

# Tibet in Crisis, Past and Present

BY DAVE KEHR

**T**om Peosay's documentary *Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion* is an impeccably made, often moving account of the captive nation of Tibet, forcibly annexed by China more than 50 years ago.

Using material gathered during 10 years, Mr. Peosay's film functions as both a breathtaking travelogue and a political provocation, offering convincing evidence of the Chinese government's determination to wipe out Tibetan culture and identity.

Although the film pays ample tribute to Tibet's status as a Buddhist spiritual capital, *Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion* also deals in brute, practical politics, examining Tibet's strategic position as a buffer between two of the world's most populous states - China and India - and its importance to the Chinese as a power base in the Himalayas.

Some of the most powerful imagery in the film comes from Mr. Peosay's exploration of ruined Tibetan monasteries. As the narrator, Martin Sheen, notes, the ruins look as if they date from a far distant past, when, in fact, the monasteries were systematically destroyed by Chinese military forces in the late 1950's and early 60's. (Another wave of

destruction came with the Cultural Revolution, beginning in 1966.) Not only buildings were attacked: a Buddhist nun describes her savage torture at the hands of Chinese military officials with a gasp-inducing matter-of-factness.

The Chinese government, Mr. Peosay suggests, no longer needs

material benefits of China's overheated economy with them. With Lhasa, Tibet's capital, overwhelmed with tourists (a new railroad connection is expected to bring even more), Tibetan culture and religion have been turned into more commodities, to be peddled in the form of cheap souvenirs manufactured and sold largely by Chinese immigrants.

Mr. Peosay has arranged his complex material with analytical intelligence and solid dramatic instinct. Though the film is plainly partisan, it also finds room for a Chinese government spokesman to explain his position - that China is merely doing its duty by bringing Tibet into the 21st century - without overtly ridiculing him, a gesture of maturity and respect that seems quite important in the context of today's cheaply sarcastic and grossly manipulative political documentaries, as pioneered by Michael Moore.

*Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion* opens today in New York. A more concise and affecting summation of the

Tibetan crisis would be hard to imagine. Directed by Tom Peosay  
Not rated, 100 minutes



to deal in such crude and obvious methods. Its weapons now are economic ones, as it tries to flood Tibet with immigrants from central China, bringing the dubious