

EDITORIAL

Reflecting on change

It's time to take stock, now, before the glut of fall filmmaking. Time to test the foundations laid by the film industry since the introduction of the tax shelter, and to decide on the shape of this structure which has been rising so quickly during the past years.

So far in 1981, four major features have been shot, all attesting to the strides made toward consolidating Canada's relations with Americans. *The Amateur*, part of the deal between Tiberius and 20th Century Fox, was first off, moving from Toronto to Washington to Vienna. Then Astral shot *Porky* in Florida with help from Melvin Simon, and R.S.L. went to Israel to make *Paradise* with advance promotion from its distributor, Avco Embassy. Finally, *Quest for Fire*, put into studio turnaround by Fox last year and picked up by International Cinema Corp., began shooting again after a winter lull.

In April, Canada's nine biggest producers of feature films made a significant move, founding the Association of Canadian Movie Production Companies (ACMPC). In doing so, they withdrew their membership from other producers' groups, leaving the old neighborhoods, so to speak. Left to fend for themselves are the less well-off and the bread and butter producers - those who make documentaries, educational films, commercials and sponsored films.

The existence of the ACMPC should clarify things considerably. In its first press release, the Association points to the gains those producers have made in solidifying their "relationships on the development, production and distribution levels with American 'Major' and 'mini-Major' distributors."

Determined to live among those who deal in the international marketplace with films for mass exploitation, these Canadian producers can only become stronger by polling their energies and, perhaps, their product. The suggestion has often been made that they might act as a distribution consortium, getting better deals for themselves and the Canadian investor.

Meanwhile, there is another cinema, a national cinema. It doesn't necessarily aspire to grandeur, but is content with creative freedom.

Canada has often made films rooted in indigenous material, speaking the language of the streets, and responding to those who live close by. Last year, the titles were *Les bons débarras*, *The Hounds of Notre Dame*, and *The Handyman*. This year, they are *Les Plouffe* and *Alligator Shoes*.

Les Plouffe, with its larger budget (though \$5 million is still small stuff on which to make a 6 hour series and a feature film) and its experienced producer (I.C.C.) is probably the exception to the rule. In the main, national cinema gets along with small budgets, making up in energy, enthusiasm and vision what it can't put together otherwise.

So it's time to ask, now, what place is reserved for these films? They won't be made from the same stuff the ACMPC will use: tax shelters, international stars and tried formulas won't do the job.

International festivals use artistic quality and innovation as their criteria, and it is unfortunate that, in some Canadian circles, the phrase, "It's a festival film," is taking on a pejorative connotation.

In every country in the world, national cinemas survive because the government provides sustaining mechanisms. Before we grow anymore, the Minister of Communications should take time out to share his view with the filmmakers, and tell them what he has reserved for those with indigenous interests.

The members of the Association des producteurs de films du Québec are hoping to hear just that when Francis Fox attends their annual meeting, June 6.

The editors

OPINION

B.C. bias

"Canadian chauvinism gives me a pain in the ass!" says Robert Altman, who did *That Cold Day in the Park* and *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* in Vancouver; *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* in Calgary; *Quintet* in Montreal.

"It may be meaningless that there's Canadian film. There just may be film," says Daryl Duke, Vancouver-based Ca-

nadian filmmaker of *The Silent Partner*, *Pay Day* and *Hard Feelings*.

"Those Canadian filmmakers who are active and successful now, and who have a rapport with the international industry, are those who will be around for years," says Justis Greene, film promotion officer for British Columbia.

Does anyone care why we in Beautiful B.C. are smiling?

In Ottawa, Minister of Communications Francis Fox lays down new regulations for a Canadian film industry. In Victoria, the Honourable Pat Jordan, Minister whose portfolio includes film, writes Fox a letter advising him that B.C. opposes his policy. Justis Greene goes to Parliament Hill to tell Fox that and more, in person. And in Vancouver filmmakers try to keep a sober face as Michel Vennat, André Lamy and the Canadian Film Development Corporation board hold a two-day meeting and then shake hands over cocktails.

"The purpose of the Vancouver meeting is for the CFDC Board of Directors to focus their attention on production in western Canada, particularly British Columbia," says a David Novek release. In an interview he adds that filmmakers are not going to get very far if they walk in off the street with a script.

"CFDC Fresh Out of Funds" says a headline in CineMag, meaning that there is no money to invest in film or to advance filmmakers until the new fiscal year.

So why not save those travel dollars? Instead, just lick a 17-cent stamp and ask Justis Greene what's going on in B.C. Or, now that the CFDC has finally opened up a fulltime office in Vancouver and appointed Calgary's Karen Laurence as regional co-ordinator, why not pick up the Red Phone and tell her to find out what irks western filmmakers? It will be the same thing they've been griping about since the first time and the last time the CFDC whizzed through town. (And always in crocus and daffodil weather.)

Apart from their inability to interest the CFDC in investing in their projects, west coast filmmakers - heads bloody and no longer unbowed - are frustrated because, as Canadians, they do not have control over their own media. Few film deals are packaged in Vancouver and the filmmakers themselves have only a slim hold on the marketing of the films they do, occasionally, manage to make. To make matters worse no films are booked from Vancouver, so there is no easy access to Canadian movie screens.

Finally, say westerners, Canadians have not been making movies, they've been making movie deals. Which means that they're too busy trying to make money to create a movie industry.

Justis Greene, between pamphlet raids over movie capitals of the world, sits back and laughs. Robbed of at least four major productions by the Screen Actors' strike in the U.S., British Columbia still finished 1980 with a record number of films completed. Production levelled off at \$65 million when sights had been set on \$100 million - which is now the realistic goal for the province's 1981 film production. Already producing more feature and TV films than any other western province, B.C. is determined that the only way to go is up, which is why the provincial government is at loggerheads with the federal film policy.

At issue is Fox's insistence on "Canadianizing" feature film production even more than it is now. Whether it gets anywhere with the argument, British Columbia is letting Ottawa know its opposition to that stance, meanwhile developing its own approach to filmmaking; and that is, that B.C. doesn't give a damn who makes the films as long as they make them in B.C. At the same time, Greene's office encourages and facilitates projects in B.C. by Canadians as zealously as it does for anyone.

Much more will be done for all filmmakers this year. By the time the Genies

attract most of the country's major film people to the annual back-slapping bash, they may be aware of something cooking in the west - something that will guarantee an ever-growing influx of filmmakers, and provide British Columbia producers with the best possible assistance.

No, the B.C. government is not into the film business, except to bolster its participation with the private sectors - whether they come from any part of Canada, Hollywood, London, or anywhere else films are seen.

Expanded nationalistic regulations for film threaten to keep away from this west coast Mecca those who have worshipped here before, or those wanting to share in the benefits of B.C. locations, and its performing and technical talent. The B.C. position is that, if outsiders come in to make films, some of their expertise in production - and more important, in distribution - will eventually increase the working knowledge of Canadians, and so reinforce the Canadian film industry.

That's why B.C. and Ottawa do not see eye-to-eye; and also why, whatever Ottawa does about the film business, there will always be a pot of gold at the end of B.C.'s rainbow.

Daryl Duke says that B.C. will never be Hollywood North: Justis Greene backs him, saying that such a notion is garbage. Like most filmmakers here, Duke asks, What are Canadian films supposed to reflect? "We had a National Film Board that was supposed to tell Canada about Canadians, interpret Canadians to themselves and to the world. What's a Canadian film industry supposed to be doing?" He has been called "commercial" and accused of "going Hollywood," but is that not what all the successful, money-making Canadian features - with the blessing of the CFDC - have done?

Just two of the many things lacking in the Canadian film industry are the ability to be bankable, and the ability to put together bankable deals, he declares. Which brings him to actors. How do we make it on the international market with the actors we have? There are a lot of actors who can be in the movies, but there are very few who can make a film happen. The sad thing, he says, is that those two or three are being overused. "We can't go on with Donald Sutherland, Geneviève Bujold and Christopher Plummer. After them there's a big drop to Gordon Pinsent - and then who? There have got to be others coming up, or else we have to forget about a Canadian film industry and just talk about a film industry."

Justis Greene is all for that, if necessary. He makes no apologies for doing what he can to lure foreign and home-grown producers to B.C. Successful producers in Canada must realize, he says - just as successful British, Italian or French producers realize - that they have to maintain a link with Hollywood because that is still where the largest pool of talent lies, in all facets of the film business. The tie-in with American filmmakers has been in existence right from the start of film in B.C. It grew stronger after the establishment of the Canadian Film Development Corporation, which was created to encourage a national industry, but which left - and leaves - western Canadians with a total feeling of isolation, a malaise that existed even before political separatism became an issue. For that reason Karen Laurence's appointment is looked on favorably, yet already there's the feeling that it won't change things.