

A Canadian Film Note From Japan

Motion picture films have become increasingly important in the programme of making Canada better known in many parts of the world. Canadian documentary films, produced mainly by the National Film Board, are lent to, or screened for, interested groups in 50 foreign countries by Canadian diplomatic, consular and trade posts abroad. During 1951 more than four million people have seen Canadian films provided through our posts. The audiences have included such diverse groups as agriculture students in Karachi, doctors and psychologists in Mexico City, art students in San Francisco, factory workers in Naples and school children in Malaya.

Most showings are held in class-rooms or lecture-halls; occasionally they take place in less conventional surroundings. A recent report of film activities from the Canadian Liaison Mission in Tokyo vividly describes a series of screenings of Canadian films held for the first time in one of the poorer districts of the Japanese capital during the spring and summer of 1951. It says in part:

I should like to make some mention of the efforts of a Japanese member of our staff, Mr. K. Tasho, to increase the number of his fellow nationals who see our films. For three months now Mr. Tasho has been a regular borrower of our films and projection equipment for use in the Tokyo ward where he lives. One night one of our officers went out to see his show.

The theatre consisted of a wide cement blind alley, empty of seats. Projection equipment was carefully mounted on a wagon. The electricity for the machine came from a small dance hall which suspended its operations during the show. The audience was as general as it could be, the ratio of children to adults being about 5 to 2. The alley was packed and indeed most of the street which flanked it. Two policemen kept the street open for traffic. Mr. Tasho had had to obtain special police permission to hold his outdoor meetings but received full co-operation from members of the force at every show.

Although the sound track must have been unintelligible to the great majority of those present the audience was extraordinarily silent through the proceedings. During the intermissions Mr. Tasho gave a brief résumé in Japanese of what the next film to be shown was about. The meeting lasted more than two hours. During the latter part of the programme our officer suggested that perhaps if the performance were to continue, the interest in it of the standing audience might decline precipitately. Thereafter before each film was screened the audience was asked if they wanted to see another, and they always did. If anyone present did not, he was neither heard nor observed leaving, and the exhibition ceased when the supply of films ran out.

The people of Mr. Tasho's ward are very poor. Few of them could often afford to see films which are commercially distributed and our staff member has, through his efforts this summer, added much to their enjoyment. There can be no doubt of the good-will value of films distributed here. The headman of the ward has personally visited our office to thank us on behalf of all ward residents who saw the films.