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CZECH AND RUSSIAN FILMS TO-DAY

ONE of the first things the Czechs did, after their country was liberated from the Nazi, was to put the Czechoslovakian cinema industry under public ownership and control. That happened some time ago now, but the following talk given by KEN ANNAKIN for the BBC, represents almost the first news to have reached us of how the experiment is going. Mr. Annakin deals also with recent developments in the Soviet cinema.

I SPENT several weeks in Prague, seeing Czech films and exploring the possibilities of interchanging their documentary films with ours. I was surprised how many good shorts had been made in Czechoslovakia during the war; but then I discovered that scores of Czech technicians spent their time during the last eight years in making instructional and educational films, in order to avoid doing propaganda for the Germans. The Germans equipped very fine studios at Barrandov, just outside Prague, and now the Czechs are using these studios to make a number of historical costume films. But the most interesting productions going on there are those of two Russian film units.

I talked with Igor Savchenko, who has made 11 films in the last 12 years, and for the last six years has never had a day off. He is quite a young man, but looked very lined and nervy. "I'm impossible to work with now," he said, "so I'm going back to Russia to rest in a sanatorium for a whole year."

I'm sure he needs the rest. He told me how there had been only one studio left intact in the whole of the Soviet Union, and that when he and other units moved behind the Urals to a place called Alma-ata, near the borders of China, they found that the local people fled when they brought out their generators and electric arcs. They had never seen electricity before, yet these people had to be the new studio electricians. Whenever a film called for German types, the director, the assistants, the make-up man, all the Russians from the West, had to don Nazi uniforms and act before the cameras, because the local people all had the Mongolian slit-eyes. It is amazing that there were any films at all produced in the Soviet Union in such conditions.

Windows Are Being Thrown Open

Now they have hired studio space in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and the two stages in the Prague studios, and, in all, hope to make 20 films this year. Alexandrov, who used to be a theatre director and has made several musical-comedies—one was a charming film called *Volga Volga*—is now making a film about a woman scientist who has been given every honour possible during the war, but who has ceased to be a real woman. She doesn't care about her clothes. She no longer notices the beautiful palace in which her laboratory is situated. So the windows of her laboratory—which are painted over with a planetarium—are thrown open. She is taken out to the garden. Then she finds herself in the middle of a scene from a Glinka opera, and dramatizations from the poems of Lermontov and Pushkin. These things are going on in a film studio, of course; and here she meets a film star who has also become very stale and one-sided in her job. The two change places for a day.

"And the moral of the whole picture," said Alexandrov, "is to show people that they must have a little of science, a little of culture, a little of beauty and love, if they're going to live a really happy and useful life." This is the sort of line on which Soviet directors seem to be basing their new films: the idea of human values. I saw two of the Russian films which had already been made in the Prague studios. Both were in Agfacolor—which was as good as the Technicolour of our recent British films—the shooting was excellent, and although they were a little slow, the warm feeling of humanity came right through them.

Still Suffering From Shock

With the new Czech films it is different. They have got excellent technicians. You see the effect of the occupation in their work—eight years of isolation from the outside world. I saw several scenes being shot by my old friend Stalic, the Czech cameraman who shot the pre-war film *Extase*, and one of our own British films *Moonlight Sonata*. The sets and the colours of the costumes were very beautiful, but the style of the film reminded me of the old British film *Henry VIII*. The Czechs have not had a chance to catch up with the new ideas which have been evolving in British and American films throughout the war. They are making seven films now, about patriots who have at one period or another helped them to rise against oppressors. They are still suffering very much from the shock of the occupation—their loss of nationhood. In the streets you see people looking at concentration camp photographs and exhibits of tattooed human skin. At every street corner there is a plaque put up to someone who fell during the May fighting and you nearly always find fresh flowers in front of it. This rather morbid-looking inwards upon their past troubles is reflected in their films. Their writers and directors have not caught the new spirit which can also be clearly felt in the streets of Prague—the spirit of the people quickening their step and moving about as though there was a job to be done. I don't think it will be very long before we find new ideas coming out of Czechoslovakia.

They are looking after their writers. I went out to a castle 30 kilometres outside Prague, which has been turned over by the State to the Czech writers. Here any of their writers can go and work on scripts or novels, surrounded by lovely Renaissance furniture and beautiful gardens with fountains playing. The Czechs have always believed that good theatre, music, poetry, and films can help them to face their difficulties.

Plenty of Healthy Criticism

The public generally is clamouring to see and hear the cultural work of other countries. Practically every month this year there has been a festival of some sort in Prague. The first night I was there I was taken to an open-air cinema,

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