As the year draws to a close, Cinema Canada publishes its 80th issue, making it Canada's most prolific English-language film publication to date. Unfortunately, the mood surrounding the event is one of sadness, one of things gone wrong in that small world of Canadian cinema.

With one sweep of the budget, the Minister of Finance dealt a serious -- perhaps mortal -- blow to the film industry which had been building over the last years. Some applaud the move, suggesting that the industry had done little to earn special support from the public purse. "They brought it on themselves," comment those for whom only "culture" should be fostered. The sum of films exhibited to date did not reassure these critics that the industry was about to contribute importantly to the cultural welfare of the country.

Yet there are many concerned people who feel that the economics of the film industry require the regular production of exploitation films so that the infrastructure can eventually support the more serious, artistic endeavors which involve greater risk. They point to recent films by Carle, Shebib and Thomas, suggesting that the industry was just turning that corner, producing finer films. To them, the financial factors are of the utmost importance.

Unfortunately, those in government who control the public purse reflect these same dichotomies.

The minister brought down his budget for obvious economic reasons: wanting to "level the playing field," cut direct-cost expenditures, film production got the same treatment as apartment building and drilling for oil. No notice was taken of the cultural dimension of cinema.

Far removed from industrial concerns are the arts councils which persist in encouraging filmmaking at the grass-roots level, knowing that the presence of co-ops and experimental filmmakers are a necessary part of film culture in Canada.

Caught between the arts bureaucrats and the economic counsellors are those whose job is to worry about "cultural industries." Neither fish nor fowl, having limited access to those who control public monies, they sit worriedly, trying to imagine a policy which would allow the inevitable marriage of culture and industry, yielding a vital and still artistically important film industry.

Only a firm understanding of the political nature of the dilemma will bring about a resolution of the competing tensions of culture and industry. A decision which is political is, by definition, "sagacious in promoting a policy." If there was little wisdom in film policy past, there is less wisdom today.

Therefore, the government's handling of the film industry over the last few years raises serious questions. Foremost among them is whether it has lost the ability to govern, to make decisions which are politic.

The bureaucrats need, too, to act in consort. The idea of the Minister of Finance doing away with the tax incentive just as the CRTC has completed its report raises serious questions. Foremost among them is whether it has lost the ability to govern, to make decisions which are politic.

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