

FILM FOR THE REVELATION OF SOCIETY

An unknown but by all indications fairly large number of people in social science departments in Great Britain are interested in the making and use of sociological and ethnographic films. Until recently, however, film-making and the use of film for educational purposes within the social sciences has been a matter of individual enterprise, carried out in relative isolation. Certain efforts are now being made to co-ordinate and organise these activities, as well as to promote actual film-making and to encourage discussion of the whole field of 'film for the revelation of society'. Whatever any one of us may feel about the kind of films that should be made, and whatever personal contacts and abilities each one of us may have, there is little doubt that the greater awareness of the availability of resources and of the extent of present interests and activities in sociological film making, that some sort of organized exchange of information would produce, will result in the improvement and expansion of such facilities as do exist and the film making activities associated with them.

The Royal Anthropological Institute in London has established a Film Committee which is at present forming an ethnographic film library, and hopes to be able, in the future, to promote the making of new films. In March this year David Seddon organised a meeting of social scientists and professional film makers under the slogan 'Film for the revelation of society' in order to place ethnographic film making in its wider context.

Discussion at this meeting, held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, centred around the problem of distribution facilities. It was noted that television was unsatisfactory in several ways (e.g. the inevitable removal of film from the control of the film maker responsible in order to edit for short programmes of popular appeal), and that, in any case, it was not likely to provide an expanding field of distribution. University circuits, on the other hand, already developed in North America, seemed more promising, and the showing of film for generally educative purposes in schools, colleges and such institutions as the Voluntary Service Overseas was felt by some to be a real possibility. Another major area of discussion concerned the need for training and special equipment. The social scientists present took film directing and producing to be a special competence that requires extensive training; whereas at least one of the professional film makers stressed that adequate films could be made with relatively simple equipment and very little training. The meeting agreed that further steps should be taken to collect more information on these, and other related, subjects; to sound out interest both in educational and professional circles, and to co-ordinate activities and discussion.

Since March 1970 David Seddon has been joined by Stephan Feuchtwang, also of the Anthropology and Sociology Department of the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, in starting a newsletter. It is likely that the service provided by this newsletter will be continued by the Royal Anthropological Institute Film Committee in 1971. The first issue appears in June and contains a questionnaire regarding the use made of films, the existence of projects involving film making, the presence of technical equipment and of training facilities in the social science departments of all British universities. The results of the questionnaire and any other information gathered will appear in subsequent newsletters. Contributions in the form of announcements, short articles, comments and suggestions, as well as enquiries, are welcome and should be sent to Film Newsletter, David Seddon and Stephan Feuchtwang, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, S.O.A.S., University of London, W.C.1.

David Seddon.