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The Pacific Film Archive Presents:

BED AND SOFA, ABRAM ROOM (USSR, 1927)

From Close Up, Vol.1V, No. 5, May 1929:

Bed And Sofa AT THE FILM SOCIETY

She: "What a disgusting picture!"

He: "Yes, darling. If I had known it would be like this I would not have brought you here."

The above fragment of conversation was overheard at the London Film Society on April 7th, when *Bed and Sofa* was screened.

What can you do with people like that? They live in a world that is not of this world; they move about with their eyes shut, refusing to see, or if they do see they refuse to understand. Certain things are not "nice". Therefore, although they happen and will continue to happen until the cause is removed, we will either ignore them, or if they are thrust upon us, we will say "how nasty", and "how disgusting", and then thank God that we are not like that. So let's go and see Clara Bow and Alice White.

And yet *Bed and Sofa* is a great human document with more truth in it than any dozen of the sex-drenched, sex-debauched films which constitute the great bulk of movie entertainment in Britain to-day. Nicolai the husband, Luidmila the wife, and Vladimir the friend are perfectly natural, normal problems.

Moscow has a housing shortage. So has London, Berlin and Paris, and every other town and city, large and small. In Moscow overcrowding breeds certain social evils; the same social evils breed in London, Berlin and Paris.

Overcrowding cramps the human being in his struggle for independence, freedom and health. Alexander Room, who is a psychologist realizes the problem and sets to work to expose it and tackle it. He knows that in doing so he has the support of the Soviet Government. In England, where there is a shortage of nearly a million houses, film directors do not do things like that....

Bed and Sofa shows us what happens when two people are herded together in one room, and then it shows us what happens when two is increased to three. Room presents his case; we know what is going to happen, and we expect it to happen, but we are vitally interested in the manner in which the director portrays pictorially the mental state and the psychological reactions of these three.

Everything is heading for a crisis, a break-down, but Luidmila takes a decision, the only decision possible, and leaves it all, sets out to start a new life.

Woman is the equal of man, says Room. Woman must be free, independent; the old moral traditions of masculine superiority are wrong. Overcrowding must be abolished, says Room. A new life, a free life, based on complete social equality.

How nasty! How disgusting!

* * *

The Film Society copy was cut, of course, but it was a notable event. One day it will be shown all over England, but in the meantime how Russia and Germany must laugh at this country of ours which shudders at *Bed and Sofa*, and goes wild over *The Red Dancer of Moscow* and *Sailors Don't Care*, and *Noah's Ark!*

A.W.

NOTE ON *BED AND SOFA*

Bed and Sofa, the star event of the Film Society afternoon of April 8th, was somewhat of a disappointment. Beforehand, one knew better than to expect a repetition of *Mother* or *End of St. Petersburg*, but it was a poor print to begin with. Next, the society's officers had been practicing for distinction and honours (sic) in censoring. The main import of the theme (the sole reason for the film being made at all) had been excised entirely. Their reasons? One cannot do better than quote their program. "The present film in its implicit significance is associated.... with a matter that has been the motive of many Russian films, the discouragement of abortion. The particular motive is one to which English convention forbids public reference and it was accordingly removed before submission to the Board. The story by means of which the general motive is expressed was, however, itself entirely disapproved! Please note.... *discouragement* of abortion... and that it comes from Russia... and yet it was removed before submission to the Board. By whom? But no matter. Of greater importance is that one can adversely criticize the film itself if necessary, even if it is a Russian film. Room may disapprove of abortion and be encouraged to use film stock to express his disapproval whether or not the circumstances make abortion necessary or even the lesser of two evils, but the method of achieving his object is, for psychological reasons, to be deprecated. The wife of the story is scared away from the abortion clinic and her resolve by screams from the operating theatre. In making an appeal to the impulse of fear, Room not only descended to the propaganda level of the *Dangers of Ignorance* but to slyness and deception too.

H.C.