

Margarita Barskaia and the emergence of Soviet children's cinema

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Abstract

Margarita Barskaia was the wife of Petr Chardynin – the legendary film-maker of pre-Revolutionary cinema, and a pioneer of children's cinema. This cluster of documents brings together articles written by Barskaia for the leading newspapers of the time, as well as letters from her private archive, in which she tries to move forward the formation of a children's film studio. The cluster contains an article by Natalia Riabchikova about the history of films for children in the Soviet Union, followed by articles from 1929, which highlight the need for a cinema for children and Barskaia's involvement in this debate. Natalia Miloserdova offers a survey of Barskaia's life and her career, which is followed by two letters from the private archive of Margarita Barskaia, which show her involvement in the formation of the children's studio at the highest level. In all her endeavours, she pleads for the formation of a production unit, not a large studio – which is what would happen with the establishment of Soiuzdetfil'm in 1936. Finally, this cluster presents some reviews of Barskaia's three films: Who's More Important, What's More Necessary, an agitational film that has only recently been identified as Barskaia's first film; Nikolai Izvolov describes how the film was identified. Lev Kassil's review of Torn Boots is indicative of the high praise that Barskaia received for her work. A report on the shooting of Father and Son from 1936 is also highly positive of Barskaia's methods, while the review of the same film, published in May 1937, reflects the campaign against Barskaia that would destroy her career and her life.

Keywords

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Introduction

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Margarita Barskaia's life makes not only for a phenomenally interesting biography, as Natalia Miloserdova sketches out below: an insignificant actress from Baku, who became the wife of Petr Chardynin – the legendary film-maker of pre-Revolutionary cinema – and a pioneer of children's cinema, and who would bring about her own fall from grace with the system as mistress of Karl Radek (1885–1939), who was exposed in the show

trial of January 1937. After the trial, Barskaia's films were shelved, she was banned from film-making and committed suicide only two months after Radek was killed in a labour camp.

This cluster of documents brings together articles written by Barskaia and published in the leading newspapers of the time, as well as letters from her private archive, in which she tries to move forward the formation of a children's film studio. Official documents provide evidence for the decisive role she played in the establishment of the studio Soiuzdetfil'm – the world's first film studio for children's films.

First, Natalia Riabchikova covers in her article the history of films for children in the Soviet Union. This text is followed by some articles published in 1929, which highlight the need for a cinema for children and Barskaia's involvement in this debate. In 'A Smile for the Children' she emphasizes the importance of laughter – an issue of huge importance for her first film, *Who's More Important, What's More Necessary* (*Kto vazhnee, chto nuzhnee*, 1930); she calls for the establishment of a professional children's cinema, for training and premises, and for the recognition of children's cinema. In this quest she has the full backing of the Directorate for Social Education, Glavsotsvos.

Second, Natalia Miloserdova explores Barskaia's life and her career. Two letters, published here with kind permission of Dmitrii Barskii, who keeps the archive of Margarita Barskaia as gathered by her sister Evgeniia, show her involvement, at top level, in the formation of the children's studio. Barskaia and the head of film production, Boris Shumiatskii, both pulled the strings in the formation of the studio. Barskaia actively promoted the art of films for children on the one hand, and supported the official agenda for the formation of a children's studio to produce films that would educate the new Soviet man on the other. In all her endeavours, she pleads for the formation of a production unit, not a large studio – which is what would happen with the establishment of Soiuzdetfil'm in 1936, thus centralizing the production of children's films in analogy to the formation of Soiuzmultfil'm in the same year (and stifling artistic and creative conditions). From the numerous descriptions of Barskaia's working methods, it is clear that she was extremely gifted in her work with children, enticing them with sweets, listening to their pleas and moving the camera along with their own games rather than forcing them to act (Barskaia 1935a and 1935b). She was aware of the pioneering nature of her work and shared her experiences generously:

Every director of a children's film is a pioneer of new work methods. There is no systematized, generalized method for working with children. It is impossible to give a recipe of how to make a film with children; one can merely share experiences and methods that have been tested so that future generations of film-makers don't have to start from scratch but can learn by our experience.

(Barskaia 1935a)

Third, this cluster presents some reviews of Barskaia's three films. The first, *Who's More Important*, is an agitational film that has only recently been identified as Barskaia's first film. Nikolai Izvolov describes how the

film was identified – partly as a result of enquiries relating to the present publication. The review by the writer Lev Kassil' of the film *Torn Boots* is indicative of the high praise that Barskaia received for her work. The report on the shooting of *Father and Son* from 1936 is also highly positive of Barskaia's methods, while the review of the same film, published in May 1937, reflects the campaign against Barskaia following the arrest and trial of her friend and supporter, Karl Radek.

1. Children's cinema in the 1920s

Children's cinema in the Soviet Union before 1936

Natalia Riabchikova, Film Institute VGIK, Moscow

By the early 1900s teachers and cinema enthusiasts in different countries had begun to acknowledge the educational function of cinema, apart from its value as an entertainment. In 1908 an article in the Russian film magazine *Ciné-Phono* (*Sine-fono*) stated: 'The cinematograph has mastered such a wide range of human knowledge that now it may be a great help in the mindful upbringing of a child' (Diadia Misha 1908: 2).

Teachers were the first to become interested in the possible application of cinema as a visual aid in education. Then, the organizers of children's dance parties and the owners of film theatres began to include cinema 'matinées' for children in their programmes. Films from the existing repertoire were chosen to fit a child's perception. That is, genres and themes that no longer appealed so much to grown-ups were considered quite suitable and even useful for children. This included early travel films and comedies, while more 'mature' audiences enjoyed melodramas and *féeries*. As one of *Ciné-Phono*'s authors (most probably, Moisei Aleinikov) wrote earlier the same year, 'a picture of scientific substance, while provoking the interest of the whole audience, especially amazes the less-developed imagination of undereducated viewers and children' (Al-v 1908: 3).

This differentiation became possible only after the accumulation of a certain number of films on the market that no longer had the appeal of novelty but could still be re-used for non-commercial purposes (with a view of publicity effect or even some profit, as tickets for matinées were sold at a reduced price). It seems that right from the start, schooling and commerce went hand in hand in forming the so-called 'school cinematograph'.

It was in that period when the specialized press for the first time gave voice to the ideas of building special film theatres for children as well as of supplementing screenings with lectures and explanations. Moreover, it was thought advisable to put together a special repertoire of films that would not be selected from the general repertoire but shot specifically for the education of children (Diadia Misha 1908: 3; Lelikov 1908: 2).

After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 the educational and instructional functions of cinema were again extended to the whole mass of film-viewers and combined with the function of propaganda. Now every Soviet filmgoer, like a child, had to be protected from bad influences and

subjected to 'favourable' ones. It is not by accident that the first Soviet film organization was formed under the auspices of Nadezhda Krupskaya at the Department of Extracurricular Activities of the State Commission on People's Education (Vneshkol'nyi otdel gosudarstvennoi komissii po narodnomu prosveshcheniiu). A couple of years later the Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros) was put in charge of the whole film industry. Naturally, the mass of uneducated viewers was not homogeneous. The most progressive were, according to Marx's theory, heavy industry workers living in big cities. Rural people were considered far less advanced and put on approximately the same level as children. Films were to be adapted differently for each category of viewers. For instance, lecturers were an indispensable part of *kinopredvizhki* (mobile film projection units), operating in Soviet villages. Issues of rural film distribution and exhibition and problems of cinema for children were raised in turn in the press, though peasant viewers were at the time more important for the regime than children. Due to the general stagnation in film production, in both cases it was once again more of a question of adapting (i.e. selection and re-editing) the existing films to the needs of these groups than a question of creating a new repertoire. In 1918 only one feature film (of a total of six) was made for children by state film organizations, and in 1919 the figure was 4 out of 56 films. In 1920 a further children's film was shot. During the next two years there were none (Paramonova 1973: 291–92).

Then, just like fifteen years earlier, the question of employing cinema as a visual aid specifically in school education was raised once again. After the Pioneers's Organization was formed in 1922, a conference was held among film workers and the so-called *krasnaia professura* (red professorate) in Petrograd. As a result the Scientific Cinematograph (Nauchnyi kinematograf) company was formed at the state studio Sevzapkino. The initiative was followed by others and by the end of the decade there was a notable growth in the number of film projector units installed in schools. In 1927–28 there were 100 units, in 1928–29 around 800, and 15,000 were planned to be installed by the end of the first five-year-plan period in 1933 (Miloserdova 2006: 9–10). By the beginning of the 1930s educational films were mostly made at the Soiuztekhfilm studio together with films on military training and agricultural instruction.

When Soviet film production was once again able to focus on children, it turned out that little filmgoers, just like the rest of the audience, preferred Chaplin's comedies and the stunt extravaganzas of Harry Piel and Douglas Fairbanks to educational films, and with a vengeance. Though attempts were made to restrict exhibition of films and introduce a rating system, in most cases it did not work and children could also quite freely watch every sort of German and American melodramas that flooded the Soviet film market during the NEP years.

The influence of those 'bourgeois' films was not always considered dangerous. There were people who thought children did not require a special repertoire.

It's time to treat kids more sensibly. During the last decade they've lost the habit of eating semolina. They were all born in the tough years of war and

revolution; they were raised on rye bread and took from it their rye toughness and tenacious mind. A child is not a hothouse flower hidden from life by hothouse windows anymore. He may not understand something like *The White Moth* (it won't seem interesting enough for him), but Mary Pickford is accessible to a child, Douglas is intelligible and dear to his heart.

(Gaidovskii 1925: 11)

Perhaps it was even more reasonable to re-edit films made for general release. The idea popped up several times over the two decades. The director Petr Chardynin, Margarita Barskaia's husband, in 1926 simultaneously shot two variants of his film about the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko. One was entitled *Taras Shevchenko* and the other – *The Life of Taras (Tarasova zhizn')* or *The Little Taras (Malen'kii Taras)*. Having made *The Circus (Tsirk, 1936)* Grigorii Aleksandrov edited a short-length film for younger viewers entitled *Our Circus (Nash tsirk)*. In 1935, Sergei Eisenstein devised a 'children's variant' of *The Bezhin Meadow (Bezhin Lug)*.

In the end, the opposite point of view won the upper hand, more for political and social than for aesthetic reasons. A special repertoire for children was considered indispensable for raising future Soviet citizens, and adventure films (mostly foreign) were deemed a harmful, detrimental and corrupting influence. The main catalyst for the start of film production for children and about children was juvenile delinquency. In the middle of the 1920s the so-called *besprizorniki*, homeless children aged 10–15 years old, left without care of their parents, school or state, were not only a real criminal threat and an eyesore for the budding Soviet state, but they also constituted a considerable percentage of film viewers. Moreover, reports published in the film press proved that cinema had contributed to their downfall. For instance, a survey carried out in one of the asylums for under-age criminals showed that 30 per cent of them had decided to commit a crime after having seen a film (Potemkin 1926: 3). Protecting children from the harmful influence of films was, of course, not only imperative for fighting juvenile delinquency. 'A need for children's cinema grows if only for the fact that, having seen Harry Piel, homeless kids won't even hear of bugs and beetles that the school will try to get them interested in', wrote the popular poet and screenwriter Nikolai Aseev (Aseev 1926: 3).

A series of surveys was carried out, mostly under the auspices of ARK (Association of Revolutionary Cinematography) but had little to no influence on real production. The tradition of film matinées was resumed, but without any system or centralized management. The same was the case for the actual production of films for children – it was carried out without any real plan, quite sporadically, at all Soviet film studios.

What was still vague was the substance of juvenile cinema itself. Technically it included educational films and animation, but they were evolving independently of each other. Then there was a question of genres and subjects. 'Harmful' films were to be got rid of. Not only adventure films about noble criminals went under this heading; it also included 'morally outdated' fairy tales and *féeries*. 'Old children's comedies with tricks, stunts, fights, insults, all the magic wands, magic flights, dead people – all this is useless junk for our kids', proclaimed Ivan Potemkin in the editorial for the

magazine *Soviet Screen* (*Sovetskii ekran*) on 16 March 1926 (Potemkin 1926: 3). The screen adaptation of an old Russian folk tale *Father Frost* (*Morozko*) made by Iurii Zheliabuzhskii in 1924 became the last fairy tale to be filmed for several years to come (Miloserdova 2006: 11).

Still, entertainment could stay – as long as it was based on education and propaganda. ‘In the task of education and development of children’s psyche, cinema should not play the part of an old nanny, sprinkling them with the holy water of ideology, but the part of a skilful storyteller that can strike the great susceptibility and lively imagination of a child’, argued Aseev (1926: 3). New films had to be up to date and ideologically correct. And the first answer to this task was the same that raised the question itself – *besprizorniki*. Starting from 1924 films about homeless children were made in a multitude of genres: comedies (e.g. *A Bunch of Rascals* (*Teplaiia kompaniia*, Mur, 1924)), adventures (*Mitka, Petka and Chamberlain* (*Mit’ka, Pet’ka i Chemberlen*, Segel’, 1927)) and dramas (*The Children of Korova* (*Koroviny deti*, Kapchinskii, 1927)). This gave film-makers an opportunity to show contemporary characters in contemporary settings and to speak about the problems of contemporary Soviet society while using picturesque types and sets to the greatest advantage of popular genres. As for ideology, they could either show the miserable existence of child workers in pre-Revolutionary Russia (like in *The Children of Korova*), thus implying the difference between ‘then’ and ‘now’, or they could show a slow reform of juvenile delinquents under the beneficial influence of the new society, like in *The Golden Honey* (*Zolotoi med*, Bersenev, Petrov, 1928).

The unorganized mass of sly, corrupted and hard-to-reform delinquents was opposed to the disciplined groups, such as pioneers, who were conscientious, ingenious and vigilant. Their life and activities were the second major topic of the children’s films of the 1920s and 1930s, from *The Island of Young Pioneers* (*Ostrov iunykh pionerov*, Gan, 1924) and *Tanka the Bar Girl* (*Tan’ka-traktirshchitsa*, Svetozarov, 1928) to *The Happy Young Generation* (*Schastlivaia smena*, Iuren’ev, 1936) and *Timur and His Team* (*Timur i ego komanda*, Razumnyi, 1940).

The final touch to the group of films about *besprizorniki* was the first Soviet sound film, *A Start in Life* (*Putevka v zhizn’*, Ekk, 1931). By 1931 its subject matter was already somewhat obsolete (the action was set in 1923), and this fact had curious consequences. Thanks to cinema, Soviet children once again picked up dirty songs, foul language and bad manners of homeless kids, and teachers had a hard time making them drop this behaviour (Miloserdova 2006: 30). Yet while *A Start in Life* was about children, it was not made specifically for children (just like an earlier example of a juvenile favourite, *The Red Imps* (*Krasnye d’iavoliata*, Perestiani, 1923)). Moreover, in the middle of the decade the most popular film among children was *Chapaev* (G.Vasil’ev, S.Vasil’ev, 1935), not designed for kids at all. The reason was quite clear. After the brief surge of children’s cinema in the late 1920s, the quality and quantity of films diminished again, mostly due to economic and technical reasons. The task of implementing sound technology and a five-year plan at the same time removed the question of children’s cinema from the list of top priority issues. Most of the industry’s artistic forces and material means were used in mastering sound. Directors and other crew members working on films

for children were paid considerably less than film-makers dealing with 'grown-ups'. There was only limited distribution and little advertising for such films. Though visibly the number of films made for children rose in the early 1930s, it was because more of them now were short-length (Angarov 2005: 288).

Only in the middle of the decade did attention once again turn to children's cinema. At that time educational goals could finally be put before commercial gain. During the final steps of centralizing its control over film production and distribution, the state, now the sole and highest authority on films, could support this costly and unprofitable production. Children's cinema could now be viewed not as a politically indispensable item of expenses but as an object of pride. An article in the main cinematographic newspaper *Kino (Cinema)* expressed the prevailing point of view.

Of course, a development of this affair is to a certain extent limited by its unprofitability: cinema tickets for children cost 25 kopecks. But this is precisely what distinguishes the Soviet cinema from foreign cinema. Our film organizations, owned by the state, can and must go for a certain loss in order to cater for children. In our country cinema is a great means of socialistic education. Juvenile cinema can be equalled to school in this respect. And we don't think about commercial 'efficiency' of schools!

(Palei 1935: 3)

The logical way of getting the production of films for children under full and centralized control of the state was to create a special production unit that could replace the sporadic activity of other film studios in this area. The decision was made to this effect in the spring of 1935. But the newly formed Moscow Studio for Children's Films (*Moskovskaia studiia detskikh fil'mov*) remained on paper only. At the same time, special departments were formed at other studios, including *Mosfil'm*. Yet often it meant nothing more than issuing an order and perhaps providing a room at one of the existing studios (this was the case of the experimental studio that was created at *Mosfil'm* under the management of Margarita Barskaia). This situation dragged on for a year; meanwhile festivals of children's films were frantically organized all over the country. While according to ambitious plans of cinema authorities, including Boris Shumiatskii, the newly appointed head of the Main Directorate for the Cinema and Photographic Industry (GUKF, *Glavnoe upravlenie kino-foto-promyshlennosti*) 25 per cent of the annual production was to be comprised of children's cinema in the future (Shumiatskii 2005: 284), real production figures could not possibly reach this level at the current state of organization. This was probably the main reason why the decision was finally taken at the highest level. On 4 June 1936 the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party resolved to liquidate the last relatively independent film studio, *Mezhrabpomfil'm*, and ordered GUKF to organize a children's film studio on its basis in one month's time – instead of building a new studio for that purpose. The order was carried out promptly and on 13 June the Studio for Feature Films for Children and Youth (*Studiia khudozhestvennykh fil'mov dlia detei i iunoshestva*) *Soiuzdetfil'm* was formed.

Documents

Translated by Jamie Miller

Margarita Chardynina-Barskaia, 'A Smile for the Children!', *Kino*, 13 August 1929

On her return from Russia to America, Mary Pickford declared in interviews: 'This is a country where nobody smiles.'

Let us suppose that she is exaggerating somewhat. But it is worth thinking about the impressions of an outsider. In reality, we have a lot of gloom and a particularly striking seriousness, which often turns to tedium. Of course, during the years of civil war and collapse when our own and others' blood spilled like a river, we were not up to cheerfulness and smiles.

But even before the Civil War, Russia had no reason to smile. A person never feels cheerful under the lash, and people do not laugh out of fear or rejoice in starvation.

Those dark times have irrevocably passed ... We have entered a period of peaceful construction, when we need no longer look over our shoulder. The time has come to think about the meaning of a smile and the culture of laughter.

Laughter not only has a great physiological significance, but also huge social importance as a means of uniting a collective, raising the spirit and affirming life, invigorating and joyous.

He who smiles is cheerful. Those who are very cheerful laugh, and the man who rejoices in life, overflowing beyond measure, roars with laughter.

Laughter is a kind of sixth sense, and people devoid of a sense of humour and a wish for merriment are very heavy going and tedious. It is not without reason that the real, inveterate bureaucrat and civil servant with pencil-pushing mentalities rarely laugh.

Laughter is a social weapon, for nobody laughs alone. On the contrary, laughter is directly proportional to the mass: the more people are together, the more cheerful and joyful they are.

Sport is a serious pursuit, but to engage in it collectively is fun!

We often use laughter as a sharp weapon to make a scathing commentary on social harm and defects. It is vital to do that, but not only that.

Laughter should help build the new life, for the cheerful person quicker perceives the idea of a good future and is carried away by the rapid flow of collective creative work which, ultimately, has the aim of creating a smiling humanity.

That is why we think that one of the main tasks of Soviet cinema is to adorn everyday construction work with laughter and joy.

Film art is for the millions of workers and it can best of all carry out this mission.

Each film should be cheerful and fresh. We do not think, of course, that a film about melioration should be strongly comical, but it is crucial to present it in a cheerful form. You might say that this is difficult ... yes, it is not so easy, but if Eisenstein and Aleksandrov, with the help of porcelain figurines, could force the spectator to feel joyous when looking at pig's carcasses, then why couldn't we do something fresh on the theme of melioration, or on the

extraction of oil? Why not force the peasant to laugh out of pleasure when a tractor appears on the screen? This is not so easy, but through persistent work it is possible. Yet the director should not frown when he makes a film, or make himself out to be a 'genius' who considers it inappropriate to laugh while solving 'global problems'.

We need to learn to direct laughter and merriment along a particular course and to regulate it with a specific aim in mind.

If a cheerful film is necessary for an adult, it is three times as necessary for young people, and absolutely irreplaceable for a children's audience.

The educational-school film has the task of helping to master a serious curriculum: 'Not everyone pursues knowledge, but everyone pursues merriment!' This slogan needs to serve as a stimulus. With this bait we need to reel in the passive brain, unable and unwilling to learn.

If schoolchildren are yawning during a lesson, the lesson is unlikely to be mastered.

Cinema should come to the aid of the school and infuse a fresh spirit into teaching. An essential dose of laughter and merriment should be used through cinema as a method of teaching.

Apart from the purely official role, laughter in school can have a large independent significance. It is precisely through children that it is easiest to educate a merry, cheerful generation; to teach them how to be joyous and how to learn reading and writing and clean their teeth.

If, in Mary Pickford's opinion, America is a country where everybody smiles, then the USSR has the right to laugh because we are climbing the mountain to a bright existence, leaving a sullen humanity at the foot.

Margarita Chardynina-Barskaia, 'Pictures ... and cadres',¹ *Kino*, 15 October 1929

What is the frame? It is a picture on the film stock, separated from the other pictures by a line.

And the picture area?

The space filmed by the camera.

And cadres?

Cadres are the hundreds of thousands of metal and textile workers, printers, scientific personnel, chauffeurs, readers... specialist cadres.

Cinema personnel: the cadres of directors, make-up artists, scriptwriters, laboratory assistants, cameramen, assistants, actors, administrators – oh!

And what are film cadres in children's cinema?

We don't know – nobody has ever seen them.

We asked at the GTK,² where they said that they have a specialist in the final year ... whom they will 'bend' towards the children's film sector. They do not know whether or not this sector will be of use on graduation from GTK and suppose that he will have nothing to do in production.

The conclusion from this information gathered at GTK is clear – the cadres in children's cinema are not being trained because production will not be able to use them. Cinema organizations will shoot an extremely limited amount of children's films. At first it was difficult to believe the situation, and the path of enquiry led to Sovkino.³

There they said: 'We cannot release more than 4–5 children's films a year. With regard to the cadres, things are not so complicated. For

1. The author here and later in the text engages in a play upon words: *kadrik* – the frame; *kadr* – the frame area; *kadry* – cadres, staff, personnel.
2. GTK (Gosudarstvennyi tekhnikum kino) – State Technical College for Cinema.
3. Sovkino: the central body for film production. Established 1924 (following Goskino, established in 1922) and replaced in 1930 by Soiuzkino.

4. Glavprofobr (Glavnoe upravlenie professional'nogo obrazovaniia) – Directorate of Professional Education.
5. Glavsotsvos (Glavnoe upravlenie sotsial'nogo vospitaniia) – Directorate for Social Education 1921–31. Supervised pre-school institutions, social and legal concerns of children, qualifications for social workers, schools.
6. Mezhrabpom (Mezhdunarodnaia rabochaia pomosh') – International Workers' Aid; the organization funded and ran the film studio Mezhrabpomfil'm (called Mezhrabpom-Rus' between 1924 and 1928) from 1924 to 1936.
7. NKP – Narkompros (Narodnyi komissariat prosviasheniia) – People's Commissariat for Enlightenment.

example, there is one director who made a decent children's film, now he does not want to shoot children's films anymore, but if we give him a pay rise of 100 roubles, then he'll start filming.'

That's not very encouraging. Only in Glavprofobr⁴ there was reason for joy. A thousand projectors were released into the Glavprofobr network specially for children's mobile cinemas. What do the poor projectionists feed into your thousand projectors? They will have to wait while one director agrees, for an extra 100 roubles, to shoot a children's film.

In all seriousness, we have to repeat once again the old truism that for a children's film we need special methods, and we need to renounce the 'grown-up film' approach in order to understand the difficulties of the children's film. You do not give a driller polishing work even though he is also a metal worker. Nobody talks about a pay rise for a cameraman for him to become a professional mountain-climber, he climbs all the same.

The scriptwriter and the director of children's cinema need to be pedagogues, if only so that there would be no newspaper columns on children's crime and nervous confusion about the box office receipts.

Therefore, isn't it about time to start thinking about cadres? Shouldn't we call a meeting of Glavprofobr, GTK, Glavsotsvos,⁵ Sovkino, Mezhrabpom⁶ and all the pedagogical organizations to discuss the question of the creation of a special faculty for the training of children's film cadres where not only cinema would be studied, but also pedagogy and paedology.

Frames are small pictures on the film stock, separated from the other pictures by a line. Cadres of children's cinema are the people who make these pictures. Without cadres there will be no pictures.

And today they are more than necessary.

Glavsotsvos NKP,⁷ 'On the children's and the school film', *Kino*, 19 November 1929

The situation with the production of children's feature and school-educational films is not good. It threatens to disrupt the speed of cinefication of *sotsvos* establishments and all sorts of work and foundation for the creation of children's cinema. Demand for films, especially feature films, is growing to the most powerful extent. At children's matinées the cinemas are overcrowded and administrators already willingly take children's films. According to Sovkino, in 1927–28 there were 17,761 distribution days, while in 1928–29 there were already 34,000 days, so an increase of 96.4 per cent. Distribution receipts have also grown from 182,000 roubles to 267,000 roubles, so up by 46.4 per cent.

All this speaks for the necessity of devoting much more attention to the matters of children's feature and school film production. Meanwhile, it has to be said that, from the point of view of our production organizations – Sovkino, Mezhrabpomfil'm – very little is being done to satisfy the growing demand. On the contrary, we certainly need to state that the situation this year is worse than last year and the year before that. In 1928, seven films were released, while five were planned in 1929, and of those only one has been released so far.

Each year we have underproduction in the area of children's films. These unfinished portions are systematically transferred from last year's plan to next year's plan, thus creating the impression that something is

being done, and that from year to year we produce more. In reality this is not the case and here we have definite degradation: the supply of children's films is growing very slowly.

True, over the last month both Sovkino and Mezhrabpomfil'm have begun to shake themselves up, but, unfortunately, all their measures are half-measures, not capable of rectifying the existing situation in a significant way. Sovkino points to the absence of a market, while not using the rich opportunities to create one, obviously waiting until someone else does it for them.

Narkomfin⁸ provides Narkompros with extremely insignificant funds for the cinefication of *sotsvos* establishments. This year it intends to release 260,000 roubles for cinefication and radio installation, at a time when there are more than 70,000 schools in the RSFSR.⁹

'A whole range of industry branches are working on the enlightenment of the people. Narkompros and its organs need to be able to present their demands also to this material base of the cultural revolution and thus increase the material resources available for cultural construction' (from a speech by Narkompros representative, Comrade Andrei Bubnov).

From this it is clear that a huge difference cannot be made solely through state budgets and therefore all organizations need to combine their efforts in order to achieve a maximum effect.

We are pressing the matter so that Narkompros, Sovkino, Mezhrabpomfil'm and the entire Soviet community can get down to the speedy implementation of the following practical measures:

1. Increase the allocation for the production of children's feature and school films so that expenditures form no less than 25 per cent of the overall expenditure of Sovkino and Mezhrabpomfil'm.
2. Organize a children's film studio by means of adapting one of the existing studios to this end. This would give us the opportunity to seriously start up production, taking into account the specificities of the children's age group and destroy the arbitrary choice of themes, enabling us to gather specialists in the field. Sovkino should select a special group of the best directors, actors and scriptwriters; organize awards for the best work in children's film and children's scriptwriting.
3. Unify research on children's feature and school films that is carried out by institutes for school methodology and adult education, supporting them financially and fully equipping their film laboratories for the production of experimental work.
4. Increase the purchase of children's feature and school films on foreign markets, which are acceptable from an ideological point of view, and increase the re-editing of adult films for children's screens. This would at least temporarily relieve the existing crisis.
5. Concentrate in one place the special training of film producers. For this we need to:
 - a) organize a special section on children's cinema under the auspices of ARRK;¹⁰
 - b) create at GTK a special course for the training of people working in children's cinema (directors, cameramen, actors and scriptwriters);

8. Narkomfin (Narodnyi komissariat finansov) – People's Commissariat of Finance.
9. Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic.
10. ARRK (Assotsiatsiia rabotnikov revoliutsionnoi kinematografii) – Association of Workers of Revolutionary Cinema.

11. Letter by Barskaia to an unknown addressee 'Dear friend', where she describes a meeting with Romain Rolland and Maksim Gorkii on Gorkii's dacha in the summer of 1935 (letter contained in Margarita Barskaia's archive, gathered by her sister Evgeniia and now in possession of Barskaia's nephew Dmitrii Barskii; henceforth referred to as 'Archive'). This phrase is frequently quoted, see Evgeniia Barskaia, 'Stol'ko stoit kartina?', *Sovetskii Ekran*, 8 (1974), p. 8.

12. Barskaia invented the term 'plastic folklore', by which she meant a set of movements, poses and gestures, shown on a subconscious level and different in each child. She filmed when the child would not notice this and behaved naturally, or she would prompt the display through provocations and contrivances so the child would 'reproduce' these movements at the right moment. Children gesticulate and move more than adults, and frequently without any logic. This abundance of muscular energy released through elaborate and almost continuous movements of the child is called here 'plastic folklore'.

c) encourage production organizations to contract students of GTK and the Leningrad Technical College.

Only by maximally developing the tempo of work on the implementation of these basic measures, can we alleviate the crisis that prevails in cinema provision for the child viewer.

2. Margarita Barskaia and the organization of film studios

Margarita Barskaia: creativity and destiny

Natalia Miloserdova, Research Institute for Cinema Art, Moscow

A man lives as long as he is remembered. Margarita Barskaia (19 June 1903–23 July 1939) is remembered unjustly by very few people. This stands in no relation to her talent and her contribution to the creation of children's cinema, or indeed to her dazzling and tragic life.

In the history of world cinema she remains the maker of a single film – albeit ingenious, by general consent: *Torn Boots* (*Rvanye bashmaki*, 1933), which fascinated and conquered the entire world. This first-ever sound film made 'by children, for children and about children', in Barskaia's own words, amazes even today with its incredible spontaneity, relaxedness and the magical naturalness of the screen existence of the young heroes, aged from 15 months to 13–14 years old. 'How did you do it – that the little boy before the window display with the toys shows such a range of emotions, which are normally found only in a great actor?' asked Maksim Gorkii in surprise.¹¹

Barskaia invented her own method of working with children, having organized at home a small laboratory where children of different ages and different social backgrounds could come to play. She observed them, involved them in games and dialogues, provoked them to speak and thus reveal their character, recording their ineffable plasticity,¹² as well as features of their thinking and the idiosyncratic logic underlying their behaviour. Thus she came to the conclusion that a desirable reaction from children can be achieved by involving them in an already known game directly on the set, and by filming the reciprocal impulses which she first recorded during observation, and then provoked again. Her inexhaustible imagination, passion and enthusiasm for the job are amazing. For each child she found a different key, each little actors' problem required a different trick or ruse.

In her work she had to overcome numerous technical difficulties. She was convinced that it was impossible to get children to behave with the same naturalness during the sound recording as they did during the shooting, or to force the children to learn the text and accurately repeat it in the required tone and rhythm. Therefore, the sound had to be recorded 'live', with cameras wrapped in special covers to muffle the noise. A specially shortened tripod had to be ordered for the camera to avoid the effect of a 'view from above', and so on.



Figure 1: Margarita Barskaia. Still from the archive of Dmitrii Barskii, courtesy of Natalia Miloserdova.

Barskaia gained fame at the age of 30. She was born on 19 June 1903 in Baku, and when she was 6 years old, her parents separated. Her mother raised Margarita and her two younger sisters, Anna and Evgeniia, alone. She owned a hat shop and billeted actors. Barskaia had no special education. At 19 years old she graduated from the First Azerbaijan State Drama Studio and was invited by three theatres at once, but preferred the touring company 'Krasnyi fakel' (Red Torch) under Vladimir Tatischev, where she soon became the lead actress of travesties. During a tour to Odessa she was invited to act in cinema; at the studio she met the famous actor and director Petr Chardynin and soon became his wife. She played several

13. From her unpublished, four-page curriculum vitae (Archive).
14. From her unpublished, four-page curriculum vitae (Archive).

roles in Chardynin's films and in Aleksandr Dovzhenko's first film, *Love's Berries* (*Iagodka liubvi*, 1926), but she found the work as film actress 'not attractive' at all, since 'the cinema deprives the actor of his main weapon: the word'.¹³ She was more interested in the job of assistant director, to which Chardynin initiated her. On her insistence, Chardynin made a special version of *Taras Shevchenko* (1926) for children. By the end of the 1920s she finally decided to devote herself to children's cinema and, having left her husband, she went to Moscow.

Convinced that even here 'children's film does not exist as an independent area of work',¹⁴ she nevertheless did not lose courage, but instead developed a stormy activity, in the first instance initiating the creation of a film council at Narkompros, where she has a seat; then she organized the 'children's section' of the Association of Revolutionary Film-Workers (ARRK) and continued to 'instigate' public opinion, writing in newspapers and magazines about the need for separate production facilities for children's cinema.

In 1930, a year after her arrival in Moscow, she made her first educational film based on her own script at the studio Vostokkino – during only four months: *Who's More Important, What's More Necessary* (*Kto vazhnee, chto nuzhnee*, 1930). The film was thought not to have survived, and there was little information; the little information that existed, however, stirred little interest among film historians. It was hard to imagine that a film for schoolboys about agriculture and Party politics in the countryside, made by a debutant, could have any artistic value. But in the archive collected by Barskaia's sister Evgeniia and preserved by her nephew, Dmitrii Barskii, I found materials that cast some light on this film. Barskaia's records are also intriguing, as are the discussions of the film at the studio and the enthusiastic responses in the press. The reviews praised the young director, including the choice of an animated sequence for the dispute between the worker and the peasant-individualist. When it emerged that this was a hitherto unknown work of one of the founders of Soviet graphic animation, Aleksandr Ivanov, and that one of the three cameramen who were 'needed to shoot the most responsible subject matter and difficult camera pieces', including optical tricks, was Valentin Pavlov, subsequently thrice winner of the Stalin Prize (for the films *The Swineherd and the Shepherd* (*Svinarka i pastukh*), *Tales of the Siberian Lands* (*Skazanie o zemle sibirskoi*) and *The Kuban Cossacks* (*Kubanskii kazaki*)), the interest in the film increased drastically. It appeared that the film was stored in the Russian State Archive of Film and Photo Documents, without credits and therefore unidentified. The film tells in a fascinating form about the complex, labour-consuming and dangerous path from grain to a loaf of bread. It is amazing for its scrupulous knowledge of the subject matter, the perfect connection of archival fragments with newly shot footage and animation, and also the ingenuity of the director and the successful merger of pathos and humour.

The film's success opened for Barskaia the opportunity to make the fiction film *Torn Boots*, which became a triumph. This indisputable, widely recognized victory also widened her opportunities in the struggle for the main goal in her life: the organization of a special studio of children's films. The film's success gave her the right to appeal to the highest bodies and

the most influential people in the country, proving the importance and necessity of her goal.

In the second half of 1934 she wrote a letter to Lazar' Kaganovich,¹⁵ who at that time supervised the general reconstruction of Moscow, and therefore was in a position to help with premises for a studio. With bitterness she ascertained that there were too few people working in children's cinema and they were treated like the 'stepchildren of production'; that the victory of *Torn Boots* had not helped break the wall of indifference vis-à-vis the problem of children's cinema; and that the officials had only understood that children's cinema could yield a profit.

All she needed was

a separate corner where it would be possible to isolate the children and work with them away from the busy production process, to sow in this corner the seeds for a methodological centre, to gather a group of people and train assistants, directors and cameramen so that their numbers could grow and multiply in the future. At the stage where we are in this work, the creation of a special studio (of which I dream in the future), is premature, but such a laboratory would cost a pittance and would pay off very quickly and a thousand times over, and it is vital.¹⁶

She received no support from Kaganovich, and on 2 February 1935 Barskaia addressed Stalin directly with the same request (the letter is published in this cluster), again arguing that a large studio was unsuitable for children, and that she needed a small house or a large apartment. After that, events happened at great speed. On 27 February she submitted an application to the head of cinematography, Shumiatskii, for herself and three more people to be accepted as staff of a children's film studio. On 26 March GUKF issued an official order regarding the organization in Moscow of a studio for children's films. A further letter to Shumiatskii about the search for a private residence for a studio followed on 2–3 September. At this time, the studio was cramped into two rooms, rented from a kindergarten at Malo-Nikolo-Pesovskii Lane, where during the summer and autumn of 1935 Barskaia selected the children for her next film, *Father and Son*.

But the filming began only on 20 July 1936 and, in a highly dramatic twist of events, the filming coincided with the organization of that 'large' studio of which she had dreamt, but which she considered premature (– and she was right). Thus, Barskaia triggered a mechanism that subsequently crushed and destroyed her: she wanted a small experimental studio where she could quietly develop – with a handful of colleagues – the methods of working with children and the methodology for making children's films. But since the studio Soiuzdetfil'm was organized immediately after the decision of the Central Committee of the Komsomol¹⁷ 'On the expansion of the production of children's films', the studio became an object of state importance and directors were required to mass produce. The Komsomol decision was published on 13 June 1936, and on the same day GUKF ordered the abolition of Mezhrabpomfil'm and the organization, in its place, of a studio of children's and youth feature films, Soiuzdetfil'm, which launched its activity grandiosely on

15. Undated letter to Kaganovich (Archive), written during the preparation for the fifteenth anniversary of Soviet cinematography; the official date is 27 August 1934, but for some reason it was solemnly commemorated on 11 January 1935 at the Bolshoi Theatre.

16. Letter to Kaganovich (Archive).

17. VLKSM (Vsesoiuznyi Leninskii kommunisticheskii soiuz molodezhi) – All-Union Lenin Communist Youth Union; generally known as Komsomol (BB).

18. Initially a term used for children born in 1917, the year of the Revolution; later for children aged 7–9, when they could join the Pioneers (BB).

19. Remarks from GUKF about *Father and Son* (after a viewing on 30 December), undated; 'Session of the creative section of Soiuzdetfilm: discussion of Barskaia's film *Father and Son*', minutes of 10 May 1937 (41 pp.) and minutes of 14 May 1937 (36 pp.); 'Session of the Komsomol of Soiuzdetfilm from 15 May 1937 concerning the analysis of *Father and Son*', (45 pp.); diary entries, undated and draft copies of letters to unknown addressees in 1937–38, as well as Barskaia's statements at subsequent meetings of Soiuzdetfilm of 16 May 1937; Conclusion of the commission of Workers in the Film and Photo Industry about Barskaia, 27 December 1938. (Archive).

20. Letter to Molotov, 8 January 1937 (Archive).

21. Letter to the studio's director Kogan, 8 January 1937 (Archive). Emphasis in the original.

29 June with the colour filming of the solemn opening of the Moscow House of Pioneers and Little Octobrists.¹⁸ From 1 July Barskaia was on the studio's payroll. Her work was hampered by endless requests for corrections: the officials in charge of production supervision zealously and enthusiastically carried out their duties, which is understandable against the backdrop of the onset of the purges and trials against so-called 'enemies of the people'.

Barskaia's situation was aggravated by the fact that in September 1936, the politician and journalist Karl Radek was arrested, with whom she entertained friendly relations (according to some – more than friendly). He accepted all charges levelled against him, including espionage and preparing an attempt on Stalin's life; in January 1937 he received the notorious 'ten years without the right of correspondence'. Barskaia refused to testify against him, claiming that, in their conversations, he followed entirely the views and positions articulated in his statements in the central press, and consequently there could have been no nocuous interference in her film.

The script of *Father and Son* had already been accepted, approved and confirmed by all the higher bodies, including the Central Committee of the Komsomol. The material for the film had been viewed by editors, management and studio, as well as GUKF, and it had been approved. Clearly the management was in a difficult position: the film was very sharp, but contained no obvious sedition; the management was very concerned that they might have overlooked something and that somebody more vigilant might find 'something'. Therefore they required Barskaia to make changes, again and again; at first these requests were motivated by a desire to cut in order to deliver the finished film and not to disrupt the plan. But Barskaia, having made the film in the most complicated production conditions, could not see the point in this haste, which would spoil her work. At first she asked, demanded and begged to be allowed to edit the film and then have it assessed and hand it over. The obstinate director was threatened with being removed from the production process, and joined forces with a film editor. The studio started to cut and rearrange bits without her knowledge, in a panic and unsystematically. When the studio managers understood that the film had lost its integrity, but still contained a certain polemic, they went over to direct political charges against Barskaia.¹⁹

Now, at the end of my work, I find myself in a completely impossible position when the point of view of one person crosses out all my work. On the order of this person, who commands over me (the deputy head of GUK Comrade Usievich), my assistants have been ordered to cut from my film one episode after another, throwing out the basic idea.²⁰

I'm in an extremely awkward position. The film *Father and Son* is, before my eyes, being turned into something that has NOTHING IN COMMON with my work or my idea.²¹

The script was approved and praised highly and publicly by Shumiatskii. [...] During the shooting the management praised the episodes. The first draft copy was also praised when it was completed. A month and a half of work to go – but since the end of year approached, the management had to report on performance and fulfilment of the plan ... and my film was cut and edited in lightning speed within nine days, and distorted – despite all my

resistance. When my protests grew stronger (a letter to you dated 8 January of this year), they began to cut the film BEHIND MY BACK, absolutely ignoring me as director.²²

All the other artists who got into similar situations, conceded and publicly recognized their 'mistakes', thus putting an end to the matter. Some time later they received the right to work on a new production. But Barskaia, having made her film by exhausting her human strength, with pure thoughts and kind intentions, refused to see any anti-Soviet intentions in this 'bloody piece of meat' – as she perceived what happened with her film – and refused to repent for sins she has not committed. She tried to search for the truth and sought protection from above, but nobody would see her and her letters of complaint about the management were returned for consideration to the very same management.

A slanderous campaign against her was organized in the press, she encountered obstructions at studio meetings, which were obviously staged. As a result, the 'public' – represented by the workers of the studio she herself had helped create – angrily renounced both her and her film, and requested that it should not be released. They demanded her dismissal, her removal from her apartment and her exile from Moscow. Two years later she was still fighting to clear her name and regain the right to work, but even the respected teacher and writer Anton Makarenko, with whom she wrote the script based on his new novel *Flags on Towers* (*Flagi na bashniakh*, 1938), was powerless in the face of this wall of animosity. More and more frequently we find in her letters and diary entries words about the wish to crush and shatter her head. On 23 July 1939 she threw herself out of the window.

Barskaia's films were ahead of their time, and her indisputable talent is visible even in her last film, spoiled by the hands of editors. She became one of the most tragic victims of the totalitarian regime and one of the greatest losses for cinema.

Translated by Birgit Beumers

Documents

Translated by Jamie Miller

Letter to Stalin, 5 February 1935²³

Dear Comrade Stalin!

I am one of two women film directors working in our country in feature film. I wrote the script and produced the first children's sound film, *Torn Boots*. I have set myself the goals of making exclusively children's films and of the development of this matter as a whole in our country. It seemed that the film *Torn Boots*, which had a huge success here and abroad, has proved the significance of this matter, but the question of children's film is, to this day, a neglected one.

My film, apart from its moral-educational success, made three million in profits. This covers any children's film production costs.

The cast of my films are children. They do not know how to act or how to apply acting techniques; therefore I have devised a special method of working with children. Judging at least by my first experience, this

22. Letter to Molotov, 28 September 1937 (Archive). Emphasis in the original.

23. From the private archive of Margarita Barskaia, published by kind permission of Dmitrii Barskii. Published by Natalia Miloserdova in *SK-Novosti*, 10 November 2008, pp. 13–14.

method is right. For this method to work I need a studio where I could meet, and work for a long period, with children. I did this earlier, although it was very amateurishly done in a room at my home, but now this is no longer possible for domestic reasons, and in any case, it is not sufficient.

My attempts to breach the wall of ignorance and set up the conditions of production are not yielding a result. An entire year has already gone by during these efforts.

Nominally, the heads of the film industry and the corresponding authorities recognize the importance of children's film as a means of showing children, in artistic forms, the history of the revolution, the meaning of the struggle for socialism, and so on. But actually they see in the children's film the lowest form of art and reckon that I associate with this cause only on a whim. They often ask me why, after such success, I continue to work in children's film. Children's film is considered to be second rate.

The struggle that our press is fighting with ugly incidents among our youth has strengthened my convictions in the social significance of the children's film.

A film can show children the harm of lack of discipline, hooliganism and bad learning better than an article or moral admonition. To show them that, by following this path, they become saboteurs of the new order. In artistic forms it is possible to connect the life and interests of children with the life of the whole country, and with the dangers threatening it from the class enemy within and without.

To carry out this task we need to:

1. Create a special children's film unit. A big studio will not be suitable for this. We need to have the opportunity to gather children in some sort of small, detached building or large flat.

Comrade Shumiatskii, who entirely sympathizes with this cause, does not have the power to grant premises.

2. We need to take measures that turn work on children's film into an honourable deed. We need to put a stop to the situation when workers of children's film have worse conditions than others, with the same or even lower qualifications. Only in this way will the professional cadres of children's cinema be created.

If you give instructions on the importance of this matter, then I am convinced that it will be possible to move it forward.

If you were to find the time to watch the film *Torn Boots* then I am convinced that, regardless of all its shortcomings, it will serve as the best illustration on the questions of this matter.

Warmest regards,

M. Barskaia

5 February 1935

Letter to Boris Shumiatskii, 27 February 1935²⁴

To the Head of the Main Cinema Industry Administration, B.Z. Shumiatskii
From the director M.A. Barskaia

Dear Boris Zakharovich,

Comrade Sokolov is writing to you about the state of play on premises.

In addition to what he reports, I can draw a conclusion on three viewed objects:

1. The Political Convict's Club, 31 Vorovskii Street.

Narkomsobez²⁵ has already moved in there, having occupied half of the detached building. Even if we managed to get hold of the second half, then it would need to be repaired and fully equipped, which would not give us the opportunity to get down to work right away.

2. The Political Convict's Publishing House, 5 Lopukhinskii Lane.

At the moment this is being vacated. Located on the second floor there is some sort of laboratory, which is also moving out. But on my first impression, although there would be enough space, we cannot expect to set up a small unit and it will also need to be repaired and fully equipped.

3. The Old Bolsheviks' Club, 6 Fokin Lane.

I think that you know these premises well; therefore, there is no need to describe them. A workers' theatre, which has had some other premises specially built, temporarily occupies half of it and, in time, should move out. The second half on the lower floor has eleven rooms and a hall of approximately 120–160 square metres.

The second floor is exactly the same. We managed to ascertain that all this is being 'handed over to the pioneers' and the person in charge of this matter right now is a certain PANSHIN, of the establishment MONO Narobraza²⁶ or the Administration for Children's Affairs MONO.

At the present moment they have NOT DECIDED on their move, because this detached building is too small for their purposes, and they are taking over another, neighbouring detached building.

On a cursory examination of the premises we can say the following:

Even one small half of the detached building is enough for us (without the theatre premises). The upper hall (160 square metres) is sufficient in order to equip a sound studio for small units. The height is approximately six metres, perhaps a bit on the small side to set up overhead lights for the entire, usable set area, but for us a fortunate peculiarity of the construction lies in the fact that the hall has a glass ceiling. It can easily be removed and a light box ceiling two metres higher could be built on top. The entire condition of the detached house is such that we do not need to report anything.

The peacefulness of the region and the sound state of the building, as well as the location of the premises, would give us the opportunity to start work straight away. If it would be impossible to get hold of this half of the detached building (twenty-two rooms with two halls suitable for studio units) then in the extreme case at least one upper floor. It is impossible to find anything better than this.

Declaration

Following on from our conversation, I request that you take me and my group on as staff for work at the studio of children's film.

25. Narkomsobez (Narodnyi komissariat sotsial'noi bezopasnosti) – People's Commissariat of Social Security.

26. MONO Narobraza (Moskovskii otdel narodnogo obrazovaniia narodnogo komissariata po obrazovaniu) – Moscow Department of People's Education of the People's Commissariat of Education.

27. *Crystal Breakfast* (*Khrustal'nyi zavtrak*) – scr. Ivens, dir. Stepanov (not completed); *Wake up Lenchka* (*Razbudite Lenchku*) – scr. Evgenii Shvarts and Nikolai Oleinikov, dir. Antonina Kudriavtseva; *Conduct-Book* (*Konduit*) – scr. Lev Kassil', dir. Boris Shelontsov; *The Amazing Garden* (*Udivitel'nyi sad*), scr. Zats (not completed); *School* (*Shkola*), scr. Agniia Barto (not completed); *Brother and Sister* (*Brat i sestra*), play and scr. Evgenii Shvarts (not realized). (BB)

Apart from me the group consists of:

- Vasil'evaia, M.E. – assistant
- Sibirtseva, B.G. – assistant
- Margolis, L.S. – methodologist on work with children

27 February 1935

/Signature/ M. Barskaia

M. Barskaia, B. Shumiatskii, 'The production of children's films', Pravda, 2 April 1935

In 1935, 15–18 feature films on children's themes will be released on to the screens of the Union: that means nearly 20 per cent of our entire feature film production. The quality of children's films has grown significantly. At the present time *Crystal Breakfast*, based on Ivens's script and directed by Stepanov, for pre-school-age children; *Wake up Lenchka*, directed by Kudriavtseva; *Conduct-Book*, based on L. Kassil's script; *The Amazing Garden*, based on Zats's script; *School* based on Barto's script; *Brother and Sister* based on Shvarts's script and many others are in production.²⁷

Regardless of the systematic quantitative and qualitative growth of children's cinema, we are still far from those immense, growing demands which our children's audience are presenting to us. The questions from Soviet children have increased, the popularity of cinema has grown.

They often speak and gladly write about this without limiting themselves, so far, to stating facts.

The organizational situation of children's cinema at the present time guarantees neither the training of specialists, nor the release of children's feature films with the necessary speed and proportion.

The script problem has been resolved to an even lesser extent than in the area of so-called adult themes. Working on scripts of 'grown-up' films, cinema has amassed significant experience, but in the area of children's film there is almost none of that experience. The directors of children's films, with the odd exception, are probationers who choose children's film in order to test their strengths and then move on to the production of 'big' films.

Can our studios develop cadres of specialist children's scriptwriters and directors? As a rule, no. The maximum that studios can do is to help individual enthusiasts and give them the opportunity to work in more or less tolerable conditions.

Some comrades reckon that the way out of the situation is the creation of a special sector for the administration of children's cinematography.

After painstaking discussion, we came to the conclusion that such a sector will not necessarily establish the creative, productive atmosphere capable of educating new specialists.

There is also a second reason that forces us to seek organizational forms like those of the studio for the production of children's films.

Naturally, in children's films the cast are most often children. Children cannot transform themselves and create a character by means of studying

mimicry, intonation, gesture; that is to say the typical methods of a professional actor's work. In relation to this, the question of the creative method in children's films presents itself in a particular way.

During the creation of a film, the production conditions at the studio ought to be set up with the child actor in mind. Child actors cannot work for more than four hours. For the most part, the director has to establish particular personal relations, based on affection and friendship. The director has to invent ways of influencing the child actor in order to achieve the desired result. All of this and a lot of other things are completely impossible in the conditions of a typical studio.

It is still too early to create a special children's studio. Soviet cinema has now gone for the creation of special smaller children's film production units. These units should amass the strength for the organization of a children's studio. A few of the already outstanding masters of children's cinema should become the centre, the organizers of a children's cinema production atmosphere.

At the end of last year, at the Union's leading studio Lenfil'm, the first attempt was made to create a workshop for children's film. This attempt has already yielded its first results – Kudriavtseva's *Wake up Lenchka*. At the present time, a bolder experiment is planned in Moscow. The Main Administration for the Film and Photo Industry has created a special, experimental children's film unit. The Union's government has approved this unit as an enterprise of all-Union significance.

We have called this studio experimental not because its tasks include experimentation. The studio is called experimental because its tasks include the production of highly artistic children's films in a short period of time. In order to achieve this, we need to find and develop special production methods.

The methodological materials, which were amassed by our best children's cinema directors, form the foundation of the film unit.

The film unit is designed for four production groups and its task for the coming year is set to two full-length fiction films.

In the relation to the entire programme of children's film releases in the coming year, this is not much. And it goes without saying, the existence of this film unit does not absolve the studios of the responsibility to speed up the creation of children's films.

At this stage, the film unit cannot be the cure, saving us from all of our troubles immediately. Relying on the film unit, the studios have no right to succumb to thoughts of abolishing their children's film production groups. We will continue to pointedly raise the question of the improvement of the situation of children's film production groups at the studio.

We are not setting a time limit, but we are sure that the production work of director's groups at the children's film unit will at the same time be collective work. We are sure that the film unit will lead us to the organization of a children's studio and equip us with precise ideas on how this studio ought to be developed.

The 'all-Union experimental children's film unit' has the right to expect full support from the entire Soviet community.

28. CC RCP(b) – Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks); GUKF (Gosudarstvennoe upravlenie kinofotopromyshlennosti) – State Directorate for the Film and Photo Industry, headed in 1933–38 by Boris Shumiatskii (1886–1938).

29. This document is held at RGASPI f. 17, opis' 114, ed. Khr. 724. ll. 77–83 and was published in *Kremlevskii kinoteatr*, pp. 281–85 and has here been shortened slightly.

30. SNK (*Sovet narodnykh komissarov*) – Council of People's Commissars.

31. *The Despairing Battalion* (*Otchaiannyi batal'on*, 1933), dir. Abram Naroditskii, Naum Ugriumov; *The Partisan's Daughter* (*Doch' partizana*, 1934), dir. A. Masliukov.

Report from B. Z. Shumiatskii to CC RCP(b)²⁸ (Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks) on the work of GUKF in the area of children's cinema²⁹

14 September 1935

Secret

To the CC RCP(b)
Orgburo

Over a number of years, both cinema organizations and the organs of Narkompros have devoted practically no attention to the creation of a cinema for children. Only after a series of recent decisions by CC RCP(b) and the USSR's SNK³⁰ on schooling and the education of children, did we achieve the first results.

Up until now, the production of feature and animation films for children has amounted to a handful. Films for children have taken the back seat of production. Distributable production was distinguished only by poor content, inertia, boring subject matter, low-quality director's and actor's work. The worst production conditions, by comparison with films for adults, the weak financial security for creative staff (a low salary, insignificant honoraria), an almost complete absence of qualified creative staff – all these conditions have led to the insignificant quantitative and unsatisfactory qualitative release of films for children. In 1931, when the general release of feature films stood at 48 titles, only 6 films for children were created and released.

Subsequent years have shown only an insignificant rise in the proportion of films for children in the overall work of film organizations. The first year when cinema organizations more seriously got down to the production of films for children was 1934. A rise began when the films *Torn Boots* and *The Despairing Battalion*, as well as *The Partisan's Daughter* and others were released.³¹ Altogether in 1934, when the overall number of films produced reached 50, 10 children's films were released.

As a result of the implementation of the decisions of CC RCP(b) on schooling and children, in the current year film organizations not only achieved an increase in quantity and a rise in the quality of children's films, but also began active work on script preparation, selection of cadres and the improvement of working conditions of children's film production.

On the basis of these preconditions, we have achieved the first significant results. Over the past eight months, 11 films for children have been completed. At the present time 6 films are being completed and 16 others are being shot. Therefore, in the overall complex scheme of things, this year there are 33 films for children in production, of which 17 have been or are being released this year, while the remainder will be completed in the first quarter of 1936.

The proportion of children's films has reached 22 per cent out of this year's general production plan figure of 83 films.

The relative balance of film production for children within the overall growth rate of the production programme outlined for 1936 will remain on a high level. Already one transient production has ensured a significant turn in the production of films for children next year. Moreover, at the present time the preparation of scripts is being carried out in all cinema

organizations. According to our incomplete information, the quantity of commissioned scripts for feature films exceeds forty titles.

One brief look at the themes and genres of the commissioned scripts already speaks of the large variation of subject matter, among which the themes of the modern school, heroics, adventures, travels, fantasy and fairy tales especially stand out. [...]

The growth of children's cinema is inextricably linked to the organization of special working conditions. Soviet cinema is the first in the history of world cinema to implement the organization of the production of films for children. The cinema of capitalist countries, pursuing large profits, completely dismisses the production of films for children as unprofitable. In West European and American film organizations, films featuring children are produced quite often. But these films do not pursue special educational goals and are conceived exclusively for adults. Thus, if in other areas of Soviet cinema we can make use of West European and American film-industry experience, then we are creating cinema for children literally from scratch.

The growth of the programme of children's film production has presented the problem of creating special production conditions for this work. The typical conditions of film studios have not been adapted to the production of films for children. Based on the necessity of creating more favourable conditions for our new activity, Soviet cinema has found a new organizational form for production. This year GUKF has begun the creation of special children's film production studios. At present two children's film units have been established in Moscow, one of them affiliated to the Mosfil'm studio, the second an independent studio under the artistic leadership of the director Barskaia. A very similar studio has been organized and entered film production in Leningrad. Studios in Kiev, Odessa and Tbilisi are being set up.

The creation of the new organizational-production form has immediately yielded positive results and has led to the gathering and selection of staff and so on. The leading masters of film art have been drawn in to work on children's films. S.M. Eisenstein is making a special children's version of *Bezhin Meadow*, while Barskaia and Ptushko are working on films only for children. The number of directors specializing in this area is growing.

Alongside the creation of feature and animated films for children, Soviet cinema has over recent times expanded into the production of other kinds of film for schools and children, including the production of popular scientific and educational films, a special newsreel for children and slides.

The creation of popular scientific and educational films has been developed literally out of thin air; despite this, over the last three years we managed to create over one hundred programmes.

We need to note that Narkompros and the educational bodies of the People's Commissariats have not given due attention to the problem of educational films, the participation of qualified experts, and so on. If real attention had been paid to this area by the aforementioned organizations, the impact of educational films would be considerably higher. Just recently, the production of popular scientific films for children has taken off. [...] With a view to improving the quality of existing production and considering the difficulties of work with child actors, GUKF has increased the limits

of negative film stock during the production of films for children by two times, by comparison with films for adults. Thus, the work of the Soviet cinema for schools and children goes on in all areas of its activity.

In order to sum up preliminary results and to outline the prospects of further activity, GUKF intends to organize a special conference on children's cinema this autumn. Alongside the positive results listed above, the business of creating films for children has a whole series of important shortcomings; namely, films for children, with rare exceptions, still do not constitute high-quality, exciting works of art. Except for *Gulliver*, *Torn Boots* and a few other good films, other productions are only notable for their insufficiently precise and insubstantial plots, low-quality director's work and inexpressive performance.

The quality of films depends to a significant degree on the quality of scripts. We have to note that, at the present time, a very limited number of children's writers are working on films for children.

The writers Marshak, Kassil', Barto³² and others, who have joined the cause of creating children's scripts, also work sporadically.

Alongside the attraction of some qualified directors to work on films for children, an acute shortage of creative qualified personnel continues to be felt. Children's studios, which have been organized and which are being organized, are not well provided for with the necessary production base. Although the chronicle magazine *Pioneer* improves with each issue, it requires more attention. We need to find ways of specially interpreting plots for children and for the special selection of themes.

For the further development of children's cinema, it is necessary to carry out a number of serious measures. First of all, GUKF considers necessary:

1. To maintain, in the years ahead, a high proportion of films for children in the general production plan so that this kind of production constitutes 25 per cent of the overall number of films released.
2. In choosing themes, it is necessary to educate the rising generation in the selfless love of our homeland, bravery, heroism. Accordingly, we need to provide interesting, meaningful, thematic content, with entertaining plots from the areas of heroics, the struggle of the working class and its party, as well as adventures, travel, fantasy, fairy tales and so forth.
3. With the aim of getting high-quality scripts based on concise subject matter with meaningful content, we need to ensure the constant participation of leading writers in this work.
4. We need to strengthen children's film-production studios with high-level staff.
5. In the cinema industry construction plans for 1936–37 provide for the building of special children's film studios.
6. Until the construction of children's film studios, we need to give special instructions to Moscow and Leningrad city councils, the Councils of People's Commissars in Ukraine and Transcaucasia on providing children's studios with premises for uninterrupted work.
7. We need to pay special attention to the proper selection of directors and actors in films for children, to recruit leading actors of theatre and

cinema for the performance of adult roles in these films, regularly enlist prominent directors to make films for children.

8. Measures have already been taken by GUKF to end the severance in financial-social provision for children's film crews and, accordingly, put their qualifications on the same footing as the staff of films for adults. We need to resolve the question of increasing the honoraria for children's film directors, bearing in mind the distribution anomalies of this type of film.
9. In relation to the significant increase in children's films, we need to introduce a practice of compiling special distribution plans for this type of film and to create special children's cinemas in the big cities. In other places we need to systematically introduce matinées at the weekends.

Alongside the growth of attention to this form of production, one has to repeatedly observe a lack of due interest and help on the part of a series of organizations.

All Party, Komsomol and Soviet organizations need to pay attention to the fact that the creation of high-quality films for children is one of the most important means of the communist education of children.

Head of the State Directorate for the Film and Photo
Industry under the auspices of SNK USSR – Shumiatskii

3. Barskaia's films in the mirror of the press

Margarita Barskaia's first film rediscovered

Nikolai Izvolov, Cinema Research Institute, Moscow

The print of Margarita Barskaia's film *Who's More Important, What's More Necessary* (*Kto vazhnee, chto nuzhnee*, 1930) was found, or rather identified in November 2008. The impulse for this discovery was set by a researcher of my department (Historical and Theoretical Department of the Scientific Research Institute for Film Art), Natalia Miloserdova, who has begun work on a monograph about Barskaia's creative career. Until now, there is no such monograph – neither in Russian nor in any other language – but only a few journal publications. Barskaia made only three films during her lifetime, of which until the present day two were known: *Torn Boots* (*Rvanye bashmaki*, 1933) and *Father and Son* (*Otets i syn*, 1936); the first is part of the basic programme of the history of Soviet cinema, while the second remained incomplete and has, essentially, never been screened to the public. So here was the problem: to find, if possible, Barskaia's debut film, which never posed an interest to film historians. Of course, the most obvious sources – the online catalogue of Russia's Gosfil'mofond and the electronic catalogue of RGAKFD, the Russian State Archive of Film and Photo Documents, were checked above all. *Who's More Important, What's More Necessary* was not listed anywhere. Together with Birgit Beumers, who was preparing the present cluster of documents, we had the idea of searching for the film by additional attributes: it was known



Figure 2: Cartoon from *Who's More Important*, *Vecherniaia Moskva* 4 June 1930. From the archive of Dmitrii Barskii, courtesy of Natalia Miloserdova.

that the film consisted of six reels, that it was devoted to agriculture, intended for children, and made at the studio Vostokkino in 1930. Looking through the RGAKFD catalogue online, we quickly found item number 1486 – a film about agriculture consisting of six reels, 1689.6 metres in length and shot at Vostokkino in 1930. The names of the film-makers were missing.

When I viewed the film at RGAKFD, it became clear that this was most likely the film we were looking for. The unexpected rhetoric of the titles confirmed that this was a film made by a director who loved and could work with children, who was applying unusual methods to raise interest for the rather monotonous process of agricultural work. The animated inserts with their signs and grotesque caricature style undoubtedly belonged to the artists Ivanov and Sazonov who, as is known from reference books, worked on this film.

Finally, the most incontestable proof came with a clipping from the newspaper *Kino* showing a frame from *Who's More Important*, which Natalia Miloserdova had found in Barskaia's private archive. It showed a worker and a peasant together on a tractor, and confirmed with absolute certainty that Margarita Barskaia's film had been found.

Indeed, Margarita Barskaia appears for a split second in one of the final frames, playing the worker of a bread factory.

On the basis of the print we can safely assume that the film has been preserved practically in its entirety, except for the credits. Each reel has a serial number, the logical sequence of events shows no obvious lacunae, and the overall length of the film is close to the data in film catalogues. The original length was 1774 metres, which matches the archive copy if we take into account that the credits are missing (75 metres is hardly more than two minutes of screen time). The absence of the credits is a frequent occurrence

that can be explained through negligence during the storage at the studio before the film was transferred to the archive, or as a special measure taken by the studio archive. When Barskaia committed suicide, badgered by accusations about her affair with the 'enemy of the people', Karl Radek, following his arrest and trial, the credits might have been removed simply to avoid any unnecessary mention of the director who had fallen into disgrace.

Translated by Birgit Beumers

Reviews

Translated by Jamie Miller

Mikh[ail] B[leiman], 'Who is More Important, What is More Necessary', Kino, 12 November 1930

A hit for lessons in political economy and natural science

Blow after blow comes down upon the main character. The attacks of two-legged and multi-legged enemies provoke upheavals of the struggle.

As usual, the hero wins. The protagonist has the viewer's sympathy, he repels sudden enemy attacks, overcomes hundreds of obstacles, following all the rules of classic dramatic art.

But all the same, the film *Who's More Important, What's More Necessary* (directed by Barskaia, cinematography by Pavlov and Sazonov, produced by Vostokkino) shows a particular struggle in the history of cinematic themes. The main character of the film is bread. The film is intended for the child viewer and sets itself the tasks of explaining, in an intelligible form, the complex agricultural and economic processes by which the country gets its bread.

The theme of bread and its production, especially from the angle of 'Who's More Important, What's More Necessary', poses the question of who takes precedence: the proletariat who make the machines or the peasantry. This calls for a clear and correct approach and a responsible screen representation of the basics of Party politics in the countryside.

The very fact that this is, it would seem, the first political-enlightenment film for children to set itself the goal of developing such a crucial theme as the question on bread, a theme that touches on the fundamental question of the mutual relations between the proletariat and the peasantry, deserves approval.

We can state with satisfaction that the rather simplified (this is entirely understandable), but at the same time perfectly correct, tasks set out in the film have been solved.

Thanks to its distinctive construction – the form of the screened dispute between the worker and the individual peasant farmer – the film covers extensive material that runs like a single thread throughout and achieves significant clarity in its presentation. An animated cartoon, which is organically introduced into the film, helps us understand and remember the complex binding of social-economic relations briefly formulated in the Leninist word *smychka* (union).

All the information, both of a biological and social-political order, which schools and clubs ought to give children on bread, is conveyed in this film in an interesting and light format.

The success of the first children's political film finalizes the question on this given type of cinema, because, to this day, we have practically no theoretical and methodological baggage in children's cinema, and every film constitutes material for study, an example that is repeated and built upon.

The ice has begun to break.

The first Soviet, truly Soviet, children's films are already appearing to take the place of sugary films for small children: cinema specialists/pedagogues take the place of directors who fell out with the management and, as punishment, were banished to children's film.

The film *Who's More Important, What's More Necessary* can become a hit – in school lessons on political economy and the natural sciences.

Our task is to transform this into an everyday phenomenon. We need to churn out dozens and hundreds of these films for education to help teaching in general.

Lev Kassil', 'Torn Boots', *Izvestiia*, 29 December 1933

A children's film is showing in seven 'adult' Moscow cinemas. They are talking about it in all ten regions of the capital. Entirely mature people are writing enthusiastic articles about it. For some time now there has not been a film that has provoked such praise. This alone already speaks of *Torn Boots* as a brilliant and significant phenomenon of Soviet cinematography.

Torn Boots is, strictly speaking, a series of scenes and episodes from the life of foreign children. There is no sharply drawn line of action in the film. Only the plot strands are outlined, and they should hold together the separate chapters of the film. There is much of what we have seen many times in many films about life abroad: the strike and the military police, the strike-breakers and the unemployed. But, nevertheless, the spectator almost all the time follows the film with unwavering attention and stays emotionally charged when he returns home. For this the film is indebted to the masterly work of the director and the children's collective who magnificently perform all the main and the best episodes. Children from 15 months to 12–13 years of age handle their roles with amazing naturalness and spontaneity.

Here we immediately run up against a serious question of an educational-pedagogical order: is it really a good idea to force small children to act in cinema, to make actors of them, to put them under the spotlight of fame? Many will respond that this is harmful and pedagogically flawed. In any case, it requires a careful, intelligent approach to the child. And we must admit that comrade Barskaia, the scriptwriter and director of *Torn Boots*, has managed this difficult task with grace, avoiding this awful pitfall.

Rather, the children play in her film. They perform the main roles and carry the main and central 'burden' of the film. Yet they hardly play-act, and instead remain the children they are in real life. No complex and overwhelming emotional experiences or dramatic poses have been imposed upon them. They are motivated by their peers' problems and by the pains and joys of their foreign counterparts. They run and play, fight and climb, and work. All these actions are accomplished with an obvious pleasure, infectious energy and simplicity.

We were told that many of the boys did not even fully understand that they were being filmed for cinema. Comrade Barskaia simply managed to

draw young children into a lengthy, interesting and gripping game. This is the result of enormous, painstaking work carried out with the children's collective. Moreover, so many children are working here that the individual child has no reason to think of themselves as an infant prodigy. That is probably why the children act tastefully and engagingly, with such apparent seriousness in *Torn Boots* – they play at being doctors, merchants or other children's games. The film is ingenious, tactical and warm in the way in which it tells the viewers of the hard everyday life in capitalist countries, without indulging in detail. The children learn from the adults, and play at being merchants. In the dialogue of a girl who plays a saleswoman and her little friend, a customer, who deliberately asks for a piece of bread from the capitalists for her hungry children – in this playful dialogue there is no hidden agenda; instead, the genuine, unpleasant reality of the working class in capitalist countries is brought to the fore.

Although this dialogue touches with its comicality, it sounds more convincing than the subsequent, direct 'head-on' portrayal of the very same characteristics of working-class life. Overall, all the scenes with adults, especially those where the children are absent, are weaker than the children's episodes. I do not want to say that the adult actors perform badly. On the contrary, a series of adult characters (the teacher; the tidy, clean old lady at the dirty rubbish dump and others) stick well in one's memory. But the fault here probably lies in the insufficient strength of the subject matter. If in the children's scenes the shortcoming is compensated for by the wonderful children on the screen, then it can be felt more clearly in the scenes without children. In those few episodes the audience's attention somewhat drops.

But here another question arises: who is the film made for? If we consider the film from the point of view of our young audiences, then we perceive a contradiction in the creative and stylistic methods. The film tells our pioneers and pupils about the life of working-class children abroad, about the participation of these kids in the political struggle of the proletariat, about class fights at school. The film shows our children their foreign counterparts, those who are close to them in spirit and interests, showing them in a warm light, intelligibly and impressively. And here we find many excellent episodes. The superb children's acting and the very pleasant design of these episodes make them intelligible, touching, memorable. In no other film have we seen such children's acting, such truthfulness of the children's characters. The stark nature of the social references, the primitive construction of the subject matter – all this is entirely acceptable for the small spectator. But in a series of scenes one feels that there is too much adult admiration for the child. For our young spectator this is hardly expedient. Here the 'Big about Small' approach shows through; the film, so to speak, is addressed too much to an adult perception. This explains the deliberate, touching nature of certain situations and the melodramatic tendency, as well as the subtle scene of the shooting during the demonstration (the episode with the blind person). Clearly the penultimate scene was done for adults – quiet, but heart-rending – where a small child sticks a toy into the hand of the dead Bubbi, the film's hero. For a child's perception this finale is hardly well chosen, imparting the film with a pessimistic tone that threatens to muffle the fanfare of the concluding pioneers' march.



Figure 3: Poster for *Fathers and Sons*, *Vecherniaia Krasnaia Gazeta* 13 January 1934. From the archive of Dmitrii Barskii, courtesy of Natalia Miloserdova.

This is a great pity, for the film contains many moments that provoke and will always provoke rapturous ovations in the cinema, regardless of the age of the viewers. These include the strong scene with the 'Red Front' in class, the fight of the scouts with the working-class children and the very strong episode with the son of the strike-breaker who refuses a chair that is offered by the guard, and runs out of the classroom, covering her face with her hands. Then we should note a very precious and important 'trick', which our pioneers will recognize: the arrested pioneers try to warn the workers about the trap set by the police and write a note on the drum, which they throw out of the window onto the street where the demonstrators march. The drum, which has become a template in children's cinema, comes to live here again with new poignancy. These and other successful episodes of the film – woven together intelligently and lovingly – inspire confidence in the director of *Torn Boots*; they make us think that she will produce worthy children's films.

I. Osipov, 'To Children about Children', *Izvestiia*, 29 August 1936

[...] The filming of *Father and Son* is moving ahead at full speed. In the big building of the studio Soiuzdetfil'm in Likhov Lane, a loud gang of film actors has arrived, the oldest of which is 13. Among the actors performing

the central roles in the film is the 3-year-old Maika, who, with dignity, declares to everyone: 'I play the girl with the doll.'

Some actors cannot tell us anything about themselves or their acting because they are only months old. The 6-month-old daughter of the actor Koval'-Samborskii³³ will sometime be able to proudly announce that her working life literally began from the cradle.

The children act with huge enthusiasm. The play completely thrills them. They get used to the heroes that they play. Somehow they noticed that the girl performing the role of Fira became sad. She sluggishly uttered her lines, was bored and lost interest in the part. Finally, she openly declared that she did not like the name of the heroine. Well, what sort of name is Fira? They changed the heroine's name to Zina and everything went well.

The director M. Barskaia has experience of working with young actors on her film *Torn Boots*.

In *Father and Son* over a hundred children up to the age of 13 are employed. All the central roles of the film are performed by children. Both pedagogical skills and a huge love of children are needed so as not to frighten their sincerity and ingenuous movements, gestures and intonations to the camera.

The children come to Likhov Lane not for a day or two. Frequent meetings with small actors lie ahead for the new film studio Soiuzdetfil'm. For the first time in our country, and even in the history of cinema, a special production organization for the release of films for children of all ages has been created. Almost all of the 8–10 films, which the new studio should release every year from now on, will be filmed with the participation of children.

In the neglected, dirty building of the studio major repairs are now under way. It has been decided to bring not only the film units, but also the entire territory of the studio up to model standards. The children's rooms are being decorated. Children ought to encounter here an environment that would in no way hinder them from remaining cheerful. We will need to think about nannies, toys and a children's canteen. We need to teach all personnel, from the porter to the director of the film crew to sensitively treat the new 'cast'. At the same time we also need to bring more discipline and order into the very process of filming. We should not engage children in filming more than two–three hours a day. Innumerable technical faults, time and again, drag out and hamper the filming.

We need to hurry along with all these organizational matters, because the kids have already made an appearance at the studio. We need to engage them in all seriousness and treat them sensitively, and protect them from anything harmful, and combine the filming with profound educational work.

A curious fact: during the film shoot one 12-year-old character from *Father and Son*, according to the testimony of relatives, became unrecognizable. Under the influence of the sensitive treatment of the director, the crew manager and his assistants, the boy began to learn better and got away from hooligan experiences. Experience has shown that a child's participation in the shooting of a film can easily be beneficial for his upbringing, especially in the new special studio of children's films. [...]

33. Ivan Koval'-Samborskii (1893–1962), in the 1920s an actor in the Meyerhold Theatre; spent several years abroad (1927–32) and was repressed in 1938.

I. Bachelis, 'Repulsive Harm', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 18 May 1937

(On the film *Father and Son* directed by M. Barskaia)

Just imagine a man returning from the Kremlin, where he has just been handed the Order of Lenin. How will the factory greet him? How will his colleagues and his family greet him in his hour of triumph?

Well, he goes back to the factory and is immediately called to account for the upbringing of his son.

So, after the meeting, he goes home and his only son, a schoolboy, refuses to talk to him – gloomily and distrustfully glancing at his father. An hour later he runs away from home, having robbed his father.

What is this? Gibberish? Lie? The director M. Barskaia suggests that all this is merely fine, artistic, psychological detail, allowing her to set out the problem of children's upbringing in the film *Father and Son*.

But how on earth can we allow ourselves to use the word 'problem' if, in the entire film, from beginning to end, there is not one lively, thoughtful, truthful shot? The wildest imagination could not conceive of a child, devoid of a smile forever – for a lifetime. But Barskaia's imagination has contrived this frightening phenomenon, this little man with a wolf-like gaze, with mechanical, soulless movements. He strides across the screen – dry, tough, empty, silent, in his squeaking leather jacket, and you no longer feel yourself, you feel asphyxiated, and you don't have enough air...

One would need to have an aversion for children and hate life in order to come up with such an unconceivable lie. Only a maniac persistently and consistently would strive to slander everything that fell into his field of vision. The family, school, factory, building site, people, children, streets, houses, air – everything in this film becomes gloomy, dull, joyless and loses light; the frame is filled with a vacant, stony heaviness.

It is difficult to understand how such a film could have been created in Soviet conditions.

They say that this film was created for children. They even still argue about the film somewhere in the depths of cinematography. But this is a mockery. No, it is more of an outrage both upon our children and our adults. This anti-artistic, repulsively false film can have no place on the Soviet screen.

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