



JOURNEY INTO TRUTH

"Mission to Moscow" dramatically records the long Soviet fight for peace and collective security, Russian heroism and wisdom. . . . The crimes of the Trotskyites revealed by the treason trials.

IN THE last few months Hollywood has reached a new level. At the end of 1942 the film industry looked pretty black; with few exceptions, silly escapist films vied with films of the people's war which were neither about the war nor about people. Faced with a clamorous popular demand for truth, truth about the war, truth about Russia, film executives decided to abandon nonsense-as-usual for a new kind of motion picture. Intelligent and progressive screen writers led the way, and the result is 1943's galaxy of war studies—surely the most vivid and thought-provoking analyses of a conflict that ever a popular entertainment medium offered the people.

Vanishing are the producers' pet formula plots, the tried and true man-hunts and girl-hunts. In their place we have the actual world, made luminous with meaning by the screen's magical powers of selection and emphasis. In consequence, we are finding it natural to discuss films with the same seriousness of approach one gives a fine novel; no longer is there any need to make allowances for an infant art. There was never any doubt that Hollywood had the finest screen technique in the world, and with the application of that fluid technique to worthy material Hollywood is now establishing itself as the leader of all film makers.

Mission to Moscow is just about a perfect film. More than that, it is a new kind of film for our country, a departure as significant as was Thucydides' first invention of the art of the objective historian. For this is history on the screen, history not sugar-coated with romance and false appeals to our sympathies, but reproduced as it happened with only brilliant selection and emphasis of details to make its meaning clear. What written texts need millions of words and months of reading to tell you, *Mission to Moscow* conveys with far greater vividness in less than two hours. We have seen history faked and fictionalized, as in the lying *Tennessee Johnson*, where real people were forced into an unreal mold. We have seen history emasculated by a phony reverence, obscured by a couple of romantic leads. We have seen historical truths expressed by fictitious characters (as in *Hangmen Also Die*) and very well too. Yet never before have we seen the thing

itself on our screen, the genuine recreation of reality. *Mission to Moscow* gives us that.

In a prologue spoken by Ambassador Davies himself, the film's *raison d'être* is made plain. This screen version of the ambassador's book represents an objective view of the Soviet Union, the view of an American capitalist who does not accept Communist theory, but who can see facts with clear eyes. Too often the American people have been shown Russia through the eyes of fascist Red-baiters, or the eyes blinded by prejudice of Colonel and Mrs. Blimp, or even the lying eyes of Trotskyites; and so the essential unity of the two nations has been undermined. Now the people of America want the truth, and must have it for victory. This film has been made to strip away the veils of illusion and lies.

Mission to Moscow reveals, on the one hand, the cynical and fruitless appeasing of Hitler by the Western democracies during the pre-war years; on the other hand, the Soviet Union's long battle with traitors within and the forces of fascism abroad. In Germany, Davies sees the marching

men and the swastika banners and the ominous guns. He pleads for peace to the smooth, venomous mask of Ribbentrop. And he hears whispers. Something is to happen in Russia, something planned in Germany. That was 1936.

THEN, in Russia, he inspects the great new industries of socialism, and notices among the signs of strength and progress the curious little incidents: sand in the machines, collisions and fires which could be accident but are not. In Moscow he meets the leaders of the Russian government, working steadfastly for peace, while Litvinov pleads in vain at Geneva for help to Ethiopia. And he meets others—Tukhachevsky, Bukharin, Yagoda—who are so strangely friendly with the Japanese and German diplomats at diplomatic parties.

When these men are arrested and brought to trial the whole sordid story of Trotskyite intrigue comes out. Taken directly from the actual stenographic reports of the treason trials, the confessions of the unmasked conspirators sum up Hitler's



In the Moscow trials Prosecutor Vyshinsky draws from Yagoda an admission of his murderous activities in the Trotskyite conspiracy against the Soviet Union.

technique of undermining from within by quislings, the technique since grown so horribly familiar to the world. There is no editorializing here, no parenthetical explanation of the involved relationships of the conspirators with Trotsky and Ribbentrop; the trial reports speak for themselves. And the picture is clear. These men were traitors, saboteurs, and murderers. They were detected in time; and Russia has had no quislings in this war.

In the face of such evidence, the attempt by Trotskyites and appeasers here to suppress this film might be pathetic were it not sinister. History is not mocked; however many books Hitler burns, however many epithets the *New Leader* sputters forth, the facts remain. Yet it would be small consolation to us for our grandchildren to know these facts, should we, who need them for our survival, be prevented from learning them. Those who organized and led the attack on *Mission to Moscow's* disclosures are as surely agents of fascism as was Trotsky when he accepted his German stipend and organized his network of sabotage and murder.

Mission to Moscow tells more of Russia than the discovery of its quislings—the splendor of the Red Army, the joyous people, the building of a new life, the struggle for collective security and peace. And of the reactionary statesmen of other countries it tells much; Chamberlain's umbrella, the sneer of Laval, and the viciously anti-Soviet Polish diplomat make a tragic combination with the arrogant Nazis and the smirking Japanese. The murder of republican Spain by fascism is not forgotten, or the betrayal of Czechoslovakia. The horrors of Japan's invasion of China are revealed in a Moscow hospital where victims of bombing, brought thousands of miles, are being treated by Russian doctors. Stalin and Kalinin, Molotov and Litvinov analyze the development of fascism and the inevitable war; Roosevelt and Davies, after the Nazi attack on Russia, campaign against the clamorous isolationists; and with Pearl Harbor America joins the United Nations in the prophesied struggle.

To organize this cross-section of world history into a coherent screen play must have been an appallingly complex task, yet Erskine Caldwell and Howard Koch, who adapted the Davies book, have produced a simple, clear, and dramatic narrative without one moment of confusion. This is great film writing; the establishing of a link between Bukharin and the Japanese, for instance, through one simple and harmless question exchanged at a party, is a touch of genius. Such small details combine with the coordination of great events to say everything as swiftly as possible. And the inspired writing has been aided by the unknown genius of the cutting room. However fine the script and the direction, cutting (or editing) can make or break a picture. The interweaving of news-reel shots from Moscow and Berlin with

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studio shots is so smooth in *Mission to Moscow* that one is never aware of the technical process involved, while transitions from one corner of the earth to another are managed without uncertainty or fuss. Cutters do not get screen credit, but they should.

The peculiarly arduous task of impersonating real people—and real people of great force of character, in most cases—has been brilliantly performed by the film's large cast. Walter Huston is miraculous as Ambassador Davies, Oscar Homolka as Litvinov. Such distinguished actors as Victor Francen, Gene Lockhart, Henry Daniell, and Roman Bohnen make Vyshinsky, Molotov, Ribbentrop and Krestinsky completely convincing, while Ann Harding, Frieda Inescort, and Maria Palmer are particularly good among the diplomatic womenfolk. Dudley Field Malone's famous resemblance to Churchill is little short of uncanny, and, what's more, he doesn't act too badly. In the role of Stalin, Manart Kippen is competent though, understandably, a little lacking in self-confidence. Captain Jack Young's familiar impersonation of Roosevelt is a bit out of key here, being strained and oratorical in what should be private conversations. It remains to speak of the film's music, ably organized by Max Steiner, which combines diverse elements such as Red Army songs, waltz tunes, and atmospheric orchestral effects into a harmonious score; and of its superb direction by Michael Curtiz. Yet individual contributions and details of acting seem to fade into insignificance when a film has so much to tell us. Indispensable and splendid as *Mission to Moscow's* technique is, the film's content is what really burns into our minds; for the film's content is the meaning of this war.

JOY DAVIDMAN.

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