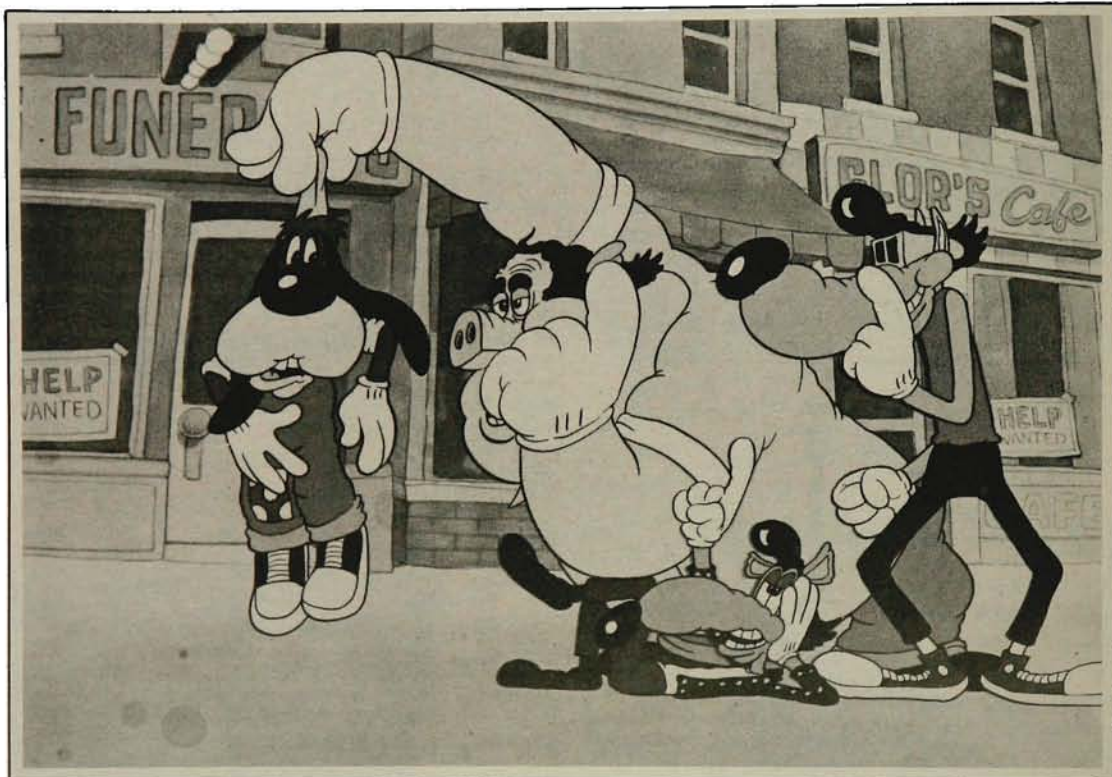


ALIVE AND KICKING

A cultural response from Manitoba filmmakers



• The look of Western animation - a scene from the 10-minute film **Bob Dog** by prairie animators, Credo Group

The signatories to this document have several things in common - none of us are full-time employees of the National Film Board, the CBC, or any other federal or provincial agency. All of us make our living or are attempting to make our living from the film industry in Manitoba. And all are disappointed in the film recommendations of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee.

Apart from that we are as diverse as any film community must be to deserve the name: directors, producers, writers, editors, camera, sound and lighting people, makeup and wardrobe, production people, animators, dramatists, documentarists, lab people, recording studio people, advertising people, graphics people, Liberals, Conservatives, New Democrats, the politically radical and the apolitical. That we can come together at all is a tribute to the Applebaum-Hébert commission's achievement in alienating all of us - without regard to race, sex, political alignment or professional training.

No government could be expected to make responsible decisions on the basis of this report - at least, not decisions that would treat fairly the needs and welfare of regional film communities.

As far as A-H is concerned, there are no regional communities. Well, A-H is wrong. We are here and kicking, and we hope by this document to bring that fact to your attention and assist you in creating a film policy to benefit all of Canada.

We are not unaccustomed to this. To be a have-not province far from the Golden Triangle is to be constantly at war with centralism. Because of this we get a reputation as professional whiners, as those who would not be happy without a cause for Ottawa- or Toronto-bashing. But for us, this constant refrain is not fun; it is not even interesting. It is tedious and annoying, and it is time - and energy - consuming. The settlers spend so much of their time on the battlements, they can't get a decent crop in the ground. We do it because we must. We want to live here. We want to make films. We must make a living. So we fight, yet again.

We reject the argument that there can only be one or two film-producing centres in Canada. Manitoba's theatre community is no less legitimate for being far from Broadway or the West End. Our dance community is no less significant to us for not being New York, London or Moscow. Our musicians, writers and

artists are no less valuable for their distance from Rolling Stone, the New York Review of Books and MOMA. We are a healthy, spirited and determined group and we deeply resent being ignored.

We will tell you a bit about our industry. We'll tell you something of what we think of the various federal agencies involved in our industry, and we'll tell you what we think of the specific recommendations of the A-H Report as it reflects on us.

The eco-system of the arts

Perhaps the best metaphor for the film industry on the prairies is the eco-system of the tundra. To an observer from the lush green south (in our metaphor, Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal) it may seem a drab and barren place with long cold winters and little vegetation. Handy for gouging out natural resources as needed and marginally important as a market. Not a region of much other interest. But to a resident of this tundra who lives in it and from it, it is rich, varied, complex and precious. Its rewards may be subtler than those to be found in Lotusland, but they are no less important or real to us.

As any naturalist will tell you, tough

and hardy as its components may be, the eco-system of the tundra is delicate and fragile. The slightest disturbance reverberates, threatening to destroy the entire system. The harshness of the environment makes every element dependent for its very existence on every other. So it is with us. Those things which nourish us can't be separated from each other. Damage to one can mean disaster for all. The production of commercials and industrials is not enough, alone, to sustain a film industry here. Nor is the National Film Board. Nor contract work for government. Certainly not the CBC. And yet it is difficult to visualize a viable industry with any one of these missing. It is only by juggling all of these and settling for incomes generally well below the national average that we have survived, and built a community that is sophisticated and accomplished.

We are a young community. With a couple of exceptions, none of us was here, making films, in 1970. In those days, the lab service was elementary, the sound recording and mixing facilities were crude. There were no independent camera or sound people, or editors, or directors. Today, there are full-service

APPLEBERT

lab and sound facilities in 16 mm with plans for expansion to 35 mm. And the market they service is almost all in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

A few years ago, any ad agency or corporation looking for a slick film product had to go to Toronto or Vancouver. Today we are producing commercials in 16, 35 and videotape with budgets in excess of \$50,000, whose quality will stand up to any on the continent. Educational films produced independently in Winnipeg have established a profitable, self-sustaining market in the west. Our animators are winning awards in Ottawa, Zagreb, Cracow, Cannes, and other international festivals. So are our live-action filmmakers. But more than that, we are producing films in and from the part of the world that is our home. We are the first generation of prairie people who can say that. We are in the process of building a genuine prairie cinema. The A-H Report, while recognizing the regional importance and legitimacy of

the other producing arts, ignored us. And their recommendations can do little but harm us.

The National Film Board

We in the prairies are in general very strong supporters of the National Film Board, whether or not we benefit directly by working for it. This doesn't mean we support the status-quo. As a national institution, apart from its regional program, the Board is top-heavy, sluggish, complacent, inefficient and apparently out of touch with the times - in short, badly in need of radical change. But the changes suggested by A-H show a complete failure to grasp what is good about the Board and would certainly complete the job of self-destruction that years of inertia have begun. The faults of the institution as a whole must not obscure its virtues, both at Montreal headquarters and in the regions.

Our support for the NFB stems from the fact that, along with the Canada

Council, it is the only government agency in the history of Canadian film to take its regional responsibilities seriously and to back them up with money. In 1975-76 the Board opened its production office here and has had a profound impact ever since. It did not, as the CBC did, simply establish a large in-house branch plant here staffed by Montreal-oriented production people. Rather it moved into the community and began to work with it, restricting staff to a few essential and highly productive positions. In the last three years the Board has spent almost \$1.5 million in this community, making it the single largest market for independent personnel and facilities. This injection of money resonates far beyond those who receive it directly. It provides an economic prop for craftspeople and facilities which are then available for employment by commercial or other government producers. Without the NFB, many of these people would have been forced out of business or out of

town, to Toronto or Vancouver - as they always were in the past.

Beyond direct film production the NFB has also involved itself in the community through assistance to the film co-ops here and in Saskatchewan, by supporting development work-shops and sending filmmakers to seminars and festivals. There is not a member of this community who has not benefitted, directly or indirectly, by the Film Board's presence.

The A-H contention that "the NFB no longer occupies a central position in Canadian film... but it is independent production which now attracts many of the skilled filmmakers who once were drawn to the NFB" (p. 257) simply does not hold in the experience of the Prairie Region. It does retain a central position here and it is a "nurturing presence" (p. 257). To eliminate that presence or severely restrict it would have the same effect on prairie filmmaking as removal of the NFB in the 1950's would have had

Award-winning films from Manitoba

Blowhard by Brad Caslor and Chris Hinton

- Golden Sheaf Award, Best Animated Film - Yorkton International Short Film and Video Festival, 1979.
- Special Commendation for Animation Techniques - Rio de Janeiro International Scientific Film Festival, 1979.

Capital by Allan Kroeker

- Golden Sheaf Award, Best Performance (Ed McNamara) - Yorkton, 1981.
- Award of Excellence - AMTEC Media Festival, Winnipeg, 1982.

The Catch by Allan Kroeker

- Golden Sheaf Award, Best Video Production - Yorkton, 1980.
- Best Drama, Can-Pro Awards, Ottawa, 1982.

Chasing the Eclipse by Norma Bailey and Ian Elkin

- Golden Sheaf Award, Best Documentary - Yorkton, 1980.

The Curse of Ponsonby Hall by Vic Cowie and Vic Davies

- Golden Sheaf Award, Best Video Production, Best Children's Production - Yorkton, 1982.

The Dreamer by John Paizs

- Best Award Animated Short - London Film Festival, 1978.

Getting Started by Richard Condie

- Bijou, Best Animation - Canadian Short Film Festival, Toronto, 1980.
- Special Jury Award, Best Sound Effects - 4th World Festival of Animation, Zagreb, Yugoslavia, 1980.
- First Prize, Category B - International Animation Festival, Espinho, Portugal, 1980.
- Diploma of Merit, Tampere International Film Festival, Finland, 1981.
- Fipresci Jury Award, Best Animation - International Short Film Festival, Cracow, Poland, 1981.
- Bijou, Outstanding Animation - Canadian Short Film Festival, Toronto, 1981.

God Is Not A Fish Inspector by Allan Kroeker

- Best Film - Northwest Film Seminar Competition, Seattle, 1980.
- Golden Sheaf Award, Best Screenplay - Yorkton, 1981.

It's A Hobby For Harvey by Barry Lank

- Chris Plaque, Best Film, Columbus International Short Film Festival, 1982.

Joe's Gym by Elise Swerhone

- Award of Merit - AMTEC, 1982.

John Law and the Mississippi Bubble by Richard Condie

- Best Animation, Tampere International Film Festival, Finland, 1980.

Loved, Honoured, and Bruised by Gail Singer

- Certificate of Merit - Cork Film Festival, Ireland, 1981.

The New Mayor by Ian Elkin, Bob Lower, Derek Mazur

- Golden Sheaf Award, Best Public Affairs Film - Yorkton, 1979.

Nose and Tina by Norma Bailey

- Golden Sheaf Awards, Best Cinematography, Best Film - Yorkton, 1981.
- Bijou Awards, Outstanding Direction, Outstanding Film under 30 Minutes, Canadian Short Film and TV Festival, Toronto, 1981.

The Pedlar by Allan Kroeker

- Award of Merit - AMTEC, 1982.

The Performer (L'Artiste) by Norma Bailey

- Special Jury Award, Cannes International Film Festival, 1980.

Petroleum's Progress by Tom Fletcher

- Red Ribbon, 23rd American Film Festival, New York, 1981.

Pigbird by Richard Condie

- First Prize, Category C - International Animation Festival, Ottawa, 1982.
- First Prize, Educational Film - World Festival of Animation Films, Zagreb, Yugoslavia, 1982.
- Bijou, Animation Category - Canadian Film and Television Awards, 1982.

Priory by Mark Dolgoy

- Red Ribbon - 22nd American Film Festival, New York, 1980.

Room Four Memory by Perry Stratychuk

- Bronze Medal - American International Film Festival, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1981.

Slide, Flip, Turn by Kim Johnston

- Award of Merit - AMTEC, 1982.

The Strongest Man in the World by Halya Kuchmij

- Bijou, Best Documentary Film under 30 Minutes - Canadian Film and Television Awards, Toronto, 1981.
- Golden Sheaf Award, Best Producer - Yorkton, 1981.

Ted Baryuk's Grocery by John Paskievich and Mike Mirus

- Official Canadian Entry - Cannes International Film Festival, 1982.

Wood Mountain Poems by Harvey Spak

- Best Production under 30 Minutes - Banff International Festival of Films for Television, 1980.

Beginnings by Tom Fletcher

- Silver plaque at the Chicago International Film Festival, Best documentary.
- 1980 Yorkton International Film Festival, Best Cinematography.

Children of the Gael-Wayne Finucan Productions

- New York Iris Award - Best Foreign Film
- Milan Film Festival - Special Year of the Child Award.
- Can Pro Award.

Assiniboia Downs-Wayne Finucan Productions

- Actra Awards - Best TV Commercial.

A Last Farewell-Film Factory Productions

- Can Pro - 1980 Performance Arts Award.

Ray St. Germaine Pilot-Film Factory Productions

- Can Pro - 1979 Entertainment Series Award.

APPLEBERT



● Bob Lower

regional components, each with its own character corresponding to the region it serves. We believe that an attempt to shift the NFB's role in the regions to either the CBC or the CFDC would be doomed to failure. We believe that history makes this so apparent that we would regard any move to do so as empty political fence-mending, and we would oppose it.

We suggest, with respect to the NFB, that the regional program, as its most successful current program, be enlarged and expanded and given a leading role in the future development of the Board. That is, the regions should be made autonomous that they might lead the founding centre rather than being tethered by its bureaucratic bulk. We believe that headquarters should be kept strong as a production centre, but that its new role, whatever else it contains, should have built into it a responsiveness to regional needs.

The CBC

The critical point to understand about the role of the CBC in the independent community is that CBC Winnipeg is not and has never been a part of the Winnipeg community except incidentally. It has always been a part of CBC Toronto, serving that body's needs without regard to its effect on Manitoba's film community. We are, for them, an employment and facilities pool of convenience. Once in a while they will reach out to us if need demands it or if there is extra money kicking around. But if it suits their purposes to undermine our position by duplicating our equipment, withdrawing their support or even competing with us in the production of commercials, they do not hesitate. Their only real and lasting contribution has been the production of some skilled people who have since left the CBC and set up on their own, to share the ups-and-downs with the rest of us. Those people retain a certain relationship with the CBC that brings them a degree of work, and this is good as far as it goes. But it does not go far enough.

Yet we would not like to see the CBC's production scattered to private producers. That, in the long run, would benefit only Toronto/Montreal and would increase centralization. We would like to see more money earmarked for regional production through the CBC and we would like to see them make a long-term commitment to involve themselves with the communities they live and work in. That way, they might

someday come to truly represent the regional nature of this country.

The Canada Council

Like the NFB, Canada Council has taken its regional responsibilities seriously. We won't deal with it here because the Winnipeg Film Group, of which many of us are members, is its largest beneficiary and is submitting its own brief to Francis Fox. Suffice it to say that for the most part our experiences with the CC have been positive and we strongly support its continuing contribution to our community.

The CFDC and the CCA

The Canadian Film Development Corporation and the Capital Cost Allowance have had a pretty limited effect on our community as a whole, but for a few of us, their effect has been significant. Several films have been made here using the provisions of the CCA and we would like to see the program continue. The CFDC, by its very nature is structured around Toronto and Montreal. If it is enlarged, as it probably should be, we don't expect to see much benefit from it. Still, we support it as an important instrument in developing a national industry. Even if centred in Toronto, a strong Canadian feature film industry must benefit all Canadians.

Conclusions

We could go on listing the pros and cons of the activities of various individuals and departments *ad nauseam*. This would be as boring to write as it would be to read, and we don't want to get lost in a sea of paper and ink. The main points are easy to sum up.

- The Applebaum-Hébert Report committed an error and an injustice in ignoring regional film communities.

- The A-H Report, while correctly criticizing the NFB for its lack of vision, makes recommendations that will only finish the job of destroying it. In particular it ignores the excellent beginnings the regional program has made.

- The CBC should be forced to diversify its production through the regions and its regional offices should be encouraged to integrate themselves with the film communities around them.

- The Canada Council's film program should be continued and expanded.

- The CFDC and the CCA should be expanded, but not at the expense of the NFB, the CBC or the Canada Council.

Finally, we don't intend to get lost in the shuffle, as everyone scrambles for position in the emerging film policy. We



● Halya Kuchmij

have worked hard and sacrificed plenty to get where we are, and there is much we still want to do. We take ourselves seriously as filmmakers and producers, as business people, crafts-people and artists. We expect others to take us seriously, too. And we intend to do whatever we must to ensure that we are not ignored.

Norma Bailey, producer/director. **Lara Mazur**, film editor. **Kim Johnston**, producer/director. **Mike Mirus**, director/sound editor. **Vonnie Von Helmolt**, production manager. **Erna Buffie**, film research/script development. **Charles A. Lavack**, assistant camera/camera operator. **Allan Kroeker**, writer/director. **Richard Condie**, director/animator. **Alan Pakarnyk**, animator. **Wendy Lill**, scriptwriter/researcher. **Leon Johnson**, sound recordist/producer/director. **Victor Dobchuk**, producer/director. **Cynthia Warner**, continuity/make-up. **Cordell Barker**, animator. **Barry Lank**, producer/director. **Jan-carlo Markiw**, writer/director. **Keith C. Long**, animator. **James Edward Ackerman**, sound recordist/director. **John Bluethner**, writer/actor/director. **Neil McInnes**, animator. **Douglas Davidson**, filmmaker. **John Paskievich**, photographer. **Larry Kurnarsky**, director/writer. **Derek Mazur**, producer/director. **Kim Forrest**, production artist. **Joan Scott**, production manager. **Brad Caslor**, animator. **Steven Rosenberg**, graphic designer. **Randa Stewart**, production manager. **Devan Towers**, production accountant. **Frank Raven**, lighting electrician. **Bob Lower**, director/editor. **Elise Swerhone**, director/editor. **David Dueck**, producer/director. **Kathleen Beach**, producer. **Ann Poten**, production secretary. **Chris D. McPherson**, sound engineer. **Shirley Schmitt**, production accountant. **Jon B. Stevens**, dubbing technician. **Wayne Finucan**, producer. **C.P. Oruis**, film lab technician. **Carol Lawrence**, film lab technician. **Sharon McIvor**, film lab technician. **Connie Bortnick**, producer/production manager. **Norman Bortnick**, producer/director. **Janice Taylor**, production assistant. **Clive W. Perry**, sound engineer. **Sheryll Histed**, production manager. **Julie Eccles**, production secretary. **Scott Collins**, artist. **Charles Speidel**, graphic designer. **Kenn Perkins**, producer/director. **Trevor Odgers**, producer/cinematographer. **Christina L. McCaughey**, producer. **Jonathan Kacki**, editor. **Ian Elkin**, cinematographer.

on all of Canada - to quote Applebaum again: "It is impossible to imagine the history of filmmaking in Canada without the initial, nurturing presence of the NFB" (p. 257).

Our support goes beyond the need for money and beyond the regional office. Montreal production headquarters has been central to the success of the regional experiment. First of all, it was a headquarters decision to establish the regions in the form they now exist - proof that not all vision has disappeared from the NFB. Second, Montreal has provided invaluable opportunities for us to work with some of the most accomplished filmmakers in Canada, and to call upon their resources to augment our own. The filmmakers at headquarters are one of this industry's most valuable resources, in spite of the current problems of their organization. Without a strong central production facility, the regional experience would be narrow and truncated.

It is not surprising that A-H missed this point in its discussion of the NFB. It is consistent with their failure to deal anywhere with regional film production, and by implication to discount it as irrelevant. It is not enough for them to say that we didn't come out to address their hearings - people rarely prepare briefs on those things they consider progressive and relatively satisfying, at least not until those things are threatened. The information was available if they had wanted to see it. We suspect that their film advisors suffered from the selective myopia that is the chronic disease of central Canada - you see what you want to see.

To reduce the NFB to an academic institution where useful production of films is not the prime mover is a silly, unimaginative suggestion. A teaching institution, a nurturing body, yes, but one in which the teachers are actively engaged in production. The best teaching institutions are those where teaching is done by, or at least led by active producers - English departments with writers, art departments with artists, physics departments with research physicists, film schools with active filmmakers.

Changes must be made in the NFB but they must be made in the role of its film production, not by the elimination of it.

The NFB is the only national film-producing institution which has an internal structure that relates well and easily to its regional responsibilities. It is not in conflict with the general running of the NFB to have strong, independent



● Filmmaker on wheels Richard Condie going off to shoot