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MASS EDUCATION IN AFRICAN SOCIETY

THE REPORT under the above title recently issued by H.M. Stationery Office is a document of historic importance to the people of Africa. It is the work of a Sub-committee of the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies.

Interested though they will be in the report as a whole, readers of the bulletin will no doubt wish to have full information about the suggestions of the Sub-committee with regard to the use of the cinema in the general scheme of mass education. The extensive section dealing with the cinema is some indication of the importance which the Sub-committee attaches to it.

Owing to the lack of evidence about the effect of films in any educational sense on colonial peoples, coupled with the fact that the cinema is universally popular, the report sounds a note of warning about laying undue emphasis on its reception and effectiveness among backward people. The cinema must be regarded as supplementary to, and not a substitute for, the teacher. At the same time, it is pointed out that the extent to which the cinema may be used in mass education is obviously very great. It can cater for large audiences, unlimited copies of a film can be produced and colonial peoples are as much attracted by it as are any others.

The report then indicates the types of film which appear to be necessary as an aid to mass education.

(a) *News Films* of world, regional and local events. If carefully selected, regional and local news items could create a healthy local rivalry in many activities which form part of a mass education movement.

(b) *Documentary films* designed to extend people's knowledge of the outside world, of the territory itself and of the region in which it is situated.

Plans to set up new forms of organisation, such as trade unions, co-operative societies and local governments, would be greatly assisted by films showing such organisations in action elsewhere. The introduction of new crafts and small-scale industrial undertakings can be facilitated by suitable films.

(c) *Films to demonstrate a technique or experiment.* A film may demonstrate to a large audience a complex manual operation or a laboratory experiment that could otherwise be shown efficiently only to very small groups. Sequences of operations about such projects as laying out a football field or building a kiln may be clearly established through a film.

(d) *Entertainment films.* Mass education movements must provide liberally for entertainment even after allowance has been made for music and talks. There is scope for material for such films in the history and folk lore of colonial peoples.

Search should be made for what is suitable among entertainment and documentary films produced in Europe and America and libraries of these films established.

In speaking of the needs of colonial peoples in general, the report says experience has confirmed that films produced in Europe and America are unsuitable for large sections of the colonial peoples. Short sequences, quick transitions and the various trick shots common to modern production, perplex the relatively uneducated as well as the more primitive people. A special type of film is necessary, produced by individuals with a first hand knowledge of the limitations of those they seek to educate. If the films are to be educationally effective, those who prepare scripts should have an extensive sociological knowledge of their audiences. It is important they should know about the sense of humour peculiar to the people, their standards of morality and their religious beliefs. As time goes on, the films themselves will give a gradual training in comprehending the more difficult techniques of presentation.

The Sub-committee feels that the resources within the Colonies themselves have hardly been touched. Many colonial peoples have outstanding gifts in acting, music and the improvisation of dialogue. Much could be done by a sympathetic and imaginative film producer. It is suggested that a necessary preliminary is the training of selected colonial personnel. A high standard of education must be a necessary qualification for selection for such training.

If the cinema is to be a genuine support to mass education work, substantial sums must be found for the provision of cinema vans and the installation of projectors at community education centres. Suggestions are made for meeting part of the cost of equipping territories adequately.

Consideration is being given already to the establishment in the United Kingdom of a central organisation to fulfil the following functions:—

(a) The collection in consultation with Colonial Governments, of suggestions for films which would be useful to those authorities.

(b) The preparation, again in consultation with Colonial Governments, of shooting scripts with detailed technical instructions.

- (c) The making of arrangements, in collaboration with regional centres in the Colonies, for films to be shot both in the Colonies and in the United Kingdom.
- (d) The processing, editing and titling of the exposed film.
- (e) The editing and titling of suitable amateur films taken by officers in the Government services.
- (f) The examination of film libraries in the United Kingdom for the purpose of acquiring and re-editing any films which might be found capable of adaptation for exhibition in the Colonies.
- (g) The provision of courses of instruction for selected Colonial officers on leave in the display and care of films and equipment and in the shooting of films.
- (h) The furnishing of assistance to local centres in the Colonies, possibly under the direction of the Information Officer, in securing equipment and in training personnel required in film production and display such as cameramen and commentators.
- (i) The distribution to local centres of films produced.
- (j) The production of film strips and film slides.

To these functions, the Sub-committee recommend the addition of :—

- (k) The direction of research into the technique of presentation including the use of sound and silent films with audiences of particular grades.
- (l) Experiments leading to the development of entertainment and recreational films with purely colonial content and with colonial actors.
- (m) The administration of a central Colonial Film Library to reinforce regional libraries.
- (n) The selection for this library of entertainment and documentary films not specially produced for colonial audiences.
- (o) The collection of the results of local research into the educational effects of individual films and groups of films.

The formation of a Colonial Film Committee in Great Britain is recommended to assist in securing films of a kind to aid mass education movements. It should be widely representative of people with knowledge of the Colonies and of film producing. It is suggested it might be associated with the Colonial Film Unit as an advisory body to the personnel of that Unit.

The report recommends that some arrangement should be made, whereby films chosen by the mass education organisation should be regularly displayed in commercial houses. At present commercial cinemas show films primarily produced for European and American audiences. The negative function of the Board of Censors merely ensures that bad films are not shown. Pre-selection would result in programmes of good films being displayed in these commercial cinemas.

The opinion is expressed that, as time goes on, the vast potential colonial audience will tempt the enterprise of the film industry. As the probabilities are that efforts will be concentrated on widely extended facilities for cheap cinema shows rather than on the production of films genuinely suited to the audiences, it is suggested that machinery be set up to advise exhibitors on the selection of films. Attempts should be made, too, to induce commercial firms to produce really worth while films specially designed for colonial audiences.

Since the financial implications of the use of the cinema on any extensive scale are uncertain, the advisability of conducting a series of co-ordinated experiments in cinema techniques and adaptations and their use in education, is recommended before any heavy initial outlay in production is embarked upon.



CHINESE GUNNERS IN ACTION



PILOTS OF CHINA'S NEW AIR FORCE



A CHINESE AIR FORCE PILOT