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A School of Opportunism

*Short Filmmakers Caught in a Web of Commissions and Dealings*¹⁾

Between 1949 and 1950, the Board for Documentary Film or Sbor pro dokumentární filmy (hereafter the board) operated within the Short Film Unit or Krátký Film of the newly nationalized Czechoslovak film industry. Krátký Film was responsible for the production of all non-feature films in this country, including non-fiction, documentaries, and animation. The Annual Reports of the Czechoslovak Film Industry written by Artuš Černík downplay the importance of this board.²⁾ However, archival materials clearly show it played an active role in bringing the professional standards of short films in line with those of Czechoslovak feature film production. While there exists a need to examine the overall vision the Board developed for documentary films, its limited scope imposes more modest ambitions on this essay.

Accordingly, in what follows, I examine the relationships between these institutions from 1948 to 1953, placing emphasis on their relationships to film directors, and the influence their professional standards exerted on the medium-to-long term ideological stance of Krátký Film. In particular, I consider the range of options available to the directors of documentaries and other short films when making their own creative decisions about subject matter, and the manner in which they handled these options. So we might better understand the systems and structures in which documentary and short film production existed, I begin by detailing how at this time production was organized and how decision-making was hierarchized in the Czechoslovak film industry. An examination of the cases documented in state archives, of filmmakers' private documents, and of the minutes of meetings between those involved allows us to identify a series of motives and practices from which we might conceptualize the dynamics of the development process. These in-

1) This work was supported by the project "Employment of Newly Graduated Doctors of Science for Scientific Excellence" (CZ.1.07/2.3.00/30.0009) co-financed from European Social Fund and the state budget of the Czech Republic.

2) Artuš Černík, *Výroční zpráva čs. filmovnictví 1950* (Praha: ČSF, 1954), p. 24.

cluded the educational and ideological functions of short films, the role of the popular hero therein, methods of reconstructing the nation, recycling archival footage, and the influence Soviet documentaries exerted on their organization, themes, and style. Given that working on short films was widely seen to prepare creative personnel for feature filmmaking, we can also glean insights into how their experiences shaped Czechoslovak socialist cinema generally. In this sense, it is necessary to distinguish between, on the one hand, the temporal and spatial specificity of production, negotiation, motivation, and practice, and, on the other hand, the general conditions of working within the non-profit audiovisual production sector.

Economizing on manpower: short film production and the non-profit sector

In 1945, Jiří Lehovec reorganized short film production in Czechoslovakia, by uniting various production companies, technical service providers, and archives into a single nationalized body.³⁾ The Czechoslovak Film Chronicle, as it came to be known, was divided into Zpravodajský film or Newsreels and the aforementioned Krátký Film, which operated out of the cities of Prague, Brno, and Zlín (known as Gottwaldov between 1949 and 1990). The latter was run by Elmar Klos, with an editorial board comprising Alan František Šulc, Vladimír Čech, Jan Kavan, Jan Kučera, Jiří Lehovec, and František Sádek.⁴⁾ By mid 1946, Krátký Film assumed responsibility for all one-off productions.⁵⁾ Within a year, it boasted five production groups headed respectively by Karel Kohout, Jan Paul, Miloš Schmiedberger, František Utěšil, and Vojtěch Červený, all of whom were answerable to Lehovec. The Animated and Puppet Film unit (Kreslený a loutkový film) operated autonomously until the establishment of the Czechoslovak Film Monopoly in April 1948, but, with the founding of the Czechoslovak State Film, it joined Krátký Film and Kreslený as simply Krátký Film, with Klos remaining in charge until he was replaced by Vojtěch Trapl in September of 1948.

The nationalization of the Czechoslovak film industry brought production under the control of the Ministry of Information. Driven in part by this ministry's agenda and its relationships to other ministries, the production and the content of short films were increasingly determined by state bureaucrats. Consequently, the Minister of Information approved the executive members of Krátký Film and the thematic concerns of its output, and insisted that its films reflected governmental campaigns of the day.⁶⁾ Patterned after the

3) Jiří Havelka, *Čs. filmové hospodářství, 1945–1950* (Prague: ČSFÚ, 1970), p. 94–95.

4) See 'Manifestační schůze pracovníků krátkého filmu', *Filmová práce*, 4 August 1945, p. 2.

5) I use Krátký Film as an umbrella term for the institution of short film production after 1945.

6) In 1951, the State expressed a preference for films which showcasing one or more of the following traits: "What the curricula vitae of the prominent industry representatives teach us", "showing transformation of village life", "the important role The Party plays in everyday life, and exposing class enemy and traitors", "the love of the Soviet Union", "the revolutionary tradition in national histories and the workers' movement", "following the example of the Soviet biographical film", "films for youth and musical comedies". Minutes from the conference of creative workers of the Czechoslovak state film (3 May 1951). NFA, f. ČSF (unprocessed, box label R9/BII/5P/2K).

Soviet model, this form of restructuring hamstrung documentary compared to other aspects of Czechoslovak production such as popular science and educational films.⁷⁾

From 1949, teams answerable to the Central Dramaturgy of Krátký Film were responsible for producing short films.⁸⁾ In the year that followed, more restructuring took place when the unit adopted the model of production used by the units behind popular science and educational films, documentary films, and animation and puppet films respectively. In this model, each unit was controlled by a supervisor; his assistant handled economic issues, and a "Dramaturgy" comprising a chief dramaturgy and two underlings liaised with their editorial boards in developing projects for production groups. Editorial boards ratified the themes and scripts of new projects and prepared final cuts of submitted works. Approbation commissions then decided how these films would be distributed.⁹⁾ It needs stressing that the editorial boards included not only unit employees but also government representatives and other external experts.

The dramaturgy of Krátký Film therefore operated in a different way to those of other units. As Petr Szczepanik has shown in relation to Czechoslovak feature film production of this period,

[t]he dramaturg, or, the artistic head of the unit, was a virtual equivalent of the pre-state-socialist hands-on 'producer', albeit without the usual financial, green-lighting, and marketing responsibilities, which were instead held by the state's or the Party's representatives.¹⁰⁾

First, Krátký Film's dramaturg partially controlled budgets, with the Ministry of Information rarely refusing his request to increase the cost of a film.¹¹⁾ Second, this dramaturg did not act as a "broker between studio and the political establishment, between upper studio management and creative teams, between writers and directors, between directors and crews, and between wider political and cultural trends and filmmaking practice".¹²⁾ On the contrary, upper management of Krátký Film shared the burden of decision-making; Vojtěch Trapl, the head of Krátký film, who was also the head of the Popular Scientific film unit, attended editorial board meetings, as did representatives of the relevant governmental ministries. A broad range of agents therefore applied regulatory mechanisms to short films. Undermining the notion of individual creative input, their actions led to mul-

7) At a meeting of the Documentary Film Group at the Film Institute of Czechoslovak State Film held on 18 November 1949, Elmar Klos stated his intention to model Czechoslovak film production on the Soviet system. "A. F. Šulc: And what will be left of the current Krátký Film? Elmar Klos: Probably nothing but popular science films". NFA, f. ČSF (unprocessed, box label R5/BII/1P/5K).

8) Dramaturgs F. B. Kunc and A. F. Šulc ran Krátký film Praha, Josef Kainar Krátký film Brno, Jaroslav Novotný Krátký film Zlín, Erik Švábík Kreslený film Praha, Richard Kubeš Kreslený film Brno, Jiří Trnka Loutkový film Praha, Hermína Týrlová and Karel Zeman Loutkový film Zlín.

9) Materials of the organisation (Dokumentární film, Populárně-vědecký a naučný film, Kreslený a loutkový film). NFA, f. ČSF (unprocessed, box label R11/BII/3P/6K).

10) Petr Szczepanik, 'How Many Steps to the Shooting Script? A Political History of Screenwriting', *Iluminace*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2013), p. 81.

11) See film budgets approvals in: NA, f. MI, k. 170–190.

12) See Szczepanik, 'How Many Steps to the Shooting Script?'

tilateral negotiations which transformed the production process into an arena in which clashes between creativity and Party loyalty played out. Crucially, during negotiations with state officials, the editorial board was often critical of the films it received and of the talent behind them. For instance, a fairly typical exchange in a summary of an editorial board meeting read "[PRVNÍ OBILÍ STÁTU / THE FIRST STATE GRAIN] was made following a commission by the Ministry of Purchase: 'Comrades were present at the screening. We criticized the film openly; they defended it.'¹³⁾ In a dual role that influenced its relationships to filmmakers, the editorial board functioned as both a gatekeeper and possessor of power in the script selection process. Moreover, as permanent staff, both dramaturgs and the editorial board members held a quite different occupational status to the directors and other personnel hired on short-term contracts. As elucidated below, their dependence on editorial boards profoundly influenced filmmakers' conduct. In order better to understand the reasons for this hierarchical organization we need to recognize its relationships to short film production generally and under State-socialism in particular.

Crucially, short films belonged to the non-profit sector of the State-controlled Czechoslovak film industry. Their circumstances of distribution ensured these were not standard commodities that stood to generate revenue to cover the cost of production and turn a profit for their backers. Short films operated outside financial spheres and circuits of monetary exchange. Rather than being judged on box office returns, their success was measured in symbolic and educational terms; by their capacity to impart values and information. While these films were not produced for commercial reasons, striking a balance between economic and ideological concerns was nevertheless pertinent to their development, not least because they were costly propositions.

Countless archival documents from the period reveal that Krátký Film strove to balance the operational and economic challenges of fulfilling the State's long-term approach to short film production. Ensuring that its shorts adhered to their educational, civic, and propagandistic responsibilities doomed the unit to the hapless pursuit of securing financing for these inevitable loss-makers. Krátký Film found itself in the unenviable position of being pressured into producing costly cultural artifacts for which the agent applying the pressure was loathed to pay. The State's hesitancy to bankroll shorts gave rise to a number of structural/organizational measures designed to ensuring high levels of output at minimum expenditure. In practice, this meant that the lion's share of the cost of production was either paid by the ministry commissioning a film or by parties expected to benefit from the film's subject matter.

These testing circumstances were compounded by a contemporaneous trend toward cutting the salaries of Krátký Film's staff, especially those of permanent employees.¹⁴⁾ Disputes between filmmakers and management predictably ensued. For example, the director Jan Kavan complained that his contract offered little professional security or control over the final cut of his films.¹⁵⁾ Kavan's lament anticipated a long-term issue captured in a letter which disoriented practitioners wrote to unit management in June 1948. They made it

13) Meeting Reports. NFA, f. ČSF (not processed, box label R11/BII/3P/6K).

14) Výklad k situaci v Krátkém filmu. Archiv Barrandov Studios, a.s., f. Barrandov — historie, c. 1949-01-c.

15) Krátký film Jízda králů — dokončení jeho. NA, f. MI, k. 176, složka Filmy krátké — J.

clear that they considered their situation to be a clear-cut case of social inequality, particularly as the duties of permanent and temporary employees were identical, but their benefits not.¹⁶⁾

(...) Krátký Film has been employing part of its staff on a permanent basis, and another on short-term contracts. Permanent contracts are given to office workers and a small number of creative workers including film directors. The rest of the film directors — the majority of them in fact — along with several members of the production section, all equally engaged in the advancement of Krátký Film, are unable to enjoy the legal benefits granted by the people's democracy of Czechoslovakia to every one of its hard-working citizens. They receive no health insurance or pension, and are not entitled to child benefits, bonuses, holiday pay, or many of the other benefits afforded trade union members. They have no right to vote for the works council yet they are obliged to pay sales tax, and, unlike their colleagues, the revenue office regards them as private entrepreneurs!¹⁷⁾

Although management at Krátký Film made no concession to creative workers employed on short-term contracts, it did attempt to resolve this situation. Concerns over the division of labor had been festering since nationalization. However, management was primarily concerned with maximize output, rather than tending to the emotional or financial wellbeing of casual workers. Klos emphasized that technical personnel were treated well at this time, much as they had been during the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia.¹⁸⁾ Because this unit was the product of a merger between eighteen companies, the various professions represented therein were unevenly distributed and in terms of skill and experience. While camera operators tended to work on shorts and feature films, directors — at least according to Klos — lacked the expertise to multitask in this way. For Klos, a lack professional expertise underwrote management's dealings with staff, especially when it came to verifying talent's qualifications, drafting contracts, and handling redundancies.

Economic conditions also played a role however, particularly the pressure placed on the management of Krátký Film by the Ministry of Information and other governmental institutions. These bodies, as well as third parties pushing their own agenda, overburdened the unit with commissions, many of which were insufficiently funded; the third parties could usually only afford to cover the cost of production and not unit's operational costs. Consequently, management sought to increase output while cutting costs in two ways. One the one hand, it channeled capital to production, sharing the burden with those who commissioned projects, and, in so doing, ensuring the continued practice of using

16) The group comprised most of the key short film makers of the late 1940s: Pavel Blumenfeld, Jindřich Ferenc, Kurt Goldberger, Antonín Görlich, Rudolf Hlaváček, Jan Kavan, František Lukáš, František Oukrop, Josef Pintner, Jiří Stichenwirth, Jan Svoboda, Václav Švarc, Ivo Toman, Ludvík Toman, Josef Vácha, Jaroslav Veselý (directors); Josef Bulánek, Karel Smutný (cameramen); Vojtěch Červený (production manager); Václav Kokstein, Václav Waldhaus (assistant production managers); and Karel Koubíček (production coordinator).

17) Československý státní film, odd. Krátký film — Pracovní poměry zaměstnanců. NA, f. MI, c. 209, file Zpl-nomocněnec pro filmovou kroniku a krátký film, 1945–1949.

short-term contracted staff. On the other, the salaries of permanent staff were not linked to workloads, ensuring their income remained fixed even when commissions increased.¹⁹⁾ Both strategies benefited management over employees, but helped the unit to grow.

A change to industrial relations came into force in 1949 when some creative personnel received fixed-term contracts.²⁰⁾ These were primarily reserved for dramaturges, scenario writers, and scriptwriters; the status of directors and camera operators was actually downgraded.²¹⁾ The prioritization of a project's ideological dimensions — elucidated below — explains much about the character of industrial relations at the unit. The fixed-term employment system may have been a stopgap solution at best, but it still tempered the charges of inequality and exploitation leveled at management. What remained, however, was the sense of insecurity that resulted from an organization which offered its creative staff quite limited professional opportunities. After all, even the Information of Ministry rationalized the one-year duration of the contracts by suggesting that filmmakers were under-qualified and by stressing the insecure nature of working on short films. “ (...) [It] is necessary to leave options open in regards to the termination of employment, in view of the fact that film directors in particular are often newcomers to the field whose qualifications remain unproven”, the ministry argued.²²⁾ Ultimately, this sense of professional insecurity at Krátký Film ranked among the most decisive factors shaping career development and professional achievement in short film production of the late 1940s. The working lives and forms of authorship incubated within this system started gradually to transform in the early 1950s amid pressures related to planning, the fulfillment of ministerial and other institutional directives, and increasing numbers of commissions. A new purpose-oriented strategy for short film production introduced in 1949 was formulated in response to the criticism of the previous system, including that of its exploitation of staff on short-term contracts. Management finally acquiesced to calls to standardize equal conditions of employment for all production personnel.²³⁾ Alongside organizational flaws and the conflicting agenda of the editorial boards and filmmakers, the labor relations problems that had dogged Krátký Film nevertheless continued to fuel criticism of unit inefficiency, from politicians and from within.

18) Výklad k situaci v Krátkém filmu. Archiv Barrandov Studios, a.s., f. Barrandov — historie, file 1949-01-c.

19) Ibid.

20) In January 1949, the Ministry of Information acknowledged that “workers were deprived of their employment rights”, and recommended their re-classification “in view of a need for workplace conditions to correspond to the social requisites of our time”. Přerazení pracovníků Krátkého filmu ze smlouvy o dílo do služebního poměru. NA, f. MI, file 209, section Zplnomocněnec pro filmovou kroniku a krátký film, 1945–1949.

21) Materiál Dokumentární film. NA, Archiv ÚV KSČ, f. Ústřední výbor 1945 — 1989, Prague, oddělení kulturně propagační a ideologické (19/7), arch. i. 668.

22) Přerazení pracovníků Krátkého filmu ze smlouvy o dílo do služebního poměru. NA, f. MI, c. 209, file Zplnomocněnec pro filmovou kroniku a krátký film, 1945–1949.

23) Materiál Dokumentární film. NA, Archiv ÚV KSČ, f. Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Prague, oddělení kulturně propagační a ideologické (19/7), arch. i. 668.

Negotiations, Ideology, Economy, and Time Pressure

It was not uncommon for the editorial board to suggest that a new project should be assigned to a director with a track-record of delivering satisfactory films on time.²⁴⁾ This seemingly trivial request was more significant than we might think, not least because it points to the demands placed on short film makers. The importance of the timely delivery of acceptable films was such that it even superseded originality. It is clear that even when the Ministry of Information assumed ultimate control of production, executives at Krátký Film were taking steps to ensure their properties stood a reasonable chance of securing ministerial support. Among the most important consequences of this conduct was the convergence and subsequent standardization of two practices: echoing the discourses set by the ministries and other agenda-setting institutions, and producing series of shorts helmed by a single director. In financial terms, the editorial board's attitude was contradictory. Its stance toward budgets was rather *laissez faire*; it even agreed to increase them from time to time. However, it did stress cost effective solutions to film development, such as reusing archival footage. Taken as a whole, these priorities underpinned its interaction with commissions and its attempts to balance the desires administrators and filmmakers expressed about the content, form, and themes of short films.

An early example of the dealings between Krátký Film and the ministries occurred around a series of overtly political films commissioned by the Ministry of Information in the fall of 1945. Unit executives proved themselves to be wholly subordinate to governmental wishes. Minister Václav Kopecký commissioned the unit to make seven short films on a variety of past regimes, national figures, and industrial matters. This request prompted Lehovec, in his role as a trustee, to contact the Ministry of Information asking for specifics about the desired subject matter, its organization, the duration of the films, and their handover dates.²⁵⁾ Six days later, the ministry sent synopses of each topic, informing the unit that the films needed to be episodic shorts assembled from stock footage, which would be given new voiceovers, cut as necessary, and be connected via brief bridging sequences, maps, or diagrams. This communiqué contrasted the hardships of the Nazi occupation of the country to the purported euphoria of postwar State-socialism, reading:

A street market: everything in abundance. Munich, Germans arriving in Prague; goods become scarce. War, introduction of ration cards: Government, National Alliance, Puppet Hácha, Neurath; the Führer making a speech, Frank making a speech, members of our Government making speeches. Destitution in the country rises. What we were being told; the press coverage, the reality. The industry works for the Reich. Young people pressed into forced labor. Anti-air-raid measures, Bombs over Prague. Germans still winning, but the reality is different. The situation escalates: climax.²⁶⁾

24) Zápisy redakční rady dokumentárního filmu. NFA, f. ČSF (not processed, box label R12/ AI/3P/5K).

25) NA, f. MI, k. 171, file *Filmy krátké politické*.

26) Ibid.

Where Tereza C. Dvořáková derives her view that Krátký Film enjoyed relative autonomy from government institutions from a document entitled "Observance of competences of the Ministry of Information,"²⁷⁾ other materials bring her conclusions into question. Production information and inter-ministerial correspondence suggest a correlation between ministerial guidelines and Krátký Film's output. The notion that strategy was devised between editorial boards and the unit head — in line with the requests of government institutions and other interested parties — therefore did not represent a paradigm shift born of the reorganization of the Czechoslovak film industry in 1950. Government bodies had dealt with the film production sector from 1945 onwards, and, even though their requests were not always granted, their political and economic power ensured they typically got their way. Such interactions represented an important yet largely unseen influence behind editorial board decisions. Reports on editorial boards meetings show that the final call was often left to representatives of the ministry or body commissioning the project under discussion, as their views carried greater weight than those of dramaturgs. One such document emphasized that "[t]he ministry insists on the implementation of the idea even though a film on a similar topic already exists."²⁸⁾

A combination of time pressure and indifference towards originality and professionalism also shaped the attitudes of filmmakers at the unit. Those working on commission-based contracts were forced to accept their situation and develop coping strategies. Knowing the time lag between the proposal of a project and the start of production, they sought to work on several short films simultaneously. They also drew up ideas in advance so that these could be put into action if and when needed. Although a paucity of available archival materials from the later period makes it impossible categorically to confirm the cases from the later period discussed by Vladimír Čech and Bohumil, it is possible to shine a light on cases from the early period.

Their reliance on commissions meant that filmmakers were in a perpetual state of competition with one another. The consequences for those who were not recipients of the preferential treatment that enabled them to build their portfolios are spotlighted in the personal papers of director Vladimír Čech. From 1946 to 1947, Čech saw only two of his projects come to fruition: *NEROZUMÍM* (I DON'T UNDERSTAND, 1947), a docudrama about the search for Czechoslovak children in postwar Germany, and *DAŇOVÁ MORÁLKA* (TAX MORALE, 1947), a Ministry of Finance-commissioned piece explaining Czechoslovakia's new State-controlled economy. At least five others remained unfinished. As was fairly typical of the period, Čech was a victim of the State's ideological priorities and of competition with the units. On occasions the topics he was developing did not dovetail with Party policy; on others, filmmakers developing similar projects were chosen ahead of him. Thus, his much-praised sketch named "Hoří!", about a child causing a house fire, failed to conform to existing mandates. Moreover, with "Hudba nad Vltavou" ("Music Over the Vltava River"), Čech had set about promoting Czechoslovakia and its music by way of a tribute to the Prague Spring Festival, the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Prague Musical

27) Tereza Cz. Dvořáková, 'Elmar Klos a zestátnění československé kinematografie', in Jan Lukeš (ed.), *Černobílý snář Elmara Klose* (Praha: NFA, 2011), pp. 61–62.

28) Zápisy redakční rady dokumentárního filmu. NFA, f. ČSF (not processed, box label R12/ AI/3P/5K).

May festival. Even though interest existed in promoting the Prague Spring, it was felt that Čech's synopsis was too vague and poetic at a time when such films needed to focus either on the reconstruction of the country or on Protectorate-era heritage

While typically associated with creative experimentation, the case of Krátký Film reminds us that reusing stock footage and other recycling strategies such as collage and montage are also practically motivated. Belonging to this unit was the Baalfilm production company, which had specialized in the production of promotional films since the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia. Baalfilm worked from a limited range of prewritten scripts that could be repurposed to the specific needs of individual clients. For example, a script entitled "White Lady" was offered as the basis for commercials for a soap firm in 1944 and a furniture company three years later.²⁹⁾ Krátký required screenwriters, production executives, and directors "to be aware of its growing archive of footage and its use in new productions". Directors clearly preferred financially-derived solutions because they were forced to process instructions quickly, because they could never be certain about what future commissions might entail, and because most of their ideas never made it to the screen.

Economics notwithstanding, short film makers needed above anything else to ensure that their work fulfilled its ideological and educational mandate. Failing to do so could result in the termination of the project. For example, stock footage of American runners and of hockey players deemed personae non grata by the State needed to be removed from *SPORTOVNÍ MASÁŽE* (SPORTS MASSAGE, 1948).³⁰⁾ Complying with the ideological demands of the client, which usually meant the government, was typically bound with four other practices: promoting the figure of the popular hero, spotlighting the reconstruction of the nation, replicating Soviet models, and maintaining a sense of authenticity through location shooting and the use of non-professional performers. Thus, the board criticized the makers of *VALAŠSKÝ SOUBOR JASANKA* (WALLACHIAN COMPANY JASANKA, 1953), for paying insufficient attention to individual folk dancers as emblems of the new Czechoslovakia, lamenting this failure as evidence of their inability to live up to Soviet precedents.³¹⁾ The pressure to meet such demands paradoxically led to confected portraits of idealized or demonized citizens and groups; of socialist heroes and enemies of the state. With their makers knowing that these were the real indices of acceptability for the board, short films were invariably derivative, schematic, and riddled with stereotypes.

It is important to emphasize that executive ideological control exerted the greatest single influence during both those parts of the production process concerned with the selection and approval of both the general subject matter of projects and their scripts. During postproduction, the editorial board mainly recommended changes to commentary, while calling for some content to be reedited or cut. Even though the board's judgments could be quite severe at this time, few films were banned. Those films the board deemed to have failed in terms of delivering suitably topical and ideologically sound content were simply

29) Kašpar Václav — Chemická výroba (Dvůr Králové). NFA, f. Baalfilm, sgn. II/d, inv. č. 44; Bratři Škutové — výroba osvětlovacích těles (Frýdek). NFA, f. Baalfilm, sgn. II/d, inv. č. 40.

30) NFA, f. ČSF (not processed, box label R11/BII/3P/5K).

31) Ibid.

distributed non-theatrically. Although it was well aware of the questionable quality of many of its films, the board went to great lengths to fulfill the terms of its contracts and to achieve its release its production targets.

Conclusion

The postwar reorganization of the Czechoslovak film industry led to the formation of a distinct, highly controlled short film production sector. Economic and organizational-operational factors fostered an opportunistic environment shaped more by external forces than individual creative talent. The degree of autonomy enjoyed by the makers of short films was determined by their capacity to deal with those commissioning their projects and to ensure they conformed to governmental agenda. Such circumstances pushed filmmakers into tailoring content accordingly, whether in terms of subject matter, the positions their films took thereon, or using stock footage. Given that the management of Krátký Film only provided some creative personnel with the security of permanent employment, workers moved between commissions or tried their luck in feature film production. By and large, the only filmmakers to remain loyal to the unit were those granted a measure of creative autonomy or those who accepted the production-line conditions of crafting short films to commission. For them, working life centered on repackaging existing material as a means of breaking into feature films. Eventually a newly established film academy would take over the responsibility of training inexperienced filmmakers; however, well into the 1950s, short film production served as a something of finishing school — one characterized appropriately enough by a mixture of discipline and freedom.

By considering how power structures and imperatives shaped the content, form, and style of Czechoslovak shorts of the late 1940s, we can conclude that creative personnel were beholden to the requirements of those commissioning the films. Put simply, during this period, very few short film makers worked with full autonomy; wholly independent of external influence. As is usually a non-profit medium, short film production the world over has been historically reliant on commissions. However, the case of the Czechoslovak sector of the late 1940s evinces a particularly strong dependency on ideological imperatives and an indifference to the demands of the audience that is characteristic of documentary filmmaking under State-socialism.

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SUMMARY

A School of Opportunism: Short Filmmakers Caught in a Web of Commissions and Dealings

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This essay examines short film production in Czechoslovakia in the late 1940s and early 1950s, examining how power structures and the imperatives of the commissioning production system influenced film content, form, and style. Considering the editorial boards to have been the most influential agents in this process, the essay focuses on their motivations as well as those of others involved therein. State archives, filmmaker's personal collections, and editorial board meeting reports reveal how filmmakers and the editorial boards clashed over ideological issues and time pressure. An analysis of the boards' editorial criteria also reveals which professional standards were valued within this system. These included an emphasis on documentary's educational and ideological values, on the popular hero, on recycling as much stock footage as possible, and on emulating Soviet documentaries.