DOCUMENTARY ON 'THE FORTY DAYS OF MUSA DAGH' & HOLLYWOOD

Posted on December 6, 2012 by keghart.com

EPIC DENIED
DEPRIVING *THE FORTY DAYS OF MUSA DAGH*

Category: Opinions

Posted by Lilly Torosyan in Armenian Weekly

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'Epic Denied' will explore the fate of the Musa Dagh epic in Hollywood. The documentary, however, has yet to be completed. In order to finance the project, the producers have launched an online fundraising campaign. One of the producers/filmmakers, Edwin Avaness, spoke with the Weekly about the importance of this feature-length documentary making its way to the public.

The objective

"Our goal is to give audiences a unique look at the controversy surrounding the novel, and the unprecedented political maneuverings by foreign forces to halt the production of the motion picture," explained Avaness. He also noted the key themes that will be explored, including conspiracy, complicity, collusion, and blatant censorship in the context of Hollywood's history, and infringement of the First Amendment by a foreign power.

"After reading the book, we saw the importance of the content and decided to option the rights and make a documentary," he said. The project is thoroughly documented based on research in the MGM archives, the U.S. State Department, the Franz Werfel Papers at the UCLA Special Collections Library, the American Film Institute, and interviews of personalities involved in the film project. The "basic components of historical research are covered in a manner that finally unveils the truth of a film denied," Avaness said.

"Organizers and activists know the power of the media and how a good documentary motivates audiences into action. That is why we also plan to invite civil liberties organizations to use as a tool of engagement, and to promote the importance of free expression in media," Avaness told the Weekly.

Future Hollywood production?

Prominent directors and actors such as Elia Kazan, Rouben Mamoulian, and Sylvester Stallone throughout the decades have attempted to produce the film based on Werfel's novel. Avaness describes how Dore Schary, the successor to MGM Studio boss Louis B. Mayer, believed that *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* was one of the few great books written since *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, and dreamed of making the movie.

In 1934, MGM purchased the rights to make the novel into a motion picture. "Undertaken by veteran producer Irving Thalberg in the 1930's to unknown millionaire John Kurkjian in the 1980's, the project faced enormous foreign intervention and blackmail, preventing it from reaching the silver screen," he explained.

Avaness noted that today's Hollywood is not the same as it was in the 1930's. "Therefore, the question becomes how profitable an epic film based on Franz Werfel's novel will be?"

Next step

Research and development of the documentary have already been completed. "Our next phase is interviewing individuals in the entertainment industry who were involved in various capacities through the many incarnations of the project, as well as scholars who have the expertise to shed light on this untold story," Avaness detailed.

He stressed that *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* is "an important part of the Motion Picture history. We need everyone's help to document it."

To make a tax-deductible donation to "Epic Denied:'The Forty Days of Musa Dagh,'" visit www.indiegogo.com/EpicDenied.

For more information about the project, visit www.epicdenied.com.

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