

August 27, 1975

PROPOSAL FOR THE FORMATION OF A NATIONAL FILM ORGANIZATION

Comrades and Friends:

We are writing this proposal in the name of the Cultural Commission of the Communist Labor Party of the United States of North America. It has been obvious to our Party for some time that in the United States at present there is a crying need to gather all the many excellent but all too often scattered and isolated progressive film makers into a united front. A recent experience of one of our members travelling to the East and West Coasts will illustrate what we are talking about. This person had occasion to talk to a number of film makers, both Party and non-Party members. He found that people in Los Angeles were unaware of what was happening in San Francisco, and vice versa. No one on the West Coast had more than the vaguest knowledge of what film work was being done on the East Coast, Midwest or South. In New York revolutionary film makers were out of touch with LA and San Francisco, not to mention Chicago. In New York itself communication between different groups of progressive film makers was at best tenuous, and actual joint work in most cases nonexistent.

On the West Coast a revolutionary film collective was making a film on unemployment and the fight for jobs. In New York another revolutionary film group was making a film on the same subject.

Speaking in general, might not the working class movement have been better served if these two organizations had in the beginning pooled their resources to make only one unemployment film, using the money, time, talent etc. left over to begin another project?

Another example: We heard that at least four films are currently being made on Chile. Now, it might be the case that there are irreconcilable political differences involved, but can there be *four* entirely different and hostile positions being expressed here? That is very doubtful. It is more likely in large part a question of lack of communication, knowledge of other people's activities and collective labor.

The disorganization and lack of communication manifests itself also in the distribution of finished films. Films made in the West are not known or distributed in the East, and vice versa. The Midwest and South remain to a large extent ignorant of either. Revolutionaries working in factories and communities remain ignorant of the existence or availability of films which could help them in their work of organizing the working class in the fight for jobs, peace and socialism.

As a result of this spontaneity, disorganization and lack of communication, an enormous amount of double work is done; resources are not shared and used fully; existing films are not distributed nearly as widely as they could be. In short, time, money and political influence are wasted at a time when the forces of peace and progress in this country cannot afford to waste anything.

Compare this present deplorable situation with that which our enemy has created for himself. Philip Agee in this book *CIA Diary* describes the CIA's approach to "media" in the following way: "Headquarters' propaganda experts have visited us in ISOLATION and have displayed the mass of papers they issue as material for the guidance of propaganda throughout the world. Some

of it is concerned only with local issues, the rest often has world wide application. The result of the talks was to persuade most of us that propaganda is not for us - there is simply too much paperwork. But despite that, the most interesting part of propaganda was obviously the business of orchestrating the treatment of events of importance among several countries. Thus problems of communist influence in one country can be made to appear of international concern in others under the rubric of 'a threat to one is a threat to all.' For example, the CIA station in Caracas can cable information on a secret communist plot in Venezuela to the Bogata station which can 'surface' through a local propaganda agent with attribution to an unidentified Venezuelan government official. The information can then be picked up from the Colombian press and relayed to CIA stations in Quito, Lima, La Paz, Santiago and, perhaps, Brazil. A few days later editorials begin to appear in the newspapers of the places and pressure mounts on the Venezuelan government to take repressive action against its communists.

"There are obviously hosts of other uses to which propaganda, both black and gray, can be put, using books, magazines, radio, television, wall-painting, handbills, decals, religious sermons and political speeches as well as the daily press. In countries where handbills or wall-painting are important media, stations are expected to maintain clandestine printing and distribution facilities as well as teams of agents who paint slogans on walls," etc., etc. (Agee, *CIA Diary*, p. 72)

The point is obvious. The CIA carries on propaganda in an organized, scientific way. Do not we, who instead of representing all that is rotten, cruel and degenerate, represent the future, represent peace, decency, progress - do not we have a responsibility to our class, to the people of our country and the world, to operate along the same scientific and rational lines? All film makers and other cultural workers no doubt understand the importance of culture in the revolutionary movement. But how many of us can say that we have succeeded in translating that understanding into organization?

If we are really serious about using films in particular in the fight against fascism and war, against imperialism, we must seek to raise the level not only of our propaganda but of the organization of the distribution of that propaganda. This can be done on a national level only by collectivizing as much as possible the many individual and small-group efforts which at the present time are being made. Succeeding in this we will be able to make more and better films and distribute them to a much wider audience than we have ever done before.

The question arises, how can we collectivize our efforts? We know that in the past efforts have been made to create national organizations of revolutionary film makers (such as the old national Newsreel) without much success. One of the main problems was that these national groupings tried to be centralized political organizations with one political line. We are not proposing this. We are not proposing that individuals or groups give up their individual political points of view or their independent organizations. We are proposing that groups and individuals come together in a united front of film makers as a part of a broader united front against fascism and war.

This united front should represent unity of action. We cannot and should not insist on fundamental unity of political views on every subject, but on unity of action around definite, concrete issues. For example, film makers in the East could collaborate with film makers in the West on a film about busing by gathering footage, coming to a basic agreement on the content of the film and its political line, and working jointly to complete it. Or, one group could make a proposal for a film, circulate a treatment, solicit help from other organizations, get criticisms, suggestions,

etc. Yet again, the members of the united front could make a comprehensive list of the films which they already have, and these lists could be circulated throughout the country in order to give everyone an idea of what films are available, where to get them, how much they cost, etc.

The possibilities for unity of action around the making and distribution of films are many. Some types of collaboration will represent a higher level of political unity than others, depending on the attitudes of the people involved. The point is that we must begin now to cooperate and support each other. Is there any one of us who does not constantly feel isolated, ignorant of what is being done in other parts of the country, in need of more collective discussion and criticism around projects? Well, then, let us remedy this deplorable situation as rapidly as possible!

On the question of building a united front against fascism we follow the lead of Georgi Dimitroff who said,

"...Unity of action to repel the offensive of capital and of fascism is possible and necessary even before the majority of the workers are united on a common political platform for the overthrow of capitalism, while the working out of unity of views on the main lines and aims of the struggle of the proletariat, without which a unification of the parties is impossible, requires a more or less extended period of time. And unity of views is worked out best of all in joint struggle against the class enemy *even today*. To propose to unite at once instead of forming a united front means to place the cart before the horse and to imagine that the cart will then move ahead. Precisely for the reason that for us the question of political unity is not a maneuver, as it is for many Social-Democratic leaders, we insist on the realization of unity of action as one of the most important stages in the struggle for political unity." (*United Front*, Proletarian Publishers, p. 89)

We should not put any preconditions on organizations and individuals entering into the united front we are proposing except that they sincerely work in the interests of the workers and other democratic sections of the people of the United States and the world, that is, the vast majority of humanity; that they fight for peace, full employment and the equality of all nationalities. Membership in the united front should be entirely voluntary and should not mean that persons and groups affiliating give up their independent existence or individual projects which fall outside of the common work.

How can we begin to put this proposal into effect? We should begin publishing and distributing as widely as possible a newsletter, open to all progressive film makers, which will begin to open up communication between different parts of the country. The editorial board of the newsletter should be made up of representatives of the most interested and active organizations and collectives. Contributions should be concerned with information on what films exist and are available for distribution, which projects are being worked on by different groupings and individuals, what people consider the priorities in terms of new projects, political discussions of how to use films

more effectively in the revolutionary movement, possibilities of fundraising, etc.

We should through the medium of this newsletter and any other means at our disposal plan for a conference of individuals and representatives of film groups, to be held within three or four months in a central location, for example Chicago. At this conference we would begin to work out a concrete program for joint work and campaigns around specific issues such as the fight for jobs with peace, the fight for busing, the fight against the fascist offensive, or whatever the con-

ference decides.

Ideally, the conference would consist of not only film makers but all cultural workers - theatre groups, writers, painters, etc - who could begin to unite around a common center, for instance a cultural journal which would concern itself with films, theatre, music, painting, etc. The different types of workers could meet separately in workshops, then together in plenary sessions to sum up their work and discuss a common program around different concrete issues.

If you are in basic agreement with what we have proposed, please take responsibility for sending us articles, suggestions, information about what you are doing, etc., so that we can put out the first newsletter as soon as possible. The united front which we are proposing should not and will not be the private property of our or any other Party or organization, but of all its members in particular and of the progressive people of the United States in general, and will serve their interests. Please join with your fellow film makers in putting an end to the backward situation in which we find ourselves at the present time and which makes our work of building an anti-fascist movement in this country much more difficult than it has to be.

Comradely,

Cultural Commission of the CLPUSNA



"JUNE 19th"
or Negro Nation Day
Line Etching of Juneteenth
Day Sponsored by the the
Detroit Unemployment Com-
mittee, Communist Labor
Party USNA, Rev. Walker &
various RUM groups & cau-
casus. Held in Detroit,
Michigan on June 21, 1975
at Chandler Park

By Aaron Ibn Pori Pitts
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