

Telegram from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea

Mr. Andrew Sarris
Chairman, National Society of Film Critics
Algonquin Hotel, Oak Room,
New York, N.Y.

It is with deep regret that we are unable to attend the ceremonies at which we were to accept the award conferred by you upon the Cuban film *MEMORIES OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT*. We write these lines first of all to express our satisfaction with the interest the film has received and with the esteem you have displayed for it. But, above all, these lines will inform you of the explanation of our unavoidable absence at the ceremonies as well as certain other things. The reason for our failure to attend is very simple: the State Department has denied us a visa to enter your country and has not given any explanation in this regard. But that is not all: the Treasury Department has threatened your Society with judicial proceedings that could put some of your officers in prison if you grant us the award (US \$2000) or even if you merely give us a plaque.

None of this is new. It should not come as a surprise to us. This superpower has subjected us to acts of aggression, to a blockade decreed against our country, and to misinformation ever since our revolutionary process began. These acts of aggression—which are to a certain extent reflected in our film—and all acts intended to interfere with any kind of contact between our people and the people of the United States have the immediate result of keeping the American people in ignorance and preventing them from getting the truth about what is happening in our country. Last year [*sic*], using the same absurd pretexts and the crudest of repressive measures, the US Treasury Department prohibited the New York showing of a group of Cuban films brought together for what was to be a Festival of Cuban Cinema. On that occasion as well, the State Department denied visas to a group of our film directors, thus preventing them from entering into a direct contact with the North American public. All of this is obviously contrary to the principles of freedom supported by the people of the United States and proclaimed—with an insistence that is quite suspect—by the US Government. We believe that the threats which the Treasury Department has aimed at the officers of the National Society of Film Critics are ridiculous and that nothing they can do can take away the recognition that Cuban cinematography has received from your Society. We would also point out, in closing, that all these manifestations of

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pompousness and arrogance on the part of the Empire toward a country that stopped being its servile colony 15 years ago also affect—in some important ways—the interests of the North American people. Among other things, they are thus forbidden to receive information which very nearby people are offering to communicate about their process of finding their own identity, becoming masters of their own destiny, and liberating all of their own creative energy.

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea