

Press release for immediate use
January 2025



Image caption: Image courtesy of the BFI National Archive

Exhibition explores cultural resistance in 1930s East London

Launching at Four Corners Gallery, *NOW FILMING: Art, Documentary and Resistance in 1930s East London* explores the fascinating story of the Workers Film and Photo League.

1930s Britain saw an era of poverty, the rise of fascism and the threat of war, countered by hunger marches and mass protests. The Workers Film and Photo League employed the camera as '*a weapon in the struggle*', engaging working people to represent their own lives and campaigns. *NOW FILMING* explores this moment of cultural resistance during the social conflicts of the time, issues which have strong resonance today.

The League countered the press barons that dominated the media by creating images produced by and for working people themselves. Films such as *Bread* (1934), employ Soviet-inspired montage sequences to show the desperation of hunger and unemployment, while *Workers Newsreel No. 3* (1935) captures mass demonstrations in London against the hated Means Test for unemployment relief. Photographs document protests in working-class Bermondsey against Mosley's British Union of Fascists in 1937 – one year after the infamous Battle of Cable Street in the East End.

NOW FILMING brings together newly discovered archival material, workers' film newsreels, photographs and agitprop, exploring their use in campaigns against the inter-war realities of hunger, fascism and unemployment. It also includes eight short films made by participants of Four Corners' Workers Newsreel project.

Co-curator Samuel Stevens says:

"I feel very privileged to be able to uncover this material for public exhibition, as I believe it represents an essential but widely overlooked lens in understanding the origins of Documentary & Workers Film and Photography in Britain."

- Ends -

Notes to editors

NOW FILMING: Art, Documentary and Resistance in 1930s East London

Exhibition launch: Thursday 23 January 2025, 6.30-8.30pm

24 January – 22 February 2025

Free admission. Opening hours 11am - 6pm Weds - Sat

Four Corners

121 Roman Road, Bethnal Green,

London E2 0QN

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For local press, listings and social media: Ruby Rees-Sheridan ruby@fourcornersfilm.co.uk

[Website](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#)

Events

The exhibition is accompanied by a series of talks and screenings. Further information [here](#)

This exhibition is produced through a co-creation project between the Film & Photo League Archive, Four Corners and the Centre for Education in Arts and Media at the University of Westminster. It is curated by Carla Mitchell & Samuel Stevens.

With grateful thanks to the British Film Institute, Whitechapel Gallery Archive, Marx Memorial Archive, Bishopsgate Institute Archives. The exhibition is supported by a National Lottery Project Grant from Arts Council England, London, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The Workers Newsreel project films were supported by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Mayor's Community Grants programme and the Scottish Power Foundation.

Film and Photo League Archive

The Workers Film & Photo League (later the Film & Photo League) was a radical grass-roots group active in East London in the 1930s. They brought together political activists, professional film technicians and amateur filmmakers and photographers, producing over thirty films including a series of Workers' Newsreels. Subjects included Hunger Marches, Poverty, Unionisation, Housing, Spanish Civil War Relief and Anti-Fascism. The group was part of a broader Worker-Photography movement of the 1920s and 30s, which began in Germany and the USSR, spreading to the United States and beyond. It was part of the broader Worker-Photography movement of the 1920s and 1930s, which aimed to use photography as a means of revolutionary propaganda to transform society.

The archive was created by Samuel Stevens in 2019 to preserve a collection of rediscovered documents, film and photographs relating to the original 1930s Workers Film and Photo League (WFPL) group. The collection includes correspondence with major political figures of the era Nye Bevan and Ellen Wilkinson, documentary filmmakers including Ivor Montagu, Rudolf Messel and Paul Rotha, and organisations such as the National Union of Unemployed Workers, the Labour Party, and the Spanish Relief Committee. Photographs taken by the Camera Section of the League document political events such as peace marches and anti-fascist demonstrations. The archive also includes a collection of newly discovered film material.

The majority of the FPL's films are held at the British Film Institute (BFI) along with a further collection of textual material. A key aim is to scan all documentation for public and scholarly access and use online. The BFI have made some of the films available through BFI Player, and a DVD publication of British campaign and protest films of the 1930s is being considered.

The archive aims to preserve and promote knowledge and understanding of the FPL's activities, to examine its role in the wider context of the international interwar Workers Film and Photography movement, identify the legacy of workers film and photography in contemporary forms of creative practice, and investigate the potential of radical archival collections. The archive is also committed to expanding its collection through the commission of new creative work made in response to the archive content, donation, acquisition and the collection of oral histories relating to the Film and Photo League.
<https://archive.filmandphotoleague.org.uk/>

Four Corners

Four Corners is a centre for film and photographic arts, based in East London for nearly 50 years. Our exhibitions explore social histories and community activism, and share stories from the margins that might not otherwise be told. www.fourcornersfilm.co.uk This exhibition forms part of *The People's Gallery*, Four Corners' cultural programme for 2025. It is supported using public funding through the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

About Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. We support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspire us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. artscouncil.org.uk

About the National Lottery Heritage Fund

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we Inspire, lead and resource the UK's heritage to create positive and lasting change for people and communities, now and in the future. www.heritagefund.org.uk. Follow @HeritageFundUK on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and use #NationalLotteryHeritageFund.



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