

Time to make choices

The federal government has been gearing up to write a film policy for quite a while now. Task force committees, studies by the department of Communications, frequent consultations between the Minister and the Producers Council of Canada, representations by the National Film Board and the Canadian Film Development Corporation all add to the certainty that soon a policy will be forthcoming.

The advent of pay-TV has made such a policy a necessity, and the report of the Applebaum-Hébert committee on culture in the fall will probably trigger its presentation.

Meanwhile, there is an absolute lack of leadership, both in government circles and in the private sector. The federal agencies, faced with severe budget cuts and a government which has more than its share of economic problems, are jockeying for funds and power. No agency, and no single person in any of the agencies has rallied the industry and given it a sense of direction or purpose.

Among those at work – or out of work – at filmmaking, no single organization has surfaced to create a consensus about the way to resolve the various problems. While the producers snipe at each other and woo the Minister, the unions, guilds and independents present no single voice. The service houses fight to stay in business. The distributors continue to cry in the wilderness.

A choice must be made about the direction in which this industry is going to move. The lack of continuity in government action to date is impairing our image abroad, as Marc Gervais notes in this issue. All signs indicate that the Minister, influenced by a strong lobby, is turning toward the Americans to resolve our problems, and that an Americanization of the industry is certainly a seductive alternative for some senior policy people. His recent trip to call on the heads of the American studios would have been, in any other context, surprising, to say the least. In Canada, it is regarded as normal – the way we do business.

To date, we can measure the effect of Americanization. In production, it has generated work and allowed some to make handsome profits. It has not produced many films which have been critically acceptable. It has fostered the emigration of many. That Peter Carter should die in Los Angeles, where he made his home, after 30 years as one of Canada's admired craftsmen, is symbolic.

In distribution, it has been an unmitigated catastrophe, all but driving Canadian distributors out of business. The Minister, reportedly, expects that his visit to Hollywood will lead to interesting initiatives on the part of the Majors to help Canadians gain control over their film destiny. Yet, two weeks after his visit, Gaumont of France gives all its films to Columbia for distribution in Canada. Gaumont, who for years had dealt with Quebec-based independents, is France's largest distributor, and owns theatres in several countries. Some wonder whether visions of owning Canadian theatres are dancing in the heads of the Gaumont planners? Or will they begin to produce English-language co-productions to crack the American market? Now that our colonialization by the Americans is all but complete, are we to be confronted by a second wave from Europe?

There is, of course, an alternative solution: a strong, culturally focussed policy aimed at fostering an independent Canadian industry. A new generation of filmmakers is ready. Many have made successful short films or feature-length documentaries. They want to try their wings at something more. Yet the current feature film situation does not encourage them.

This is not to say they are unable to work. Many a film is being made, often with budgets which stagger the imagination, so trim are they. The CBC and the NFB show signs of wanting to help, but staff agreements and the weight of bureaucracy severely limits those corporations' ability to move quickly in new directions.

Provincially, much could be done. The Institut Québécois du Cinéma, which generates lively criticism, tries to reach out to help young filmmakers and has encouraged the CFDC to look favorably upon the filmmakers it backs. Alberta is on the brink of making its provincial corporation operative. The Ontario Arts Council, which has no provincial counter-part elsewhere, could be extended by the addition of a granting agency to help more mature filmmakers.

The provinces can also get on with the debates on quotas and levies. The federal government has made it clear that these areas are not within its jurisdiction.

But there must be a will to act, and a direction well defined. The young filmmakers are still timid. They grew up when the industry was booming, and have seen nothing like the scene which greets them today. No organization bridges the gap, sustaining them with tales of other battles fought and won. There is little sense of history, of coherence. Many react by withdrawing. They would prefer not to know what is going on, and this disinterestedness is dangerous. One cannot influence policy if one does not have an overview.

Confusion is rampant today, and even the most valiant wonder if the situation can be reversed. In its last editorial, Cinema Canada told a cautionary tale, emphasizing the influences surrounding the Minister, and suggesting that the cultural voice was being silenced. That many read this as an endorsement of the Americanization of the industry is one sign of how deeply that confusion now runs.

Obviously, the only viable solution to the present woes must be one which creates a positive, invigorating climate in which young filmmakers are allowed to flourish. While the more seasoned producers have proved they are able to go it alone, those who care about Canada, its image and cultural integrity, will need to get the government's ear. Only the young filmmakers and their films can reverse the process of Americanization which is so well on its way in Canada.

The editors

Scandale – Counterpoint

This letter is in reference to David Clarke's review of *Scandale* in the June issue of Cinema Canada.

Dear David,

Now that you have finally seen the film *Scandale*, you seem to have taken it upon yourself to defend your honour by attacking director George Mihalka under the seedy guise of a film review.

Believe me, George Mihalka makes no pretence as to the socially redeeming values of *Scandale*. His, be-it, scathing retort in the May issue of Cinema Canada was merely in response to your "pre-scient criticism" of the film in the April issue, and therefore, should not be the basis of your present criticism and ridicule.

Granted, *Scandale* is no work of art, nor does it presume to be. However, to dismiss it as "witless filth", and insist that it made you sick, and angry, and that it insulted the people of Quebec, please, spare us the grief.

Don Cohen

location sound mixer
Scandale

Complaints to register

We are writing to register a series of complaints about the management of the Toronto Super 8 Film Festival...

As independent filmmakers, totally self-supporting our endeavors, we were particularly enthused about the festival's stated aim: "to serve as an interface between individuals, groups and organizations" (from the last page of the 1982 program).

During our initial phone conversation with Ms. Sheila Hill, the director, we were told the following:

- 1- All films sent to the festival would be screened.
- 2- There would be a trade show at the festival.
- 3- There would be film entries and participants from all over the world.
- 4- The deadline for entry was May 20, 1982.

We decided to enter 2 films and attend in Toronto. This decision was

promptly communicated to Ms. Hill, who encouraged our attendance. We then made lengthy plans which included the expense of plane tickets and hotel reservations.

On May 17, 1982, we simultaneously mailed our films and informed Ms. Hill that we would definitely attend. Again we were told that all films would be screened at the festival, regardless of the jury selection outcome.

When we arrived at the festival on June 4, 1982, we were rudely greeted by Sheila Hill and learned the following:

1- Under no circumstances would our films be shown, since they had arrived too late. (We would have expected to have been notified if the films had arrived too late to justify our attendance.)

2- The trade show was not a trade show at all, with no manufacturers' representatives or technical experts but only employees of a few local retail stores.

3- The participants and audience was not world-wide or numerous, but instead was made up almost entirely of a number of local college students.

4- Ms. Hill, by her own admission had extended the deadline in order to include some films.

In spite of these unpleasant realizations and discourteous treatment, we made a humanistic plea to have our films shown, since we had invested so much and traveled so far.

We were categorically denied our request of a public screening. Instead, we were sent to a class room, where on a broken-down projector, we were "privileged" to show our films to 3 people, sent to the "screening" by Ms. Hill.

We were lured into a provincial but nonetheless rigid structure, where rules were changed at whim, and outsiders were not welcome.

Our complaint is two-fold: we were misled into spending a considerable sum, and the director, who was aware of our predicament, made no effort to right a wrong. The misrepresentations of the festival by its director and the rude and abominable treatment meted out to us by her are an affront to our professional, artistic and, not least, human sensibilities.

We attended to share our films and art, and wound up in a regional club undesirous of outside participation...

Katia Grossman

T. Val Liebl

Lindenhurst, N.Y.

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