

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

NO. 43

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PIONEER DISTRIBUTOR TOM BRANDON TO PRESENT SPECIAL PROGRAM OF 1930s DOCUMENTARIES AT MUSEUM

Pioneer film distributor Tom Brandon will present a program of rare social and political documentaries from the 1930s at a special showing Wednesday, June 6, at 7:30 p.m., in the auditorium of The Museum of Modern Art. These films, many of which were thought to be lost and have not been shown publicly in New York in 20 to 40 years, represent an often-neglected chapter in American film history; they consist of works by organized groups of socially conscious filmmakers who were then producing newsreels and documentaries independently of the commercial industry.

It is fitting that Tom Brandon, who will be present at the Museum showing to answer questions from the audience, should attempt to illuminate this period of American film, for he was a participant in the film activity of the 1930s. Brandon is well-known as a pioneer of non-theatrical film distribution in the U.S.A. Founder of Brandon Films, long a major source of 16mm foreign films and American documentaries in this country, he helped, as early as 1931, to form the Film and Photo League and the National Film and Photo League, both of which influenced the rise of the American documentary film movement. He was also director of the Harry Alan Potemkin Film School, founded in 1934, and, later in the 1930s, Brandon distributed the productions of Frontier Films, a leading non-profit association of social/political filmmakers.

Brandon's principal contribution to these movements was as a distributor and exhibitor. Today, having retired from Brandon Films, now affiliated with Crowell, Collier and Macmillan, he has been researching the documentary films of the 1930s for a book on his "forty years in film"; he is also instrumental in uncovering many of these hitherto forgotten films.

The 1930s was a period of domestic unrest, particularly in the field of labor. Events such as the Hunger Marches of 1931-32, the Bonus March of 1932, the Kentucky Miners' Strike of 1932, the Ford Massacre of 1932, the struggles of sharecroppers, cotton-pickers and other rural workers, unemployment, civil liberties, exploitation and repression of

(more)

blacks, strike scabbing, the rise of the C.I.O. and the building of the U.A.W. were among the issues that engaged serious filmmakers of the time. But these conditions of the 1930s were obscured by subsequent events -- World War II and the McCarthy era -- and the films were buried even as the memory of the events portrayed in them became blurred; and eventually little was known of such militant film activity.

Brandon's program, the result of years of research, includes newsreels, various length short documentaries and fragments of "lost" films, all of which illustrate the kind of work in social/political film accomplished during the 1930s. It is Tom Brandon's intention to continue presenting similar programs, in an effort to fill in a neglected chapter in American film history.

This special Wednesday evening program is open to the public. For reservations, call 956-4208. The program follows:

1. WORKERS NEWSREEL NUMBER 12. Produced by Workers Film and Photo League, 1932. Newsreel excerpts from the lost 90-minute feature documentary of the historic National Hunger March of December 7, 1932. 10 min.
2. AMERICA TODAY. Produced by Workers Film and Photo League, 1933. A review film of original films and compilation material. 10 min.
3. THE FORD MASSACRE. Section of a Newsreel Special made by Workers Film and Photo League in Dearborn and Detroit, 1932. Coverage of the demonstration in Dearborn of the unemployed, the attack by the police and thugs, the funeral of four young workers killed, and the vow that went into the building of the UAW-CIO. 8 min.
4. MILLIONS OF US. Produced by American Labor Films, Inc, Hollywood, 1934-35. Dramatic staged story documentary made on location about strike scabbing and the unity of the employed and unemployed. 20 min.
5. PIE IN THE SKY. Produced by Nykino (New York), directed by Elia Kazan, Molly Day Thacher, Irving Lerner, Ralph Steiner, 1934. Featuring Elia Kazan and Russell Collins of the Group Theatre. A satirical and farcical partly improvised film on just that "pie in the sky." 14 min.
6. CHINA STRIKES BACK. Produced by Frontier Films, 1937. Written and edited by Jay Leyda, Peter Ellis, David Wolf, and Sidney Meyers. Based on material filmed by Harry Dunham in Shensi Province in Northwest China, hitherto inaccessible. Sustained coverage of the Chinese 8th Route Army, its guerilla tactics, educational program, relation with the peasants, and its efforts toward unity of Free China against the invading Japanese. 24 min.

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7. DEADLINE FOR ACTION. Produced by Union Films, Inc. Sponsored by United Electrical Workers Union/CIO. Written and directed by Carl Marzani. A Brandon Films release, distributed by Brandon, U. E. and Union Films. A treatment of imperialism and the incipient Cold War from the trade union point of view. 10 min.

8. UNITED ACTION. A film by the film department of the UAW-CIO, directed by Michael Martini, 1939. Editing and soundtrack by Frontier Films. Music by Earl Robinson. Sung by the American Peoples Chorus. Narrated by Charles Gordon, with additional voices by Virginia Stevens and Earl Robinson. A documentary record of the organization of the UAW-CIO and the strike against General Motors in 1939. Demonstrates the objectives, program, and problems of a large militant trade union at the height of the "March of Labor" before World War II. Used widely as an effective morale builder and organizing tool. 40 min.

Additional information available from Lillian Gerard, Special Projects Coordinator, and Mark Segal, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7296, -7295.

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