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Formation of Ukrainian Newsreel and Documentary Cinema in 1923–1928

Volodymyr Myslavskiy ^{a,*}, Ganna Chmil ^b, Oleksandr Bezruchko ^c, Vasily Kupriichuk ^d

^a Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, Ukraine

^b National Academy of Arts of Ukraine, Institute of Cultural Studies, Kyiv, Ukraine

^c Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, Ukraine

^d Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyze the formation and development of chronicle-documentary cinema in Ukraine during the period 1923–1928. The authors also cover the most significant events that influenced the formation of Ukrainian newsreels. This article is based on little-known critical publications of 1920s in the Ukrainian and Russian media.

An analysis of the polemics of Soviet authors in relation to Ukrainian newsreel and documentaries on the pages of magazines of the 1920s shows that this type of cinematography developed in several directions. We present in chronological order the most significant innovations in Ukrainian cinema production:

1. 1923. Organization of production at the Odessa Film Factory *Chronicle of VUFKU*; opening in Kharkiv of a special film laboratory for the release of newsreels.

2. 1924. Start of production of the newsreel *Flywheel (Makhovik)*; approval of the thematic direction of the newsreel produced; the beginning of the release of the newsreel *Flywheel Cinema week (Kinonedelya Makhovika)* with an overview of life in the USSR and the West.

3. 1925. Work to increase the number of newsreel issues, increase circulation, increase the number of staff correspondents; reformatting *Flywheel Cinema Week* into *VUFKU Cinema Week*; opening of a special department of filming production at the Odessa Cinema Factory on request of commercial and industrial enterprises and opening of a newsreel department.

4. 1926. The newsreel department of the Odessa Film Factory is organizing the production of newsreels according to the principle of illustrated newspaper reporting.

5. 1927. Involvement of film amateurs and operators of various institutions in filming newsreels; instead of overview of plots devoid of social significance, the production of thematic newsreels is being established; all newsreels are included in the production plan of VUFKU.

6. 1928. Inclusion of foreign newsreels filmed by their own correspondents in the Cinema weekreleases; opening of a frame library at VUFKU; the beginning of the production of full-length editing films based on archival newsreels.

Keywords: film history, USSR, VUFKU, documentary film, Soviet Union, avant-garde, Kiev film studio, Odessa film studio.

1. Introduction

The formation of Ukrainian newsreel and documentary cinema in the period of 1923–1928 is still not widely studied, although a significant number of publications on the Soviet cinema of this

* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: odry2006@gmail.com (V. Myslavskiy), gannachmil@gmail.com (G. Chmil), oleksandr_bezruchko@ukr.net (O. Bezruchko), kvm1968@ukr.net (V. Kupriichuk)

period have seen the world. The purpose of this article is to study the thematic and conceptual search of Ukrainian documentary filmmakers and put into scientific use the materials of little-known articles on this problem from the Ukrainian and Russian press of the 1920s.

2. Materials and methods

The materials for our research are academic books and articles by both contemporary authors and authors of the 1920s, who wrote about the formation and development of Ukrainian chronicle-documentary cinema of the 1920s. The research is based on meaningful analysis and comparative approach.

The research methodology used by the authors is based on an integrated approach that provided consideration of all aspects and relationships that influenced the processes under study. Research methods used in the work include historical-comparative and historical-systematic approaches.

3. Discussion

As our analysis of the scientific film literature of recent decades has shown, in scientific works devoted to Soviet cinema of the 1920s, more and more importance was attached to the study of the formation and development of chronicle documentary cinema in the USSR of the specified period (Bezruchko, 2017; Gillespie, 2000; Hicks, 2007; Malickij, 2013; Mislavskiy et al., 2020; Priest, 2008; Sandomirskaia, 2008; Widdis, 2003).

The Soviet Union in the early 1920s was the site of significant artistic controversy as various groups tried to become the successful tool for promoting revolutionary political and social change. In the first half of the decade, the Communist Party did not want to support officially one or another literary group. However, in 1925, the party's decree on literature created a new precedent for the party's participation in the country's cultural events. J. Malickij in his book mentioned a document signed by Nikolai Bukharin. This document urged that material and ideological support be given to the proletarian groups calling for a conservative realist form with revolutionary characters and themes. Whereas the resolution explicitly addressed only literature (the *All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers* [VAPP] was the greatest beneficiary), its applicability to the other arts became evident in the rise to prominence of the proletarian *Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia* (AKhRR) (Malickij, 2013).

Ukrainian newsreel and documentary cinema emerged on the background of acute polemics based on different views on the development of Soviet cinema. Thus, the representatives of the *Cine-Eyes* group were against the involvement of actors in the cinema, as well as the use of scripts, sets, studios, and argued that ordinary people should be filmed at work and on vacation. In their opinion, cinema, as a new mass media, had to show the world of ordinary Soviet people from all over the Soviet Union to other ordinary Soviet people from different parts of the country.

This radical rejection of the old forms of cinema was in tune with some leftist approaches to art in the early and mid-1920s. Representatives of the camp associated with the avant-garde magazine *LEF* (*Left Front of Art*) spoke out especially zealously in this regard. It really was a radical interpretation of the role of cinema in the new Soviet society. *LEF* activists Osip Brik and Sergei Tretyakov believed that documentary cinematography eliminated the artist's subjectivity. In their opinion, the documentary was supposed to replace the feature film. The English researcher D. Gillespie, in his work, quotes a statement characteristic of that time by the representative of *LEF*, writer and critic Osip Brik, dated 1927: "We have once and for all to discard from the picture all its romanticism, all its psychological emotionality. We have to say completely openly that in a film we are prepared to arouse neither joy nor sadness, and that we want to depict the necessary facts and events" (Gillespie, 2000).

American scientist J. Hicks, in his work dedicated to the work of Dziga Vertov, draws attention to an article written by the director in October 1926. In this article, Vertov describes five different types of film work that he expects from *Cine-Eyes* in the near future: "These include current newsreel weeklies, thematic newsreels covering several months, complex newsreels making summary of a year, scientific or educational films and finally [e]xperimental film studies, laboratory research, laying down new paths for all the *Cine-Eye* movement as a whole" (Hicks, 2007).

In the mid-1920s, a controversy concerning the further development of Soviet cinema unfolded at the state level. Communist party ideologists believed that if one wished to create a more effective cinematography of the country, attention should be paid to everyday life, to the local

space, to ordinary people. In their opinion, the masses would most of all respond to the familiar things, to the representation of the events of their lives. It was suggested that it was not worth focusing on films showing military parades and demonstrations. The documentary film had to show the full breadth of events related to everyday life and events of ordinary Soviet people.

However, this doctrine, according to E. Widdis, became relevant only after a few years: “A sense of the urgency of this developed toward the end of the decade, and in 1929, a debate took place in the pages of the popular journal *Zhizn' iskusstva (Life of Art)*: filmmakers (implicitly from the centre), as one writer proclaimed, needed better to understand the lives of ordinary people: “We have to put our directors face to face with their audiences, in factories... and in villages” (Widdis, 2003).

The turning point in the ideological and political status of cinema was the first party film conference, held in March 1928. The resolution of the conference said that from now on cinema should be a weapon in the socialist transformation of the country and the creation of a single Soviet people. The large-scale mobilization of the country, which was demanded by the first five-year plan, required the introduction of a new cinematography program. It was planned that during the second half of 1928 the number of new cinemas would double.

Moreover, the conference resolutions called for the sovietization of films. These films were supposed to promote popular support for government initiatives. Since the mid-1920s, the production and distribution of newsreels had been considered a key ideological challenge.

As J. Hicks notes, contemporaries regarded this conference as a refusal from discussions about newsreels or documentariness since it adopted a resolution on comprehensive financial support of cultural films production. Avant-garde filmmakers strongly opposed this decision. They believed that cultural films were a potential destroyer of documentary cinema as a separate form. In particular, J. Hicks writes in his book: “In 1929 Shub condemned ‘the so-called ‘kulturfilm’ as the invention of those ‘unable or unwilling to define the new form of cinema...the unplayed film’”. Needless to say, Vertov was equally vocal in his opposition. As early as 1926 he derided *Kulturfilm* as representing a dangerous blurring of distinctions between documentary and fiction, undermining “unplayed” films by subtly eliding them with acted films under this general category. As such, it was to theory what Eisenstein’s brand of film-making was to practice. The real distinction had to be drawn, he insisted, between films that recorded life and those that recorded acting” (Hicks, 2007).

At the end of the 1920s, the systematic curtailment of the autonomous existence of national cinematographies, including Ukrainian one, was held. In addition to the subordination of the republican film studies departments to a single center in Moscow, a large-scale attack on the aesthetic experiments of leading Soviet directors began. The filmmakers were demanded to abandon their creative methods and submit to a single method – socialist realism. D. Priest, notes that under pressure from Soviet censors, leading avant-garde directors Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein were forced to reconsider their attitude to their own work: “Eisenstein and Vertov changed over the course of their careers, both in their theories and in their films. While the change can be partially attributed to the natural evolution and refining of their theories over time, the Cultural Revolution (1928–1931) played a crucial role in the way both directors approached film making” (Priest, 2008).

By the early 1930s, in response to Stalinism and the Cultural Revolution, fundamental changes were taking place in Soviet culture and art. The era of Stalinism, according to the accurate observation of I. Sandomirskaja, instead of contributing to the enlightenment “brought about a stagnation of intellectual life under the Stalinist Zhdanovian slogan of cultural diversity representing cultures as inarticulately “national in form, socialist in content” (Sandomirskaja, 2008).

4. Results

After the reorganization of the All-Ukrainian Film Committee into *VUFKU* in Ukraine, shooting of newsreels and propaganda films continues. According to press reports, in March-April 1923, 3,000 meters of social and household chronicles were filmed, which they planned to release in the form of separate issues and the form of newsreels, as well as three propaganda films *In memory of the great communards*, *From darkness to light* (about the fight against illiteracy; director N. Saltykov), *History of May 1* (from the history of the revolutionary past in the West; director S. Tsenin).

At the same time, in 1922–1923, the *VUFKU Photo Department* took more than fifteen hundred photographs (894 photographs were taken in 1922), which were arranged in a series by themes and handed over to schools, workers' and Red Army clubs. The themes of future photo albums were also outlined: *revolutionary romance and everyday life, history of the revolution and the party, social themes, production and scientific organization of labor* (Nevskij, 1923).

Among the newsreels, the press most often noted *Great October* (1922, directed by V. Gardin), *May 1 in Kharkiv*, *VII-I All-Ukrainian Party Conference in Kharkiv* (both 1923), *The funeral of Lenin in Kharkiv* (1924), etc. However, most of the newsreels were released within the framework of film magazines: *Chronicle of VUFKU* (1923), *Flywheel* (1924–1925), *Flywheel Cinema Week* (1925), *Cinema Week of VUFKU* (1925–1929), *Newsreel* (1929–1931).

The newsreel of the Odessa Film Factory *Chronicle of VUFKU* was made in the same way as the weekly Moscow chronicle *Kinopravda* (*Cinetruth*), but did not have a periodicity in the release, and was shown on screens as the materials accumulated (about nine issues were released). Along with newsreels, campaign and fiction short films were included in the magazine. The first issue included such plots: *Celebration of the 5th anniversary of the Red Army in Odessa*, *Sunday on Easter Day*, *Laying out the park*, *Gift of Odessa railroad workers to Ilyich*, *Arrival of German tractors at the Odessa port*, *Arrival of Colonel Gaskel*, *First Soviet steamer departing for Constantinople* (D.M., 1923). There was also no clear system in the layout of the magazine materials. Not all episodes consisted of story packs.

To normalize the situation with the release of newsreels at the central administration of the *VUFKU* in Kharkiv, a special film laboratory was created. The laboratory was supplied with all the necessary equipment to facilitate filming of the current chronicle, as well as industrial and scientific films.

In the summer of 1924, *VUFKU* launched into production a newsreel *Flywheel*, intended for demonstration in workers' and rural clubs. It was a kind of symbiosis of newsreel plots and short-length play films, arranged chaotically. The premiere of the first release was planned on August 1. The newsreel consisted of four plots: *Black Sea Region* (directed by L. Sheffer), *Dobrokhim* (directed by S. Waiting-Radzinsky), *Questionnaire of the XIII Congress of the RCP(b)*, *An Eye for an Eye* (directed by L. Kurbas), *Piebold Heifer* (directed by V. Tezavrovsky). Some of the news stories were bought from the French company Pathé and the Russian Sevzapkino.

“The *Flywheel* does not lead to the discovery of Americas. – noted one of its authors Waiting-Radzinsky. – It helps to find out more about the Ukrainian SSR. It doesn't take life by surprise. It only grasps life with its apparatus” (Ujejting, 1924). As shortcomings, Waiting mentioned the poor-quality translation of titles from Russian into Ukrainian, and then back into Russian.

The press reported that the shooting for the second issue of *Flywheel* had already been carried out: newsreels *5th Congress of the Comintern*, *Congress of Comnezam (Committee of poor peasants)*, *Plant named after Marta and Badin*, *Opening of the monument to Artem in Bakhmut*; cultural films *Field pests and control over them*, *Askania-Nova (National park)*; fiction *Vendetta* (directed by L. Kurbas), *The nobleman* (directed by V. Kovrigin); agitation *Hands off China*, *From darkness to light* (both directed by N. Saltykov).

The documentary filmmaker and editor Leonid Mogilevsky reported in a memorandum of the Odessa Film Factory Directorate in 1924: “Observing the production of newsreels in Ukraine and taking into account the enormous importance that can play a big role in the merger of the city and the countryside, in the matter of information and education of the masses, you come to the conclusion that it is necessary to make a number of significant amendments to the production of newsreels and define its direction” (CDAVO..., 1924). Further, Mogilevsky revealed his vision of staging the work with newsreels.

In particular, he noted: “The chronicle should be timely and topical, cover all events, achievements, show life as it is, so that the chronicle edited on the day of shooting with inscriptions should be sent to Kharkiv; the entire chronicle must be accounted for; filming of newsreels should be carried out according to a previously approved plan; introduce a group consisting of the head of the newsreel, the operator and the administrator into the staff of the *VUFKU* board” (CDAVO..., 1924).

However, Mogilevsky's plans remained largely unfulfilled.

In 1925, *VUFKU* curtailed the release of the *Flywheel* newsreel, switched over to the production of full-length feature films, and began to publish the *Flywheel Cinema Week* newsreel with an overview of life in the USSR and the West. Cameramen D. Feldman and G. Drobin filmed for the new newsreel the stories *Congress of Soviets in the AMSSR*, *Trial of Roman Catholic*

priests, *Members of the British Labor Party in Odessa* (all – cameraman D. Feldman), *Jewish agricultural colonies* (cameraman G. Drobin), *May Day* (operators: G. Drobin and D. Feldman). Operator I. Gudima filmed scenes: *Restoration of the Lunacharsky theater*, *Workers at Odessa resorts*, *Construction of mechanized barns in Odessa port*. Director S. Waiting-Radzinsky was invited to direct the newsreel shooting in terms of the choice of topics for reporting and editing.

VUFKU paid more and more attention to newsreels. At the end of 1925, the film industry once again revised its approach to the production of newsreels. Based on the task of newsreels to cover comprehensively the life of the USSR and Western countries, the development and distribution of newsreels was directed towards increasing the number of newsreel issues (instead of a two-week issue - weekly), increasing circulation (for better and timely coverage of the periphery) and increasing the number of staff correspondents.

The reformatted newsreel received a new name – *VUFKU Film Week*. The newsreel covered events of a political, economic, scientific, technical, cultural nature of all-Union, local significance and Western countries. The delivery of foreign materials for it was made by the German film company *Ufa*. For example, the 19th release of the film weekly had a footage of 430 meters and was devoted exclusively to the life of Hamburg, its port, docks and factories.

At the Odessa Cinema Factory, a duty of cameramen is introduced for emergency filming, and a special department of production filming is organized by order of industrial and commercial enterprises and a newsreel department. Leonid Mogilevsky was appointed head of both departments. In Kharkiv, Kyiv, Odessa, Yekaterinoslav and Donbass, VUFKU opens offices with permanent film reporters, and buys special reporter film cameras abroad. The average footage of *VUFKU Film Week* was 350–400 meters, and the circulation was 8 copies. By the beginning of January 1926, there had been 19 releases, and during the summer of 1926 – 16 (Mik., 1926).

According to the head of the production films and newsreel departments L. Mogilevsky, the newsreel department planned to serve Odeshchina and Podillia. Themes of the plots: agriculture, the life of the Red Army and the Navy, construction, sports, technology, export, import. The plots were planned on the principle of illustrated newspaper reporting with the involvement of the press, institutions and enterprises which don't underestimate the importance of newsreels (Mogilevskij, 1926) (in the next summer season, the newsreel department planned to depict the developing industry, production, historical places, and the most interesting sights of Ukraine).

“But the newspaper and the magazine are raw material. – G. Leychenko noted. – The viewer wants to see movement, life, work in a living figurative newspaper called *Newsreel*. And we cannot ignore this demand in silence. There is no need to prove the whole vitality of this idea. Experience has shown that it is completely relevant. ... Each program should include a short film in 5-6 parts and a newsreel” (Leychenko, 1926).

The shortage of newsreel plots was replenished by film amateurs with their own film cameras and by institutions filming newsreels. Filmed chronicles came from different cities, everyday moments from the life of the village (harvest festival, international youth day). VUFKU gavetape to freelance correspondents and paid for their work. In March, 4 issues of VUFKU Film Week were released. Moreover, VUFKU contacted the Odessa branch of the ODSK (*Soviet cinema and photography amateurs' society*), which had 3 cameras, with a proposal to shoot social and everyday chronicles, sending the required amount of negative film (Mogilevskij, 1927).

VUFKU took the new path of newsreel production due to the fact that the plots of *Flywheel* were a simple overview of the current day's events and had no social significance. The content of the magazine made it possible for the viewer to get acquainted with individual episodes and events, but there was no target setting here. Therefore, VUFKU decided to refuse to cover only episodic events in magazines, and move on to a thematic chronicle, that is, to produce individual short films up to 300 meters long, devoted mainly to the industrial topic. The newsreels department of VUFKU switched to a thematic release of newsreels in the form of separate independent cyclical films.

Until 1927, the content of newsreel plots was random. The work of newsreels had to be deployed in very difficult conditions due to the number of subjective and objective reasons: lack of experience in the production of newsreels in Ukraine, lack of a correspondent network, filming equipment necessary for the work of a small staff of correspondents, but most importantly, a catastrophic shortage of professional workers and a special laboratory, which would make it possible to show newsreels the day after the shooting.

The first issues of *Cinema Week* were distinguished by an abundance of filming of demonstrations and meetings and were rather boring. Public viewings showed that the audience was

least interested in demonstrations and meetings. The viewer was more attracted by the achievements in the field of science, technology and sports in the USSR and abroad shown on screen.

Beginning in 1927, the weekly newsreel release was included in the production plans of *VUFKU* (the premiere release of *Cinema week* according to the thematic plan took place on August 1, 1927). A newsreel subdivision was included in the production department of *VUFKU* and a special instruction was developed. It was said that several centers for filming newsreels had to be created in the republic; correspondents had to submit a monthly or two-week indicative filming plan to the *VUFKU* board; the entire chronicle filmed on the same day with no exception had to be recorded in a special book. According to the production plans of the financial year 1927–1928, 52 issues of the newsreel were supposed to be filmed, for which 46,222 rubles were allocated. It was also planned to create a base for shooting newsreels in Kharkiv, since in Kharkiv, as in the capital of the Ukrainian SSR, more interesting events took place that could be chosen for newsreel plots.

During the October holidays, the newsreel department sent 24 cameramen to different cities and villages of Ukraine. The celebration was filmed in Kharkiv, Stalino, Dnepropetrovsk (now Dnipro), Odessa, Mykolaiv, Vinnitsa. Four operators worked simultaneously in Kharkiv, Kyiv and Odessa. The footage of the holiday was soon shown in cinemas. Some of the filming was done from an airplane.

Thematically, the plots of *Cinema week* covered the most significant events in the republic: the work of the *Krasnoe Znamya (Red Banner)* textile factory, which was the first in the USSR to switch to a seven-hour working day; mechanized operation of a long-distance telephone exchange; operation of a new power station at Dneprostroy; 10th anniversary of the *GPU (State Political Directorate)* in Ukraine; participation of the Soviet delegation at the Geneva Conference on Disarmament; the veche (meeting) of the union of foreign peasant delegations with the peasants of the Soviet Union, organized in Moscow; state metallurgical plant in Stalino, etc.

The most important events of a scientific and cultural nature were also reflected in the *VUFKU Film Week*: campaigning for donations to the monument to Kotsyubinsky; 4th World Congress of the Red Profintern; the opening of the Jewish department at the *All-Ukrainian Academy of Science*, etc. Separate issues were devoted to certain events: the International Labor Day; anniversary of Lenin's death; anniversary of Leo Tolstoy; grain procurement campaigns, etc.

Since March 1928, foreign chronicles bought abroad or filmed by their own correspondents had been regularly included in the issues of *Cinema week*. I. Gudima worked in New York, E. Deslav in Paris, B. Zeitlin in Berlin.

At the same time, it was planned to release a special chronicle for children *Screen of a Pioneer* and special supplements to *Cinema week*, edited from homogeneous newsreels: *Nature and People, Science and Technology, Cultural Life*, etc. (Mogilevskij, 1928).

Short-length newsreels were dedicated to separate important events: *10 years of the GPU Cheka in Ukraine, Decade of Soviet Medicine* (cameraman S. Chernyavsky), *Decade of the Red Army*, the trip of the *Shevchenko Committee to Kanev* and the *Ceremonial meeting of the Committee at the grave of Taras Shevchenko* (cameraman D. Soda) and others.

It should be noted that in 1928, the Ukrainian film industry was organizing the release of the so-called *Film feuilletons*, which, according to the authors, were supposed to become a means of combating negative phenomena in society. Bureaucracy, alcoholism, nepotism, and laxity were clearly shown and evily ridiculed in the *Film feuilletons* that go along with the chronicle. The authors drew themes for these issues from newspaper *feuilletons*. *Night after Christmas* (after a holiday in the regional police department), *Nepotism in Dneprostroy* (Dnepropetrovsk construction organization), *Our Roads* (the answer to an article in the newspaper *Proletarian – Cars in Ukraine will replace the horse-ridden vehicles*), etc.

From September 15, 1927 to January 15, 1928 *VUFKU* produced 16 issues of *Cinema week*. But *Cinema week*, which, during the entire existence of *VUFKU* with a frequency of four issues a month, did not always reach the viewer. According to the head of the newsreel department of the *VUFKU* L. Mogilevsky, the administrators of some cinemas, citing the need for the maximum number of sessions of commercial films, did not release newsreels until they received a film with a small footage for demonstration. Sometimes, even in cinemas, newsreels were shown between sessions, so, in fact, most of the audience watched them. Mogilevsky also reported on the chronic backlog of the newsreel demonstration (almost three months after its release) – while the *VUFKU Film Weeks* No. 37 and 38 were shown in cinemas, the newsreel department has already released No. 48.

However, representatives of the Odessa regional department of *VUFKU*, on the contrary, indicated that newsreels were received irregularly. At a meeting devoted to newsreels at the regional department of *VUFKU*, held in February 1928, it was noted that the February issues of *Cinema week* had not yet been received, and the chronicle of the October celebrations was received in Odessa only in early February. Director of the regional department of *VUFKU* M. Katzent noted the need to show newsreels weekly.

During the past 1927/28 operational year, the *Newsreel Department of VUFKU*, formed in October 1927 (*Kul'chych, 1928*), released 52 issues of *Cinema week* and 19 newsreel short films with a total positive footage of over 28,000 meters. In distribution in Ukraine, 20 copies of each issue were released. On the release of newsreels in June 1928, 2,518 rubles were spent, in July – 2,700. And according to the Dnepropetrovsk department of the *VUFKU*, the profit from the rental of newsreels amounted to 2,695 rubles in June, and 2,677 in July (*Mogilevskij, 1928, 1*).

In 1928, the press widely covered the Komsomol air expedition, which was the first balloon flight in the history of USSR aviation with a visit to all the Union republics. The expedition planned to visit Rostov, Tiflis, Baku, the Caucasus ranges, the Black Sea coast. *VUFKU* dispatched operator D. Soda to shoot this event (*I.A., 1929*).

Also in 1928, *VUFKU* introduced several innovations in the process of newsreel filming. At the Odessa Film Factory, according to press reports, the newsreel department in order to make it easier for directors to select actors, released a film album in two parts. The first part contained photographs of actors without specifying names and characteristics, and the second – reviews of directors, a list of films where the actor was filmed, etc. that can be used in various films. The press also reported on the organization of the *VUFKU*, following the example of American film factories, the first film frame in the USSR. The catalog of the frame library consisted of cardboard sheets with small windows-frames for viewing in the light, indicating the name of the event, the time and place of shooting, the content, the quality of the film, the name of the operator, the footage (*L-ov, 1928*).

In parallel with the commissioning of a frame library, *VUFKU* was trying to establish the production of full-length montage films based on archival chronicle material, that is, to create a film chronicle. L. Mogilevsky, who already had experience of similar work (since November 7, 1927, his three-part *How It Was* was shown on the screens of Ukraine), acted as the film's director-editor. As the author stated: “The purpose of the film *Documents of the Epoch* is to identify, systematize and logically link only genuine historical film documents related to the history of the class struggle in Ukraine” (*Mogilevskij, 1928, 2*).

The production of this film was prompted by the success of the editing films of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, edited from the tsar's chronicle (1927, directed by E. Shub) and released by *Sovkino (Soviet cinema)* for the anniversary of the October Revolution, *Great Way* (1927, directed by E. Shub). Although, we note that the first editing film in the USSR was released in Ukraine *Great October* (1922, directed by V. Gardin), and was timed to coincide with the fifth anniversary of the October Revolution (*A., 1923*). According to Mogilevsky, work on the painting lasted about eight months. A huge number of old newsreels were viewed. There was footage of Lenin, Trotsky, Germans in Ukraine, Petliura, the entry of Austro-German troops into Odessa, Central Rada, etc. Most of the chronicle was filmed in Kyiv. A significant part of the chronicle included in the film was filmed by operators of political departments in the early years of the revolution, stored in Moscow, as well as in other regions of the USSR and abroad (*Cvitarenko, 1928*).

VUFKU took measures to acquire the chronicle filmed in Ukraine in the period 1917–1921. Chronicle *Ukrainian Directory in Kiev* – was purchased from one of the operators who worked in Ukraine and later moved to the far North. As a result of painstaking work, it was possible to acquire and collect the chronicles *The Entry of the Directory into Kyiv*, *Skoropadskiy*, *Petliura's Meeting with the Clergy*, *Kerensky in Kyiv*. The newsreel footage *Banquet in honor of the Hetman*, *Announcement of the universal law*, *White Army entering Kyiv* were acquired from German film organizations and cameramen working in Ukraine.

However, despite a very thorough search, it was not possible at that time to find a significant amount of chronicle, about the presence of which there was reliable information: *The funeral of Eichhorn*, *Execution of Boris Donskoy*, *Explosion in the Menagerie* (*Mogilevskij, 1928*) ...The edited film consisted of eight parts: “1. *Personnel from the period of the First World War*; 2. *Petrograd*; 3. *The parade of the Austro-German and Petliura troops on the Sofia square in Kiev*; 4. *Arrival of Petliura to Kiev on December 19, 1918*; 5. *The invaders are loading the looted*

grain on ships in one of the ports on the Black Sea; 6. A new front of struggle has been faced by the proletariat of the Ukraine; 7. The workers and peasants, abandoning their bayonets, took up science; 8. The victories of the world's first Republic of Soviets kindled the proletariat of other countries with the fire of revolutionary enthusiasm" (Mislavskiy, 2016).

5. Conclusion

In the early 1920s, the Ukrainian republic was recovering from the consequences of the civil war. The film production base in Ukraine was also in a very poor state at that time. In such conditions, it was incredibly difficult to develop one's own country cinema production. However, the situation was gradually beginning to normalize. With the commissioning of film production bases in Odessa, Yalta, and eventually in Kyiv, it became possible to create new film groups and establish relatively stable filming.

But apart from the technical problems associated with an acute shortage of film equipment and film, there was an acute shortage of qualified cameramen, screenwriters and directors. In difficult economic conditions, VUFKU was forced to solve both technical problems and creative ones. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian film industry managed to industrialize the production of newsreels and documentaries.

However, the artistic quality of documentary filmmaking remained at a low level.

The qualitative rise of Ukrainian documentary filmmaking took place only in 1928–1929, after the transition from *Sovkino* (Soviet cinema) to VUFKU of individual members of the creative group *Cine-Eye* (Dziga Vertov, his wife Elizaveta Svilova and brother Mikhail Kaufman). It was at this time that their best films were released – *The Eleventh*, *The Man with a Movie Camera*, *Spring...* However, the rise of Ukrainian documentary cinema was not long. With the introduction of the system of centralization of cinema in the 1930s, and the subordination of Ukrainian film production to a single center in Moscow, Ukrainian cinema lost its national identity and joined the general stream of propaganda film production in the USSR.

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