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45 Anatoli Goldobin: Our Cinema and Its Audience

Source: A. Goldobin, 'Nashe kino i ego zritel', *Novyi zritel'*, 10 February 1925, pp. 5-6.

There is no doubt that during the past year there has been a significant improvement in the attitude of our cinema audience towards the film production that it is offered. A year ago it was seen as an indisputable truth that only a foreign 'hit' could bring in the takings, that Soviet films would not make a profit and would for the most part not even pay their own way.

Life itself is now in the process of refuting this truth daily. The news that Goskino's Soviet scientific film *Abortion* had broken all the records set by foreign 'hits' caused a real sensation. And in which cinemas?! In the best cinemas in Moscow that are by no means patronised by the proletarian public.

What does this mean? That the Nepmen who patronise the expensive cinemas and have previously preferred foreign films have changed their tastes and rushed to see Soviet films, even scientific ones, that have neither Mary Pickford, nor lavish sets, nor thrilling stunts? Not at all. It means that the workers' demand for really useful films is so great that they are not put off even by the high prices of the first-class cinemas and that they have filled them in the knowledge that *Abortion* had its 'first run' in these cinemas alone.

The figures and facts at our command indicate without doubt a regeneration in the social composition of our cinema audience. The network of so-called 'commercial' cinemas in the large cities, that has been significantly reduced as a result of the government's *tax policy* is no longer able to compete with the elemental growth of the network of cinema installations in local and Red Army clubs.⁸⁷ According to the latest data, this network has already passed one thousand outlets for the whole of the USSR. The number of mobile cinema units serving the countryside is growing day by day and has now reached 600.

Interest in cinema amongst the broad masses of workers and peasants is undoubtedly growing and the worker audience's conscious attitude towards cinema is becoming stronger and more precise with every film that it is shown. Witness to this is the current wave throughout the Soviet Union of mass organisation of workers' film

circles, the growing number of film critics from the machine-tool industry, of worker film correspondents, as our press wrongly calls them.

What are the demands made on films of this new audience for our cinema? They are demands dramatically opposed to those made by the world bourgeoisie.

The principal demand of the worker cinema audience is a demand for the contemporary film content that we need, that meets the most vital spiritual needs of the revolutionarily inclined mass. It is not entertainment that this mass expects from cinema but a healthy resolution of those doubts that it finds difficult to resolve on its own. If a film has something to say, if it calms the anxiety of a troubled mind about the future and creates a firm conviction that 'we have not lived, we are not living and we shall not live in vain' the worker audience will be quite satisfied.

The techniques of cinema, the lavish sets and the art of the 'kings of the screen' are of no interest to the worker audience. It still has little understanding of the finer points of film and photographic techniques or the delights of fanciful montage.

It is no accident that the most enthusiastic reviews in the provincial Party and Soviet press (which is a better reflection of workers' opinions than the press in the capital) are devoted to films produced by Proletkino.

As everyone knows Proletkino's films are distinguished by one common failing, the undoubtedly clichéd nature of their production. Despite this, all Proletkino films without exception treat the contemporary and profoundly revolutionary themes that we need (*The Red Home Front, From the Spark - a Flame*). This apparent virtue is for the worker audience the principal and fundamental virtue of the film.

The worker audience obviously does not notice the technical poverty of the film and this failing is perhaps not so important if it is concealed by the ideological value of a subject that is properly communicated and that the audience needs in the way that it needs 'black bread'.

The most successful Goskino films in the

provinces were: *Old Knysh's Gang*, *The Red Web*, *The Valley of Tears* and in particular *Abortion*.

The much-talked-about *Aelita* was received by worker audiences in the provinces with considerable doubt as to its usefulness.

Foreign films are unconditionally rejected by the worker audience almost without exception.

In terms of the number of titles there are few Soviet films. For every thousand programmes composed of foreign films, no more than a

hundred Soviet films are released. But foreign films are distributed in the USSR in five, and as a maximum eight, copies where fifteen to twenty copies of Soviet films have to be printed. (*Old Knysh's Gang* was sold out in twenty-six copies, *How Petunka Went to Ilyich* and *The Lenin Cine-Pravda* in twenty-five.)

When the countryside is properly supplied with mobile film projectors Soviet films will be released in hundreds of copies.