

## THE FORMATION OF UKRAINIAN DOCUMENTARY FILM DIRECTING IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 1920S

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### **V. Myslavskiy. The formation of Ukrainian documentary film directing in the second half of the 1920s**

**The scientific relevance.** The formation and development of the newsreels and documentary films in Ukraine in the 1920s remains one of the least researched pages in the history and development of Ukrainian cinema. That is why the relevance of this research lies, mainly, in filling a significant gap in the history of Ukrainian cinema. A detailed study of newsreels and documentary films production will allow to reveal trends in the development of the Ukrainian film industry in the 1920s in the field of documentary films.

**The purpose of the article** is to study the specifics of the VUFKU policy on strengthening the material and technical base of Ukrainian film production during the 1920s, to study and analyze the history of the formation and development of the production of newsreels and documentary films in the specified period.

**The methodology** of analysis of the problem consists in using, first of all, the historical-systemic approach, which provides an opportunity to understand the dynamics of the development of newsreels and documentary films at a specific historical stage. The problem-chronological approach made it possible to distinguish by year the main directions of the VUFKU activity in the development of newsreels and documentary cinema within the defined chronological framework. The historical-systemic approach made it possible to understand the dynamics of the development of Ukrainian cinematography in the field of documentary cinema as a system at a specific historical stage.

**The results** of the research are that the article examines the prerequisites that served as an impetus for the emergence of a special technical basis for shooting newsreels. The way of development and establishment of newsreels production is considered. Genre and thematic directions of newsreels, types of newsreels, as well as the circumstances that led to the development of the production of newsreels and documentary films are analyzed. The composition, features and functions of the

elements of the Ukrainian organizational and creative model of cinematography have been established.

**The scientific novelty** lies in the fact that the article for the first time, on the basis of a complex analysis, researches the process of transformation of structural elements of Ukrainian cinematography in order to establish the release of newsreels and documentary films.

**The practical significance** of the article lies in the fact that the results of the study will contribute to the filling of the “white spots” in the history of Ukrainian cinematography, in particular, the establishment of newsreels and documentary cinema as a component of Ukrainian cinematography, which contributes to the creation of a holistic concept of the development of domestic cinema, further understanding of the film production process of the past and present. The materials of the article can be used in further scientific and theoretical researches, during the creation of training manuals and separate sections of the history of Ukrainian cinema.

**Keywords:** *VUFKU, Ukrainian cinematography, newsreels, Ukrainian culture, Odesa film studio, Kyiv film studio.*

### **В. Н. Миславський. Становлення української кінодокументалістики в другій половині 1920-х рр.**

На основі широкого спектру маловідомих публікацій в українській та періодичній пресі 1922–1930 рр. в статті розглядається формування матеріально-технічної бази українського кіновиробництва, аналізується вплив технічного оснащення кінофабрик на якісний показник випуску документальних та хронікальних фільмів у другій половині 1920-х рр. Усеукраїнське фотокіноуправління не отримувало необхідного державного фінансування на розвиток кіновиробництва й змушене було самостійно шукати можливість такого фінансування. Спочатку основні капіталовкладення направлялися на розвиток Одеської і почасти Ялтинської кінофабрик. З другої половини 1920-х рр. було прийняте рішення про

будівництво в Києві найбільшої в СРСР кінофабрики, і тому всі кошти направлялися на це будівництво.

**Ключові слова:** ВУФКУ, Український кінематограф, кінохроніка, Українська культура, Одеська кіностудія, Київська кіностудія.

**The relevance of the article.** The formation and development of the production of newsreels and documentary films in Ukraine in the 1920s remains one of the least researched pages in the history and development of Ukrainian cinema. That is why the relevance of this research lies, mainly, in filling a significant gap in the history of Ukrainian cinema. A detailed study of newsreels and documentary films production will reveal trends in the development of the Ukrainian film industry of the 1920s in the field of documentary films.

**Presentation of the main research material.** Analysis of publications about Ukrainian newsreels and documentary films on the pages of Ukrainian and Russian specialized magazines of the 1920s showed that the development of this type of cinematography went in several directions. We will list in chronological order the most significant innovations in Ukrainian film production at that time:

1. 1923. Organization of the release of “Chronicle of the VUFKU” at the Odesa film studio; opening of a special film laboratory for the production of newsreels in Kharkiv.

2. 1924. Start of production of the film magazine “Makhovyk”; approval of the thematic direction of the newsreel produced; beginning of the release of the film magazine “Film Week of “Makhovyk”” with an overview of life in the USSR and in the West.

3. 1925. Work on increasing the number of issues of film magazines, increasing of print run, increasing the number of the own correspondents; reformatting of “Film Week of “Makhovyk”” to “VUFKU Film Week”; opening at the Odesa film studio of a special department for production filming commissioned by trade and industrial enterprises and the opening of a newsreel department.

4. 1926. The newsreel department of the Odesa film studio begins the production of newsreels based on the principle of illustrated newspaper reporting.

5. 1927. Involvement of film fans and cameramen of various institutions in the filming of the newsreels; instead of review stories devoid of social

significance, the release of thematic newsreels is being established; all newsreels releases are included into the production plan of the VUFKU.

6. 1928. Inclusion into the issues of “Film Week” of foreign newsreels shot by the own correspondents; opening of a still library at the VUFKU.

After the reorganization of the All-Ukrainian Film Committee at the VUFKU, filming of newsreels and propaganda films continues in Ukraine. According to press reports, in March-April of 1923, 3000 meters of social and routine newsreels were shot, which were planned to be released as separate issues and film magazines, as well as three propaganda films: “In memory of the Great Communards”, “From darkness to light” (about the fight against illiteracy; directed by M. Saltykov), “The Story of May 1” (from the history of the revolutionary past of the West; directed by S. Tsenin) (*Agitatsionnaia rabota VUFKU*, 1923, p. 13).

Among the newsreels, the press most often highlighted: “Great October” (1922; edited film; directed by V. Hardin), “May 1 in Kharkiv”, “VII All-Ukrainian Party Conference in Kharkiv” (both 1923), “Mourning procession of the funeral of V. I. Lenin in Kharkiv” (1924) and others. However, a large part of newsreels was produced as part of film magazines: “Chronicle of the VUFKU” (1923), “Makhovyk” (1924–1925), “Film Week of “Makhovyk”” (1925), “VUFKU Film Week” (1925–1929), “Kinozhurnal” (1929–1931).

The Odesa film studio released a film magazine “Chronicle of the VUFKU”, which was modeled after the Moscow film magazine “Kinopravda”. “Chronicle of the VUFKU” was not a periodical and was published as material accumulated (nine issues were published). Along with newsreel stories, the magazine included feature and propaganda stories. The magazine was composed of different materials. Randomly. Thus, the eighth issue of “Chronicle of the VUFKU” is devoted to the start-up of blast furnace No. 3 at the Petrivskiyi plant in Katerynoslav. “In order to normalize the situation with the release of newsreels at the central administration of the VUFKU, a special film laboratory was equipped in Kharkiv. The laboratory was provided with all the necessary equipment to be able to shot current newsreels, as well as production and scientific films” (*Nove mystetstvo*, 1927, p. 18).

Documentary director and editor of the Odesa film studio L. Mohylevskiy wrote in a report to the directorate in 1924:

“Watching the production of newsreels in Ukraine and taking into account the crucial importance that the merger of the city and the countryside can play in the matter of information and enlightenment of the masses, one comes to the conclusion that a number of significant amendments must be made to the production of the newsreels and give it a certain direction” (TsDAVO(a), p. 343). Then, Mohylevskiy revealed his vision of newsreel production process. In particular, he noted:

“Newsreel film must be timely and topical, cover all events, achievements, show life as it is, so that the newsreel film edited on the day of the shooting with inscriptions went to Kharkiv; all the newsreel materials must be taken into account; filming of a newsreel should be carried out according to the previously approved plan; to introduce a group consisting of a newsreel manager, a cameraman and an administrator into the staff of the VUFKU board” (TsDAVO(a), p. 343). Mohylevskiy’s plans remained mostly unrealized.

After the VUFKU stopped production of the film magazine “Makhovyk” in 1925, it switched to the production of full-length feature films and established the publication of the film magazine “Film Week of “Makhovyk”” with an overview of life in the West and in the USSR (Chervonyi shliakh, 1925, p. 275). Cameramen D. Feldman and H. Drobin filmed several stories for the new film magazine: “Members of the English Labor Party in Odesa”, “The Congress of Soviets in the MASSR”, “Court proceedings of the Ksiadz”, (all — cameraman D. Feldman), “May Day” (cameramen: H. Drobin and D. Feldman), “Jewish Agricultural Colonies” (cameraman H. Drobin) (Zhovten Ukrainy, 1928b, p. 9). Cameraman J. Hudyma filmed the following scenes: “Workers at Odesa resorts”, “Restoration of the Lunacharskyi theater”, “Construction of mechanized warehouses in Odesa port” (Zhovtnevi sviata v fil’mi, 1927, p. 11). director S. Weiting-Radzynskiy was invited as the head of newsreel filming (selection of topics for reports, editing) (Kinoreportazh, 1925c, p. 11).

The VUFKU pays more and more attention to newsreels. In November of 1925, the film administration once again reconsidered the

approach to newsreel production. The spreading and development of the newsreel films was based on the purpose — to comprehensively cover the life of the USSR and the countries of the West. VUFKU increases the print run (instead of biweekly — weekly) and increases the number of the own correspondents. The new film magazine was modified and named “the VUFKU Film Week”. The film magazine included stories of local importance and about Western countries. These stories covered scientific and technical, political, economic events. The supply of foreign materials was carried out by the “Ufa” German film company (Kinokhronika, 1926, p. 24).

In Kyiv, Kharkiv, Katerynoslav, Odesa, and Donbas, the VUFKU opened offices with full time film reporters, and purchased film cameras from abroad for reporter shooting (Tsvintarenko, 1928, p. 11). 19 issues of this magazine were published at the beginning of January 1926, and 16 issues — in the summer of 1926.

According to L. Mohylevskiy, who headed the departments of production films and newsreels, they planned to cover Podillia and Odesa region. (In 1928, the Odesa film studio became a regional filming center for newsreel service. It covered Mykolaiv region, Kherson region, MASSR, Pervomaisk region and Zinoviiiev region). The life of the Red Army and Navy, construction, agriculture, sports, technology, export, import were the subjects of the stories. They were planned to be created according to the principle of an illustrated newspaper report with the involvement of institutions and enterprises, press, which understand the significance of newsreels. (In the next summer season, the newsreel department planned to film production, industry development, historical places and the most interesting landmarks of Ukraine) (Vsia Ukraina, 1926, p. 2).

“But newspapers and magazines are “raw” material. — H. Leichenko noted. — The viewer wants to see movement, life, and work in a vivid, imaginative newspaper called “Kinokhronika”. And we cannot bypass this demand in silence. It is enough to prove the vitality of this idea. Experience has shown that it fully justifies itself. <...> A small film of 5-6 parts and a newsreel should be included in each program” (Leychenko, 1926, p. 5).

As a result of the fact that the stories of “Makho-vyk” were a simple review of the events of the current day and were devoid of social significance, the VUFKU followed a new way of producing newsreels. The content of the magazine gave the viewer an opportunity to get acquainted with separate episodes and events, but there was no target setting here. Therefore, it was decided to abandon the coverage of only episodic events in magazines and to switch to thematic newsreels, that is, to release separate short films up to 300 meters long, devoted mainly to the production topic (Kinokhronika, 1927, p. 7). The newsreel department of the VUFKU switches to the thematic release of newsreel films in the form of separate independent cyclic films.

Until 1927, the content of newsreels was random. As a result of a range of subjective and objective reasons, the newsreel filming had to be carried out in very difficult conditions: the absence of a correspondent network in Ukraine, the filming equipment necessary for the work of a small staff of correspondents, the absence of experience in the production of newsreels, and most importantly, the catastrophic lack of professional workers and special laboratory, which would provide an opportunity to show the newsreel on the next day after the shooting.

The first issues of “Film Week” were marked by a large number of demonstrations and meetings filming and were quite boring. Public screenings showed that the working audience is least interested in demonstrations and meetings. The viewer was attracted by the display of achievements in the field of science, technology and sports in the USSR and abroad.

Starting from 1927, the production plans of the VUFKU included a weekly release of newsreel films (TsDAVO(a), p. 3) (on August 1, 1927, according to the thematic plan, the premiere issue of “Film Week” took place) (Etapy kinokhroniky, 1927, p. 12). The newsreel sub-department was included in the production department of the VUFKU and special instructions were developed. It stated that “several centers for filming newsreels are being created in the republic; correspondents must submit a monthly or biweekly approximate shooting plan to the VUFKU board; all newsreels, without exception, shot on the same day must be recorded in a special book” (TsDAVO(a), p. 350). According to the production

plans of the 1927/28 economic years, it was planned to release 52 issues of the film magazine, for which 46222 rubles were allocated (TsDAVO(b), p. 3), and to create a base for filming newsreel films in Kharkiv, since there were more events interesting for newsreel subjects in the capital of the Ukrainian SSR (Nove mystetstvo, 1927, p. 18).

During the October holidays, the newsreel department sent 24 cameramen to different cities and villages of Ukraine. Celebrations were filmed in Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Odesa, Mykolaiv, Vinnytsia, and Staline. Four cameramen worked simultaneously in Kharkiv, Odesa and Kyiv. Filmed footage of the holiday was soon shown in cinemas. Some filming was done from a flying machine (Zhovtnevi sviata v filmi, 1927, p. 14; Zhovtnevi sviata na ekrani, 1927, p. 33).

In the spring of 1928, the issues of “Film Week” regularly began to include foreign newsreels bought abroad or shot by the own correspondents in Paris, Berlin and New York: the Communist Party of Germany; elections to the Reichstag; speech of the Red Front soldiers; election campaign in France, etc. (I. Hudyma worked in New York; B. Tseitlin — in Berlin; E. Deslav — in Paris) (Kino-kory VUFKU za kordonom, 1928, p. 248).

Short newsreel film was devoted to certain important events: “10 years of the PC SPD in Ukraine”, the trip of the Shevchenko Committee to Kaniv and the solemn meeting of the Committee at the grave of Taras Shevchenko (cameraman D. Soda) (Podorozh Shevchenkiv's'koho Komitetu, 1928, p. 15), “Ten Years of the Soviet Medicine” (cameraman S. Cherniavskiy), “Ten Years of the Red Army” and others. (Khronika VUFKU, 1928c, p. 15).

From September 15, 1927 to January 15, 1928, the VUFKU published 16 issues of “Film Week”. But “Film week”, which was published four times a month during the entire existence of the VUFKU, did not always reach the audience. According to L. Mohylevskiy, “the head of the newsreel department of the VUFKU, the administrators of some cinemas, referring to the need for the maximum number of screenings of commercial films, did not release newsreels until they received a small film for demonstration. Sometimes, even in cinemas, newsreel films were shown between screenings, so that a large part of the audience actually did not see



it" (Khronika VUFKU, 1928a, p. 5). Mohylevskiy also reported a "chronic delay in showing newsreel films (almost three months after its release), so when "the VUFKU Film Weeks" No. 37 and No. 38 were shown in cinemas, the newsreel department had already released No. 48" (L., M, 1928, p. 4–5).

In February 1928, a meeting dedicated to the release of newsreel films was held at the regional department of the VUFKU. At this meeting, it was noted that the February issues of the "Film Week" have not yet been received, and Odesa received the newsreels of the October celebrations only in February. M. Kattsent, who headed the Odesa regional branch of the VUFKU, noted the need to show newsreels every week. "It is necessary that the filmed political and social moments were shown no later than a week — ten days from the moment of filming, the official highlighted. — In addition, it is necessary to regularly give weekly magazines to the club screen and for the village, so the VUFKU should send at least 4–5 copies. Short films of a production nature should be included as appendices in the newsreel films" (Gorsoviet o rabote VUFKU, 1927, p. 17).

"During the 1927/28 operating years, the VUFKU newsreel department, founded in October 1927" (Kul'chych, 1928, p. 1), produced 19 newsreel short films and 52 issues of "Film Week" with a total footage of more than 28 000 meters. 20 copies of each issue were distributed across Ukraine. "In June 1928, 2518 karbovanets were spent on the production of newsreels, and in July — 2700. And according to the Dnipropetrovsk branch of the VUFKU (one of the six), the profit from the distribution of newsreel films was 2695 karbovanets, and in July — 2677" (Kul'chych, 1928, p. 1).

In 1928, the VUFKU introduced several innovations in the process of newsreels filming. According to press reports, "the newsreel department of the Odesa film studio released a film album in two parts in order to make it easier for directors to select actors. In the first part, photos of the actors were placed without indicating their surnames and characteristics, and in the second one — a list of films where the actor was shot, reviews of the directors, etc. To save costs and time for film production, the department began to systematize the filming of unbiased shots: the sea,

landscapes, etc., which can be used in various films" (Hrupa khroniky ta vyrobnychoho filmu, 1928, p. 17). The press also reported "on the VUFKU, the first film still library in the USSR based on the example of American film studios. According to the Management of the VUFKU, the collected and systematized archive newsreel material over the past two decades has gained enormous historical value and significance, and will also play a significant role in the rationalization of film production" (Persha v SRSR fil'mkadrotek, 1928, p. 137). "The catalogue of the still library consisted of cardboard sheets with small windows-frames for viewing through the aperture and the name of the event, time and place of filming, content, film quality, cameraman's last name, footage length" (L-ov, 1928, p. 12).

Simultaneously with the implementation of the still library, the VUFKU is trying to create a film chronicle, that is, to establish the release of full-length edited films based on archival newsreel material. From the beginning of March 1928, the press began to report that the VUFKU was finishing editing a full-length documentary film, which included events "from the imperialist war to the days of peaceful construction in Ukraine." The director and editor of the picture was L. Mohylevskiy, who already had experience in similar work. Assistant Ya. Habovych and editor A. Livodarov worked on the film "Documents of the Era" ("October in Ukraine") together with Mohylevskiy (Zhovten' Ukrainy, 1928a, p. 13; Zhovten' Ukrainy, 1928b, p. 13). As the author stated:

"The purpose of the film "Documents of the Era" is to identify, systematize and logically connect only the real historical film documents related to the history of the class struggle in Ukraine" (Mohylevskiy, 1928, p. 2).

The success in the RSFSR of the edited films "The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty", edited from the tsarist chronicle (1927, directed by E. Shub) and "The Great Way" (1927, directed by E. Shub), released by Radkino on the anniversary of the October Revolution, prompted the VUFKU to release the "Documents of the era" film. Although, we should note that the first edited film in the USSR was released in Ukraine ("The Great October", 1922, 4 parts; directed by V. Hardin), which was devoted to the fifth anniversary of the October Revolution.

As Mohylevskiy reported, “work on the picture lasted about eight months. A huge number of old newsreels were watched. Footage of Lenin, Trotsky, Petliura, Germans in Ukraine, entry of Austro-German troops into Odesa, the Central Rada, etc. were discovered. A large part of the newsreels was filmed in Kyiv. A significant part of the newsreel materials, which was included in the film, was shot by cameramen of the political departments in the first years of the revolution, and was kept in Moscow, as well as in other regions of the USSR and abroad” (Tsvintarenko, 1928, p. 3).

“The VUFKU took measures to purchase newsreels shot in Ukraine in the period of 1917–1921. The newsreel film “The Directorate of Ukraine in Kyiv” (negative) was purchased from one of the cameramen 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 newsreel film “Skoropadskiy”, “Entry of the Directorate in Kyiv”, “Kerenskiy in Kyiv”, “Petliura’s meeting with the clergy”. Through the correspondence between German film organizations and cameramen working in Ukraine, frames of the newsreel films “Proclamation of the Universal”, “Banquet in honor of Hetman”, “Entry of the whites to Kyiv” were acquired (Mohylevskiy, 1928, p. 2).

A very thorough search for film plots (despite having the reliable information of their availability) did not yield results. A significant number of newsreels were never found: “Execution of Boris Donsky”, “Funeral of Eichhorn”, “Explosion in Zvirinka”. The edited film consisted of eight parts:

1. Footage from the period of the First World War.
2. Petrograd.
3. Parade of the Austro-German and Petliura troops on the Sofia Square in Kyiv.
4. Arrival of S. Petliura in Kyiv on December 19, 1918.
5. Interventionists load looted grain onto steamships in one of the ports on the Black Sea.
6. The proletariat of Ukraine faced a new front of struggle.

7. Workers and peasants, leaving their bayonets, took on science.
8. The victories of the first Soviet Republic in the world ignited the fire of revolutionary enthusiasm of the proletariat of other countries” (Myslavskiy, 2016, p. 368–370).

**Conclusions.** In the early 1920s, the Ukrainian republic was recovering from the consequences of the Soviet-Ukrainian war. At that time, the film production base was also in a very deplorable condition. In such conditions, it was incredibly difficult to establish the own film production. However, gradually the situation begins to normalize. With the introduction of film production bases in Yalta, Odesa, and later in Kyiv, it became possible to create new film groups and establish relatively stable film shootings.

But in addition to the technical problems related to the acute shortage of equipment and film, there was an acute shortage of qualified cameramen, screenwriters and directors. In difficult economic conditions, the VUFKU had to solve both technical and creative problems. At the same time, the Ukrainian film department managed to establish continuous production of documentaries and newsreels. However, the artistic quality of documentary films was still at a low level.

Qualitative improvement of Ukrainian documentary film directing began only in 1928–1929, after the transfer from Radkino to the VUFKU of some members of the Cine-Eye creative group (Dzyha Vertov, his wife Ye. Svilova and his brother M. Kaufman). It was at this time when their best films were released — “The Eleventh One”, “The Man with a Film Camera”, “Spring” ... However, the rise of Ukrainian documentary cinema was not long. With the introduction in the 1930s of the system of centralization of cinematography and subordination of Ukrainian film production to a single center in Moscow, Ukrainian cinematography lost its national identity and merged into the general stream of propaganda film production of the USSR.

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