PFI films. The Tatler Theatre in Leeds gave the first public exhibition in Britain of Luis Bunuel's Land without Bread (1932, re-edited by Montagu, 1936), showing the film for a week in March 1938.

The PFI attempted to penetrate the commercial cinema in two other related ways: by persuading cinema circuits, or independent cinemas to take its news material for inclusion in their newsreel programmes, and by sell footage to newsreel companies. Herbert Marshall recalls that material sent over by the Spanish Government was edited into ten-minute newsreels, such as Madrid Today, and shown by cinemas in the Granada circuit owned by Sidney Bernstein.(52) This circuit, of 26 cinemas in 1937, took other PFI material, including the Institute's own productions such as Prisoners Prove Intervention in Spain.(53) The ABC chain was reluctantly persuaded, with the help of the Duchess of Atholl, to take another PFI production shot during an expedition in early 1938, on the fascist bombing of British merchant shipping off Spanish coasts. The five minute newsreel featured the courageous 'Potato Jones', Captain of the Mary Llewellyn, who, unprotected, successfully evaded the fascist blockade of Bilbao and brought much needed food to the town. The Chain manager however withdrew the reel after a few days.(54)

Newsreel companies proved similarly reluctant to include PFI's Spanish material in their reels, although they occasionally took clips from its collection of Soviet newsreels. The PFI expedition to Spain sent back a stream of items on the bombing of Barcelona and the sinking of British shipping, and these were offered to all the newsreel companies.(55) Only Pathe would take them however.(56) In Issue 38/13

52. Herbert Marshall, in 'My Basque Beret', a chapter from his forthcoming autobiography, Young Blood Runs Red. I am grateful to Mr. Marshall for kindly giving me a typescript copy.
53. Reynolds News, 8 May 1938, p.1.
54. It was Sidney Bernstein who funded the Duchess of Atholl's trip to Spain, and agreed to give a percentage of his profits to the NJCSR. See, C.Moorehead, Sidney Bernstein (London, 1984), p.108.
55. Thorold Dickinson, in a letter to the author, 11 March 1979.
56. A.Aldgate, Cinema and History: British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War (London, 1979), pp.171-2.

(14 February 1938) Pathe included a fifty foot item 'British Ships Bombed in Mediterranean', shot by PFI's cameraman Alan Lawson. This was followed by stories using PFI footage in Issues 38/20 (10 March) and 38/24 (24 March) on the bombing of Barcelona and British ships in Tarragona, and in Issues 38/28 (7 April) and 38/34 (28 April) items on Republican preparations for the anticipated advance of Franco's forces. Thereafter, Pathe took occasional footage from the Institute of May Day parades and other Soviet events.(57)

The work of the Progressive Film Institute was of a fundamentally political nature, guided by the political needs of the Communist Party. Although its penetration of the commercial cinema was minimal the PFI's attempt to reach a wider, politically undifferentiated audience with its anti-fascist films, its reportage and news material, was implicit in the popular front strategy. Theatrical distribution was therefore a political necessity rather than an occupational interest. Moreover, its non-theatrical work was not confined to the passive provision of a service of which the Labour movement, humanitarian relief agencies, etc., could take advantage. The PFI actively encouraged organisations in the forefront of 'popular frontism' such as the China Campaign Committee, the FSU, the Left Book Club and the NJCSR to use this material. It even contributed directly to the task of raising funds for Spanish Medical Aid and other relief agencies, organising its own shows specifically for fund-raising purposes. More significantly, the Institute was deeply involved in the political work of the Communist Party and its orbital groups, organising shows, providing introductory talks for exhibitions at political meetings and generally performing a positive role in the organisation and conduct of Party propaganda. The Institute also made a small but important contribution to the social and cultural character of inner-Party life in London. Despite the more open stance permitted by the popular front strategy the Communist Party still required of its members an all-embracing devotion to the organisation. This immersion, usually willingly accepted, inevitably led to the Party thriving beyond its formal organisation, with members focussing their own social and

57. British Universities Film and Video Council, Slade Film History Register, Pathe Issue Sheets 1938.

personal lives upon the local and district membership. The Institute provided, as did Unity Theatre, Left Review and the Forum Cinema, a natural focal point for Party members. Unity Theatre Club even held regular shows of PFI films in 1938 at its Goldington Street theatre. In addition, Montagu, Marshall and Sidney Cole frequently gave lectures on various aspects of film and the film industry at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon, and elsewhere to Labour film groups, and contributed to the numerous film schools organised by the Film and Photo League, participating in the long-term project shared with Kino of cultivating an informed workers' film culture.

The most immediate and conspicuous indications of the PFI's close involvement in the propaganda activities of the Communist Party, and generally in the left wing culture of the period, are its productions. Between 1936 and 1939 the Institute produced 13 films from material shot by its own cameramen. Most of these corresponded to the broad needs or the immediate emphases of the Party at their time of production. Most were related to Spain, the results of two expeditions there in 1936 and 1938.

The Institute's first production, Defence of Madrid, arose specifically from Comintern propaganda requirements. The Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in July-August 1935 finally ended two years of vacillation and uncertainty. The main task of its Sections, the defence of the USSR, was to be achieved by the creation of a popular front in strategically important countries such as Britain and France, which would, it was hoped, lead, by the cultivation of opinion sympathetic to the Soviet Union, to the negotiation of military alliances with these countries, thereby improving its security and containing fascist expansion.(58) With the outbreak of civil war in Spain popular front politics took a new turn: the Iberian struggle became symbolic of the emergent confrontation between Soviet communism and German fascism, and the focal point of anti-fascist activity in Britain and France. The USSR invested the outcome of the war with considerable importance in its strategic policies, and though its aid for and involvement in Republican Spain were by no means unequivocally supportive,

58. A.B.Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence op.cit., pp.217 ff.

the propaganda value of this anti-fascist struggle for assisting in the advancement of Comintern popular front aims in Britain and France was considerable.(59)

The Spanish conflict had a substantial impact on Labour politics in Britain, providing a major focus for the political struggle between left and right for influence and power within the Labour movement.(60) After an initially indifferent response, and as evidence of German and Italian contravention of the Non-Intervention Agreement accumulated, there was an enormous upsurge of political and humanitarian support within the movement for the Republican cause. There were however considerable differences in the level of support for and activity in aid of, the Republican Government between area organisations and their generally right wing dominated national leaderships.(61) The Communist Party, and later the TUC, the Labour Party and the Cooperative movement, organised fund-raising and propaganda campaigns. Medical and relief agencies sprang up almost immediately, and appear to have worked closely with local Labour groups in raising money, purchasing equipment, dispatching ambulances, medicine and food, etc.(62) Opposition to the National Government's policy of 'non-intervention' was reinforced by a moral indignation over German and Italian involvement in Spain which transcended the organisational boundaries and political divisions within the movement. It extended deep into the working class and other sections of the population, and had profound consequences for a generation of artists, intellectuals and politicians.(63)

In this climate the Communist Party strove not only to promote its own campaigns in aid of Spain, but enhance its prestige and influence within the Labour movement. The Spain issue, particularly in view of the

59. B.Holloten, The Grand Camouflage: The Spanish Civil War and Revolution 1936-39 (London, 1968), pp.131-46.
60. K.W.Watkins, Britain Divided: The Effect of the Spanish Civil War on British Public Opinion (London, 1963), pp.145, 148 ff.
61. Ibid., pp.181-2.
62. I am grateful to Dr.Stuart Rawnsley for providing me with much information on this subject.
63. See, S.Hynes, The Auden Generation (London, 1976); S.Weintraub, The Last Great Cause: The Intellectuals and the Spanish Civil War (London, 1968).

Labour Party and the TUC leaderships' reluctance to organise machinery for the mobilisation of mass opinion and mass action, (64) provided the opportunity for the CPGB to take the initiative and offer a lead. The concept of the 'popular front' allowed Party activists to work in unprecedentedly close cooperation with non-Party groups. The remarkable commitment of CPGB members to the issues at stake enabled them to attract a following, or at least, sympathetic support, hitherto impossible due to TUC 'black circulars' and Labour Party exclusion clauses, which had prevented the CPGB from working within trades councils and Labour Party organisations. As Attlee recalled,

The Spanish struggle was the occasion for a very determined attempt by the Communist Party to get into the Labour Movement by devious methods.....(65)

The Spanish Civil War became a central focus of CPGB activity.(66) The Party was aided by the work of Spanish Medical Aid and the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, both of which, while professedly non-political and embracing a wide range of political opinions, in practice had a noticeable sympathy for the Republican cause. The Party was also indirectly assisted by the visual reporting performed by the newsreel companies, whose response to the Civil War, Anthony Aldgate has concluded,

was a basically humanitarian one. They chose to emphasise the destruction and devastation in Spain and they used this footage as part of a more general campaign to show the horrors of modern war. (67)

Aldgate further notes that the newsreels were 'limited and partial' in their coverage of the conflict, tending to endorse the policy of the British Government, sharing its broad interpretation of events in Spain.

64. R.Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism (London, 1972), pp.255-6. See also the debate on this subject after the Civil War had ended, at the 1939 Party Conference, IPAR 1939, pp.257 ff.
65. C.R.Attlee, As It Happened (London, 1954), p.95.
66. An illuminating statement of Spain's centrality to the Communist Party's analysis of the political situation is given in an Editorial 'Spain is the Key', Daily Worker, 22 March 1938, p.3.
67. A.Aldgate, op.cit., pp.182-3.

Leaders of the Labour movement in Britain were generally suspicious of newsreel presentation, and as information began to filter through from Spain saw in newsreel coverage of the the war only confirmation of their fears. The communist section of the movement was particularly sensitive to newsreel output. The Daily Worker's correspondence columns frequently contained indignant complaints concerning 'bias' and the paper's film critic Jane Morgan made it her special concern to discuss this question, almost every other week.(68) Modes of protest against what Morgan considered these 'insidious and deadly forms of propaganda', had long since been established. Direct action in cinemas demanding the withdrawal of the offensive reel, 'pickets' outside un-cooperative cinemas, general publicity and complaints to cinema managers and newsreel companies were by 1937 common aspects of communist and left wing responses to the 'bourgeois' newsreel. Moreover, the Federation of Workers' Film Societies, Kino and the Workers' Film and Photo League had all developed 'workers' newsreels' not simply as a celebration of the Labour movement or for consciousness-raising purposes, but as a 'counter-cinema' specifically in opposition to the conventional commercial newsreels. There was therefore a body of experience within the recent memory of communist and left wing sections of the movement regarding the importance and value of Labour newsreels or reportage films.

It is in this context that the various films produced by the Progressive Film Institute on the war need to be seen. The PFI was well positioned to assist, by the provision of visual 'evidence', in the generation of humanitarian sympathy for Republican Spain and consequently in the raising of funds for relief,(69) and in informing British audiences of an interpretation of events alternative to that present on the commercial screen. Above all there was a concern to simply show what was 'really' happening in Republican towns and cities. As Montagu explained:

68. See for example, Daily Worker, 15 February 1937, p.7; 3 May 1937, p.7; 8 January 1938, p.8; 18 February 1938, p.3; 21 March 1938, p.7.

69. Isabel Brown, in an interview with the author, 9 December 1979.

One made a particular film because the Party asked for one for a particular campaign.....When the war started it suddenly occurred to us that the best way we could help the Spanish Republicans was to make known what was happening to them. So I rushed over there. (70)

The PFI's first trip to Spain in November 1936 was conditioned by the need to publicise the heroic defence of endangered Madrid, suddenly threatened by Franco's forces' unexpectedly rapid advance. As one participant in that defence observed,

Internationally, the prestige of the Comintern and the USSR would have collapse irrevocably with the fall of Madrid.... Madrid absolutely had to be held. (71)

But it was more than the Comintern's reputation which was at stake, and the British Labour movement in the autumn of 1936 had responded to this largely with indifference, accepting it as a strictly internal affair, supporting the Non-Intervention Agreement on the basis of the terms being universally upheld.(72) There was a need to bring the full dimensions of the war to the attention of the British public. In view of the press and commercial newsreel reports that Madrid was on the verge of collapse (Gaumont British News, for example, actually implied that the city had fallen in Issue 299 on the 9 November 1936,(73)), there was a need to counter any possible sources for defeatism and oppose what the Party considered to be a pro-fascist propaganda conveniently overlooking evidence of German and Italian intervention.

Two prominent attempts to meet these circumstances were the publication in October 1936 of the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Breaches of International Law in Spain, and the distribution of a PFI film on the defence of Madrid. The Committee, an offshoot of the National Joint Committee For Spanish Relief, was composed of a distinguished

70. I.Montagu, in an interview with B.Hogenkamp, Skrien, op.cit.
71. Felix Morrow, Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain (New York, 1938, reprint 1974), p.222.
72. D.T.Cattell, Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War (Berkeley, California, 1957), p.26.
73. See, A.Aldgate, op.cit., pp.134-5, 206-7.

panel of well-known personalities, including Philip Noel-Baker, Eleanor Rathbone and Lord Farrington. Its work was guided by a caucus of senior CPGB members: Geoffrey Bing and John Langdon-Davis (the Committee's Secretaries), Ivor Montagu, Isabel Brown and Otto Katz. Arthur Koestler, who acted as liaison between London and Willi Muenzenberg's propaganda headquarters in Paris, recalls that the Committee of Inquiry was Muenzenberg's creation, and that Katz, former manager of Mezhrabpomfilm in Moscow and chief organiser of the World Committee for the Relief of Victims of German Fascism, was Muenzenberg's 'roving ambassador' and chief aid.(74) The Committee of Inquiry's findings attempted to demonstrate conclusively that German and Italian troops were already heavily involved in Spain against the legitimate Government; and in so doing attempted to influence public opinion to demand an end to the British Government's policy denying the Spanish Government arms. In opposition to this fascist intervention the Party sought to make public knowledge the fighting spirit, the resilience and the determination of the people of Madrid to resist superior fascist forces. It was keen, in addition, to stress the role of the International Brigade in assisting the Republican cause as an indication of what could be done through international solidarity.

The PFI's first production, Defence of Madrid, corresponds closely to the political needs of the CPGB during those months. Hurriedly shot, using four stock, and lasting 45 minutes, the silent film consists of three parts. The first discusses the situation before the revolt and moves quickly to scenes in Madrid. An air raid and an aerial battle are shown, followed by scenes relating excavation work and attempts to rescue people buried in the rubble. A tour of the city shows scenes of the destruction, including blasted buildings, buildings in flames, injured and dead. The second part deals with 'the call to arms'. Various preparations for the 'defence of liberty' are shown, including the building of barricades and air raid shelters, the training of troops and the dispatch of troops to the front. Front-line scenes in the suburbs of Carabanshel and the University City include shots of troops eating, an impromptu concert, and telephoto shots of rebel positions.

74. A.Koestler, The Invisible Writing op.cit., pp.209-11, 314, 323-4.

Queues, and evacuation scenes are followed by a shot of General Miaja, commander of the forces defending the city. The final part of the film, 'the world assists', which no longer survives, showed the dispatch of food from the Soviet Union, the rushing of supplies to the capital, hospital scenes, and the International Brigade. Members of the Brigade were shown in billets, at a cookhouse, in a machine-gun repair shop, and in front-line trenches. Scenes of rebel positions were followed by shots of Brigade members under fire. The film ended with an appeal by Eleanor Rathbone MP and Dr. Christopher Addison for funds for medical aid relief.(75)

Being the first substantive visual evidence of life in the beleaguered city and the courage of its people, the film was obviously of general interest in the curious atmosphere of late 1936 and early 1937. But its unique value as the first to be shown in Britain sympathetic to the Republican cause at a time when morale within the left in Britain was low ensured that Defence of Madrid was in exceptional demand within these sections of the Labour movement. No doubt one of its attractions was its camera-as-witness style, presenting in journalistic form a documentary record of 'life as it is being led' in Madrid - the sense of immediacy and authenticity enhanced by the use of a hand-held camera and the 'action' shots taken at the front-line under fire. There was also a dramatic element: Hans Beimler, leader of the Thaelmann Battalion of the IB, was killed in action within four days of being filmed by Montagu, and was seen briefly in the film at the front.

A companion film, International Column, was made dealing 'in a more intimate way with the training of the [IB] volunteers'.(76) Although the film has not survived, and little information is available, it would appear to have been an attempt to give greater publicity to

75. Information for this final section of the film is derived from a Kino publicity leaflet, issued in conjunction with the premiere show late in November 1936, in the Herbert Marshall Collection. See also New Leader, 1 January 1937, p.5. (Hereafter, the Collection will be referred to as 'HMC'.)
76. H.Marshall, HMC, 'Catalogue and Price List', n.d., (?late 1937).

the IB, and in so doing emphasise that fascism could be and was being resisted; or perhaps an attempt to concretise for Britons their images of the IB, which up to that point were probably hazy and confused. It was released in early 1937.

The PFI's second trip to Spain was made specifically at the request of Otto Katz, who had arranged for the Republican Government to provide £3000 to finance the production of three films on the war by an outside agency.(77) Katz had close connections with the Republican Government, being in charge of Agence Espagne in Paris, a news agency set up by Muenzenberg and Alvarez del Vayo, the Spanish Foreign Minister, to provide the French Press with news and comment for the Spanish Government.(78) Katz believed that such productions would be far more effective in influencing international opinion than any material produced by the Spanish Commissariat of Propaganda. Moreover, there was apparently no cinema organisation in Spain in a position to produce what was required apart from Film Popular, which was heavily involved in producing a large number of shorts on 'concrete fighting themes of the day' for internal consumption,(79) and Laya Films, the film section of the Commissariat of Propaganda. This problem was compounded by the compacent attitude of the Spanish to propaganda generally. As del Vayo explained shortly after the war had ended in Republican defeat:

The work of propaganda was on the whole less satisfactory. In this sphere the Spaniard has to fight against his own temperament.....Convinced of the justice of his cause, he finds it hard to realise that it is not enough to have right on one's side, but that one must also persuade others that this is the case. (80)

By late 1937 the policy of non-intervention maintained by the British and French Governments was having a disastrous effect on the Spanish Government's ability to resist Franco's forces; and, having

77. I.Montagu, in an interview with B.Hogenkamp, Skrien, op.cit.

78. B.Gross, Willi Muenzenberg op.cit., p.311. By this time Katz was using the name André Simon.

79. International Literature, May 1938, p.89.

80. J.Alvarez del Vayo, Freedom's Battle (London, 1940), p.150.

gained almost complete control of the air, Franco pursued a relentless policy of aerial bombardment of civilian populations in Madrid, Barcelona, Tarragona, and elsewhere. German and Italian involvement was public knowledge. But the British Government was determined to steer a course calculated to minimise frictions with these fascist powers, and was in any case loathe to assist what it considered an essentially 'communist' Government in Spain. Under these circumstances the PFI's function was to produce material which would help to improve the Republican Government's image in Britain, and generate revulsion at Franco's methods of warfare. Consisting of Montagu, Thorold Dickinson, Sidney Cole, Alan Lawson, Arthur Graham, Ray Pitt and Philip Leacock, the PFI's two film units stayed in Republican Spain from January to April 1938. Their brief was to produce three films: one on educational and cultural achievements, one on the army, and a third on the democratic character of the Government.(81)

The first film, Spanish ABC, directed by Dickinson and Cole, was the only one to be completed as planned. Subtitled a 'Film Report on the work of the Spanish Ministry of Public Instruction' the film attempts to demonstrate that life continues as normally as possible under war conditions, contrasting the neglect of education by previous governments with the extensive innovations of the Republican administration in education and cultural welfare. Shots of bomb destruction are juxtaposed with scenes of new schools, the evacuation to Valencia of the treasures of the Prado Museum, and the evacuation of children to new homes. Careful attention is given to the Spanish authorities' concern to preserve religious artefacts, in reply to fascist propaganda in Britain and France that the Spanish Government was not merely of atheistic persuasion, but determined to pursue a policy of religious persecution and destroy the Church's property, relics and treasures.(82) There follow further

81. For information on the expedition, and the films produced, see Thorold Dickinson, 'Experiences in the Spanish Civil War, 1938', Notes written at the request of the Archivio Nazionale Cinematografico della Resistanza, Turin, 1976. I am grateful to Mr. Dickinson for a typescript copy of this. See also, I. Montagu, in an interview with Skrien, op.cit.; S. Cole, 'Shooting in Spain', The Cine Technician, May-June 1938, pp.1-2.
82. S. Weintraub, The Last Great Cause op.cit., p.58.

sequences attempting to demonstrate the Government's concern for the welfare of its citizens, with shots of everyday life in Barcelona and scenes of factory and mine workers being taught to write. Men at the front-line are shown being given instruction in trigonometry and art appreciation; and the film closes with shots of mobile libraries providing reading material for the troops. Both commentary, written by Montagu, and visuals, are restrained and essentially confined to factual reportage. The twenty minute film was given a BBFC certificate and registered for theatrical exhibition in mid-1938.

A second film was to be descriptive of the army, its structure and composition, emphasising its character as a people's army where, for example, combatants took literacy classes while off duty. The third, again in reply to specific fascist propaganda charges, was intended to demonstrate that Republican Spain was not governed by a heavy-handed, unreliable and dictatorial communist clique, but by a democratically elected parliamentary government, representing a diversity of political tendencies. However, due to the rapid advance of Franco's forces, threatening to cut off Madrid's links with Barcelona, the expedition decided to leave Madrid prematurely and try and return to Britain as quickly as possible. Out of the footage shot several films were put together. Behind the Spanish Lines was an unsuccessful attempt to cover the ground of the third of the scheduled films. An indigestible catalogue of leading Republican politicians is shown, including del Vayo, Negrin and La Pasionaria; and at Monserrat the Cortes is seen in session. The film discusses democracy in Spain at all levels, illustrating its arguments by reference to government institutions, an open prisoner-of-war camp, and the communal ownership and control by miners of their place of work. Shots of British ships being bombed at Tarragona, interviews with survivors, the wreckage of a German plane and shots of the aerial bombing of Barcelona are used to emphasise the involvement of the Axis powers and Franco's cynical and callous conduct in the war. This is followed by a sequence illustrating the determined resistance of the civilian population. An interrogation of German and Italian prisoners precedes rallying calls by Negrin and La Pasionaria; and the film closes with scenes of the Republican war effort. Again, the commentary, written by Montagu, is largely sober and restrained, serving to explicate a 'factual' visual presentation. But a note of stridency rings occasionally as the film tries to persuade its audience

of its case. This is most noticeable regarding the bombing of British shipping, where the British Prime Minister's statement that there is no indication as to the nationality of the bombers is immediately followed by the interrogation of an Italian and a German prisoner. Lasting twenty minutes, the 35mm film was passed by the BBFC, but not registered for theatrical exhibition.

Intended as an extended news film for exhibition before mainly Labour audiences, International Brigade reported Harry Pollitt's visit in April 1938 to the British Battalion of the IB just behind the front-line after the retreat from Tervel. This film has not survived and little further is known as to its contents. A film with the same title, also released in 1938, was shot by Vera Elkan and produced by the PFI. The ten minute silent film opens with shots of war-torn Madrid and the preparations for streetfighting, with huge barricades being erected across the streets. The International Brigades is seen in training and eating. The last fifty feet show the IB going to the front-line. The film contains some good shots of various personalities, including Koltsov, the Soviet correspondent, Claud Cockburn and J.B.S.Haldane.

Continuing the series of PFI productions arising from the expedition to Spain in early 1938, Prisoners Prove Intervention in Spain, a five minute film intended for commercial exhibition, shows German and Italian prisoners undergoing interrogation in a Barcelona prison. Filmed by PFI cameras, the prisoners were unaware that their answers were being recorded by discreetly hidden sound equipment.(83) Statements are elicited revealing that they are professional soldiers, not volunteers, and that the Italian at least did not know where he was being posted before arriving in Spain. A longer version of this film which details the questioning of four Italian and German prisoners, was released under the title Testimony on Non-Intervention, and although on 35mm stock it was not intended for commercial release.

A good deal of footage was sent back to Britain while the two units were in Spain, intended for inclusion in commercial newsreels. Some of this material was later re-edited into Britain Expects with the

83. Daily Herald, 22 July 1938, p.5. Montagu has confirmed this to the author.

sponsorship of the National Union of Seamen and the Officers (Merchant Navy) Federation. The sound film, lasting 25 minutes, similarly attempted to cultivate the opposition in Britain to the Government's adherence to the Non-Intervention Agreement. It contributed to the minor outrage which simmered through much of 1938 concerning the fascist bombing of British shipping.(84) The film showed in detail the fascist attacks on British vessels, interviewed survivors and contained a strongly worded statement by the Union's Assistant General Secretary. Using footage shot in Britain it then proceeded to condemn Chamberlain's foreign policy. The public exhibition of the film was banned by the BBFC, which took exception to comments on the Prime Minister, Hitler and Mussolini.(85) Kino however distributed the film on 16mm in December 1938.

The PFI's production work was not confined to the Spanish conflict. At various times the Institute assisted Kino, providing material for Kino's newsreels and footage for inclusion in other Kino films.(86) It probably produced three films for other organisations: It's Up To Us! for the left wing literary journal Left Review, Left Book Club for the LBC, and Help Spain for the NJCSR. Unfortunately virtually nothing is known of these productions. The first, a short sound film, was shown at performances of The Road to Life, a Soviet film widely distributed by Kino. The second was shown at an LBC Northern Rally held in Manchester in March 1937, and presumably used thereafter for LBC publicity. The third, a more substantive sound film lasting 40 minutes, was produced in the late summer of 1938, and apparently used widely by the NJCSR as part of its fund-raising activities. Billed as 'The only film ever made dealing exclusively with Relief work', it ended with a direct appeal by the Earl of Listowel for funds.(87)

84. One contemporary estimate placed the number of British ships bombed between July 1936 and June 1938 from the air at 51, the number sunk at 13, and the number of British sailors killed and wounded at, respectively, 35 and c.50. Labour Research, August 1938, pp.173-4.
85. Daily Herald, 9 December 1938, p.5; News Chronicle, 10 December 1938, p.7. This film has not survived.
86. I.Montagu, in an interview with Screen, op.cit. There is no indication as to which films Montagu is referring.
87. Left Review, February 1937, advertisement inside back cover; Daily Worker, 26 February 1937, p.7; Spanish Relief, October 1938, pp.2-3.

The PFI also made two films specifically for direct Communist Party recruitment and propaganda: Communist Party 15th Congress and Peace and Plenty. As suggested by the title, the first film was of the Party Congress in Birmingham, September 1938, and was shot on 16mm sound film by Montagu. It shows Wal Hannington, Willie Galacher and Harry Pollitt giving speeches, and a Congress rally, during which John Goss conducts the assembly in community singing. A play, 'Plant in the Sun', is performed by Unity Theatre, and various books are detailed on the Congress bookstall. The new Committee is elected and takes its place on the platform. The surviving copy is incomplete, but it was clearly intended to build up a picture of the Party as a serious and dedicated organisation, alive to present-day problems, thriving culturally and socially, and led by personalities full of warmth and humour. The film was considered essential viewing for Party members, and an 'invaluable' aid at public meetings under the conditions of post-Munich Britain. The London District Political Committee of the Party even took an advertisement in the Daily Worker to bring the film to the attention of Party propaganda sections.(88)

Peace and Plenty, a twenty-five minute sound film, was produced at Montagu's initiative for the Communist Party, and apparently would not have been made had he not provided the required £900 from his own pocket.(89) Shot during the winter of 1938-9 with the help of a number of ACT film technicians and PFI members, the 16mm film was distributed by Kino. It was not intended for theatrical exhibition, but for showing before Labour groups, many of which had, by this time, developed a regular practice of film exhibition as part of their routine activities.

Released in March 1939, Peace and Plenty was intended to contribute to the Party's propaganda for the anticipated general election. In consequence, the film is based on the Party Secretary's report to the 15th Party Congress. Harry Pollitt had concentrated on two themes: the fight against fascism by means of an international peace front consisting of Britain, France, the USA and the USSR; and the fight against the policies of the National Government by means of a popular front strategy, consisting of a broad alliance of all those who opposed the

88. Daily Worker, 25 October 1938, p.6.

89. Ivor Montagu, in an interview with the author.

Chamberlain Government. Peace and Plenty, focussing almost exclusively on the latter theme, employs a variety of techniques, including stills, compilation, animation and graphics, a puppet unmistakeably representing Neville Chamberlain, and evocative symbols, such as a rolled umbrella, to imaginatively create 'caricature and violent contrast'.(90) It is a highly critical portrayal of the class character of the National Government and the appalling consequences of its policies for the people of Britain generally and the working class in particular. Visual images are used to elaborate a sparse, polemical commentary. The sections consisting of factual narration are implicated in this highly political posture by an unsettling musical score; and the sound track, recorded originally on 35mm film and then married to the 16mm image track, provides the main thrust of the film, enabling Montagu to construct a level of argument unrivalled in earlier left wing Labour films.

A series of statistics and charts explain scenes of rural and industrial poverty, showing that despite the election promises of the National Government in 1935 it has made little progress in problem areas such as housing, health, nutrition, education, agriculture and industry. Stills and a single, high-pitched percussion beat derisively introduce each Minister, and the commentary explains their wealth, landowning backgrounds and their connections with big business. 'This Government is a government of rich men'. Chamberlain is portrayed in bizarre fashion by a marionette, brought jerkily to life by strings manipulated by hand. Episodes in Chamberlain's career are recalled, including several of his widely disliked policies, such as the reduction in tax rates for industry in 1929 and the tea tax of 1932. There follows a short discussion of his foreign policies, and he is accused, 'Friends with Hitler, friends with Mussolini', as stills capture his image in ridiculous or damning pose. 'They give us this', precedes images of gas masks and air raid shelters, 'to send against this', and shots of the destruction caused by aerial bombardment. In a contemptuous tone the commentary declares 'This Government has done enough - how can we get rid of them?'. A short speech follows by Harry Pollitt, directly facing the camera in mid-close up, urging the British people to unite against the Chamberlain Government.

90. For a discussion of Soviet influences in this film, see I. Montagu, interview with Screen, op.cit.

Under the circumstances of post-Munich Britain, with growing numbers of people questioning their political allegiances and uncertain as to the future, the popular front enjoyed a temporary revival. The Communist Party, characteristically over-estimating its own importance, believed that another opportunity had arisen to place itself more near to the centre of the political stage. While the TUC was conferring with the National Government over plans for reserved occupations and military conscription, and the Labour Party vacillated, awaiting the next election, the Communist Party thrived on its popular front stance, appearing to be the main source of serious opposition to the Government amongst left sections of the Labour movement. It is in this context that Peace and Plenty was made and shown, its agitational and propagandist structure calculated not merely to generate opposition to Chamberlain, but point to the required course of action. Pollitt's speech, addressed directly to the audience, comprises the final sequence of the film, and provides the film's main political statement:

The defeat of the Chamberlain Government is the supreme task of the labour and democratic people in Britain the time has come for all opponents of the Chamberlain Government to get together and elect a government which.... will defend the British people from fascist aggression, by joining hands with the people of France, the Soviet Union and the United States..... (91)

Peace and Plenty was one of the most expensive film made by the Labour movement in Britain in the 1930's. The didactic, expository tone, its use of graphs, and its use of music and voice-over commentary reveal the influence of the documentaries of the period such as Enough to Eat? and New Worlds for Old. Its abrasive political analysis and technical proficiency make it outstanding among Labour films of these years. Such characteristics probably made it far more accessible for Labour audiences than earlier 'workers' newsreels' or the more rough-and-ready reportage films covering the Spanish Civil War. The film was enthusiastically received by the left press in April 1939, and although no statistics are available regarding its usage, advertisements in the Daily Worker for London shows reveal that it was screened on at least 25 occasions in the city between the beginning of April and the end of June. It was shown in many other towns and cities during the same period, including Kilmarnock, Watford, Leeds, Bradford, Southampton,

91. Peace and Plenty (1939). The film is in the National Film Archive.

Portsmouth, Glasgow, Birkenhead, Nottingham, Romford, Halesowen, Hornsea and Southport. The general election, of course, never materialised, and the film was probably never shown widely beyond the audiences which the Party and its auxiliary organisations could command.

The PFI's production work clearly corresponded to the political needs of the Communist Party at any given moment. As suggested earlier however, the Party was not formally involved in the Institute's activities, and cannot be said to have 'controlled' the agency. This correspondence apart, one of the outstanding features of the Institute's activities was its extremely close cooperation with Kino. All its productions and most of its library of Soviet and other foreign films were made available on 16mm stock and distributed by Kino. Commercial exhibition was important, and the attempt to reach a wide and politically diverse audience is implicit in the popular front strategy. But the PFI's main target was 35mm non-commercial exhibition in cinemas and Labour halls, before cadre audiences: the converted, the sympathetic, and those who could generally influence larger numbers of people on the shop-floor, in the working-men's club, the local trade union branch, the pub and the family. Non-theatrical exhibition was of particular value for meetings in large public auditoria, especially for annual congresses, meetings inaugurating campaigns and specific publicity or fund-raising activities, where politicians, cultural figures, intellectuals and senior political organisers and activists were usually present, and whose favourable opinions could do far more for the Party (or whichever organisation) than dozens of experienced Party activists working frantically in the field. It was not necessary therefore for the PFI to achieve extensive support from cinema exhibitors, although this would certainly have been welcomed. The close cooperation with Kino suggests that non-commercial exhibition took precedence, and it is apparent from the lists of registered films in the Board of Trade Journal that the bulk of the Institute's films were intended for this type of showing. Where the PFI acquired BBFC certificates for some of its films, as in the case of Behind the Spanish Lines, this was as much to help overcome objections from Watch Committees regarding non-theatrical use as to assist in achieving commercial showing. It was also done specifically to assist Kino, whose experience of politically 'sensitive' or partial local Licensing Authorities was far greater, and which found that the possession of BBFC certificates considerably improved the chances of

giving the film show as advertised.(92)

3. Kino

(i) Film and a "Workers' Cinema"

In accordance with the guidelines laid down at the Moscow Olympiad in 1933, Kino was formed to fulfil three functions: to distribute and exhibit non-theatrically 16mm Soviet and other workers' and 'progressive' films to Labour and working class audiences; to produce 16mm films for the Labour movement; and to build up an informed workers' film culture critical of the commercial cinema and receptive to the use of the medium for purposes of education and propaganda. Whether or not Kino consciously maintained allegiance to these guidelines is impossible to determine. Nevertheless, the group pursued these aims, giving priority to distribution and exhibition over production, throughout the 1933-39 period. Between December 1933 and September 1939 the group handled at least 56 Soviet films, 13 American, 8 from Republican Spain, 5 German, 2 French, 2 Chinese, 1 from Czechoslovakia and 1 from Eire. It also handled at least 68 British films: approximately 15 productions of the Workers' Film and Photo League, 14 PFI films, its own 16 productions, and approximately 23 others produced by groups such as the Realist Film Unit, the Dartington Film Unit, the British Film Unit and the Merseyside Workers' Film Society. Production was spasmodic, determined by specific needs at particular moments, and ranged from 10 minute documentaries to 15 minute newsreels and 3 minute news films. Of the 157 films which Kino handled, approximately half (78) were sound films, obtained after the group acquired sound equipment in February 1937. Kino's films were screened at film shows convened simply for entertainment; at social and cultural gatherings such as bazaars, clubs and exhibitions; at political meetings, such as conferences, rallies, and routine local gatherings; at educational classes and summer schools; and at meetings convened as part of a specific campaign regarding, for

92. PRO HO, HO 45 21109/695383/67, 'Memorandum of Evidence to be submitted to the Cinematograph Advisory Committee to the Home Office on the subject of sub-standard films, by Messrs. Kino Films(1935) Ltd., and Progressive Film Institute Ltd.', submitted to the Committee, 3 February 1939. (Hereafter, this memorandum will be referred to as 'Memorandum of Evidence'.)

example, 'peace' or 'A.R.P.'.

Kino conceived of its role as a Labour film agency in specifically political and educational terms. Its articles of registration (in March 1935) reveal that it had been formed 'To promote sociological education by means of the Kinema', and the group announced in May 1936 that 'Kino's object is to use the film as a force for social, political and cultural progress'.(93) In its early years, probably under the influence of the decisions taken at the Moscow Cinema Conference, there was a strong emphasis on cultivating a workers' cinema culture capable of developing beyond the merely dismissive attitudes towards the cinema which prevailed within Labour and left wing circles. Kino consequently organised classes, lectures and schools to provide education for workers in film appreciation and theoretical understanding.(94) It also provided practical lessons in camera use and editing.(95) In addition, a regular practice of exhibition was maintained as the essential condition for building up an interest within sections of the movement in seeing films in a non-commercial context. To assist in these aims, to raise much needed money, and to facilitate the booking of licensed halls for shows, Kino launched an Amateur Film Federation - in effect a loosely organised film society. Some of Kino's shows were open only to members and associate members, (monthly subscriptions were, respectively, 1s and 1d) who by May 1934 numbered, according to one report, over 60.(96) More generally, the move was both an attempt to establish connections with the thriving amateur film movement,(97) and provide a focus for 16mm left cinema work.

93. Kinematograph Year Book, 1936; Left Review, May 1936, p.415.
94. A Kino School, for example, was held at High Beech, Epping Forest, in July 1934; and lectures were given by Herbert Marshall. Daily Worker, 11 July 1934, p.4.
95. Cinema Quarterly, Winter 1934-5, p.127.
96. Amateur Cine World, May 1934, p.45.
97. For information on the amateur film movement in Britain, see Amateur Cine World. See also, M.A.Lovell-Burgess, The Amateur Cine Movement (London, 1933).

The types of film shown were also important in this political/educational project. Emphasis on Soviet productions was, given Kino's loose connections with the Comintern and other international organisations based in Moscow, a political imperative. The exhibition of Soviet newsreels and documentaries on the success of the Five Year Plans, or life in Soviet towns was in accordance with Comintern policy. Soviet films were, however, a major point of reference for the 'workerism' of not only the communist section of the Labour movement but also the mainstream social democratic sections which subscribed to a Labour Socialist perspective. Soviet films were 'workers' films' made in 'the first workers' state', and such a pedigree, it was tacitly assumed, guaranteed that their form and content would be of direct significance for British Labour and working class audiences. 'Workerism' per se was, of course, only an intermediary goal, a necessary condition for the long process of building a more class-conscious, politically knowledgeable Labour movement. Soviet films possessed, for the communist section, a class propaganda value, not merely emphasising the fundamental conflicts between 'labour' and 'capital', and the enormous strength of a united working class asserting its political opposition to capitalist exploitation and injustice, but in conveying these ideas with stunning visual power.

Although the bulk of Kino's film shows probably included a Soviet feature or newsreel (at least until 1937) Kino was not totally dependent on its Soviet material for the fulfilment of its functions. Its collection of British productions ranged from general educational films such as Limestone, Sheep-Dip and Bananas (Dartington Hall Film Unit), to newsreels such as UAB and the Workers' Newsreel series (Workers' Film and Photo League), to documentaries such as Spanish ABC (PFI) and Schools in Catalonia (Kino/NJCSR), to 'class propaganda' such as Bread (Kino London Production Group), Stop Fascism (Kino) and Tenants in Revolt (British Film Unit). Almost all its 33 non-Soviet foreign films were newsreel or documentary material mainly on the wars in Spain and China, such as Barcelona News (Laya Films) and Nanking Captured (?). The few exceptions, such as Soap Bubbles (Davis Film) and Millions of Us (American Labor) were more directly propaganda films.

Finally, other important elements in Kino's work, in the early years, were the organisation of Kino 'socials' - dances, trips and rambles; publicity and protests regarding the exhibition of reactionary films or the censorship of progressive films; the production of five newsreels and propaganda films; the provision of a film hire service; and training classes for operators who volunteered to give shows.(98)

With the decision to run the operation along business lines in late 1934, the group concentrated on film distribution and exhibition, increasing the number of its own shows and building up support in provincial areas. While leaving responsibility for the social aspects of its work, class work and production to the Workers' Film and Photo League, Kino's political/educational role remained undiminished. Ralph Bond, for example, described Kino's task in December 1935 as being 'to sell working class ideas and working class politics'.(99) The Kino group publicised itself in advertisements in Labour journals offering 'Films for working class education',(100) and explained its own role in the following terms:

Those of us who stand for progress have not time to lose: today the road is steeper than before. This is an age of monopolies, of immense vested interests....There are powerful forces working, not for progress, but for reaction and decay.

The election is still fresh in our minds.....We cannot doubt that if the electorate had been convinced that the National Government stands for reaction and against progress, this Government would have suffered an overwhelming defeat at the polls.

Therefore, our first task is - Enlightenment.

We have no illusions that this will be easy, but twentieth century science has given us the most powerful instrument for our purpose which we have ever known - THE FILM.

The film has been intensively exploited by the entertainment monopolies for super-profits. Now is the time to challenge the conception of film which they have created. Now is the time for every individual and every group who realises the need for progress to use the film for its real purpose - for culture, for education and for enlightenment.

98. British Film Institute, FPL (2), Kino Circular, n.d., (January 1935); Kino Films First Annual Report, 1936; Daily Worker, 23 January 1934, p.4; 19 February 1934, p.4; Amateur Cine World, May 1934, p.45; Cinema Quarterly, Winter 1934-5, p.127.
99. R.Bond, 'Making Films With A Purpose', Kino News, Winter 1935.
100. For example, Plebs, February 1936, p.37.

Bring your own organisation into this work. Your club, your film society, your school, your trade union branch, your cooperative guild, your local Labour Party.

Lead them on the new road to progress. (101)

This educational role embraced the long-term project of bringing pressure to bear on the commercial cinema to change its products. The leaders of the Labour movement took profound exception to the content and method of the average commercial cinema film. Kino members concurred in this rejection of the staple Hollywood product, and advocated the need to raise the critical standards of Labour audiences through its own shows. They would then, it was assumed, begin to demand films of greater political and technical quality from the industry. As the group explained:

Only when the public as a whole is much more critical towards commercial films and insists on films of a different kind from those which it now sees, will it be possible to use the commercial cinema to any extent. The work of the Labour Movement in the non-theatrical sphere can do much to bring about that state of affairs. (102)

Kino's original preference for 16mm had been based principally on the gauge's partial immunity to censorship regulations. The development of an alternative, non-theatrical, practice of exhibition was not therefore an implicit rejection of the cinema, but a strategic move in the political struggle to use film politically. There was consequently no political distinction to be made between showing films in halls and showing them in cinemas, merely a tactical one. The use of 16mm film therefore to influence the character of the commercial cinema was integral to Kino's political role. To this end, Kino planned the production of Kino News as a regular bulletin,

dealing with all branches of sub-standard production and distribution and including news and criticism of the commercial cinema. (103)

101. Leading article, Kino News, Winter 1935. My emphasis.
102. Kino News, n.d., May 1936. See also, 'Can Twenty Million People be Fooled?', Daily Worker, 11 June 1936, p.4.
103. Kino News, n.d., May 1936.

While considering entertainment not the only function of the cinema, it did not reject that function. Critical tastes were to be cultivated by the exhibition of approved films of various types - newsreels, documentaries and features - and the bulletin would perform the important task of providing

Publicity for those commercial films which are progressive, and exposing those films which are openly militaristic or reactionary. By this means it is hoped to build a real live public opinion in this country. (104)

A tantalising glimpse into this aspect of Kino's work is given in one of the very few internal documents of the group which have survived and which were not intended for public consumption. Basil Burton, Kino's Chairman, outlined in a memorandum dated February 1938 plans for the utilisation of the film society system of exhibition in the long-term strategy of influencing the character of the commercial cinema. There was a considerable public demand within the provinces, Burton argued, for progressive and unusual films of the type being shown by film societies. Exhibitors were generally extremely reluctant to show this type of material as part of their normal programmes, and as film societies did not usually attempt to attract a working class membership there were few opportunities for the wider public to see such films in the cinema. Moreover, film societies were often barely tolerated by local Licensing Authorities, which had the power to grant or deny permission for cinemas to open on Sundays, the usual day for film society exhibitions. Burton continued:

We guess that if there is any concerted activity to show Left films in towns in which there is no Labour majority and no Sunday opening, there will be great difficulties put in the way.

The great strength of Labour in many provincial towns however, gives us plenty of places favourable to Sunday showing.

It would therefore show that the present time is favourable to the showing of films by the Film Society methods to a very much wider audience, both from the general cultural point of view, and for propaganda.

Indeed, it can be safely said that if Left films, and films of a sociological tendency are to be shown throughout the Labour movement in cinemas this is one of the best methods of beginning. (105)

104. Kino News, n.d., May 1936. My emphasis. Unfortunately no other issues of Kino News have been discovered to judge the extent to which Kino carried these tasks out.

The establishment of film societies 'more popular in aims and composition' than existing ones was to be the first stage in a new move to build up an interest within the Labour movement in seeing 'non-commercial' films as part of the daily programmes of ordinary cinemas.(106) The role of the PFI in this respect was crucial: as the principal distributor of 35mm films of the type which Kino wished to see in the cinema, the Institute's collaboration was implicit in Burton's plans. Alternatively, the educational aspect of Kino's distribution work was an extension of the PFI's activities in the theatrical field. Wherever the balance of the relationship lay, the two agencies clearly linked their respective activities, as Frank Jackson implied in a review of a number of Soviet films released by the Institute:

These films must be shown more widely in this country. They must be got into the ordinary cinemas, and into halls and meetings on 16mm. (107)

Burton suggested that, in view of the increased public interest in this type of film, film societies be established in towns where there was a Labour Council,(108) and where this proved impossible, that pressure be brought to bear on individual exhibitors to show films of the appropriate kind.

Kino will do the necessary preparatory work. There are two alternatives as to how the scheme should be worked at the centre:

a) Kino would set up an organisation as a head and coordinating body which would be a Limited Liability Co. Council of this could be composed of representatives of all interested bodies, Coops, Labour Party, TUC, ACT, Left Book Club, etc. We might even get a nomination of the Film Trade Exhibitors and Producers.

or

b) Kino would take over the running of an organisation receiving the support of all interested organisations. Each local Film Group would be autonomous, but would have to be confirmed by the centre in its offices. (109)

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105. Herbert Marshall, HMC, 'Popular Film Societies and Associations', 9 February 1938.
106. Ibid.
107. Left Review, December 1937, p.681.
108. Between 1933 and 1938 Labour was the dominant party in municipal politics.
109. Herbert Marshall, HMC, 'Popular Film Societies and Associations', op.cit.

The 'General Objects' of Burton's scheme were listed as follows:

- 1) The organisation should be roughly 'popular' in intention. It should not have too stiff a political complexion, as tending to appear to interest only Socialists.
- 2) Slogan 'For a free and independent cinema'.
- 3) Reorganisation of censorship system....The Board of Film Censors must be made a popular body or abolished altogether...the system of censorship is so strong at the moment that only a wide popular movement for a change will shift it....
- 4) For Sunday opening of Cinemas provided that the Trade Union regulations are observed.
- 5) For the production of films of a progressive tendency. Our intention in the future should be to produce a super film by public subscription, as 'La Marseillaise' was produced in France. Collection of money to produce shorter films from time to time.
- 6) To start a small journal, possibly a monthly giving expression to our views, and information as to our activities. (110)

It is clear that one of the central elements in Burton's strategy was close cooperation with Labour organisations. The object was to consolidate the status of Kino's coordinating body and boost its potential influence vis-à-vis far from captive Labour audiences. It was also to draw sections of the movement towards greater participation in the creation of an independent left cinema within the commercial cinema industry. This is most apparent in the proposal to fund the production of a 'super film' by public subscription, along the lines of Jean Renoir's La Marseillaise.(111)

Until the French initiative British Labour film groups had dismissed the possibility of producing a film for the commercial cinema on the grounds that firstly, such a production would have to be technically impressive for it to have any chance of being booked by exhibitors or attracting audiences, and therefore would require considerable financial resources, far beyond the means available. Secondly, that even

110. E.Marshall, HMC, 'Popular Film Societies and Associations', op.cit.

111. La Marseillaise was released in France in January 1938. For details of its production see G.Fofi, 'The Cinema of the Popular Front in France (1934-38)', Screen, Winter 1972-3, pp.35-7. For left cinema in France generally during this period, see E.Strebel, 'French Social Cinema and the Popular Front', Journal of Contemporary History, no.12, 1977, pp.499-517.

if such a film could be made, for it to pass censorship requirements it would have to be politically innocuous, and for it to be booked by exhibitors it would need to have a conspicuous entertainment value.(112) Burton was evidently influenced by the achievements of the French Labour movement, which was fortunate in having several film directors and technicians working within the film industry who were sympathetic to its principles and aims, and which was far more more enthusiastic about the use of film as a political weapon than the British. A prominent production/exhibition/distribution group, Ciné-Liberté, had, in conjunction with the French Communist Party, produced La Vie Est À Nous for the Party's election campaign. The film had been immediately banned from public exhibition but Ciné-Liberté sidestepped the prohibition by transforming itself into a film society and inviting members to private performances. Eventually Ciné-Liberté attracted more than 20,000 members.(113) Burton's plan was to encourage a nationwide Kino film society membership based upon the constituent organisations of the Labour movement, which would provide, hopefully, both the foundation of support for left cinema exhibition, and the resources for productions intended for theatrical and non-theatrical exhibition.

It is probably more than coincidence that Burton, together with Elsie Cohen and George Hoellering had established in September the previous year Unity Films, primarily as a distributor of foreign non-commercial 35mm films, but also as a 35mm producer. Unity Films imported mainly European material, but also American and occasionally Soviet films. The company appears to have been formed to meet the apparently growing demand for art films and 'progressive' documentaries. Its most important film in the context of Burton's scheme was The Spanish Earth made by Joris Ivens. Specifically made for theatrical exhibition eight copies of the undoubtedly pro-Republican film were made available by Unity in late 1937, and Kino distributed a 16mm version. During 1938 the film was in considerable demand, assisted in all probability, by the International Peace Campaign, which had intended to give the British premiere at its first National Congress in November 1937. With the eventual lifting of the BBFC ban the film was booked, according to one report, by at least 55 different cinemas in 44 different towns and cities in Britain, during the first four and a half months of 1938,

112. See, for example, the report of the debate at Kino's first A.G.M., in Kino News, n.d., May 1936; and Left Review, June 1936, p.477.

113. G.Fofi, 'The Cinema of the Popular Front in France (1934-38)', loc.cit., 30n., p.50.

the majority of cinemas taking the film for three days - the usual programme cycle for most commercial cinemas in Britain.(114) Claims of this sort are difficult to verify. But in this case the towns in which the film was booked are identified, and the number of days booked for each cinema are given. This is not of course proof of anything, but it suggests that the statement is not an empty claim based on wishful thinking, but is largely accurate. Certainly, advertisements in the left press and Labour journals indicate the widespread showing of the film.

Other films of a distinctly political, social or 'progressive' character made available by Unity Films were Prison Sans Barreaux (CIPRA, France), Alerte En Méditerranée (Société Vega Films, France), The World in Action (Le Monde En Action, France), Professor Mamlock (Soyuzintorgkino, USSR), and The River (Pare Lorentz, for the Farm Security Administration, USA). Unity Films did not devote its energies entirely to these types of film, and under Elsie Cohen's influence imported as many if not more art films such as Der Spiegel (Vienna-Film, Austria) and La Femme du Boulanger (Les Films Marcel Pagnol, France). It is questionable how far Cohen subscribed to Burton's political perspectives, but Burton nevertheless appears to have secured her witting assistance in a fresh bid to further open up the cinema trade to non-commercial film.

Burton's proposals regarding Labour film societies appear to have been accepted by Kino's other members, and at least one coordinating body was established, in Scotland. Based at the Grand Central Cinema in Glasgow, the Scottish People's Film Association (SPFA) was formed in March 1938 by Robert Mure and Jack Quinn, members of Glasgow Kino. In accordance with Burton's scheme, the SPFA's manifesto announced that its aims were the exhibition of non-commercial films in the cinema and the production of 16mm documentaries.(115) Regular fortnightly exhibitions at the Grand Central Cinema were supplemented by prestige shows in central Glasgow cinemas such as the New Savoy and the Lyric Theatre. Attendance at performances was by membership only, costing 1s per year and 1s for each performance. The SPFA successfully negotiated with the PFI and Unity Films for exclusive rights in Scotland and showed their latest imports, together with material imported by the Film Society,

114. International Peace Campaign, January 1938, p.15. It was also promoted by Sidney Bernstein. C.Moorehead, op.cit., p.18.

115. D.Allen, 'Workers' Political Cinema in Scotland in the 1930's', op.cit.

British documentaries such as Enough to Eat? and the PFI's own productions on the Spanish Civil War. Moreover, wishing to become a popular film society the Association organised social events such as dances and trips, circulated a fortnightly newsletter and attempted to collaborate with Labour organisations and bodies such as Left Book Groups.(116)

Far from rivalling Glasgow Kino, as Doug Allen and Anna Shepherd suggest,(117) the SPFA complemented Kino's most prominent and successful provincial group, commensurate with Burton's original scheme, the former being concerned with 16mm non-theatrical exhibition the latter with 35mm exhibition in cinemas. Furthermore, from the beginning the Association 'intended making 16mm documentary films of Scotland' and at least one, Scotland Speaks, was produced.(118) Glasgow Kino declined dramatically in the aftermath of the Munich crisis, and the two groups appear to have merged, with Robert Mure, the mainspring behind SPFA activities, becoming Kino's official Glasgow Kino agent in March 1939. The merger appears to have been formalised with the establishment of Scottish Film Services in June 1939, under Mure's management.(119)

As part of the overall strategy Burton acquired in 1938 the site in Glasgow for what became the Cosmo Cinema, a purpose-built specialist cinema which opened in March 1939. This became the PFI's principal theatrical outlet.(120) In addition, Unity Films announced in January 1939 that it was shortly commencing film production;(121) and Burton negotiated with Herbert Marshall on behalf of Unity for him to produce Thunder Rock.(122) Based on Robert Ardrey's play, the script

116. D.Allen, op.cit.; Left News, September 1938, p.981.

117. D.Allen, op.cit.; A.Shepherd, 'Helen Biggar and Norman McLaren', New Edinburgh Review, no.40, February 1978, p.26.

118. Daily Worker, 1 April 1938, p.2; Left News, September 1938, p.981. The film was a record of a pageant of Scottish history held during the summer of 1938. It has not survived.

119. Left News, March 1939, p.1205; Daily Worker, 10 June 1939, p.6.

120. Ivor Montagu, in an interview with Screen, op.cit., p.95.

121. Today's Cinema, 4 January 1939, p.118.

122. Herbert Marshall, in a letter to the author, 22 February 1979.

attacked American isolationism and stressed the need, in the event of any future war, to fight not simply against the military enemy, but for social progress. The project fell through however, and was later produced by the Boulting brothers in 1942.

In addition to these moves, Kino, taking advantage of the close collaboration with the Left Book Club, was able, in conjunction with the PFI, to launch a Left Book Club Film Group. Formed in December 1938 the Film Group was open to any members of the film workers' union the Association of Cinematograph Technicians, and people working in any aspect of the industry. The purpose of the Group was, it would appear, to provide a forum for discussion by which means it was hoped to influence workers within the industry in a leftward direction. Speaking at the Group's inaugural meeting, Sidney Bernstein hoped that the Group would become as influential as the Hollywood Anti-Fascist League, which had been in the forefront of political opposition to reactionary tendencies in the American film industry.(123) A series of discussion meetings were subsequently held on censorship, propaganda in films, ways of achieving alterations in scenarios, and other subjects.(124) At one of these meetings Thorold Dickinson, an Editor at Associated Talking Pictures, a liberal anti-fascist, and a colleague of Montagu's during the PFI's expedition to Spain in 1938, proposed that the Group produce 'collective films' for specialised cinema audiences: films of a progressive character bypassing the studio system of production and the circuit system of exhibition. They could be financed, he argued, by public subscription, via the Left Book Club network: members would pay far in advance for their tickets, and would see these films at special LBC screenings arranged, presumably, in conjunction with either Kino or the PFI.(125) Again the French influence can be detected here. Plans were drawn up with the approval of the LBC for the production of a film version of Ellen Wilkinson's book The Town That Was Murdered (1936), which was to be published as an LBC edition in September 1939. A team consisting of Ivor Montagu, Thorold Dickinson,

123. See L.Furhammer, F.Isaksson, Politics and Film (London, 1971), pp.62-3.

124. Daily Worker, 22 December 1938, p.2.

125. The Cine Technician, March-April 1939, p.182.

Sidney Cole, Christopher Brunel and Max Anderson (all of whom had worked for the PFI) went to Jarrow on an exploratory visit and took stills. Despite arrangements being drawn up in July 1939 with Kino and the LBC for 'the provision of a selected programme of Left films for Left Book Groups' the film never materialised through lack of money, and the Film Group dissolved with the declaration of war in September.(126)

All these moves were aspects of a general thrust, initiated by Kino and the Progressive Film Institute, to penetrate the commercial cinema and influence its development in a leftward direction. Neither was principally concerned with this strategy, but both considered it inseparable from their main activities. Given their mutual origins and the extent to which their operations dovetailed, their collaboration on a number of schemes to cultivate audiences and produce films for a 'left cinema' was probably far closer than surviving evidence suggests.

The background to this strategy was provided firstly by the activities of the art film/film society movement in creating a small but nonetheless legitimate space for 'non-commercial' cinema within the cinema industry; and, closely related, those of the Independent Film Makers' Association and a number of groups such as the Association of Realist Film Producers, in encouraging the production and theatrical exhibition of 'non-commercial' films, especially of a documentary character.(127) The second component of this background was the work of the ACT leadership in promoting trade unionism within the film industry and campaigning against low wages and poor conditions. The investigation into the working of the industry by the Government-appointed Moyne Committee, and the subsequent crisis in 1937 which led to considerable redundancies and wage-cutting, occasioned ACT investigations into

126. The Cine Technician, March-April 1939, p.182; Left News, July 1939, p.1331; T.Dickinson, letter to the author, 11 March 1979; Christopher Brunel, letter to the author, 17 March 1977.

127. See, for example, The Arts Enquiry, The Factual Film op.cit., pp.44-78, 154-9. See also D.Dusinbere, 'The Independent Film Makers' Association', in D.Macpherson (ed.), Traditions of Independence: British Cinema in the 1930's (London, 1980). Cinema Quarterly and World Film News were immensely important in this project, providing a focal point for news, information and opinion, bringing together all aspect of 'non-commercial cinema'.

all aspects of British cinema. One outcome was widespread debate amongst workers within the industry (whether technicians, 'creative' individuals or the production-line employees in the processing laboratories) regarding issues such as poor production methods, freedom of expression, censorship and the importance of the growth of an independent sector. This discussion was informed by a campaign led by but not exclusive to the Communist Party fraction within the ACT (about ten or eleven) against reactionary films, against an inhibiting censorship system and against the prevailing structure of the industry, which determined, it was argued, by virtue of its emphasis upon maximum audiences and profits, the entertainment values at the base of almost all commercial production.(128)

Given this critical atmosphere Kino and the PFI were able to enlist the support of many sympathetic people within the film industry, and coordinate their work with that of groups such as Unity Films. In implementing Burton's strategy, they participated in a general campaign originating within the industry itself, to influence opinion within the Labour movement, to raise the critical standards of working class audiences, and to establish a viable independent cinema within the industry which embraced not simply documentary or art films but features for general exhibition. How far Kino and the PFI succeeded in their aims is obviously impossible to assess. It is probable however that the SPFA was the only Kino film society established as a direct result of Burton's scheme. Despite the cooperation of Unity Films, and the creation of the Left Book Club Film Group - both performing important roles in the full elaboration of this plan - very little of concrete value appears to have been achieved, although this may have been different had the country not been preparing for war for twelve months previous to its outbreak, making such a long-term project appear futile.

128. See for example, S.Cole, 'What is Quality?', The Cine Technician, February-March 1937; 'Technicians and the Quota', ibid., April-May 1937; 'What's Wrong?' (a symposium) ibid., June-July 1937; 'An Open Letter to the Board of Trade', ibid., March-April 1938; S.Cole, 'Documentary at the Crossroads', ibid., George Elvin, 'This Freedom: An Inquiry Into Film Censorship', ibid., January-February 1939; The Association of Cinematograph Technicians Annual Report, 1938-9, pp.4,5; R.Bond, Film Business is Big Business (London, 1939). See also M.Chanan, Labour Power in the British Film Industry pamphlet (London, 1976), pp.30-44.

(ii) Film as a weapon in the class struggle

Film was conceptualised by Kino as an important weapon in the continuation of the class struggle. Its specific values resided in class propaganda, the provision of information, and in education (both general and cinematic). None of these properties were seen, it would appear, as entirely separate -indeed they were considered to be fundamentally inter-related. The educational role of Kino in regard to the commercial cinema was performed largely through its 16mm exhibition/distribution work and only secondarily through the scheme of film society theatrical exhibition. As with the PFI, Kino was essentially a communist organisation, preserving an identity independent from the Party, but conducting its work in close correspondence with the broad sweep of Party policies. In the era of the popular front much of the Party's ground-work was conducted through the various Spanish relief agencies, the League of Nations Union and the International Peace Campaign, and the Left Book Club. Through these bodies the CPGB sought to extend its organisational and political reach to audiences far beyond those which it had commanded in the days of the 'class against class' policy predating Hitler's rise to power. The strength of the peace movement in Britain, and the widespread support for the Republican cause in Spain, offered opportunities for the Party to build an anti-fascist, anti-National Government opinion on the basic foundations of pacifism and humanitarianism - notions and values which were not confined to one particular class or section of society.

Under these circumstances Kino occupied a strategically important position. As the principal non-theatrical distributor of films on the progress of the war in Spain or China, relief agencies wishing to raise funds for ambulances, blankets, medicine, etc., appear to have used Kino's library extensively. The National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief for example, whose film consultant was Ivor Montagu, cooperated closely with Kino to arouse sympathy for the Republican cause.(129) The Committee was certainly left wing in character, but its primary motive was humanitarian, not political. It was not

129. Isabel Brown, in an interview with the author.

'infiltrated' by a Communist Party caucus, although individual branches may have been under the Party's influence. Its officers included the Duchess of Atholl MP, the Earl of Listowel (a Director on the PFI Board) and Eleanor Rathbone MP, who were respectively Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Vice-Chairwoman. Viscount Cecil of Chelwood was the Honorary Treasurer, and Honorary Secretaries were D.R.Grenfell MP, J.R.J.MacNamara MP and Wilfrid Roberts MP (who was also on the PFI Board).

Within six months of the Civil War breaking out, Kino had obtained Defence of Madrid, given copies to the NJCSR, and was showing it before a wide variety of audiences throughout the country in aid of the NJCSR's appeal for funds for relief. An item in the Daily Worker in June 1937 claimed that twenty copies of the film were circulating in England and,

since the spring two shows a night have continuously been given. The amount raised in this way for Spanish relief is now more than £6000. (130)

Kino handled other films for the Committee, such as Basque Children, a 16mm version of Modern Orphans of the Storm (made by Victor Saville, Basil Wright and other members of the film trade for the Committee, and which had an entry to all Odeon cinemas (131)), and Help Spain, the PFI production.

The Committee apparently had a considerable organisational reach, claiming over 150 groups throughout the country by mid-1938, and

All of them are continually arranging meetings, concerts, film shows, flag days and house-to-house collections. (132)

As Frieda Stewart, the Committee's Concerts Secretary explained,

we are trying to raise money and interest in the Spanish Refugees in the concentration camps in France.....to do this it is necessary to find ways of bringing it home to people, and we are having meetings and film shows as much as possible, everywhere. (133)

130. Daily Worker, 9 June 1937, p.4. Kino later claimed that the film had raised over £8000 for the NJCSR. PRO HO, HO 45 21109/695383/67, 'Memorandum of Evidence' op.cit.

131. Spanish Relief, June 1938, p.3.

132. Ibid.

Apart from supplying most of these branches with film material Kino co-produced with the NJCSR three films of the Committee's relief work in Spain. The Committee had sponsored an expedition to Catalonia by a Kino film crew led by James Calvert in December 1937.(134) The results, Blood Bank Service in Spain, Schools in Catalonia and Save Spanish Children survive, but the author has been unable to view them.

Kino similarly cooperated with the British Section of the International Peace Campaign, providing special programmes of films for IPC groups and the British IPC Committee based in London. Kino conducted various tours, for example in the Home Counties in mid-1937, giving shows at IPC meetings.(135) The British National Committee of the IPC, whose officers included Viscount Cecil, Sir Norman Angell and Dame Adelaide Livingstone, was a highly influential body working in cooperation with, it was claimed, over 250 organisations in Britain

to mobilise and render effective public opinion in all countries in support of Peace, Disarmament and International Justice through a strong League of Nations. (136)

During 1937 the IPC held over 100 'Peace Weeks' in major towns and cities in Britain, and attracted delegates from 369 organisations to the British National Congress in October that year.(137) Kino's shows were, according to Frank Jackson, a prominent feature of such publicity drives.(138)

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133. British Film Institute, FPL (2), Frieda Stewart to Hugh Cuthbertson, Secretary of the Film and Photo League, 11 July 1937.
134. Daily Worker, 12 January 1938, p.2; Left Review, March 1938, pp.857-9.
135. International Peace Campaign, October 1936, pp.8, 12; February 1937, p.15; June 1937, p.19.
136. Peace Year Book, 1938, pp.118-9.
137. Ibid., p.119.
138. Frank Jackson, 'A People's Cinema Grows', Daily Worker, 9 August 1938, p.2.

Towards the end of 1937 the IPC recruited to its Arts Peace Campaign prominent artists, writers and intellectuals such as Alan Bush (marxist composer), Peter Ritchie Calder (Daily Herald journalist and Labour Party propagandist), Edgell Rickword (Editor, Left Review), Basil Wright (documentary film-maker), Andre van Gysegem (stage director, first President of Unity Theatre), Anthony Asquith (film director), John Goss (marxist conductor) and Eric Gill (sculptor and typographer). (139) As Norman Dawson, an IPC organiser, explained, the Arts Peace Campaign

represents a determination on the part of writers, journalists, advertisers, actors musicians, cinema actors and artists to awaken the members of their own professions to the necessity of world peace for the continuance of their work, and records an attempt to construct a central publicity and propaganda bureau where members of all seven artistic professions may meet to coordinate their publicity work for peace. (140)

One outcome of this centralisation of propaganda work was the production of a short film, Martyred Towns, distributed by Kino and given much publicity by the CPGB. (141) The IPC in Britain evidently had considerable organisational strength, at least until 1938, and, embracing a wide range of political opinions, possessed an impressive influence, capable of mustering massive peace demonstrations and mobilising a distinguished array of cultural figures to promote anti-war publicity.

Much more substantial research is needed on the activities of campaign organisations such as these. Unfortunately in these and many other cases their organisational records have either been lost or are known to have been destroyed. Nevertheless it is apparent that Kino provided a valuable service for some of these bodies, particularly where funds were being raised for relief. The corollary, of course, is that Kino, in working not merely as a supplier of films, but often in close cooperation with an individual organisation, was performing a distinctly political role in the context of the CPGB's preoccupation with the generation of a popular front. This becomes more apparent in relation to the Labour Party, the Left Book Club and the Communist Party itself.

139. International Peace Campaign, November-December 1937, p.53; January 1938, p.5; Daily Worker, 8 January 1938, p.2.

140. Peace Year Book, 1938, p.85.

141. See, for example, Daily Worker, 15 October 1938, p.6.

As early as June 1935 Kino had sought to elicit the support of the Labour Party for its film service, and, lacking sufficient resources to reach the majority of local Labour Parties, attempted to use the Party's Head Office to distribute its publicity widely. As the Party was drawing up plans for its own film service, under the influence of established documentary film-makers, both moves were frustrated. (142) Undeterred, Sam Handel, Kino's Secretary, considered the Kino's first annual general meeting

was an unqualified success, there being over eighty delegates from Trades Councils, TU branches, Labour Parties, League of Youth, Cooperative Societies and Guilds, Friends of the Soviet Union. (143)

but he insisted that

In a critical situation like the present, it was essential to get on the Kino Council very much wider representation from the Labour Movement. (144)

Subsequently, Kino attempted to draw into its operation local Labour Parties and trade union branches where it had established provincial agents, (145) and by early 1938 appears to have established a body of support amongst divisional Labour Parties at least. With little encouragement from Transport House, whose plans for a Labour film service were near completion, over 160 shows of Kino's films were given by local Parties in connection with the Party's Spain Campaign; (146) and, judging from advertisements for shows, many local Parties arranged screenings at various types of meeting. By late 1938 some local Parties appear to have been regular customers of Kino, and when the Workers' Film Association (WFA) was finally established in October 1938 it immediately became, in effect, a Kino agent. During its first year the WFA hired programmes of Kino material on 77 occasions (that is, on average, at least once a week) to distribute to local Parties and trade

142. Labour Party National Executive Committee Minutes, Finance and General Purposes Committee Minutes, 21 June 1935; National Executive Committee Minutes, 22 January 1936.

143. Cited, Kino News, n.d., May 1936.

144. Ibid.

145. Kino Films, First Annual Report, 1936.

146. LPNEC, National Joint Film Committee Minutes, 24 March 1938.

union branches. It was given complete access to Kino's film collection; and hired Kino's mobile daylight cinema van three times (once for a month). (147) It would appear therefore that although Kino's appeal to the Labour Party was only partially successful, with a relatively small number of local Parties using its material, it nevertheless provided a service for the most important political organisation of the Labour movement.

Kino was more successful with the Left Book Club which, shortly after its inception, became a major channel for Kino's work with the assistance of John Lewis, Organising Secretary of the LBC Groups. Although the Club's organisational records have not survived, there is sufficient information in Left News, the LBC journal, to give an indication of the close working relationship between the two bodies.

Extremely enthusiastic to use film as a routine part of its activities, the LBC cooperated closely with Kino and the Film and Photo League, assisting Kino in setting up local agents and film groups, and forming, in conjunction with the FPL, a number of production units under the League's centralised guidance. (148) The LBC according to Stuart Samuels, 'was the most active and largest organised body in Britain working for a Popular Front', and, as a sizeable number of its members were members of the CPGB, the Party 'secured from the Club a respectable, highly organised vehicle for its propaganda and recruiting'. (149) With 500 groups in 1937, over 1200 by May 1939, a membership of 57,000 and an estimated readership of 250,000, the Club provided Kino with a potentially far greater web of contacts and agents than the Communist Party, (150) and offered invaluable opportunities for the continuation

147. Trades Union Congress Library, Workers' Film Association Papers, Ledger, 1938-9; Annual Report, 1939.
148. Left News, February 1937, p.220; March 1937, p.263; June 1937, p.392; July 1938, p.906. J.Lewis, The Left Book Club: An Historical Record (London, 1970), pp.28,66.
149. S.Samuels, 'The Left Book Club', Journal of Contemporary History, no.2, 1966, pp.68, 79.
150. Left News, April 1939, p.1218; May 1939, p.1270. S.Samuels, loc.cit., pp.63, 73. In October 1936 the CPGB's membership was claimed to be 11,500; in September 1938, 15,570; and in July 1939, 17,756. K.Newton, The Sociology of British Communism (London, 1969), Appendix 1A, p.159.

of Kino's cadre work. 'Hundreds of film shows', Lewis revealed in the autumn of 1938, 'have been given by both large and small groups', and 'Kino has worked in the closest collaboration with the Groups.'(151) Films at meetings were extremely popular, and helped to swell the ranks, as one convener, for Wolverhampton LBC, revealed:

[the Club] has increased from about 30 last April to 90 at the present moment. This increase is chiefly due to the success of the film show which we gave in April and to the activity of our members on the Aid for Spain Committee. (152)

Some Groups, such as Carshalton LBC, showed films every week - in this particular case to a reported average audience of 50.(153) Finally, Lewis, in discussing recent PFI productions on the Spanish Civil War, informed readers:

Experience has proved time and time again that there is really no finer way of rousing public support for Spain than by using these films in conjunction with public meetings. (154)

Victor Gollancz, the LBC's publisher, estimated that over 12,000 people were meeting on a regular fortnightly basis in Britain, and considered that the two outstanding success of the LBC were the varied social origins and professions of LBC members, and

The development in and around the groups of a vigorous cultural life - particularly cinematographic and theatrical. It was not much earlier than half-way through last year that we really began seriously to undertake this work through Kino and the Left Book Club Theatre Guild. (155)

Important though the Left Book Club was for Kino, the Communist Party was the mainspring of Kino's work, providing the film agency with political and strategic guidance, organising the political life of its individual members, and constituting Kino's foremost organisational contact with other sections of the Labour movement. While recognising

151. Left News, September 1938, p.981. See also ibid., April 1939, p.1220.

152. Cited, ibid., September 1937, p.497. See also ibid., January 1938, p.661.

153. Ibid., December 1937, p.623.

154. Ibid., November 1938, p.1053.

155. 'The Left Book Club - Its Past and Future', Daily Worker, 28 January 1938, p.2.

the value of film as a propaganda weapon however, the CPGB as a national organisation attached low priority to the use of the medium in its political work in view of the meagre resources at its disposal; and consequently it did not generally coordinate film publicity or propaganda activities with its national campaigns.(156) The usual practice of the national leadership was to arrange film shows only at prestige events in large halls in central London or other cities and large towns, usually requiring the PFI's larger gauge material. The existence of Kino as a Party film agency enabled the Central Committee to leave responsibility for film work with it; and, as many CPGB branches, through their respective FSU branches, were arranging regular exhibitions of Soviet and other films, the initiative was left largely with them - even though individual Party leaders such as Emile Burns and Harry Pollitt were enthusiastic regarding the potential of the medium.(157) This was not inconsistent with general Party practice, as a resolution passed at the Party's 15th Congress on 'Building the Party and the Daily Worker' makes clear:

The function which the Party branches must strive to fulfil is that of giving daily leadership to the workers and mass of the local population on all the political issues of the day, as well as the local social, economic and cultural matters affecting their interests.

The branches must accept responsibility for working out a branch policy on all these matters, and strengthen their ability to radiate activity amongst all sections of the local population, and to react quickly and effectively to all local issues as they arise. (158)

It was largely as a result of the Spanish Civil War, and the need, derived from anti-fascist, popular front perspectives, to show people what was happening in Spain, that Party branches began to arrange

156. I.Montagu, in an interview with the author.

157. B.Megarry, in an interview with the author.

158. Report of the Fifteenth Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain: For Peace and Plenty, 1958, pp.156-7. My emphasis.

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exhibitions regularly. As Ivan Seruya (no longer with Kino, having established his own left wing distribution company International Sound Films) complained in May 1937

in general branches have been very slow to take up the showing of working class and progressive films in the districts...

It has, apparently, been thought that the showing of films was a subject to be left to FSU's and other non-Party bodies, as it was not of sufficient political importance. (159)

Seruya added however that,

Recently, this attitude has, in part, been dispelled through the amazing results obtained by the showing of the film Defence of Madrid..... (160)

Produced by the PFI at the Party's request Defence of Madrid was immediately in great demand by CPGB branches. The Report of the Central Committee of the Party to the 14th Congress revealed

We have made some progress in developing other forms of propaganda, including films (the Defence of Madrid film has been shown in over 400 centres, in most cases by our Party organisations or through their initiative)..... (161)

Although there are no means of verifying this claim, advertisements in the Daily Worker for Party meetings or shows at which the film was to be exhibited suggest that the film was in exceptional demand. For the first eight weeks of 1937 such advertisements reveal that the film was scheduled to be shown before at least 76 meetings, (162) roughly half of which were in provincial towns and cities such as Glasgow, Birmingham, Bury, Nottingham, Sheffield, Manchester, Bursley, Airdrie, Ashton-under-Lyme, Leeds, Stockton, Rochdale, Guildford, Colwyn Bay, Liverpool, Swindon, Stockport and Edinburgh. While the experience of one District Organiser may or may not be representative, it indicates the level of Party activity in at least one area of the country.

159. I. Seruya, letter, Party Organiser, May 1937, p.32.

160. Ibid,

161. Report of the Fourteenth Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain: It Can Be Done, 1937, p.251.

162. It must be noted that some shows were probably not advertised in the national press.

Douglas Hyde, organiser for North Wales, recalled in his autobiography some years later:

Organising two or three meetings daily kept me fully occupied.....I showed the propaganda film, Defence of Madrid, at each meeting. After hiring a cinematograph machine and the film time after time, I bought both outright and took them everywhere with me. At one period I saw that film twice daily for four months, and made as many speeches and appeals. (163)

The unrivalled demand for Defence of Madrid was due, according to Ivor Montagu, to the specific circumstances in Britain in the first six months or so of 1937, and to the film's unique value as the first to be shown in Britain sympathetic to the Republican cause.(164) Only the sound film, The Spanish Earth, available through Unity Films for 35mm exhibition and through Kino for 16mm showing, appears to have generated a similar level of interest. Nevertheless, Party branches quickly discovered that films attracted people to meetings; that they could be excellent propaganda material, did not cost much to show and could be used both as the focal point for a range of popular front meetings,(165) and the principal means of raising funds. Moreover, the extension of Kino's organisational reach and the rapid expansion of its collection of sound films in 1937, facilitated and encouraged a more regular practice of Party film exhibition throughout the country, either in conjunction with film groups such as Glasgow Kino and Manchester Film and Photo League, through LBC Groups or FSU branches, or entirely independently.

Perhaps encouraged by this growth in film usage amongst the branch membership the Party leadership arranged for the production of at least three films, a Daily Worker Trailer in December 1937 urging people to take the paper and stressing the importance of expanding its circulation; a film of the 1938 Party Congress, Communist Party 15th Congress, intended specifically for recruitment; and Peace and Plenty in 1939. All three were distributed by Kino on 16mm, and appear to have been shown fairly widely by Party branches.

163. D.Hyde, I Believed: The Autobiography of a Former British Communist (London, 1952), p.58. See also, D.Corkill, S.J.Rawnsley, The Road to Spain: Antifascists at War 1936 - 1939 (Dunfermline, 1981), p.117.
164. I.Montagu, in an interview with Jonathan Lewis. This is a transcript of the full interview with Mr.Montagu prior to the production of Lewis's film Before Hindsight.

Kino conceived of its role in essentially political/educational terms, not merely providing a service for the Labour movement but contributing to the political struggle for the reconstitution of that movement as a politically motivated, class conscious unified movement. As the Communist Party's popular front strategy began to assume priority over all other political work Kino's strategic importance for the Party became increasingly apparent. Kino consequently appears to have adopted a more active political role, participating in the Labour movement's political struggles (as defined by the Party) through close cooperation with various organisations, and contributing to the mobilisation of public opinion generally within all sections of the population. This more positive role even extended to the provision of its own speakers from within the Kino group for meetings at which its films were to be shown. Kino's political work, like that of the PFI, was fundamentally of the cadre type, seeking to influence activists, influential figures at national level and local level, and sympathisers. It was also a deliberate means for recruitment to the Party or its auxiliary bodies, as Frank Jackson explained:

to get the full value out of film shows, sympathisers should always be taken along. The value of films is that they attract the outsider much more than the ordinary meetings, and make it very easy to get people outside the organised movement to come and hear what we have to say. (166)

(iii) Distribution and Exhibition

Possessing only a single 300 watt projector and a single copy of one film, Kino commenced operations with meagre resources. With few contacts beyond the Communist Party and its orbital groups Kino had difficulty reaching organisations within the mainstream of the Labour movement; and film work in the first year or so was confined largely

165. Films did not need to have any relevance to the subject of the meeting convened. A meeting on Spain, for example, was held in Manchester during which China Strikes Back was shown specifically to raise funds for Spanish Relief. Daily Worker, 12 February 1938, p.6.

166. F.Jackson, letter, Daily Worker, 4 January 1939, p.2.

to shows organised by Kino itself and those arranged by CPGB or FSU branches and, occasionally, trade union branches, in London. By 1938 Kino's status within the Labour movement had been fully established. As Frank Jackson proclaimed:

Gone are the days when small crowds huddled fearfully in halls in back streets to use forbidden films.

Today Kino is part of the entire progressive movement. It gives shows to all political parties, to trade unions, to peace organisations, to religious and missionary bodies, to Left Book Clubs, to professional organisations, to the Coops., to Spain organisations, to China organisations, to Nationalist organisations (our operators, several times in fear of their lives, give shows to fierce crowds of Irish Nationalists). (167)

Before 1935 the group had problems in meeting the growing demand for its films. As the Secretary Sam Handel explained in his report to Kino's first annual general meeting:

The Group experienced little difficulty in getting audiences but very great difficulty in obtaining films, in finding the money for showing rights and the cost of copies, and in carrying out the distribution and the shows with entirely voluntary help. At the beginning of 1935 it was evident that if we were going to cope with the situation, the organisation would have to be run on business lines. (168)

Occasional censorship difficulties were less inhibiting than more basic problems and served more to publicise Kino's shows. As few Labour organisations possessed 16mm projection equipment, and experience in handling 16mm film stock was equally uncommon, Kino was very reluctant to send its only projector and the only copies from its library to unknown people in distant parts of the country. (The available prints of Soviet Russia: Past and Present and the Socialist Film Council's The Road to Hell quickly became unusable due as much to careless handling as constant use.(169)) Under these circumstances Kino could usually only provide films and equipment for an exhibition outside London if one of its own operators drove films and equipment to, say Birmingham,

167. F.Jackson, 'A People's Cinema Grows', Daily Worker, 9 August 1938, p.2.

168. Kino Films, First Annual Report, 1936.

169. For the Socialist Film Council, see below, Chapter Nine.

and conducted the show. Apart from the expense involved, the time consumed by these trips restricted the number of shows which could be given. It was imperative therefore for Kino firstly to expand its library collection to retain the growing number of regular customers (Atlas folded, it will be recalled, because it failed to increase its stock). Secondly, to increase the number of projectors at its disposal to enable more shows to be given more frequently and facilitate a film hire service. Thirdly, to develop a distribution network based on accredited provincial agents, who would act as booking agents and operators, providing equipment and handling Kino's films wherever they may be shown - thereby extending their useful life and reducing the time lost in continually sending films up and down the country from the London office.(170)

The greatest and most immediate problems were working capital and income. Before March 1935 Kino appears to have operated on a very tight budget, its members contributing to the work entirely out of interest and political commitment. Profits on individual shows were so small that prior to 1936 fifty or sixty shows were needed to provide sufficient surplus for Kino to purchase another film for its collection.(171) As demands on the office became too great to maintain the work entirely on a voluntary basis, Kino Films Ltd. was launched. But the group was unable to attract enough members to the company to raise sufficient working capital, and individual short-term loans from friends and sympathisers had to be arranged, amounting to £320.(172) Public appeals for funds and benefit shows were also made.

By the end of 1935 Kino had acquired at least two more projectors and built up its collection of Soviet films to sixteen. With Ivor Montagu's successful negotiation with Soyuzintorgkino in February 1935 for both 16mm and 35mm distribution rights for Kino and the PFI respectively, and the provision of these films free of charge, an important item in Kino's overheads disappeared. Even so, import duties

170. For an account of these problems see, Kino Films, First Annual Report, 1936.

171. Ibid.

172. Ibid.; British Film Institute, FPL (2), Kino Films Ltd. Statement of Accounts as at 4th March 1936.

and the rates for reduction printing from 35mm to 16mm stock were sufficiently high to prevent Kino from acquiring more than single copies of most of its films until late 1936. Individual routine shows produced little profit for expansion. Kino's Annual Report for 1936 noted that, regarding two films which had caused national controversy a few years earlier, and which had achieved a certain notoriety value,

From April until March 4th 1936, Storm Over Asia has been shown about 120 times, netting a revenue of £125 and Mother about 75 times, netting £75. (173)

A practice of pre-release and premiere shows was consequently devised to boost income and pay for print-costs. New Babylon, for example, was given three shows daily for four consecutive days, one day each in Hammersmith, Whitechapel, Holloway and Euston, before being released at the end of January 1935. Similar shows were arranged in other cities and usually raised sufficient income to enable Kino to continually expand its library.(174) Receipts from Kino's own shows came to £694 for the 1935-6 financial year; the hire of films provided £844; and the hire of apparatus, £189. Kino's first year as a business operation, considered an experimental success, realised a net profit of £97; and the group anticipated extending their work into sound-on-film in the autumn of 1936.(175)

No other primary sources have survived for Kino's finances and income after 1936, but Kino appears to have continued to expand until at least the summer of 1939, although it did not cease operations until 1941, when the company gave its entire collection of films to the Workers' Film Association. In February 1937 the group finally acquired sound equipment,(176) and their first sound film, Torn Shoes (Mezhrabpomfilm, USSR, 1933). Thereafter its films appear to have been in constant demand, particularly its Spanish material and the extremely popular Soviet production The Road to Life (Mezhrabpomfilm, 1931). Kino derived sufficient income from its film hire service to send its

173. Kino Films, First Annual Report, 1936.

174. Ibid.; Daily Worker, 22 January 1935, p.4; 28 January 1935, p.4.

175. British Film Institute, FPL (2), Kino Films Ltd. Statement of Accounts as at 4th March 1936.

176. The equipment used was the SMPE (the American Society of Motion Picture Engineers) system.

own camera unit to Spain in December 1937 (with the help of the NJCSR) to purchase a mobile daylight cinema van in 1939, and to purchase the rights to several issues of the March of Time newsreel and reduce them to 16mm stock. It would seem therefore that the operation was financially successful for the duration of its pre-war existence.

The growth of Kino's operation may also be gauged by the growth of its library of films. Despite the arrangement with the Soviet trade agency there were still considerable difficulties in obtaining the desired material.(177) This was in part due to the remarkably bureaucratic Soviet methods, and to the disarray in the organisation of Soviet exportation following the restrictions imposed on the activities of the Soviet Trade Delegation in Berlin after the Nazi rise to power. The Berlin offices had controlled all Soviet business operations in Europe.(178) The export and import of film was administered by Soyuzintorgkino, via the Delegation, but Soviet films were usually supplied by Mezhrabpomfilm's European office in Berlin and, from 1933, in Paris. With Mezhrabpomfilm's closure in 1936, and the ending of Soyuzintorgkino's monopoly rights the following year, the acquisition of Soviet films again became problematic.(179) Kino and the PFI not surprisingly found it difficult to ensure a regular supply of Soviet material from these agencies, and were occasionally compelled to buy prints from Ciné Mondiale in Paris and Garrison Films in New York.

A total of 75 Soviet films were introduced by the PFI and Kino before September 1939, 45 being handled by the former, 56 by the latter. Less than ten more were handled by other distributors, such as the Film Society, Reunion Films and Butchers Film Service in the same period, 1933 - 1939. In comparison the far more lucrative American market appears to have been given priority by the Soviets. V.I.Verlinsky, the President of Amkino, the Soviet trade organisation based in New York which distributed all Soviet films in North and South America, claimed in 1937 that the total number of films imported by the Corporation since 1934 would, by the end of the year, be 67. Soyuzintorgkino was, it would seem, more interested in satisfying the far greater commercial demand in the USA than the not inconsiderable but unprofitable

177. Kino Films, First Annual Report, 1936.

178. B.Gross, Willi Muenzenberg op.cit., p.165.

179. K.London, The Seven Soviet Arts (London, 1937), p.276; J.Leyda, Kino op.cit., p.338.

demand in Britain. A typical release by Amkino, Verlinsky claimed, 'has an average of from 350 to 400 bookings' - probably far in excess of PFI's or Kino's average market.(180)

There were problems therefore in acquiring material, but Kino obtained overall a reasonably regular supply of foreign films. Using information in publicity leaflets and catalogues issued by Kino, the minimum number of Soviet films handled by Kino was 56. That the figure may have been higher is suggested by details of a report on Soviet film exports by the Director of Soyuzintorgkino, A.J.Linov, given in the Daily Worker in March 1939, according to which 25 films were exported to Britain in 1938.(181) Existing information accounts for only ten or eleven; but most of these were imported by the PFI and there is no evidence to suggest that Kino acquired 16mm copies of them. It is possible that many of those imported were not registered with the Board of Trade and were eventually returned unused; otherwise the discrepancy is something of a mystery. Even so, Kino received a substantial, if intermittent, flow of Soviet material until early 1939.

Other foreign films were acquired mainly through the PFI, particularly Spanish material, from Unity Films and the Film Society, and from Garrison Films and Ciné Mondiale.(182) The pattern of acquisition for all films handled by Kino is given below in Table VII, p.271. The figures given may vary slightly between any two consecutive years, as it has proved impossible to pinpoint the precise release date (to the nearest month) of a number of these films. It must also be noted that Kino's library probably never exceeded 70 or 80 films at any one moment. Much of its material was simply worn out by constant use, and as Kino only had positive prints of many Soviet film in particular, with negatives often unavailable, the group was unable to arrange for replacement prints to be made. Other material of British

180. The Journal of Commerce and Commercial, (American-Soviet trade number) Section 2, 26 April 1937, pp.75-6.

181. Daily Worker, 29 March 1938, p.6.

182. For information on Garrison Films and the American Film and Photo League, see F.Sweet, et al, 'Pioneers: An interview with Tom Brandon', Film Quarterly, no.27, Fall 1973, pp.12-24; R.Campbell, Radical Cinema in the United States, 1930 - 1942: The Work of the Film and Photo League, Nykino and Frontier Films (Unpublished PhD. Thesis, University of Michigan, 1976).

Table VII. Films Distributed by Kino, 1933 - 1939

Financial Year	British	Soviet	American	Spanish	German	French	Chinese	Others	Total
Dec. 1933 Feb. 1935	8	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	18
Mar. 1935 Feb. 1936	15	10	-	-	2	-	-	-	27
Mar. 1936 Feb. 1937	12	8	-	1	2	-	-	1	24
Mar. 1937 Feb. 1938	11	16	4	3	1	-	-	1	36
Mar. 1938 Feb. 1939	18	11	7	4	-	2	2	1	45
Mar. 1939 Sep. 1939	4	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	7
Total	68	56	13	8	5	2	2	3	157

origin, having become out of date, was sometimes cut up and used as stock footage in other productions. Consequently, at the end of a financial year in which Kino had acquired 45 new films, David Granville, Kino's Manager, revealed in evidence submitted before the Home Office Advisory Committee inquiring into the desirability of the censorship of sub-standard (ie. 16mm gauge) films, that the company's entire stock amounted to 62 films.(183)

The overall figures represent the minimum number of films handled by Kino during its five and three quarter years existence before Britain's involvement in war in 1939. The Table reveals not only that Kino had a constant supply of films from British and foreign sources, but that after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, and the group's acquisition of sound film equipment, its library expanded considerably, coinciding with the most influential phase in the history of the Communist Party up to 1939. Incidentally, the growth of Kino's library compares favourably with commercial distributors. Simon Rowson revealed in his survey of the cinema industry in 1934 that a yearly film intake of 30-plus or 26-or less were generally regarded to be respectively large and small trade for distributors.(184) Kino's average yearly intake during these years was 28 films.

183. PRO EO, EO 45 21109/695383/67, 'Memorandum of Evidence', op.cit.

184. S.Rowson, 'A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry in Great Britain in 1934', Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, loc.cit., p.73.

The character of Kino's development can also be traced in the growth of its network of provincial agents. Shortly after forming, the Kino group appealed for volunteers with projectors to assist in providing shows.(185) The popularity of Soviet Russia: Past and Present, the demand within Labour circles for Battleship Potemkin and The General Line, and the promise of more Soviet films led quickly to the formation of a number of workers' film societies, such as East London Film Guild and Manchester Kino in April 1934, Merseyside WFS and West of Scotland WFS by July 1934, Birmingham People's Film Service in March 1935, Bradford and District FSU Film Circle in April 1935, and Hull ILP Film Society in September 1935.(186) In the absence of sufficient projectors Ivan Seruya appears to have acted as Kino's chief roving operator, taking equipment and films with him up and down the country as required. But with the reappearance of these workers' film groups a distribution network began to take shape. By December 1935 Kino had agents in Birmingham, Bradford, Doncaster, Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle and Cardiff. Acting as district operators organising shows and using their own equipment, at least four of these agents were providing 'road show' services in 1935, offering complete programmes of films, equipment, musical accompaniment and publicity, once a month to groups in their regions.(187) Working mainly with single copies of films, and often having to arrange transportation of equipment to distant parts of the country, Kino was necessarily dependent upon its provincial agents to organise shows and maintain a rapid despatch service from one city to another. Kino was unable to set up offices in provincial towns through lack of capital, and used a series of four-week regional tours as a means of building up contacts with local activists who were sufficiently interested to volunteer their services, and whose support within local Labour organisations offered the basis for the establishment of viable local film groups, acting not only as agents but focal points for local film work generally.(188) With a small staff - probably no more than eight or ten ran the operation - Kino could only slowly build up such local groups, and in one or two cases they either collapsed a few weeks after Ivan Seruya or

185. Daily Worker, 31 January 1934, p.4.

186. Ibid., 20 February 1934, p.4; 10 April, p.3; 13 April, p.4; 20 April, p.4; 4 July, p.4; 16 March 1935, p.8; 2 April, p.4; 5 October, p.7.

187. Kino News, Winter 1935.

188. Kino Films, First Annual Report, 1936.

Charlie Mann had left the area, as in Cardiff, or failed to exploit an apparently favourable situation, as in Manchester and Bradford. Other groups, such as Glasgow Kino and Birmingham People's Film Service were reportedly successful.(189)

Encouraged by the demand throughout the country for its films Kino resolved at its first annual general meeting in April 1936 to extend its network of provincial agents.(190) By June 1937 new agents had been established in Blackpool, Cardiff, Doncaster, Belfast, Co.Durham, Nottingham and a second in Birmingham.(191) Expansion continued and by November that year Kino regional organisers were operating in key centres throughout Britain:(192)

J.MacGougan, Belfast
O.Istead, Birmingham
W.Pearson, Birmingham
J.Hall, Blackpool
A.Jarratt, Bradford
M.W.Dinscombe, Bristol

R.Richardson, Doncaster
T.A.Richardson, Co.Durham
M.Biggar, Glasgow
Wands Ltd., Leicester
A.Marshall, Nottingham
G.Taylor, Cardiff

During the following twelve months Kino recruited four more agents, in Birkenhead, Bournemouth, Newcastle and Sheffield, but appears to have lost those in Blackpool, Belfast, Nottingham, Co.Durham, Leicester and one of the two in Birmingham.(193)

Whereas in early 1936 the Kino group revealed a little uncertainty as to the success of its work, due in large measure to the considerable difficulty of the London-based operation in distributing and exhibiting its films anywhere in the Midlands, the North of England or South Wales, the agency had developed by 1938 an extensive and apparently efficient distribution/exhibition service based on this network of area agents. Perhaps equally important was the collection of local agents and contacts which had gradually been cultivated. Closely linked to the CPGB, Kino obviously benefited from the web of Party branches and district organisations which spanned the country. Moreover, the

189. Kino Films, First Annual Report, 1936.
190. Daily Worker, 1 May 1936, p.5.
191. Left News, June 1937, p.392.
192. H.Marshall, HMC, Kino Publicity Leaflet, 'USSR on the Screen', n.d., (November 1937).
193. Daily Worker, 29 October 1938, p.5.

Party provided Kino's most immediate and most important contacts with the wider Labour movement; and several of its area agents were Party-card-holding trade unionists (Arthur Jarratt, for instance, who was a member of the National Union of Vehicle Builders, and a Booking Manager for Provincial Cinematograph Theatres). It was probably such Party contacts which led Basil Burton to claim in a circular to potential customers in 1938 that

We now have agents in almost every principal town in England. No matter where you are, if you want us to a film show for you, let us know and we should be able to carry it out. (194)

Other organisations appear to have provided contacts and agents, such as the FSU, the IPC and the NJCSR, but probably the most important after the Communist Party was the Left Book Club.

Seeking to meet the growing demand for films on the Spanish Civil War, Kino negotiated with John Lewis of the LBC a scheme of mutual cooperation. Lewis had stated in January 1937 that 'it is going to be greatly to our advantage to enter into the closest relations' with Kino. By March arrangements were 'practically complete'. As Lewis explained:

The essence of the scheme is that we should help to find regional organisers who will organise shows for an area covering 60-70 miles around a large town....These shows will be run in connection with the Groups and, of course, other organisations. (195)

In return Kino helped Lewis arrange films shows 'all over the country' as part of the Left Book Group movement's propaganda and educational activities, (196) and even arranged, it would seem, for the PFI to produce an LBC trailer Left Book Club to publicise the movement. Whether or not Left Book Groups did provide Kino with local agents is uncertain, but it would seem likely that they did because, as Lewis explained in the autumn of 1938:

194. H.Marshall, EMC, Kino Films, Circular, n.d., (1938). See also Left News, October 1937, p.543.

195. Left News, January 1937, p.196; March, p.263; J.Lewis, The Left Book Club op.cit., p.28.

196. Left News, May 1937, p.351.

Ever since the formation of the Club, Kino has worked in the closest collaboration with the Groups. Hundreds of film shows have been given by both large and small Groups partly as entertainment, but increasingly to illustrate current politics and awaken people to realities. No previous crisis in history has been put across so dramatically as the Spanish Civil War by means of such well-known films as Spanish Earth and The Defence of Madrid.....The Groups have discovered the enormous possibilities of the Film Meeting. (197)

Lewis further claimed, in April 1939, that

some four or five hundred [LBC] film shows have taken place before audiences ranging from fifty or sixty to seven or eight hundred. (198)

It would seem therefore that within four years, from operating film shows in London, Kino had become a national organisation, with extensive channels for distribution and exhibition. The range of services which it provided grew accordingly. Commencing with extremely limited means Kino slowly built up support for its regular shows, and within nine months was able to provide a somewhat anarchic film hire service within the London area. With the acquisition of more films and equipment, tours were arranged during 1934-5 of the Midlands, Lancashire, Yorkshire and South Wales to establish contacts and publicise its work.(199) As provincial agents appeared in 1935 with their own equipment Kino's film hire service began to assume a more complete form. Three types of hiring arrangement were possible: films, equipment and an operator; films and equipment; or simply a programme of films. Charges for film hire in 1935 were 4s per reel for one day, progressively reduced to 20s for seven days and 60s for 28 days. Charges for films, equipment and an operator were 6s per reel for one performance and 3s per reel for each subsequent performance on the same day, plus travel expenses. Kino provided advice on how to organise shows and publicity, and offered musical accompaniments (either appropriate scores or gramophone records), radio amplifiers, handbills, posters, and advice on how to avoid censorship restrictions and deal with police

197. Left News, September 1938, p.981. See also, ibid., November 1938, p.1053; J.Lewis, The Left Book Club op.cit., p.66.
198. Left News, April 1939, p.1220.
199. Kino Films, First Annual Report, 1936.

harrassment.(200) By early 1937, on acquiring sound films, Kino's service had developed considerably. All silent shows could be given with musical accompaniments provided by Kino, including records, turntables, amplifiers and microphones. Two projectors could be had for a sound show, thereby eliminating delays during a performance for the changing of reels. Two operators could also be hired for a show, one of whom would give a short talk on some subject related to the films to be shown or the subject of the meeting. More attractive publicity was also available, including two-colour posters.

Aiming to provide as comprehensive a service as possible, Kino by early 1938 made available 'campaign books' for all of its films, containing the story of the film, speakers' notes, suggestions for publicity, stories for the local press and advice on running a show. Blocks for reproduction in the local press or in leaflets were also available for hire. Charges by this time were according to the particular film rather than its length. Battleship Potemkin could be had for 15s per day (regardless of how many performances), and Storm Over Asia, 24s. Sound films such as News from Spain and War is Hell, cost, respectively 20s and 30s. Reductions of 10% to 50% were available for hirings between 2 and 28 days. Apparatus and operators were available at an inclusive price of 50s for one sound show in a hall seating up to 400 people, and 70s for a hall seating over 400. Apparatus, etc., for silent shows cost 30s, whatever size of hall, but musical accompaniment, including turntables, microphones, etc., cost 10s extra. Travel expenses were charged at 2d per mile.(201)

The final element in Kino's range of services was its tours during the summer months. These became an annual exercise, reaching out all over the country seeking audiences during what was acknowledged by the cinema trade as a relatively lean period for custom. From 1936 Kino toured seaside resorts and holiday camps giving several shows a day in a town before moving along the coast. By 1939 it took full advantage of the newly acquired mobile daylight cinema van. This van in itself was an important addition to Kino's services. Described in the Daily Worker as 'technically the last word in this field', and as being far in advance of cinema vans in the possession of the Conservative Party, the van was available for hire together with an operator

200. Kino News, Winter 1935.

201. The above information is taken from various publicity leaflets and price lists issued by Kino, in the Herbert Marshall Collection, op.cit.

who gave a short talk at each show, and a programme of films.(202) There was no lack of interest in Kino's new attraction and both the Daily Worker organisation and the Workers' Film Association hired the van during the summer, the latter for a month (being charged £57).(203)

Screenings for Kino films varied in length according to the type of meeting arranged and the films hired, but average shows lasted roughly 90 - 120 minutes. As events in Spain began to affect British public opinion the emphasis upon the exhibition of Soviet productions tended to give way to a preference for newsreel and documentaries on the war, with FPL films and Kino's own films filling out the programme with Soviet newsreels. Kino often arranged for its own operators, or recruited prominent speakers, to give talks at its own shows. At the London premiere of March Against Starvation, for example, an actuality record of the 1936 National Unemployed Workers' Movement national hunger march, Kino invited Wal Hannington, the NUWM leader, to speak and provide a running commentary for the silent film.

Evidence for the number of shows given using films from Kino's collection and for total audiences, is limited. The most detailed information is available only for Kino's first year as a non-profit-making company. Kino's First Annual Report, 1936, claims that its first two films Battleship Potemkin and The General Line were shown on an aggregate of 120 occasions within a year, that Storm Over Asia was shown on 120 occasions, and Mother approximately 75 times. The Ghost That Never Returns was shown apparently 45 times within seven months, and Ten Days That Shook the World, despite its inordinate length and general unsuitability for British audiences, approximately 60 times within six months. The Report further claimed that the total number of shows for the 1935-6 year was in excess of one thousand; and total audiences for the year were estimated at 250,000.(204) Information in Kino's Statement of Accounts for the same year substantiates its estimates for the total number of shows, but suggests that its claim for the total audience size is exaggerated.

202. Daily Worker, 5 August 1939, p.3.

203. Trades Union Congress Library, Workers' Film Association Papers, Annual Report, 1939; Cashbook, 1938-9.

204. Kino Films, First Annual Report, 1936.

Receipts from shows organised by Kino amounted to £694, income from the hire of films to other organisations totalled £844, and apparatus hire provided a further £189.(205) Kino's lowest ticket charge was 6d. Entertainment tax was payable on any tickets costing more than this sum. In 1934 almost half (43%) of all tickets sold in the commercial cinema cost 7d or less, and 86% cost 1/3d or less, the average price per ticket being 10½d.(206) It is probable therefore that while Kino offered for sale for its own shows tickets costing 2/6d the bulk of its admissions were for tickets costing 1/3d or less. Taking therefore 6d and 1/3d as the lower and upper limits for the majority of tickets sold, there is sufficient information available to estimate the limits within which the probable size of Kino's total audiences and its total number of shows can be gauged.

The lowest admission charge suggest the upper limit for the total number of possible admissions. As Kino's cheapest tickets cost 6d, and receipts for Kino's own shows amounted to £694, the maximum number of people who attended these shows would have been 27,760. For the higher admission price, 1/3d, the number would have been 11,104. In its Annual Report Kino claimed that of 'over 1000 shows of our films' 'about half' were given by Kino itself. Taking this as a rough guide, the average number of people at its own shows, if the maximum total audience was 27,760, would have been approximately 50. The possible scope of Kino's film shows are summarised in Table VIII below:

Table VIII. Approximate Limits for Film Shows Organised By Kino, March 1935 - February 1936

Average Ticket Price	Total Audience	No. of Shows if Average Audience Per Show		
		50	100	150
6d	27,760	555	277	185
1/3d	11,104	222	111	74

205. British Film Institute, FPL (2), Kino Films Ltd. Statement of Accounts as at 4th March 1936.

206. S.Rowson, 'Statistical Survey', loc.cit., pp.70-1.

It can be seen therefor that the maximum possible audience for Kino's own shows during this particular year was less than 30,000; and the total number of shows which it gave could have been between 500 and 600, depending upon how large its average audiences were. If this range represents 'about half' the total number of shows for which Kino provided films, then the probable limits for this total were 1000 and 1200.

The upper limit for shows organised by Labour and other groups can be obtained by reference to the probable average charge for film hire. Receipts from film hire totalled £844. With reels costing 4s per day, and an average show lasting 90 - 120 minutes (7-9 reels), (207) the average cost of film programmes hired ranged between 28s and 36s. This would suggest that programmes of films were hired from Kino on between 470 and 600 (approximately) occasions. The number of hirings was probably nearer the lower figure, as some groups gave shows for more than one day. (208) These limits would tend to substantiate independently the estimates for the total number of shows given by Kino.

If we take the upper limit for shows of Kino's films to be 1200, then some indication of the probable maximum total audience for these shows can be given. It must be noted that in the following Table the total number of Kino's shows (600), the total number of other shows (600) and Kino's total audience (30,000) are constants, and that it is highly unlikely that Kino achieved an average audience per show of more than 50, even though reports in the left press suggest that shows attracting 500 people or more were not uncommon. (209) Average audiences of over 200 would have been necessary to substantiate Kino's claim to have reached a total audience of nearly 250,000. As average audiences for Kino's own shows were roughly 50, average audiences for other shows would have been in excess of 360 to correspond to this improbable claim. While no fully reliable estimate can be made, a total audience of approximately 100,000 is suggested as a generous upper limit.

207. The estimate is Ralph Bond's, in Kino News, Winter 1935.

208. Doncaster Workers' Film Society, by no means exceptionally, hired Battleship Potemkin for 14 days. Daily Worker, 8 November 1935, p.7.

209. See for example, ibid., 29 July 1935, p.2; 26 October 1935, p.6.

Table IX. Approximate Upper Limit For Audiences For Shows of Kino's Films, March 1935 - February 1936

Average Audience	Maximum Audience for Kino Shows	Maximum Audience for Other Shows	Maximum Total Audience
50	30,000	30,000	60,000
100	30,000	60,000	90,000
150	30,000	90,000	120,000
200	30,000	120,000	150,000

There is no other year for which detailed evidence on shows, audiences and film hire exist. No reasonably accurate limits therefore can be placed on the scope of Kino's activity in these respects. Kino did supply estimates in February 1939 to the Home Office Advisory Committee inquiring into the question of the censorship of 16mm films, but there are no means of verifying them. Kino's claims are given in Table X below. (210)

Table X. Kino Film Distribution: Evidence to the Home Office Inquiry, 1939

Year	No. of Shows	Estimated Total Audience
1936	764	100,000
1937	1036	200,000
1938	1372	330,000

Such claims were, it must be noted, part of an argument attempting to establish Kino's credentials as a flourishing 16mm distributor. The official inquiry had been launched after five years of pressure from sections of the commercial (35mm) film world, and from local government authorities, which were anxious, respectively to restrict 16mm competition, and secure censorship control over 16mm exhibition. (211) Kino's evidence was intended to stress both the non-commercial character of its business and the valuable contribution which it made to legitimate political and cultural activities in Britain.

210. PRO HQ, HQ 45 21109/695383/67, 'Memorandum of Evidence', op.cit., An identical claim for the number of shows in 1936 was made in the Daily Worker, 4 September 1937, p.6.
211. See, Report of the Committee Appointed to Advise the Home Office and the Scottish Office on Matters Concerned With the Administration of the Cinematograph Act, 1909, The Position of Slow Burning Films (London, 1939).

Kino's claims may be exaggerated, but they do at least possess symbolic accuracy, since there was an unmistakable rise in film usage by the Labour movement and campaign organisations from 1937 onwards. A combination of often spectacular and horrifying events abroad, a basic mistrust of commercial or official news sources, a desire to see what was happening in places such as Spain and China, and an increasing awareness of Kino as an organisation of and for this movement, provided the basis for the expansion of Kino's work in the 1937-9 period. This expansion was encouraged by the acquisition of sound films and equipment and the extension of Kino's library and distribution network. While it is not possible therefore to accurately quantify Kino's total audience at the peak of its activities, there is room for speculation as to the likely upper limits of this audience.

The group's evidence to the official inquiry into 16mm censorship made no attempt to suggest a massive increase in the number of shows given: emphasis was upon the increase in audiences attending them. The claim of 1372 shows for 1938, roughly a 35% increase on the 1935-6 year, would therefore appear feasible. If so, then Kino could have reached a total audience of 68,000 with an average audience of 50; an audience of 137,200 with an average audience of 100; and 205,000 with one of 150. For Kino's claim of 330,000 to be accurate the group would have had to attract an average audience of 240. This is probably too high even though meetings of over 1000 people were common for leading speakers. An extremely tentative estimate would place Kino's total audience for 1938, its most successful year, between 150,000 and 200,000.

Evidence regarding the composition of these audiences is also slight. Before 1937 Kino's library consisted almost entirely of Soviet and British productions. During the 1935-6 year somewhere between 470 and 600 programmes were hired by the following organisations: (212)

ESU Branches	30%
Film Societies	12
'United Front Bodies'	10
Communist Party and Young Communist League Branches	10
Trade Unions and Trades Councils	6
Cooperative Societies and Guilds	6
ILP Branches	5
NUWM Branches	5
Labour Party and Labour League of Youth Branches	4
Miscellaneous	12
	<hr/> 100

It would appear from this that just over a third (36%) of Kino's customers were groups of the organised Labour movement; while just under a third consisted of FSU branches - which were usually composed of CPGB members, Labour Party members, members of Cooperative organisations and occasional Labour and Conservative MPs.

While shows obviously appealed to members of the group organising them, they were not usually exclusive to that membership, and were open to the general public. Though no evidence is available on the audience composition for individual shows, it is probable that they generally attracted a cross-section of political, trade union and cooperative society activists and the politically informed. The proportion of Communist Party to Labour Party members present being determined by the nature of the meeting convened, the state of the political situation in the locality concerned at any given moment, and the films to be shown. Even film societies gave film shows for Labour groups; the Leeds Film Institute Society, for example, gave regular shows for a local trade union group in the spring of 1935.(213)

No organisational documents contain details of Kino's customers for succeeding years. The FSU, with its curious mix of panel beaters, scientists and politicians, was probably a consistently regular customer, largely because of the vital importance which the CPGB attached to the FSU in its popular front strategy. As Harry Pollitt reminded Party members in 1939:

the stronger the Russia Today Society becomes, the more effective bonds of solidarity will be developed between the British and Soviet peoples, and the sooner we can help change the pro-Fascist policy of the National Government. (214)

Indeed, as with the PFI, Kino appears to have enjoyed a close relationship with the FSU, the latter acquiring for the former a number of Soviet newsreels and shorts from Moscow, and in return Kino distributing several films for the FSU.(215)

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212. Kino Films, First Annual Report, 1936. See also, Russia Today, March 1936, p.3.
213. Sight and Sound, Summer 1935, p.93.
214. H.Pollitt, letter, Daily Worker, 16 March 1939, p.2. The FSU was renamed the Russia Today Society in September 1938.
215. Kino Films, First Annual Report, 1936.

Collaboration between Kino and various organisations discussed above suggests that audiences ranged from Communist Party members, to trade unionists, to members of the Labour Party, to LEC groups, to liberals and progressives involved in a variety of ad hoc committees and relief organisations, to people simply concerned by the prospect of another war, etc. Recourse to the minutes of information contained in the 'What's On' column of the Daily Worker and similar columns in the New Leader and Reynolds News (the Daily Herald does not contain such information) and advertisements in the left and cinema journals of the period, tends to confirm this. Caution is required however in drawing too firm a conclusion as many local organisations probably never advertised their activities in such papers. Even so, as the foremost source for this type of information, the Daily Worker can be used to provide an impression of the range of organisations which used Kino's films. Thus, for example, the following is a random selection of bodies which advertised meetings at which Kino's films were to be shown:

London Cooperative Society Education Committee
 Shepherds Bush Transport and General Workers Union
 Stratford Amalgamated Engineering Union
 Glasgow Trade Union and Workers Social Club
 NUWM Limehouse and Poplar Branch
 Paddington Trades Council
 Stockport Trades Council and Labour Party
 Edmonton Labour Party
 Trades Union Congress
 Rochdale Clarion Cycling Club
 Gloucester Labour Party
 Tooting Young Communist League
 Newcastle Labour Party
 Stoke Newington Communist Party
 Stepney NUWM
 Relief Committee for the Victims of Fascism
 Bethnal Green FSU
 Willesden Young Engineers
 Streatham 'Kino' Group
 East London Spanish Youth Foodship Committee
 Scottish People's Film Association
 Wembley Spanish Aid Committee
 Nottingham FSU
 West Ham Daily Worker League
 Labour Party (Transport House)
 Manchester Left Book Club
 National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants
 (Central London)
 London District Communist Party
 Bermondsey Trades Council
 East Liverpool Communist Party
 Ipswich Cooperative Society
 Lewisham Left Book Club
 Glasgow Kino
 Bradford Communist Party
 Stratford Labour College
 Carshalton Labour Party
 Leeds FSU

Finally, little information has so far been found for the various local groups established by Kino. Efforts to trace individual agents such as Arthur Jarratt, Robert Mure and Gilbert Taylor have been unsuccessful. Kino's own head office staff have nearly all died within the last ten years or so, and individuals involved with Kino for part of its existence, such as Ivan Seruya, Betty Bower and Bill Megarry were unable to recall in sufficient detail provincial developments. A brief sketch of Glasgow Kino, probably Kino's most successful provincial group, can be made however. (216)

A body of support for a 'Labour Cinema' had existed in Glasgow since the days of Glasgow Workers' Film Society in 1930; and there were various workers' film societies active in the city between 1930 and 1935. With the development of Kino's film hire service the ailing West of Scotland WFS was replaced by Glasgow Kino, Kino's official Scottish agent. According to Allen the group had extensive connections with the local Labour movement, and quickly developed an important role within the city's political life. Moreover,

The major Glasgow Labour movement events - May Day festivals, Peace Rallies, Spanish Concerts, Hunger March Receptions - were always complemented with a Kino film. And showings around Scotland were given in tours that covered Fife, Edinburgh, the East Coast, Central Scotland, the Vale of Leven and Ayrshire. (217)

Glasgow Kino showed most of Kino's films, either in the context of a 'left cinema', or that of an 'agitational body' contributing to the political and campaign work of the Communist Party, Spanish Relief groups, and the Labour movement generally. Some indication of the scope of this work is given by Allen. By February 1937 the Group were reported to be regularly giving shows five times a week, to audiences of between 300 and 1300. Weekly receipts sometimes reached £100, with individual shows apparently raising £15 - £30 for Spanish Relief. A portion of every collection, in addition, was given to workers at Hawick Mill, who, being unemployed, had taken over the factory to produce goods to help the Republican cause in Spain. (218) In 1938 the group began to coordinate its work with that of the Scottish

216. The following account draws heavily on D.Allen's unpublished research, Workers' Political Cinema in Scotland in the 1930's op.cit.

217. Ibid.

218. A.Shepherd, 'Helen Biggar and Norman McLaren', New Edinburgh Review, loc.cit., p.26.

People's Film Association, Kino's 35mm film society coordinating body. It also produced an agitational film, Challenge to Fascism, with Glasgow Trades Council and Labour Party sponsorship. By early 1939 however disillusionment or feelings of futility had begun to erode the group's coherence and sense of purpose, and, in decline, Glasgow Kino merged with the SPFA to form Scottish Film Services, Kino's sole agents in Scotland in the months preceding the outbreak of war.

While it is difficult to assess how representative Glasgow Kino was of other provincial groups, it is probable that it functioned generally as Kino had prescribed. Glasgow Kino was not however a mere outpost of Kino in London. Led by an enthusiastic and lively group of people, it was an autonomous body, informally cooperating with Kino's plans rather than implementing instructions and, as with most local groups, much of its success was dependent upon local initiative. Its allegiance to the central organisation was probably based on a broad correspondence of political views, and the sharing of similar notions as to the importance of films in the political and cultural life of the Labour movement. (219)

(iv) Production

Of the 20 films made by Kino, seven were made by Kino's London Production Group before the Group assumed its separate identity as the Workers' Film and Photo League; and six were made at the request of other organisations. In addition to these 20 at least three films were started, but never finished or released. Furthermore, Kino set up a new production unit, the British Film Unit, in late 1938, which included League members, and which produced at least two films, possibly four. Kino's production, therefore, may have extended to 23 or 24 films.

219. The main part of this chapter has been devoted to a description of Kino's principal activities and to an attempt to give some indication of their scope. One important aspect of Kino's work, so far unmentioned, was its relationship with the Workers' Film and Photo League, the group which provided Kino with many 'workers' newsreels' and propaganda films. This shall be covered in the next chapter.

A description of all surviving films (with the exception of three, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) has been made. Most information about these productions has been derived from viewing them and from details in journals and publicity material. Little is known of those which no longer survive. To indicate the historically specific nature of these films brief explanations of the political circumstances in which some of these films were produced and shown are provided. Finally, central to the development of Kino as a production unit was its relationship with the Workers' Film and Photo League. In the following section this relationship is described in outline only.

Within a month of the Film Section of the Workers' Theatre Movement forming Kino, it began making preparations for production, and the group was informally split into two sections, distribution and production, their personnel overlapping. Kino London Production Group's first task was collaboration with the National Unemployed Workers' Movement 'to make an official workers' record' of the NUWM National Hunger March, which started in January 1934 in Glasgow. The previous National Hunger March, in October 1932, had precipitated momentous events, not the least of which were the remarkable scenes of confrontation in London and elsewhere with police forces, generally considered by left sections of the Labour movement to have been determined to destroy the March.(220) Kino appealed to readers of the Daily Worker for anyone with 9.5, 16 or 35mm movie cameras to take footage of the march; and began making preparations for the production of a documentary and 'workers' newsreel'.(221) Meanwhile a preview of material edited by Kino was given at the group's first 'social', and then released as a 'workers' newsreel'.(222) The film included footage from the surviving but incomplete London May Day 1933, and footage from different members of other events in 1933 shot before Kino's formation.(223) The surviving record of the May Day demonstration in Hyde Park begins with the following titles:

220. See, J.Stevenson, 'The Politics of Violence', in G.Peele, C.Cook, (eds.), The Politics of Reappraisal op.cit., pp.146 ff; W.Hannington, Unemployed Struggles (London, 1936, reprint 1973), pp.230 ff.
221. Daily Worker, 5 January 1934, p.4; 10 January 1934, p.4; 16 January 1934, p.4.
222. Ibid., 13 January 1934, p.4.
223. Amateur Cine World, May 1934, p.45.

The Workers' United Front in Action. All Out against Fascism. Despite the orders of the leaders, the workers are determined that all workers shall be allowed to march to Hyde Park, thus showing a REAL United Front against the National Government and the Capitalists.

Shots of various contingents are too frequently interspersed with titles which contribute little to the film's intelligibility and undermine its continuity and visual appeal. But banners and other pro-filmic resources are also used to convey appropriate information. One sequence for example depicts a horse-drawn cart laden with what appears to be an entire family, one of whom holds a placard declaring:

Men who starve at the factory gate
Mark the ruin of the State.

and another placard on the end of the cart proclaims:

We fight
For the freedom of Socialism
Against the servitude of Fascism

Although very amateurish, it was obviously a welcome start, and helped to boost Kino's credentials within London as a film agency of the Labour movement. By April National Hunger March 1934 was complete, and was soon being shown as far as Partick. (224) The film starts with references to the National Government's economy drive, and shows stills of pamphlets by Wal Hannington attacking the Unemployment Bill. Scenes of people preparing to march are followed by shots of Harry McShane addressing marchers in Glasgow, and John McGovern (an ILP MP) explaining to Gaumont Graphic 'why they march' (this footage was pirated). The film then shows various scenes in Cambridge, including a procession of dons, shots of students, and workers outside an Employment Exchange. Marchers are shown nursing their sore feet; and a combination of stills and captions tells audiences that J.H. Thomas (the Dominions Secretary) 'says we have mastered the unemployment problem'. More scenes in Cambridge depict crowds at a meeting, a soup kitchen, and police in readiness; and the film closes with scenes of contingents arriving in Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park.

224. Daily Worker, 7 May 1934, p.4.

Lasting ten minutes or so, the 16mm silent film was a vast improvement on the earlier material, using fewer and shorter titles and more variation of subject. It would appear that Kino's appeal for footage was answered as North London Film Society (a working class, amateur cine-club) provided material, and the Cambridge material appears to be very similar to that shot by James Harris for his own film The Hunger Marchers, which, though covering the national hunger march, 'was mainly about the part played in the procession by the Cambridge University Socialists.'(225)

Kino's second production, Bread, was intended as a 'photoplay on the law and justice from a new angle',(226) and was released in May 1934. The film was conceived in a more agitational role, as Sam Serter, who was largely responsible, revealed, recalling the influence which Eisenstein had exerted on him during a lecture at the Marx Memorial Hall a few years earlier.(227) Using a fictional format, Bread relates the story of an unemployed worker, who, denied relief by the Charity Commissioners, resorts to stealing a loaf of bread and is caught after a struggle in the street. In the magistrates' court middle class students, charged with causing an affray, (spilling food off a cart, which is re-enacted), are set free with a mild caution. Next it is the unemployed worker who faces the magistrates; and titles, 'Starving? Nonsense', 'No need to starve' appear over scenes of poverty and a repeat of the theft scene. The man is sentenced to imprisonment.

The points of the film, that crime is not an effective method of fighting unemployment, and that the judicial system is class-biased, are emphasised through imaginative use of camera angles, lighting and cutting. The Commissioners are shown questioning the worker in a quickening montage sequence, using low angle close-ups, and lighting which imparts a sinister element to their faces - these characters are portrayed as the class enemy in terms similar to the 'character type' of the Soviet cinema. Tension is built up when, following this sequence, the man returns to his family with neither food nor money: his clenched fist beside the kitchen table fills the screen as he confronts his family in despair.

225. Kino News, n.d., May 1936; Cinema Quarterly, Autumn 1934, p.61.

226. Amateur Cine World, May 1934, p.45.

227. See, T.Dennett, 'England: the (Workers') Film and Photo League', in T.Dennett et al, Photography/Politics: One (London, 1979), p.113.

The final sequence of the film consists of actuality footage of the the 1934 Hunger March, with banners providing appropriate pro-filmic references: 'NUWM Kirkaldy Branch Against Hunger and War'. The final point, that an effective resolution of the unemployment problem can only come through mass, organised action, is stressed by the transposition of the film from the fictional mode to the realist mode of representation. The record of the march serves further, to specify the particular agency for this action which the Labour movement should use - the NUWM. In so doing the film attempts a political intervention in the debate between communists and social democrats as to the most appropriate forms of struggle against unemployment. It must be recalled in this respect that the Labour Party and the TUC, despite organising one national demonstration, in February 1933, against mass unemployment, appeared to be doing very little of concrete value, in comparison with the NUWM, to alleviate the plight of the unemployed and the victims of unemployment.(228) From communist perspectives therefore the film attempts to present the political campaign against unemployment as inseparable from the political campaign within the Labour movement against the policies of the Labour Party and the TUC.

By the time Kino's London Production Group had made their next two films, dramatic adjustments in Soviet policy in response to the consolidation of Hitler's power in Germany had had important effects on Comintern policy. Diplomatically isolated and militarily weak the Moscow leadership initiated a series of diplomatic manoeuvres to improve its vulnerable position, including gaining admission to the League of Nations in September 1934. From mid-1934 onwards Soviet policy was preoccupied with and oscillated between improving relations with non-fascist powers to contain fascism and avoid isolation, and improving relations with Germany.(229) The practical outcome of this ambivalent policy, for the Comintern, was unclear, and Stalin's temporary indecisiveness in 1934 allowed individual Communist Parties more room to take the initiative. Where the French did so, the British did not, probably through difference of opinion within the CPGB leadership on the Party's policy regarding a future war between Britain and a fascist Germany; but also because the Party was reluctant to make any move which did not

228. See R.Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism op.cit., pp.211 ff; J.Stevenson, 'The Politics of Violence', loc.cit., pp.147-9.

229. A.B.Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence op.cit., pp.221 ff.

correspond to Soviet/ECCI guidelines. The Party was therefore in a state of partial paralysis, awaiting a clear-cut decision from Moscow.(230)

Nevertheless, fascism and war were the dominating themes in Comintern propaganda, and the cultivation of anti-fascist, anti-war views assumed increasing priority as the most immediate practical policy as more Comintern sections drifted towards a 'united front' strategy. This allowed even greater licence for Willi Muenzenberg's semi-independent Comintern initiatives, which had been at the core of many notable peace and anti-fascist campaigns since 1932, and which were already implicated in a 'popular front' strategy of appealing to the broadest possible unity in opposition to fascism and war.(231)

The dramatic growth of the British Union of Fascists (BUF), culminating in the massive and violent meeting at Olympia in June 1934, and Hitler's purge of Sturmabteilung leaders the same month, created a charged atmosphere in Britain in the summer of that year. The necessity within communist circles to challenge the BUF's influence, and take advantage of the public recoil from the fascist movement's transparent thuggery, became compelling. Much of CPGH activity was consequently devoted to these ends, and it is under these circumstances that the next two Kino films were produced.

With access to only one camera however, Kino's contribution to this political work was obviously restricted, and Kino appears to have continued its appeal for assistance from left wing cine enthusiasts in other parts of the country. Evidently they had a measure of success, because their next film, Workers' Newsreel No.1, was assembled from material shot in several different locations. The newsreel, which 'shows the main events during the first seven months of 1934', (232) opens with the title: 'This is an attempt to present News from the working class point of view'. Included in the Daily Worker Gala, Plumstead, featuring various sporting activities (boxing, netball, a

230. J.Haslam, 'The Comintern and the Origins of the Popular Front 1934-35', Historical Journal, vol.22, no.3, 1979, pp.689-91; B.Pearce, 'From Social Fascism to "People's Front"', M.Woodhouse, B.Pearce, Essays on the History of Communism in Britain op.cit., pp.209-11.
231. H.Gross, Willi Muenzenberg op.cit., pp.242 ff.
232. Daily Worker, 24 August 1934, p.4.

sack race) and fun-fair competitions (throwing darts at cartoon figures of Hitler and Mussolini). A title, 'The Workers Create.....The New and Largest Store' is followed by shots of the construction of a Cooperative store in London; and then 'Whilst.....Capitalism Destroys' is followed by shots of a plane crashing, and the Hendon Air Pageant, with planes in formation and carrying out bombing practice. Images of people distributing anti-war leaflets outside the show are followed by 'Workers make these machines', images of planes, 'To Destroy Workers and their Children', and a repeat of the crashing plane in a fast montage sequence. 'But the masses are organising - against war!' precedes shots of a demonstration revealed as 'Youth Anti-War Congress, Sheffield'. A poster is framed giving details of a meeting in London at which Henri Barbusse and Harry Pollitt are to speak; and the incomplete film ends with footage of an anti-war demonstration in Hyde Park. Other items, taken out for use in later reels, included footage of the Blackshirt rally at Olympia, and a counter-rally in Victoria Park.(233)

The newsreel skilfully combines items of humorous, topical and culturally relevant interest with standard symbols of Labour's political strength in a single thematic presentation: capitalism and capitalist governments are destructive, and only mass united, organised action can prevent future wars. The use of intercutting techniques serves to emphasise the fundamental political opposition between Labour and Capital, and the film, as with Bread, offers an unmistakeable guide, specifying the most appropriate agency, to action. The newsreel was clearly carefully constructed from available material with an agitational as well as a news value; and appears to have been conceived in terms of contributing to the most recognisably immediate needs of the CPGB in the summer of 1934.

Given its first showing in August, the reel was immediately followed by Workers' Newsreel No. 2. Billed as 'Workers and Fascists in Hyde Park. A Vivid record of Sept. 9', (234) the film was released in late September and comprised material from a number of locations. Lasting 10 minutes the film begins with the title 'London. Release Thaelmann Banner in Strand', and is followed by shots of police taking the banner down. Footage shot in France, the provenance of which is

233. Daily Worker, 24 August 1934, p.4.

234. H.Marshall, HMC, Kino Publicity Leaflet, n.d.

unknown, follows: 'International Anti-Fascist Sports Rally', and shows the prominent left wing writer Barbusse addressing the rally in Paris. A cycling race, and the Russian athletic team, 'who outclassed all nations', are featured. The reel moves quickly to 'Hyde Park September 9th'. Footage of the Fascist rally in the Park emphasises the police protection needed against 'A Counter-Demo'. 'Fascist Fiasco' precedes a shot of Blackshirts marching through a path cleared by police, with hostile crowds pressing on either side. Shots of various anti-fascist banners punctuate the sequence, which is followed by shots of a number of speakers, including Harry Pollitt, Bert Papworth, John McGovern, and 'Young Liberals', addressing crowds at a demonstration against the Sedition Bill (although this is not clear from the surviving copy of the film). The next item, 'Wrexham Colliery Disaster', billed as a 'special supplement' to the newsreel in publicity leaflets, was shot by Kino's own camera unit, who considered it too important to overlook, and evidently had no contact in the area to provide footage. (235) 'Miners risk their lives for 7/8d per day' precedes shots of men standing by the lift shaft of Gresford Colliery. There are general shots of rescue workers, and close ups of faces of members of the rescue party. The film closes with 'All About the Boat Race', showing a Daily Herald poster and three men in a boat with a Daily Worker banner - a taunting joke referring to the Herald's opposition to the anti-fascist rally, and providing publicity for the Communist Party's daily paper.

As with the previous reel, Workers' Newsreel No. 2 combines agitational techniques with news values, emphasising strongly the importance and effectiveness of mass organised action for a united front in opposition to fascism. The inclusion of the Paris material serves to stress the need for an international front; and the use of a hand-held camera in the coverage of the fascist and anti-fascist demonstrations helps to build up a sense of immediacy and tension, contributing thereby to its agitational value.

By the late summer of 1934 the group involved with Kino's distribution/exhibition work were preparing to establish a limited company to run the agency on more organised lines. Unhappy with this move

235. Herbert Marshall, in an interview with the author.

towards professionalisation of the operation, the London Production Group decided to form a new group, the Workers' Film and Photo League, with the Workers' Camera Club. Only two more films were subsequently made by the Kino London Production Group before the split, in November 1934. One, Socialist Summer School, lasting a few minutes, was probably intended as a newsreel item, but was in fact shown separately. It featured a 'workers' summer school' held at New Milton.(236) The other, referred to as an 'anti-fascist film' in Cinema Quarterly, is a compilation of material from National Hunger March 1934 and the two Workers' Newsreels, with additional footage. Although the surviving copy has no opening name-title, one of its first titles is 'Against Fascism', and this has been taken as its name-title. The film begins with shots of Blackshirts, and Young Communist League members, dressed as Nazis. The sheet music for the 'Internationale' is framed, 'against fascism', prior to scenes outside the Olympia stadium the previous June when the notorious fascist rally was held, showing mounted police and Blackshirts. Harry Pollitt is then seen addressing a rally, with a banner declaring 'Fight Fascist Anti-Semitism'. The film returns to scenes of the 1934 Hunger March in London, 'against starvation', and then, 'against war', showing Army recruitment posters, an RAF plane, and anti-war banners. The film returns to the theme 'against starvation', showing a child's face in close-up, and ends (the surviving film is incomplete) with 'Workers of the World', a shot of feet marching, 'Unite'.

Although the formal separation of functions generated some resentment amongst KLPG members who went on to establish the Workers' Film and Photo League, the relationship with Kino remained close, Kino distributing WFPL films, participating in and cooperating with the League's schools and classes; and many Kino members retained their membership of the production unit. Amicable cooperation continued throughout 1935 and Kino even provided material for the League's Workers' New reel No. 4, having filmed the ILP's Summer School in August 1935 at the Party's request.(237) The five minute film shows James Maxton, John McGovern, Fenner Brockway and others taking part in a political

236. See, Daily Worker, 25 September 1934, p.4. The film has not survived.

237. New Leader, 23 August 1935, p.4.

discussion; the School eating, playing various sports, and dancing at the 'farewell carnival'. But in January 1936 Kino attempted to secure the League's re-amalgamation. The move, by Albert Pizer, Kino's Treasurer, was made because the League had failed to develop provincial production units and was no longer, it was implied, under Kino's political influence.(238) In consequence,

Very little has so far been done in the way of creative work. Kino has practically no films which deal with conditions in this country. Such films are an urgent need at the moment. (239)

Attempts to force the issue by setting up a Kino Production Committee failed, as did Pizer's resolution seeking League amalgamation with Kino, put to the League's annual general meeting in February that year. The outcome, much resentment apart, was that League-Kino cooperation gave way to a considerable overlapping of function and competition, as the League no longer automatically gave its productions to Kino for distribution and Kino recommenced production.

Kino announced in April 1936 that a Production Committee had been established

- 1) To discuss and determine themes and treatments for films of social significance.
- 2) To form units throughout the country for their production on substandard stock, and to act as a coordinating body to all such units and give assistance in every possible way.
- 3) To offer existing units a source of distribution for suitable productions in the substandard market, to assist and advise them on scenarios.
- 4) To undertake for any organisation who feels that a film illustrating their work from a particular angle will aid them in their own sphere. (240)

The following month in the second issue of its bulletin, Kino News, Kino reported that three films had already been started, but in Left Review the same month, referred to only two: a film for Kensington

- 238. British Film Institute, FPL (7), Film and Photo League Central Committee Minutes, Minute Book, May 1935 - January 1936.
- 239. 'Kino Production Committee', Left Review, May 1936, p.415.
- 240. British Film Institute, FPL (2), Kino Publicity Leaflet, 'Film Production', n.d., April 1936.

Labour Party 'dealing with infant mortality', and 'a film on Housing and Slums in cooperation with builders' unions'. (241) A third source, a Kino advertisement in the Daily Worker, gave further details:

A unit of building workers, architects and film technicians has been formed to make a film dealing with the problem of the slums now and the new slums which are being built. To expose the jerry-building feverishly carried on by get-rich-quick gentry who receive congratulations from the National Government for boosting up their so-called Housing Campaign. (242)

A second production unit was already making 'the first working class comedy':

A riotously funny comedy is just getting under way. We're keeping mum, but the producers have solemnly sworn to make this the funniest picture that Kino audiences have seen for many a day. (243)

Apart from an item revealing the title of the comedy to be Touch Wood, (244) there are no references to these films in surviving Kino catalogues and publicity leaflets, or in the Daily Worker; and it is probable that even if they were completed they were not released. Gaps in the sources preclude the drawing of firm conclusions but it would appear that Kino's new scheme never materialised. There is certainly no evidence that Labour groups responded to Kino's appeal and established cine production units. One group did however commission Kino to make a film: We Are the English was made at the request of the London District Communist Party in 1936, recording the Party's 'People's Pageant' of 20 September that year. The film opens with the following:

Produced by the London District Communist Party of Great Britain. From the time of the Magna Carta to the recent day the rights and liberties of the British people have been won by the ceaseless struggle of the commoners against tyranny and oppression

and explains that

5000 London Communists assembled on the Embankment to demonstrate to the people of London that the glorious principles of the English are today inherited by the Communist Party.....

241. Kino News, n.d., May 1936; Left Review, May 1936, p.415. The 'infant mortality' film was eventually made, but not by Kino.
242. Daily Worker, 1 May 1936, p.5.
243. Ibid.

Images of the march to Hyde Park show the marchers in orderly formation with crowds lining the streets in curiosity. There is a close-up of a clenched fist, and banners are framed depicting victorious events in a 'people's history' of England, including one of the 1919 Police Strike. Individuals are also featured on banners: Pollitt, Tom Mann and Willie Gallacher follow Wat Tyler, Simon de Montfort and John Milton. Shots of marching feet are then followed by banners depicting more recent victories - notably, the anti-fascist rally in Hyde Park on 9 September 1934. We see shots of a Young Communist League Band and CPGB leaders singing; and the film closes with '810 new recruits joined this day', and 'Join the Communist Party', with a final pan of banners in a large demonstration.

The Party was enjoying an upturn in popularity, reaching a reported membership of 11,500 in October 1936, its highest ever membership. (A similar figure had only been reached in 1926.) The popular front policy was beginning to produce results in Britain, and the Party's appeal was widening. The most conspicuous example of this being the immense success of the Congress of Peace and Friendship with the USSR held in London in December 1935.(245) But the popular front strategy had broader implications. Cultural life generally was influenced by a spate of books written by Party members. Left literature and left theatre thrived under the new conditions; and left historians began to produce studies corresponding to and intended to assist the new policy of the Party - most notably A.L.Morton, and his A People's History of England (1936). (246) The Communist Party in the mid-1930's, in London at least, was pervaded by a 'culturalism' which extended to all forms of artistic expression. Production of a film for publicity and propaganda

244. Daily Worker, 6 August 1936, p.3.

245. See the report of the Congress, Britain and the Soviets op.cit.

246. An indication of the extent of the left literary culture of these years is the remarkable list of books reviewed in The Eye: The Martin Lawrence Gazette, the house journal of Lawrence Publishing Company. See also the various articles in J.Clark, et al, Culture and Crisis in Britain in the 30's (London, 1979), a recent survey by Communist Party members; F.Mulhern, The Moment of Scrutiny (London, 1979); and, more generally, R.Williams, Culture and Society 1780 - 1950 (Harmondsworth, 1963), and J.Symons, The Thirties (London, 1960).

served the aims of the popular front both directly, by virtue of its propaganda value, and indirectly, by bringing kudos to the Party, enhancing its prestige and attractive appeal, in London in particular, amongst the intelligentsia, who were increasingly receptive to its fashionable status as 'radical chic'.

Given the strength of the London District Communist Party (LDGP), in relation to other districts, and the depth of interest in film within the London Labour movement and the city's intellectual and literary/artistic circles, the LDGP was evidently confident of the value of the medium for direct recruitment purposes for a wide range of audiences. We Are the English consequently eschews agitational techniques and the 'workerist' images of earlier productions. The film makes a straightforward appeal for support, invoking the 'English people' as the object of the appeal, and a tradition of resistance to 'tyranny and oppression' as both a celebration of 'the people' and a guide to action.

Following this Kino concentrated on distribution, with the expansion into sound film and equipment in February 1937 most likely consuming all its resources. The group was willing even so to make occasional short films. The celebration of May Day was particularly attractive to left wing cine units in the 1930's, and Kino made a nine minute reel of the 1937 demonstration, Communist Party Demonstrations May Day 1937. Customary images of marchers wielding a cornucopia of banners are seen. They move through London towards Hyde Park, in which various speakers are seen addressing crowds, including D.F.Springhall, and Ted Bramley, respectively Secretary and Head of Propaganda of the LDGP. Emphasis throughout is on the Party's close relationship with the tradition of popular struggle, and its contribution to the strength of the demonstration.

In November 1937 Kino produced a three minute film, Anti-Fascist Demonstrations, which was used both as a short, and as a newreel item in Kino's News Review 1937 (a compilation of footage shot by the Film and Photo League, North London Film Society, the PFI and cine groups in Holland and elsewhere). The surviving copy of the silent film opens with the gathering of anti-fascists in Hyde Park, with banners proclaiming 'London again says NO to Fascism'. Crowds are seen in the streets of

Bermondsey, waiting for the BUF march. Scenes follow of fascists struggling through the hostile crowds with police protection. The final part of the film shows a demonstration along the Strand to Trafalgar Square. This copy has no titles and is incomplete, with material probably taken out for use in other films. Nevertheless, it is another example of Kino publicising the activities of the CPGB - those activities which had a strong intrinsic propaganda value.

A third Kino production in late 1937 was a Daily Worker Trailer, for showing at exhibitions of their films arranged by the Party and its orbital groups. Drives to boost the circulations of their press have always taken up a large proportion of the energies of minority parties, and the CPGB was no exception. The Daily Worker was given priority status in the propaganda drives of the Party, and was a focal point of all Party activities.(247) The Trailer, which was available from Kino free of charge, explains the scope of the paper's work, how it is run, and its role in Party work, finally appealing for more readers.

The same month, December 1937, Kino sent a camera unit to Catalonia to shoot footage of relief work being done there by the NJCSR, which co-sponsored the expedition.(248) The outcome, at least three short films, Blood Bank in Spain, Schools in Catalonia and Save Spanish Children, were made available in the spring of 1938 and used by the NJCSR to publicise its work.

We have already seen how Kino attempted to influence the character of the commercial cinema by encouraging the formation of 'Kino film societies'. One of the broader aspects of this strategy was that it was hoped to be able to raise by public subscription sufficient money both for the production of films intended for commercial release and for shorter, 16mm films. Another extremely rare Kino document gives an indication of the plans drawn up for 16mm production.

247. Report of the Fourteenth Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1937, p.82; Report of the Fifteenth Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1938, pp.82-8, 163.
248. Daily Worker, 12 January 1938, p.2.

In March 1938 a Kino Committee meeting was held 'to discuss formation of organisation for amateur 16mm production' (sic) (249). The Committee resolved that a Kino production group should be established to make films, enlist the help of other organisations, and advise groups on production. Furthermore, it was agreed that members of the Committee still involved with the Film and Photo League should 'get the F+PL moving' (sic). Lastly,

a film must be made AT ONCE, without even waiting for further meetings, on CHAMBERLAIN MUST GO, NO CABINET RESHUFFLE, A PEOPLE'S GOVT. The cdes. present agreed to work together on such a film at once. (sic) (250)

Plans were drawn up for films on A.R.P., on the 'unity of the working class' and on the 'expansion of Fascism'. These plans were surely in response to the Anschluss earlier in the month, and the rapid deterioration of the international situation which ensued, indicating the seriousness of their approach to film production and the value of film propaganda in the anti-National Government campaign. Accordingly, Kino approached the League in April with a view to co-production of the May Day demonstration, and a joint production unit was quickly established to

- a) prepare the May Day film for use by the Labour Movement
- b) to make one 45 minute sound film
- c) about two silent shorts (251)

While the May Day film was being co-produced Kino's production group made Stop Fascism, as the first of its own projected series. The three minute film discusses the meaning of 'non-intervention' in Spain, showing fascist leaders before large rallies, and fascist troops in combat. Shots of Hitler delivering a speech are accompanied by sounds of a pig grunting, and appropriate music provides the background to battle-scenes.

- 249. H.Marshall, HMC, Kino Committee Meeting, Minutes, 22 March 1938.
- 250. Ibid.
- 251. British Film Institute, FPL (unnumbered file), Letter, Kino to the Film and Photo League, 27 April 1938; Minutes of the joint Kino/FPL meeting, 2 May 1938. See also Left News, July 1938, p.906.

A diagrammatic map of central Europe is used to illustrate Germany's assimilation of Austria in March 1938. There follows shots of people at a rally in Trafalgar Square, and then people, gradually growing in numbers, marching through backstreets and across fields - sometimes marching directly towards the camera. These later scenes are interspersed with titles: PEOPLE OF ENGLAND, UNITE, STOP FASCISM, SACK CHAMBERLAIN, UNITE, DEMAND A PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT, FOR PEACE; and the sound track renders briefly the 'Internationale'.

One indication of how closely Kino's production followed Communist Party policies is given in this film. In March 1938 the CPGB issued a statement Save London from the Fate of Barcelona, in which an argument was put forward to the effect that the National Government was actively helping to create a fascist government in Spain and in so doing was threatening the communications vital to British interests. This represented a remarkable, tortuous shift in perspective, a stunning accommodation to Conservative politics, in as much as it implied that fascism must be fought because it endangered Britain's strategic interests. This line of argument is present in Stop Fascism: there is a short sequence in diagrammatic form showing a map of Western Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. British trade routes and communication links with her imperial possessions are plotted and, using animation, the danger to these links arising from a fascist victory in Spain is explained.

Although the co-production with the FPL appears not to have been completed, Kino's own production group had taken footage of the May Day demonstration in 1938, and this was released as London's Labour Day 1938. This film has not survived and no details of its contents have so far been discovered. Kino persisted in its attempts to reactivate the ailing Film and Photo League, as League production work had more or less ground to a halt. The first fruit of Kino's efforts was the British Film Unit, based at Kino's offices, consisting of members of both groups, including Frank Jackson and Hugh Cuthbertson, the League's driving force. The unit's first meeting, in late October 1938, resolved that its 'immediate objective' was the production of 'a film dealing with A.R.P.', intended 'to prove that protection against air-raids is perfectly feasible so long as certain conditions are fulfilled'.(252)

252. British Film Institute, FPL (4), Minutes of Meeting of New Production Unit, 26 October 1938. See also, Amateur Cine World, January 1939, p.544.

It is unclear whether the film was ever completed. The Film and Photo League files contain a script and commentary.(253) From these it would appear that the film was to contain shots of London, planes in mass formation, scenes of the bombing and destruction of Guernica, maps of London and the distance from Germany, and London under 'black-out'. The film was then to discuss the different types of air-raid shelter available - their advantages and disadvantages. The commentary ended with a plea: 'We must have real defences. There should be adequate shelters near to every home'.

Another film which the British Film Unit made, or at least planned, was 'Popular Front Film No. 3' (presumably a production title). It was probably completed but never released. The synopsis of the ~~second~~ film reveals it to have analysed recent European events, and the life of the British people; and argued that only through 'unity' can progress be made and fascism thwarted. The film, according to the note appended to the synopsis, 'is intended for all kinds of people who are just awakening into political consciousness'.(254)

A third BFU film was probably Youth Peace Pilgrimage, which records the arrival in London of a march of youth and student groups from Edinburgh in February 1939. A large indoor rally is featured, with close-ups of various speakers; more shots of the march passing through Whitehall, and more scenes of the indoor meeting. The surviving film has no introductory title, and no titles throughout its length of eight minutes. Banners framed by the camera reveal the nature of the demonstration, which is in opposition to war, with specific reference to Japan's aggression towards China. The film ends with a shot of a banner, which reads: 'Defend Democracy at Home and Abroad'.

The last BFU production, probably its most important, was Tenants in Revolt, a twenty minute sound film made in the early months of 1939, in collaboration with the Stepney Tenants' Defence League. For years tenants in East London had suffered negligent and racketeer landlords; and attempts to secure improvements, lower rents and greater security of tenure had led to the formation of various tenants' committees to negotiate with landlords and deal with problems

253. British Film Institute, FPL (4), 'ARP Film', n.d.

254. Ibid., 'Popular Front Film No. 3', n.d.

of repairs, etc. In late 1938 the conflict between landlord and tenant took on a new form with the organisation of large scale rent-strikes. The success of this tactic spawned similar moves in other cities; and in the first six months of 1939 large areas of Stepney, led by the Tenants' Defence League, were engaged in long disputes with landlords and police, which in some cases led to streets being barricaded and picketed day and night.(255)

No copy of the BFU's film has survived, but a Kino publicity leaflet gives some impression of its contents:

The conditions under which the Stepney Tenants live, with a sidelight on the underlying causes of these conditions, are dealt with sympathetically. The film passes on to show how the Stepney Tenants' organisation was built, and how it works to win better conditions for its members. (256)

The Communist Party played a leading part in the political life of Stepney borough, and was deeply involved in the various strike actions. The BFU's production, made during the course of some of these conflicts, was used by defence groups to assist tenants involved in similar actions in Stepney and elsewhere.(257) The film's propaganda value however transcended the particular issues of slum life and resistance to racketeer landlords. As Kino's publicity slip explained:

The lessons to be learned from this film go far beyond the struggle of the Stepney Tenants - they apply to and will appeal to working class organisations of all kinds. (258)

Kino's role as a production unit was always subsidiary to its role as a distributor and exhibitor; and production only became necessary when either no other groups existed to supply the agency with films, when the supply was too small and intermittent, or when those films were considered unsuitable under the specific circumstances obtaining

255. A useful though partial and somewhat heroic account of these strikes is given by P.Piratin, in his Our Flag Stays Red (London, 1948, reprint, 1978), pp.35 ff.
256. British Film Institute, FPL (2), Kino Publicity Leaflet, n.d.
257. Daily Worker, 15 June 1939, p.2.
258. British Film Institute, FPL (2), Kino Publicity Leaflet, n.d.

at any given moment. Persistent attempts to keep the League faithful to its own political position tended to complicate the production work of Kino: there are indications in surviving Kino records that Kino occasionally engaged in production as a means of re-vitalising the League, or, in persuading the League to agree to co-productions, as a means of bringing the League under its political influence. Lastly, although the PFI had not intended originally to produce films, once it had started in late 1936, it began to supply Kino with a reasonably regular supply of films, making unnecessary any full-scale commitment on Kino's part to production.

While production was considered important therefore, it was always, at least until late 1938, carried out as a low level operation - with meagre resources and low expectations. A single camera was used in the first year or so, though there were twenty members of the Kino London Production Group by November 1934. The KLPG's accounts for 1934 reveal that its income was £6 2s and its expenditure £18 9s 3d. Itemised costs of footage indicate that film taken of the Daily Worker Gala shot for Workers' Newsreel No. 1 cost £1 1s 11d, and footage of the Wrexham mining disaster and the Hyde Park anti-fascist demonstrations for the second reel in the series cost, respectively, £1 6s 8d and £3 15s 10d.(259) In 1936 similar budgetary constraints stopped work on Touch Wood: over half the total money required for the film had been raised and used, but Frank Jackson needed another £6 before the work could continue.(260)

Pervading all Kino's productions until 1937 is a conspicuous and self-consciously preserved amateurism, even though the group occasionally enlisted the assistance of professional technicians. While the exhibition of film was only marginally less routine than the holding of conventional political meetings, the step to production was evidently a large one for many activists. Something of the complex mix of attitudes which Kino's members brought to the task of production is revealed in the following account of the shooting of footage of the May Day demonstration of 1932. (The result, Against Imperialist War - May Day 1932, was probably intended as a part of a 'workers' newsreel'.) Titled 'Filming the May Day Demonstration' the article,(261) probably written

259. British Film Institute, FPL (2), Statement of Account of Production Group, 29 October 1934.

260. Daily Worker, 15 June 1936, p.4.

261. New Red Stage, June-July 1932, pp.4, 9.

by either Ivan Seruya or Eli Silver, reveals that a 'workers' cine unit' hired a van, secured a cameraman with a 16mm camera to its roof, and filmed contingents marching through Stepney Green and Hackney.

The police, who were with these marchers, apparently took us for Pressmen, but our driver was ready to step on the gas. (262)

The unit took footage of 'the entire East London, Barking and West Ham Demonstration' as it went along Whitechapel Road.

This time, the cameraman shot from inside the van, so as not to attract attention, but nevertheless the huge crowd of onlookers, which had gathered on either side of the pavement to greet the marchers, were very curious at the black van (they probably took us for Workers' Movietone); but, fortunately for us, some Press photographers came up and asked permission to use our van. This was just what we wanted for it served as a camouflage for our work, and it was then a simple matter to film the magnificent demonstration.

We moved on to the Embankment, parked the van in a back turning, and made our way to the demo (sic) that awaited the arrival of East London. Here we found to our dismay that filming of any description was barred. As we looked around at the crowds, banners, tableaux, carts and cars covered with slogans, our cameraman nearly wept and we had to forcibly restrain him from filming. We then had a short discussion, and we came to the decision that it must be 'shot' and that order was carried out.

Just off the Embankment the road through which the demo had to traverse on the way to the Park, we spied a Movietone van, and certainly if they could film so could we..... (263)

The unit was apparently working in cooperation with another shooting in North West London. The two finally met in Hyde Park and took footage of the massed crowd. Obviously well-informed as to what was to happen next, the unit filmed a contingent marching to protest, outside the Japanese Embassy, against the Japanese invasion of Manchuria.

The demo left the Park in an orderly manner, and suddenly came the baton attack by the mounties, who hurled the demo and crowd back. We were there right in the thick of it. What an opportunity! Up went the cameraman on the shoulders of the tallest in our party, and got an excellent shot of this. (264)

262. New Red Stage, June-July 1932, pp.4, 9.

263. Ibid.

264. Ibid.

While too much can be made of this, as the people involved may not have been those who joined Kino's London Production Group, and these attitudes did not hold good for the whole of the pre-war decade, this account nevertheless captures the curious combination of attitudes typical of the Labour film-maker of the early and mid-1930's. A strong sense of the political importance of the work is compromised by an inhibiting, self-conscious mischievousness - suggesting an ultimate inability to take film production, as a political task, seriously. These contradictory elements are underpinned by a further contradiction. There is evident in this account a certain element of class defiance (against the State, and other class-based forms of authority), which is similarly compromised, by an ultimate acceptance of the subordinate position of the working class. There is conveyed in this description a strong sense of the naughty boy who knows he is doing wrong. In addition, though film production was important, it was in a sense an alien practice, still having thoroughly 'middle-class' connotations despite the hard work of Bond and others in the late 1920's and early 1930's in publicising workers' films and encouraging workers to make their own films. Moreover, as a highly technical process, film-making required a certain level of technical knowledge and competence, which implied professional training. The mystique of film production tended to elevate the skill to the level of a profession, and in so doing, in the eyes of many workers, identified it with another class, which in turn denied effectively any general access to it for working class people. There are threads of evidence regarding Kino which suggest that in the early years its members were influenced by such attitudes. There was an extremely self-conscious involvement in film production and a desire to preserve an amateur approach. The enormity of the task of overcoming long-established cultural and social preferences amongst the overwhelming majority of the working class and the Labour movement must have been quite dispiriting. Even so, changes occurred: by 1937 Kino had developed a highly professional approach to its work, and production was regarded with a seriousness and sense of political responsibility appropriate to the gravity of the political situation.