

## **Mass-Observation File Report 524**

### **MEMO ON NEWSREELS**

LE 11.12.40

The period under review (23.10.40 to 7.12.40) contains no particularly significant development in newsreels. The big news item, of the period — the Italian retreat in Greece — has provided only library sequences of Greek soldiers and one speech by King George of Greece, but press as well as newsreels have been given few photographs of these engagements. On the whole, the reels have maintained their policy of giving what news there is, and making no attempt to introduce freshness. For example:

- South Africa's Home Guard
- Binoculars Wanted
- Destination Unknown (Queen Elizabeth leaving New York)
- Have You Posted Your Christmas Mail (trailer)
- Mosquito Navy in Action (inland water patrol)
- It's in the Air (U.S. Air Show, Canadian Air Battle, King at Bomber Station)
- War Weapons Week in Glasgow
- More 'Jervis Bay' ships home
- The Army prepares for Christmas
- Army Motor Cyclists show their prowess
- Indian Contingents Are Expert with Mules
- Ethiopian Troops Join British Forces
- South African Troops Man Front Line
- African Air Force Raid with German Planes
- Taranto — the Proof (stills)

(B.M.N. 28.11.40)

Of the 33 newsreels, observed in the period under review, no fewer than 23 included shots of Dominion troops or Dominion news; South African Home Guard, mentioned above, is an example, or the Indian troops with mules. Air raid damage is another constant factor, and shots of bombed houses occurred in over half the reels, though in only two cases (an actual rescue from a damaged house, and shots of Coventry) could the shots be said to have real news value.

To this general policy of short, bitty items, there have been three notable exceptions in the period. In the Gaumont reel released 28.11.40 nearly four minutes of an eight minute newsreel was devoted to shots of Lloyds. This was almost entirely documentary, though a concession to 'news' was made in a detailed description of how business carries on underground in an air raid. Though the sequence seemed a little too long for the audience, it at first created a very high degree of favourable comment, and it seems reasonable to assume that further similar items would also be popular. It has always been found that sequences containing, information not usually available to the public (cf the control room scenes of THE LION HAS WINGS, and the convoy sequence CONVOY) are always highly popular.

In the Paramount reel, released 4.11.40, both items were of unusual interest. The first was taken by a cameraman who had left for Dakar with General de Gaulle. The general was seen on board, the deputation was seen leaving for the shore, and then returning with one of the party wounded. De Gaulle receives the news and so on. Except for a few action shots of Finland and of France and occasional naval actions taken by Royal Navy officers, there has been hardly any first hand news since the beginning of the war. It is this that makes this item so significant and very Popular with the audience

The other item in the same news was called 'Design for Living' and showed a day in the life of a Londoner; people living in shelters because their homes have gone; Father Groser and other unofficial helpers; a man trying to hitchhike, gives the right sign, and then, because the car won't stop, changes the gesture to two fingers up; a daylight raid, casualties being removed from a wrecked house; people going back to shelters at night, and some leaving in coaches for a night's rest in the country. There was nothing very original in this item and much of the ground had already been covered by BRITAIN CAN TAKE IT, but it was well moulded together and it was given an excellent reception; the laugh when the attempting hitch-hiker changed his sign was the loudest that inv has ever heard in a newsreel, lasting long enough to drown much of the subsequent commentary.

These three items have been described in some detail because they are the only ones observed which have created real interest in the audience. On the whole, there is every evidence that the newsreels are still losing Ground with the public.

### **Response to subject matter**

In the period under review:

|                         |                          |            |       |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------|-------|
| The Army has been shown | 8 times and applauded on | 1 occasion | (12%) |
| Navy                    | 18                       | 10         | (56%) |
| RAF                     | 15                       | 2          | (14%) |

In the previous report (7.10.40) it was found that all three forces were applauded on roughly 45% of their appearances, though the navy was most frequently seen. Hitherto the navy had always been the most popular service. Now the Navy has increased its popularity considerably while the other services have lost a great deal of Ground. The Army is passing through another period of waiting and it is understandable that soldiers should not for the moment be regarded as heroes, but among the unapplauded shots of the Air Force was one of a squadron which had brought down 600 planes; other heroic deeds have also been shown but not clapped. The main applause points for the Navy were the Jervis Bay episode and the Taranto incident.

Dominion troops, once applauded on 25% of their appearances, have been seen 13 times and applauded only once, and that very slightly. Free Allied troops, also once popular, have not been applauded at all, except for the Greeks, clapped on 2 out of 3 appearances. Inv does not think this is due to any sort of hostility but simply — as with the Royal Family at the beginning of the war — to monotony. Each shot of Dominion or Allied troops is of them on parade or manoeuvre and is very similar to all previous shots. The audience thus soon loses interest.

Shots of air raid damage have been included in nearly half the observed newsreels. The reaction to these is noticeably different in London and the provinces, the first time that any such variation has been noticed. In London the shots have been received in rather an uninterested silence; the only shot that has caused adverse comment was where injured people were seen being brought out of a damaged house creating a personal touch. In the provinces, however, reports come mainly from Watford, Oxford, and Stockport, all fairly undamaged areas — there has been a high degree of comment at these shots, and some signs of horror.

Prisoners have been seen on three occasions; twice there was no response, once there was laughter at a particularly ugly German. On no occasion has there been any hissing, or signs of objection.

### **Response to personalities**

|                        |                        |             |       |
|------------------------|------------------------|-------------|-------|
| The King has been seen | 12 times and applauded | 2 occasions | (17%) |
| Queen                  | 7                      | 1           | (14%) |
| Churchill              | 4                      | 2           | (50%) |

These figures indicate that the King has lost the great popularity he gained between May and September 1940, though he is still as well applauded as he was between the outbreak of war and the beginning of serious fighting in May. The Queen is still as popular as in the preceding period, but not as much as at the beginning of the war when she was applauded on 27% of her appearances.

The only other member of the Royal Family seen during the period is the Princess Elizabeth on the occasion of her broadcast speech. On both occasions when she was seen she was loudly clapped.

Churchill is now less often seen and less often clapped though he is still by far the most popular personality in the newsreels. Sinclair has been seen twice, applauded on neither occasion, Eden has been seen once with no applause. Kingsley Wood and Halifax, observed with an Oxford audience, were both booed; apparently the booing came only from undergraduates.

The funeral of Neville Chamberlain was twice observed once there was no response at all, once there were one or two claps, quickly stifled, as if a funeral was not the right thing to applaud.

The loudest applause for any personality seen during the period was to Joseph Kennedy, making his farewell speech in this country in which he said that the world would no longer praise Spartan courage but British courage. This was observed four times, and three occasions was loudly applauded, once for 6 seconds. Roosevelt was seen twice, was applauded once.

Of foreign statesmen, Benes was been seen twice and not applauded. The King of Greece, making a speech, was applauded. General de Gaulle, who, before Dakar, had been clapped on 100% of his appearances, has been seen once and not applauded. Hitler and Mussolini have only been shown in purposely comic shots which caused a good laughter response.

### **General conclusions**

The newsreels have not made many attempts to make the best even of the scanty material at their service, and seem to have lost a little more of their popularity. Gaps are filled almost always by shots from the Dominions or of Dominion troops, and this has resulted in less interest in the Dominions.

The Navy still maintains its popularity but the Army and Air Force have both lost ground. The King and Queen are both less popular than in earlier periods, so — slightly — is Winston Churchill. The most popular figure seen was Mr Joseph Kennedy.