Empire Inc.

**Telling an Anglo tale**

With the down-turn of the Canadian film industry, the CBC is once again the only game in town. While the news department in Toronto — with its expanded The National - The Journal format estimated to cost between $7 - $10 million — gambles on the Now, the Montreal-based TV drama series is taking a risk on re-interpreting the "Then.

Hailed as "one of the biggest" dramatic series ever made in this land, the $3 million, six-part Empire Inc. slated for viewing early in 1983, hopes to do for the memory of Anglophone Montreal what the hugely successful Duplessis series did for Quebec's pre-1960 politics: consecrate its official demise.

Fittingly, this six-hour requiem to past glories is being brought to you in a never-before-seen spirit of amicable collaboration between TV's two solitudes, CBC and Radio-Canada, with slightly less prominent (though credited) help from the National Film Board. Verily, the Canadian TV producer's dream come true!

And it is largely, at least in key respects, the same equipe that created Duplessis (the tandem Mark Blandford producer - Denys Arcand scriptwriter) who are behind this chronicle of the boom to bust saga of (fictional) Montreal financier James Monroe's rise from Scottish immigrant's rags to the pinnacle of pre-Quiet Revolution high finance. Arcand says he's greatly looking forward to working with Anglophone actors.

With Mark Blandford as executive producer and director of two-hour-long episodes, screenwriters Douglas Bowie, Denys Arcand who will also direct two episodes and Jacques Benoit, with Douglas Jasckon directing the other two segments, Empire Inc. is the triple story of a man and his family, that of the times the Great Depression, the rise of Nazism and the Second World War, as well as that of the city of Montreal from 1929, when it was the financial capital of the country, to 1960.

Location shoots include such former bastions of the Anglo establishment as the Mount Royal Club and the Mount Stephen Club — once the home of CPR magnate and rubber baron George Stephen; the House of Commons in Ottawa (thrown back to the days of Mackenzie King dullest); and, sure sign of these change times in the course of one day's shooting, the schedules are gruelling.

One of Empire's stories within the story — which the publicity department goes so far as to call a "career change" — concerns Quebecois political documentarist Denys Arcand's (On est au coton: Quebec: Duplessis et apres; and the forthcoming Le confort et l'indifference on the 1980 Quebec referendum) presence as hired director not working on his own script for the first time in his professional life.

"I've worked directly with actors," since Michael Dorland •

**Scandale**

**Porno for fun and profit**

They were doing alterations on one of Quebec's more noisome skeletons the other day, down at R.S.L. Films. Lately, you see, a number of Quebec's skeletons have jumped out of the family closet and come clanking into the parlour: The folks down at R.S.L. have seized the opportunity to take one of them - the Pornobec scandal — and parade it around the countryside, with the hope that the yokels will fill R.S.L.'s coffers in order to see it.
employees of the Quebec governmen who were shooting porno movies in the basement of the National Assembly building in Quebec City.

That's the truth of the skeleton around which R.S.L. producer Robert Lantos has tailored Scandale, a film shot in less than a month for under a million dollars by George Mihalka (Pinball Summer and My Bloody Valentine).

The Pornobec scandal broke in the early autumn of 1981. George Mihalka agreed to do the film on December 4. There was no script or even a step-outline, by December 11. There were 4 weeks of pre-production, hampered by the fact there were four-day holidays in December for New Year's, and the bulk of the shooting took place between January 12 and February 2. As Mihalka put it, "it happened so fast, we began shooting without knowing some of the people we were going to be working with."

When I visited R.S.L. in early March, post-production had started even as pick-up shooting (establishing shots, the little things that help a film run smoothly) was still going on. Distribution deals had been struck, and release date of April 23 had been set.

Making a film that quickly poses problems. In the words of the film's writer, George Mihalka, "When you're making a film so fast, on a shoestring budget, things are bound to foul up. And they did, every day. "I had a day off."

On the very first day, 2 1/2 hours before shooting was scheduled to begin at the Palais de Justice, the provincial government, which had given R.S.L. the permit to use the site, "all our lighting equipment," says Mihalka, "our crew was there when we got thrown out."

But, clearly, all the problems with Scandale could be solved. Mihalka was quite philosophical about the fact that the conditions on which the film was shot made even approaching perfection impossible. Speaking of the probability that there are going to be technical flaws in the film, he said "I'll laugh it off." Well, start laughing George, because I really didn't like the cut of the suit I saw being made for the Pornobec scandal. Not that I was actually allowed to see shots from the cut. Mihalka said it seemed a little, well, sketchy about that idea.

Mihalka and Lantos and the others involved in Scandale for having the nerve to deal with such a touchy subject, especially since this is Mihalka's first film in Quebec, with no experience about the contributions of Francois Protag, the director of photography (Les Raffles, and Nanette Workman, who apparently knows the five cabinet numbers in the film.

But...