

The Raw Stock Scheme

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

AS the Colonial Film Unit actually grew out of film-making activity in Africa, it has always strongly supported the principle that the major portion of the material it uses should be photographed in the Colonies.

It will be appreciated that the activities of an organisation supplying films for the whole of the Colonial Empire must necessarily cover a wide field. In considering its production, it will be well to divide these activities into two separate categories. The first will deal with films which cover the more important issues and policies which are likely to be common to all the colonies; the second will be concerned with the production of films on local subjects which may assist in the solution of local problems. It should be realised that the word "local" may cover quite a vast territory and a large population. It was rather to assist the second of these objectives that the Raw Stock Scheme was started.

The Raw Stock Scheme came into being in 1941 when agreement was reached about the appointment of 16 mm. cameramen in a number of areas. As a result of correspondence with information officers, certain people, chiefly colonial officials associated with information or education, were chosen to help. Early in 1942 the first outfits were sent out to Gambia, the Gold Coast, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanganyika, and later to Uganda. This equipment consisted of a magazine Cine-Kodak with 1-inch f/1.9 lens, a Vinten light friction-head tripod and a supply of 16 mm. film in magazines. Since that time a constant stream of material has come back to this country, to be dealt with in London.

The importance of the Raw Stock Scheme lies in its ability to deal with the local film-making problem. Incidentally it will help the central organisation to build up a useful library much more quickly than would otherwise be possible. When making his newsreels and useful local pictures the substandard cameraman may at the same time provide excellent material which can be usefully employed in other areas to convey information and to compare methods and ideas.

It was known from the start that a number of problems such as war-time difficulties with regard to transport, laboratory finishing and the effects of climatic conditions on the film stock and equipment were bound to arise. Again, most of the cameramen were lacking in experience. To help on the work of the scheme, courses of instruction were started by the Unit for officers on leave in this country. In the *Colonial Cinema* of May 1943, the first of these officers reported on his experience while taking the course. Since then several others have taken advantage of the facilities offered.

The *Colonial Cinema* has played a part in the scheme by printing in each issue informative articles from expert sources on the technique of

film making, with particular reference to the problems of the 16 mm. worker, and this series of articles will be continued and extended in future issues.

Field workers have also been encouraged to submit queries to the Unit, and as a result, a considerable volume of information has been conveyed to them.

Usually the exposed material is sent to this country and processed here. Each film is then seen by a 16 mm. specialist and lengthy criticisms prepared and sent to the maker of the film. The material is edited and titled, and either returned for showing in the colony where it was made or sometimes incorporated with other material in a newsreel or interest film for more general distribution.

It is becoming more common for local film-making committees to consult the Unit at an earlier stage. Scripts are now being submitted to the Unit for consideration. Many of the suggestions made are being incorporated, and some very good films are being produced. With some re-editing, these films can often be made suitable for wide distribution. Two such films have been of sufficient merit and interest to be selected by the Ministry for non-theatrical use in Britain. This is a tribute to the progress which the Raw Stock Scheme has made.

Considerable experience has now been gained in the particular problems associated with the operation of the Raw Stock Scheme, and certain improvements have been made. As an example, it was decided to replace the original cameras with more complete equipment, and in March 1945 the magazine Cine-Kodak cameras were withdrawn, and new equipment was issued to Gambia, Gold Coast, Fiji, Kenya, Nigeria, Northern Rhodesia, Sierra Leone, Tanganyika, and Uganda. This equipment consisted of the Bell & Howell "Filmo" 70 D.A. 16 mm. camera, with a range of speeds from 8 to 64 pictures per second, a set of several lenses, a rotating turret head holding three lenses so that they can instantly be swung into position, and a variable viewfinder to match the lens in use. The original lightweight tripods were retained as they were suitable for the new cameras. The film for these new cameras is supplied on daylight loading spools, which provide a great measure of protection to the film under adverse climatic conditions.

One of the most vexed questions and one which has seriously affected the efficient working of the scheme is deterioration of film stock owing to tropical and sometimes sub-tropical conditions of climate. It is the subject of a scientific investigation being carried out by the Unit in conjunction with Dr. Batley of Kodak research laboratories. Special packings have been sent out to cameramen in the areas where the trouble is most prevalent. The whole history of the packages, from the moment when they left the Kodak factory until they arrived back for processing, has been carefully recorded; it is hoped in this way to evolve improved emulsions which are less prone to attack, and also to find convenient methods of film handling and transport which will assist the workers in

the field, while at the same time giving the maximum of protection to the film itself.

When a film is returned to London for completion, it is first processed and a duplicate is immediately made from it. The precious original is stored away and all editing operations are carried out on the dupe. When it is certain that the best possible use has been made of the available material, titles are prepared, the original is matched to the edited dupe, and the requisite number of copies taken from this edited original, which is retained for further use as either master for additional prints, or for library material to be incorporated later on in newer films.

When the material is unlikely to be of general interest and only one copy is required for local use, the original is edited and titled. It is then returned for use as it stands or for incorporation in local newsreels. Defective material is also returned with information as to why it has been discarded. In this way instruction on film technique reaches the cameraman.

During the war this work was carried out under somewhat difficult conditions by an officer who was able to devote only part of his time to it, and in not a few cases films were edited in the evenings to the sound of dropping bombs. Now that he is employed as a full-time officer of the Unit, and is devoting the whole of his time to the Raw Stock Scheme, those who participate in this important side of the work should benefit as a result.

In view of this new arrangement, it is proposed to extend considerably the system of individual criticism of film material submitted, and to arrange for a much more condensed course of instruction for those who attend here for that purpose. The officer is also available to answer promptly, by cable if need be, the immediate problems and queries of cameramen in the field, and to give direct attention to the editing and titling of the material sent in.

Already the Raw Stock Scheme has accomplished a great deal. An impressive number of subjects have been presented and completed. The number should grow as the organisation improves and far more of the films made should be suitable for wide distribution. What we plan to produce from the scheme is not only local newsreel items and records of subjects of local interest, but also films of an instructional character and of a more technical nature, which are likely to be of considerable assistance to colonial people generally. In this plan all the resources of the Unit as to choice of subjects, assistance in preparing scripts, technical advice on shooting and camera work generally, editing and titling and so on are at the disposal of the worker in the field, who is invited to make every possible use of them. By our schemes of training we hope to put the cameramen in possession of all the technical knowledge necessary to build up a coherent story in pictures as well as to master the mechanics of successful photographic exposure.

There is considerable interest among our cameramen about the possi-

bilities of using colour film. We are fully aware of these possibilities and their importance in preparing films for colonial showing. Colour filming, to be successful, requires a higher standard of technical accomplishment than black-and-white work. Exposure has to be much more exact; the nature and type of subjects available are more limited. The actual colour content of subjects and its composition within the picture have to be considered, and also the overall colour balance of individual pictures as they relate to the whole subject. For this reason, most of our work will at first be done in black and white, but as individual workers attain the necessary technical standards in camera work, it is our intention to make colour film available for them and to give them the necessary additional information and training. Colour film of good quality in 16 mm. can be enlarged up to 35 mm. for general distribution; first-class black-and-white copies can be prepared from 16 mm. colour originals. This gives a tremendous advantage to the worker who has the ability to make high-class pictures economically in colour on 16 mm. film. For this reason we are anxious to see the majority of our 16 mm. workers turn over to colour filming at the earliest possible moment after they attain the necessary technical standards and *when colour film is no longer in short supply*.

As a final word to cameramen, we wish to point out that there is no need for them to be niggardly in their use of film stock. In such a scheme as this, the cost of film stock is the least important expense, and the worker should never lose significant material because of any worthy but mistaken desire to be economical. We do not of course wish to encourage haphazard shooting in the hope that material will emerge which is worthy of use, but we do urge that, having carefully planned the film to be made and the shots to be taken, the cameraman should spare no effort until he is satisfied that he has done everything possible to secure the desired result.

Extract from Hansard, 24th October, 1945

MR. REEVES asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies whether it is proposed continuing the Colonial Film Unit now that the war has terminated, and if so, what are its functions to be,

MR. GEORGE HALL: Yes, sir. Present arrangements for the supply of films to the Colonies include films made by the Colonial Film Unit of the Ministry of Information, British Council documentary films and a special newsreel sent weekly by air to Colonial Territories. These films include a substantial proportion of material illustrating the British way of life. The Colonial Film Unit also produces films on educational and social subjects. It is my intention to maintain and expand these arrangements to ensure a vigorous presentation of the British case in the Colonies. Precise details of administration and finance are under consideration at present in connection with the future of Government publicity as a whole.