

## LONDON FILM MAKERS' CO-OP GENERAL MEETING

Minutes taken at a discussion arising from the Distribution Report: item 6(d) on the agenda - the Co-op's role vis a vis the Arts Council's schemes for subsidised screenings of films

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FS told the meeting that she was concerned at the position of the Co-op's Distribution Office in view of the Arts Council's heavily subsidised screenings of films (Film Tour, Filmmakers on Tour and now European package tour) which she felt was undermining the Co-op and in some cases filmmakers too. Briefly F explained that David Curtis had, at a meeting of the Executive Committee in June, proposed that the Arts Council proceed with a smaller touring version of 'Perspectives on British Avant Garde Film' to be shown in major art centres in Europe. Objections had been raised at the time but were dropped due to lack of support. Subsequently the distribution office had been approached by individuals (including those invited to participate) dissatisfied with the scheme and it was felt that the matter should be brought up at the General Meeting and the implications of this form of subsidy should be discussed more fully, as the Co-op's distribution was to some extent the responsibility of its membership and some sort of policy was needed, and possibly a committee formed, to make proposals to the Arts Council to avoid this 'competition'.

The points raised specifically related to the European tour were:

From the Distribution Office's point of view it was felt that the scheme undermined the Co-op (a) financially as a large proportion of revenue came from foreign (European) bookings: last year over £2,000, £1,000 from British films and (b) the role of the Co-op as distributing its members' films was being overtaken by the establishment - for the past 11 years considerable time and effort had gone into making contacts in Europe, both by the distribution office and individuals touring with films which would go by the board when the AC stepped in with a cheaper more attractive package deal.

Annabel Nicolson, as an invited participant in the scheme, then raised the following points:

- 1) The scheme undermined excluded filmmakers: (a) in terms of their chances of arranging tours in Europe and (b) in terms of recognition
- 2) Inadequate fees: twice print costs not sufficient in view of the number of times films were likely to be screened. If Co-op charges of 2 p per minute were taken as a basic rate after 12 screenings the filmmakers would be making a loss. As there would be no percentage to the filmmaker for screenings it was felt that purchase of prints was not appropriate, that rentals would be better.
- 3) The scheme would mean relinquishing control of one's work - how and where it was shown and general loss of contact .
- 4) The only beneficiaries would be foreign bookers getting an attractive package deal, too easy and convenient for administrators, no stimulus from their end and general inclination to accept a 'historical perspective'.
- 5) The whole question of filmmakers work being placed in a historical context and the dangers of using work to illustrate history which somehow validates films by inclusion, fitting them into a neat coherent thesis and excluding those that don't fit (Gill Eatherly, Fred Drummond, Jenny Okun, Dave Parsons, to mention only a few omitted).
- 6) Constructing a history and definition at the point of where the work is made and then projecting it outward rather than allowing history to be made.

- 7) Categorisation. Inappropriate labelling of films and compartmentalising them for administrative ease: bracketing a film under the heading of, say, 'printer processor' when it might equally illustrate the other categories listed, and channeling viewers' responses to a film to a specific area because it has been defined that way.
- 8) The hierarchic approach to the programming. There should be more of a cross section of British work
- 9) Unique situation of filmmakers and critics working together ...

The discussion then became more open and general misgivings about the scheme were voiced on practical and moral grounds. Guy Sherwin pointed out that it had always been the policy of the Co-op not to select work whereas the Arts Council always selects. FS said that when the Co-op sent out a package of 'non-selected' work it was a far broader representation of filmmakers and dominance wasn't given to better known filmmakers as in this instance. AN suggested that the work could have been channelled through the Co-op rather than in opposition to it.

Deke Dusinberre said the selection had been done by himself and David Curtis following the success of the Hayward show and therefore referred to the Co-op and AC. He also added that the sum quoted in Annabel's letter (£120 per 9 hour programme) was incorrect and that it was more likely to be double that. FS felt that even that fee would be undercutting the Co-op and that the European community didn't need subsidising by the British. DD then went on to say that Dave Curtis, who had been informed that this item would be on the agenda but wasn't able to be present, would be willing to meet with the Co-op as an institution to talk this over further. Deke personally felt that the scheme was favourable to filmmakers as the AC would be used to promote British filmmaking in an area where up to now very little attention had been paid as to what was going on in Britain. The Co-op wasn't capable of making that intervention as it can't make that administrative thrust.

Peter Cidal pointed out that he had already signed his contract and was upset that he had done so without consulting other filmmakers, especially now he realised the implications of the tour. DD said there would be no problem if he asked for his contract back. PG agreed to do so. DD said the same applied to others who had signed their contracts and wished to have them back to argue more favourable terms.

FS reminded the meeting that this particular issue was being isolated from the main concern which was the role of the Co-op's distribution office in the face of AC's subsidised screenings - it couldn't compete, should it sit back and merely become distributors of American films in London which it seemed would be the case if the package toured Britain, together with the Film Tour and Filmmakers on Tour. It was agreed to shelve this issue until January but to meet and discuss in more detail the European tour. FS agreed to contact those wishing to be present at the meeting with Dave Curtis and Deke Dusinberre and Tuesday 20th December was tentatively suggested.