



WAR DIARY OF THE SOVIET FILM

From the moment of invasion this is how the industry adjusted itself to new demands. What leading movie-makers are now doing. Shifting the studios.

THE film in the Soviet Union has always demonstrated an interdependence between its art and its country's history, its country's aims. In the life and death struggle in which that country is now engaged that interlocking grows firmer. The film's expression of the epoch and of the individual in this epoch is heightened and grows more intense.

How quickly did this adjustment take effect?

We can find a frank and accurate picture of the film industry there through the pages of the Soviet movie trade paper, a weekly called *Kino*. The issue dated June 20, 1941, is a normal one in every respect except its date. As the last glimpse of a pre-war film industry, it merits a close inspection.

Page one is devoted to articles relating the Soviet cinema to Maxim Gorky, the anniversary of whose death was observed that week. Page two contains reports on productions in work at the Mosfilm and Lenfilm Studios, and correspondence from the new studio in Tashkent and from Sverdlovsk. Page three reports new films under discussion in Kiev, Odessa, the Lenfilm Studio in Leningrad, and the Mosfilm Studio in Moscow. From Mosfilm comes a discussion around the proposed sequel to *General Suворov*, which records the opinions of its director Pudovkin, the studio's artistic director Eisenstein, the scenarist, the cameraman, and the actors on

the studio committee. Major-General Shimonayev, who was given a scenario, set in the siege of Sevastopol (1855) for criticism, publishes his report in full. Progress in dubbing each Soviet nationality's film production in the languages of other nationalities in the Union, is described. Page four is full of small pieces of news and other studio reports. Lenfilm has sent the actors Sverdlin and Cherkasov to Ulan-Bator to assist in a Mongolian Republic production. Natasha Matveyeva, the real Girl upon whose frontline experiences *Girl from Leningrad* was based, speaks at the opening of the film in Terioki. A film on Gogol's youth is nearing completion. The animated-cartoon studio has fourteen films in production. From Shanghai comes news of the reception there of Pudovkin's *Minin and Pozharsky* and from America items about *The Howards of Virginia* and *Grapes of Wrath*. There are films on football and the Dnepr River and, threaded through the whole page, announcements and notes of military films, dramatic ones, educational ones, reconstructing battles of the past, and training for battles of the future.

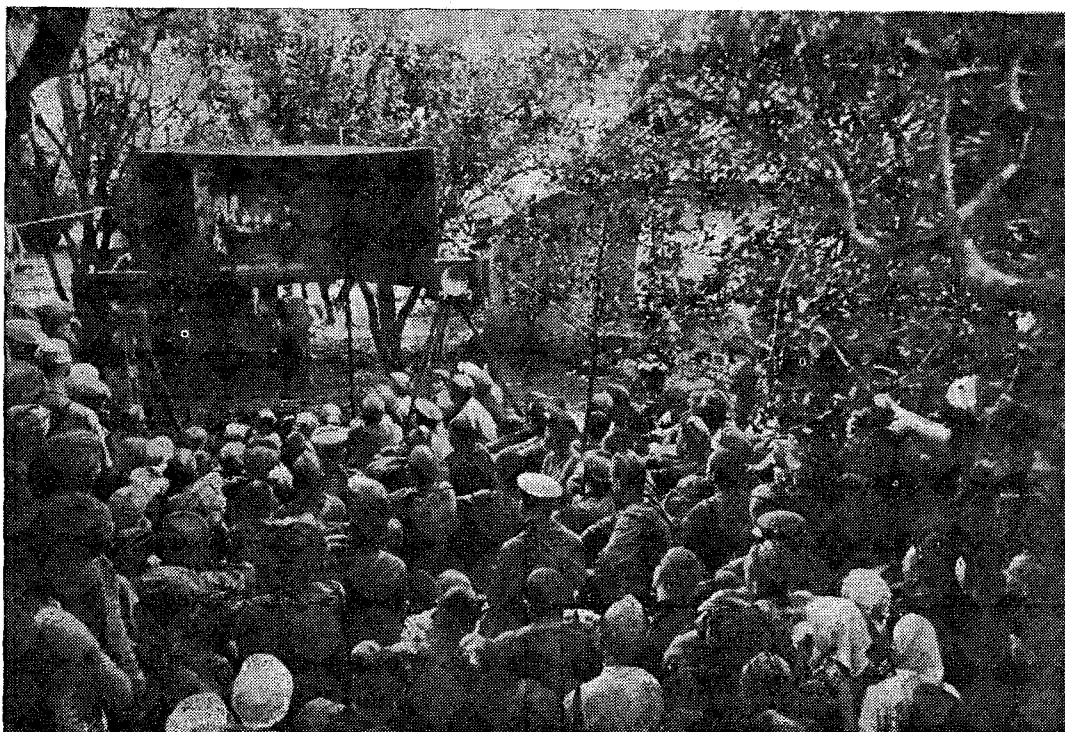
Two days later the German army crossed the Soviet border, and the next issue of *Kino* (on June 27) shows the Soviet film industry already on a full wartime footing. Besides stirring statements from every leading film-maker, there are detailed proposals to speed

production, and cut all waste. New emphasis is placed on widening newsreel coverage of every vital move, behind and at the front, so that no Soviet citizen will lack visual information on his country's struggle. The new Eastern studios in Tashkent, Stalinabad, Alma-Ata prepare for new production emergencies. Units are already working on short dramatic and satirical films to bring the issues and needs of the war close to the brain and heart of every man, woman, and child. A full program of instructional films for civilian war activity is launched. Every studio has its air raid drills, its blood donors, and its rifle classes.

SOVIET film-makers pledged themselves to reflect every aspect of the war in the many-sided, creative mirror of their medium. They, backed by their government's belief in and respect for the film medium, have achieved such success that their accomplishment is worth recording as a model for the role of an art in a war.

On the day of the invasion film-makers in every studio held conferences to determine how best they could help their country fight its war. Without any inter-studio conference, two of the Moscow studios and a Leningrad studio arrived at the same solution—short, sharply pointed films to be made quickly by any crew that could submit a good idea. Within a week eight different short films were in production—among them, a drama at the front, a satire on Hitler's ambition, an illustration of a popular song, and a whole group of three-minute cartoon-posters. As the first shock of attack wore away, the film industry examined its war baby, born overnight, found it good, and determined to foster it with extra production care, a working plan, and an editorial committee. This latter was formed in the first week of July, and included Pudovkin, Donskoy, and Alexandrov. Their job was to organize the spontaneous short productions into regular monthly issues. These, under the series title, *Victory Will Be Ours*, were open to short films in any form, any style, as long as they said something important about some phase of the war against fascism. They poured in, from Moscow and Leningrad, from Kiev and Odessa—farce, fantasy, comedy, tragedy.

In Mosfilm the film-makers discussed the values and problems of the new form. Eisenstein led the discussion citing the short-story methods of Robert Louis Stevenson and Ambrose Bierce as useful for study, for Soviet film-makers feel obliged to study their job, in war or peace. Eisenstein read a Russian translation of a Bierce Civil War story, "The



A Red Army film show. The apparatus is a portable rear-projection unit that can be used in full daylight—at the front, in a forest clearing, or on a battleship's deck.

Affair at Coulter's Notch" as an ideal precedent for the short story war film form. At a conference at Lenfilm, chairmaned by Frederick Ermler, every director-writer team submitted a script for the new shorts.

With Shostakovich and other composers throwing their rich talents into songs for a fighting people to sing, and with the best painters flooding the TASS windows with posters and caricatures, it is not surprising to find the best film-artists devoting themselves to this wonderful short film form. They were creating the patriotic poetry of wartime.

PHOTOGRAPHED in sets left over from more ambitious films, played by volunteer actors, great and unknown, who refused payment for this work, the first compilation of these films achieved an enormous popular success when it appeared at the end of July. The second issue, which is shown in North and South America as *This Is the Enemy*, appeared in August, composed of five items, and climaxed by a bitter drama of Yugoslav hostages. This concluding item was made by the emigré director, Herbert Rappaport. Every month since, no matter what hardships the studios endure (and these hardships have already increased beyond Hollywood's imagination), a new issue of *Victory Will Be Ours* appears. Nothing stops them—not even the incendiary bombs that fell on Mosfilm's roof over the stage where Pudovkin was filming an item for the third issue. These are war films for fighters, and their continuation proves their validity and authenticity.

The men and women who made films often insisted on making war in the more traditional way. As the Nazis approached Kiev, many of the film-workers joined the armed forces while the main body of the studio moved east to Tashkent. There was no news for months of the whereabouts of Alexander Dovzhenko, head of the Kiev studio and creator of some of the greatest of Soviet film masterpieces. When Leningrad was endangered, Lenfilm was not able to hold back from actual battle many of its young and old artists. Lola Fyodorina, the *Chizhik* of *Girl from Leningrad* brought her role to life by joining a unit of nurses at the front. Mikhail Rosenberg, brilliant young author of *Girl from Leningrad* and short films for the monthly issue, joined a Komsomol detachment and has been reported killed in action. Boris Poslavsky, famous character actor, helped construct the Leningrad defenses, day and night. As studio-workers and projectionists left their jobs for the front, women took over. Films had to be made and shown.

As the enemy drew near to the gates of Moscow at the beginning of the winter, the government made its decision to withdraw eastward all government offices unrelated to the defense of the city, all representatives of foreign governments, and all the film studios. The removal of all vital industries excepting those needed in Moscow at that critical moment had already taken place. The government and embassies and correspondents were concentrated in the temporary capital of Ku-



The civilians receive arms. From "Moscow Strikes Back."

byshev, on the Volga. The film studios were evacuated from danger zones and scattered to the furthest corners of the Soviet Union. This move away from threatened Moscow was accomplished in twenty-four hours (October 16). The magnitude of this act may be guessed if you try to imagine the mechanics of shifting the entire organization of Twentieth Century-Fox from Beverly Hills to Minneapolis and Paramount to New Orleans while the whole US Army is moving in the opposite direction toward the West Coast. This is what happened when the huge studios of Mosfilm and Lenfilm were moved to Alma-Ata in the Kazakhstan Republic and the Children's Film Studio was abruptly shifted to Stalinabad in Tadjikistan. A personal glimpse of this move is provided by my sister-in-law, who with her husband, forms a camera team at the Children's Film Studio:

"Stalinabad is the furthest point south on the Soviet map (that's why we are here). It is a very nice town, quiet, the lights burn at night, and once a week we get an earthquake, but an earthquake is much, much better than a bomb. . . .

"The fact that we have to start life all over again in a new place makes it all the more interesting. Working here is not easy as we are like pioneers, having to make the studio all over again. Our studio here will be better than the one in Moscow and of course the weather is ideal for filming. . . ."

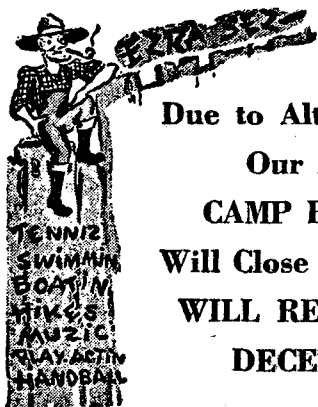
The hardships attendant on the uprooting of these studios seem unimportant beside the greater hardships of war, but I believe it takes a special kind of heroism to continue the production of films in the middle of deserts which had been begun in two of the greatest cultural centers of Europe, Moscow and Leningrad. But they did go on. At the Children's Film Studio Yutkevich continued his production of *New Adventures of the Good Soldier Schweik*.

In Ashkhabad, on the Iranian border, Donskoy is filming *The Making of a Hero*, and Savchenko is making a sequel to *Guerrilla Brigade*. Even dramatic films about the heroic defenses of Leningrad and Moscow are being completed in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Films for the Lermontov anniversary are faithfully continued.

EISENSTEIN, Tisse, and Prokofiev shifted their film production on Ivan the Terrible from Moscow to Baku, and then to Alma-Ata. There Eisenstein not only continues his historical allegory as if he were at home in his comfortable Moscow studio, but also supervises the other productions of his shifted studio, and directs the State Film Institute, which has also taken up wartime quarters in secure Alma-Ata. The job of the Film Institute in training young film-makers in every branch of creative work has been stepped up in time and in scope. In an industry where the average age is between twenty-four and thirty years, there can be little opportunity for hardening of the artistic arteries.

The offices of the entire film industry were moved to Novosibirsk, but since March are back in their Moscow quarters. The studios stay in the East.

The newsreel's job was the toughest of all. In the first week after invasion four crews had been sent to four sectors of the long front, all headed by veterans of the best of all war documentaries—*The Mannerheim Line*. Within four months there were 100 newsreel cameramen covering every phase of the fight even to parachuting with parachute troops and hiding with guerrilla fighters, filming history in detail, from the White Sea to the Black Sea. Within this time a newsreel method of unprecedented scale was worked out: to send back two kinds of material from every post—over-all coverage of events for items in the



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weekly newsreel, and detailed, almost docu-
mentary footage of every event for feature
newsreels to be edited around the major clashes
of the war—the push-back at Moscow, the
siege of Leningrad, the fight at Kharkov, the
tragedy of Sevastopol. Only the first of these,
Moscow Strikes Back, has thus far arrived in
this country. Working on this film the camera-
men Schneiderov and Karmen have told
graphic and exciting accounts of their ex-
periences. This is from Schneiderov's notes:

"It was a dark night when we flew over the
German lines. My photographic supplies were
to take one parachute, myself another. German
searchlights probed the sky around us and
Nazi anti-aircraft sent up a trail of bullets
after us.

"I jumped and as we parachuted to the
ground a group of German night-fighters at-
tacked us. Our planes gave fight and one of
our men was killed. Three of us, myself in-
cluded, were wounded.

"I was worried about my camera and other
equipment and would not leave the spot de-
spite the commander's suggestion. We couldn't
move for the planes were still circling over
us, and I worried all night about my camera.

"Toward morning I saw the red flag mark-
er on our supplies and hurried to claim it. By
some miracle, nothing was damaged."

THE audience was kept supplied with
films. Morale was kept stiff by telling
the truth on the screen. Each spectator was
kept strong by seeing the strength of his coun-
try and his army—whether he was a Moscow
citizen watching the film shows given in the
Moscow subway, or a Sevastopol defender
dodging the Luftwaffe for rest, tea, and a
movie.

The audience was kept aware; instruction
was never relaxed. Actually, instruction came
closer and closer to a life and death matter.
While the first instructional films had titles
such as *How to Fight Incendiary Bombs* and
How to Recognize Enemy Aircraft, those in-
tended for civilians gradually took on titles
such as *Military Surgery* and *How to Operate
the Machine-Gun and Rifle*.

There had always been films about the
Red Army, in the Red Army, and for the
Red Army, but now the Red Army really saw
plenty of films, because films became as essen-
tial to their fighting life as newspapers or
guns. Sixteen millimeter equipment and pro-
jection apparatus have received their first real
Soviet test in trenches and dugouts. All prison-
ers are given regular film-shows, whose pro-
grams are superintended by expert psycholo-
gists. In his report to the Society of Motion
Picture Engineers, Gregori Irsky has told of
special apparatus to bring films to the Red
Army—traveling projection installations and
special equipment for showing pictures in mili-
tary camps during the daytime without the
need for darkened places.

Foreign markets have never been the goal
of Soviet film productions, but never before
have the film theaters of the Soviet Union's
allies cried so loud for Soviet films. These

peoples need them too, for morale and
strength. The demand is so great in England
that every new dramatic film that arrives there
is immediately dubbed in the English language.
America is less interested in dubbed versions
than in re-makes with their own stars and
American voices. Already two have been pur-
chased for this purpose: *Girl from Leningrad*
and *The Thirteen*. Where Soviet films once
dribbled through Latin America, they are now
pouring, with one or two notable exceptions
of fascist-dominated countries. China employs
them as swiftly as she employs Soviet arma-
ments. Soviet films have never been permitted
in India.

And Soviet audiences want to see films of
their allies. Recut English documentaries are
popular and England has herself sent over
fifty short films with Russian commentary.
Nicholas Napoli, of Artkino Pictures, is now
concluding arrangements for the Soviet dis-
tribution of a large number of American films
—the first result of the Conference on the
American and British Cinema, recently held
in Moscow.

THE attitude of Soviet films towards the
war can be summed up in the statement
recently received from the reappeared Dov-
zhenko: "The Soviet camera records the vis-
ual aspect of war completely and unflinchingly
and the record is seen by all."

JAY LEYDA.

From the September "New Movies." Mr.
Leyda edited and translated from the Russian,
Sergei Eisenstein's "The Film Sense," pub-
lished by Harcourt, Brace & Co.

Ten Days

Alvah Bessie revisits this monument of
Soviet film-making.

EISENSTEIN's film masterpiece which he
named for John Reed's great book, *Ten
Days That Shook the World*, has been play-
ing at the Fifty-Fifth Street Playhouse in
New York, and may still be there when you
read these words. Made in the late 1920's
as a silent film *Ten Days* will stand forever
as a monument of Soviet cinema art, whatever
its shortcomings in the light of present film
advances in both the Soviet Union and Amer-
ica. Eisenstein was and is a great director, a
great artist. And the bedrock of the Soviet
cinema's enormous appeal may be found in
Ten Days, just as it is found in *The Girl
from Leningrad*. That bedrock is a special
way of looking at people and the events in
which they participate; or better still, the way
the Soviet cinema artists have of looking at
historical events (or fictional events) through
the medium of the people involved in them.

You will find that the film of *Ten Days* is
somewhat scratched by now; that certain
scenes are not as brilliantly lit as they would
be today; that certain "takes" are too swift
making the eye dance from one face to