

FILMMAKERS AND THE VISUAL ARTS

Yesterday we filmmakers presented our paper at the section of the conference and we hoped that together with the assembled comrades we could discuss perspectives that would concretizing guide our way forward.

We are already in the proces of setting up a national film and video organisation in South Africa. And a committee in which we delegates are included was elected as an interim measure until after this conference.

We see this proces as part of the broad movement towards consolidating the organisation of cultural workers nationally.

We have listened - but yesterday certainly, we did not have much discussion. In reflection, we think that maybe we did not make clear enough the possible routes that we can follow. So please bear with us if we repeat a few points which we made yesterday.

We must not underestimate the potential power of the film medium.

We need to the growth of good progressive film in South Africa and utilising it effectively in the struggle.

Recently the Mandela series and Attenborough his "Cry Freedom" have been shown worldwide.

We might object to the treatment of both of these subjects, but there is little doubt of the power of these products to conscientize the world - and ultimately to move the struggle forward.

These films could be far more effective in better informed hands. If film is used effectively it speaks very eloquently to a mass audience.

Despite the richness of most of the South African culture, we see here in Amsterdam very little of it is reaching the people - and we think that we can acknowledge the reasons e.g. that theater enjoys less censorship is because the government knows that it speaks to a small audience.

As comrade Gordimier and comrade Jordan pointed out, the culture that reaches people and speaks to them most effectively, is television, and film skills and distribution networks are very largely in reactionary hands. We think that it is of grave importance that we start now

1. to train workers who will be the film-makers of the future South Africa and
2. to begin to undermine the state monopoly of distribution.

These are fine statements of intent ..., but we need to implement them. Film differs from other mediums in that it is far more dependent on money. Film-making and film training is expensive! Firstly let us look at training.



There are formal film schools of merit in South Africa so it would be of great practical value to obtain grants or bursaries for promising potential film-makers to study outside the country. The theoretical study of film is of great value - but hands on training within the country has to be encouraged. there is the less expensive possibility of working on non-professional video equipment.

This means that after an initial outlay which is still large ( R 80.000) you have the means to make videos to show at union halls or community centres.

You also have the means to give basic training. This is a real and practical route for community film. It needs initial funding.

On the other hand, if one is looking at making - and training people to make films that are of technical standard, good enough to be released on television networks or movie outlets, it is a much more long term complicated process.

To make a good entertaining film that the people want to watch - a film that will replace Rambo and Scarface - you have to know the medium very well.

You have to have a lot of skills and you need to practise those skills. Most artforms you can practise with limited resources. Not so with film!

In South Africa it is very difficult to get any work at all, outside the existing film industry.

As for black film-makers, other than those that are members of the few progressive film groups and other than those employed by the news networks were they have realized the advantages of sending black videocameramen into the townships, it is still virtually impossible for black film-makers to practise their craft. Job reservation is still in control. The only exception is the ABC.

We have to acknowledge that many colleagues working in progressive film and community video have come the route of the SABC. We must also acknowledge that in future our colleagues go that route as well. We have been for example to work with Marie van Rensburg who recently left the SABC fold.

The growth of a peoples film industry has at the moment a lot to do with financing and more consistent opportunity to make films. This means that external links with the international film community are vital. The writers have suggested setting up branches of COSAWU outside the country.

Likewise in film we think it is vital that our internal film organisation has counterparts throughout the world, so that exiles can join us in our particular "film struggle".

We need to have dialogue with international film unions e.g. ACTT, the film workers union in Britain, has allowed channel 4 to found certain of our projects which goes against their normal policy.



We also have to start making feature films, South African films which we can be proud of, which the people want to watch. The cost of making feature films is huge and the difficulties of getting feature films distributed are equally enormous. One has to find practical ways of getting peoples films made. We are not in the short term going to set up effective international networks. This is a long term process, bannon etc. at the moment holds sway. We have to fight within the established networks.

This together with distribute of progressive film and video to mass organisations inside the country will aid the development of a new political film and video culture.