

Radical Filmmakers in Detroit

Dena Clamage

1969

On the night of July 3 the staccato of machine-gun fire rang out across the Jeffries Housing Project bordering on the Lodge Freeway. The sound was accompanied by the appearance of flickering letters on the wall of one of the high-rise concentration camps spelling out the name: NEWSREEL.

The sound and the letters are the trademark of Newsreel, a radical filmmaking and distribution organization which had an outdoor film showing at the housing project.

With groups in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago and Boston, a number of Newsreel people have come to Detroit to build the Detroit Newsreel.

According to a spokesman, "Detroit, and cities like Detroit are the up-front reality of America. We feel it is important not only for people to see the movement work going on in Detroit but also for people to see what America is all about, which is production."

In the two years since Newsreel began in New York as the movement's alternative to the pig news media, the group has produced over thirty films. These films deal with a whole range of movement experience from street-fighting in Berkeley to the women's liberation protest of the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City.

Newsreel also distributes about 20 Third World films from Cuba and Vietnam and is currently setting up linkages with radical film-makers throughout Western Europe.

In Detroit, the Newsreel office will serve as a distribution center for these films. Besides showing the films for organizations and public meetings, Newsreel provides speakers to accompany the films and rap about their political implications. "We are organizers who use films as our tools, We relate to the movement and consider ourselves part of the movement. We are more than a service organization."

Besides this distribution function the group is currently feeling out the possibility of producing a number of films in Detroit. The first of these is a film on insurgent workers' movements, especially the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. "We see groups like the League as pointing the way towards the first really significant movement in an industrial situation for 30 fucking years."

The group is also beginning to discuss films on consumerism, white working class culture, youth culture, and women's liberation, especially as it applies to working class women.

Detroiters will be able to see recent Newsreel produced films at a number of places in the next few weeks.

On Wednesday, July 16, at 7 and 9 pm at the U-M Architecture Auditorium, Newsreel will hold a benefit for Legal Self-Defense.

"Agit-Prop No. 505," a recent Newsreel film, will be shown at the Detroit Repertory Theatre along with a Harold Pinter play beginning July 17 and continuing on for an indefinite run. Check our Calendar for complete details.

There will be a July 26 film showing at Wayne University of Cuban films to celebrate that country's revolution. Call Newsreel at 833-7885 for more details or for information on screenings.



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