

The final chapter

During the international film festival at Cannes, world attention turns to national cinema, as countries trot out their best films and vie with each other for notice. The festival is one of the yard-sticks against which the worth of a national effort can be measured.

This year, only two Canadian features were chosen, one for the Directors' Fortnight, and another in a less prestigious selection called *Un certain regard*. Neither attracted much attention. Officially, the Canadian star - which was rising in the early '70s - has waned, and with it, the hopes of many filmmakers.

Ironically, this happens at a time when the Canadian film industry is busily retooling to confront the new age of television, with the energetic assistance of a flurry of fresh policies from the minister of Communications.

So it is perhaps worth remembering how the same well-meaning government approved measure after measure, to shore up the film industry, and at the same time only succeeded in completely undermining that very industry. The occasional fine film is still made in Canada, but it is an exception; more often than not, those films are made despite the measures meant to 'create an infrastructure' upon which a healthy, vibrant film industry should rest.

It began with the tax shelter. The financial incentive proposed and adopted in 1974 came out of the blue, unaccompanied by any serious film policy from the Secretary of State's office. Its first years gave us a host of co-productions, and triggered the immigration to Canada of several producers who would color those first years. (Remember Julian Melzack and Harry Allan Towers?)

Events then followed in quick succession. The CCA provisions were tightened against abuse, but no film policy was written to steer the course. McCabe replaced Spencer at the CFDC, ushering in an era of fast moving, short-sighted deals which left the industry devastated after a few boom years.

In its frenzy, the industry had turned-off the financiers, the general public and even the department of Finance, which rolled back the tax shelter.

The only people not turned off were those Americans who understood that, through alliances of mutual interest, a weak Canadian production industry could always be co-opted to suit American requirements. The producers who flourished, or seemed to flourish, at the end of the tax shelter period were those producers who had built strong ties to the American system, producing films for the Majors and working to the rhythms of commercial television.

Understanding that the demise of tax shelter incentive was threatening the entire industry - and that no serious infrastructure had resulted from a truly monumental influx of capital into that industry - the minister turned to pay-TV, hastening its arrival in Canada and welcoming it as the final saviour of film production. Hearings, briefs and individual comment all made it abundantly clear that, given the Canadian market, the CRTC must proceed with caution; that the American experience could not serve as an ideal model, and that over-licensing would lead to yet greater dislocation and perhaps bankruptcy. Fearlessly - and heedless as always of the opinion of those who work in the industry - the CRTC granted seven licenses to operate; and the dismal results are with us now.

Too much, too soon, and too unimaginative: pay-TV in Canada offers nothing new and exciting to producers or viewers. But it has increased the numbers of mediocre films available to the public for a price, and it has generously brought pornography into the living-rooms of the nation. Perhaps 'pornography' is still an exaggeration, but the pay stations report that subscribers are already demanding that hard-core replace the soft fare offered by Playboy.

And so, we enter the new era - with ACTRA writing guidelines for nude auditions, production of porn mushrooming, and many Canadian producers feeling themselves compromised or excluded from the promised land of pay-TV.

How predictable that C Channel, the only pay station to receive high marks all around for its dealing with producers and its intention to screen Canadian productions of high calibre, is now - given the pay-TV environment structured by the CRTC - in dire straits.

As if surprised by what the lack of serious policy has engendered, the minister tries once again to salvage something from what had been a promising artistic milieu in the early '70s - before all the various measures designed to create an industry infrastructure. Suddenly a broadcast policy appears, made up of incoherent thrusts, coupled with a still unreleased film policy. Now there's the broadcast program development fund. And an extension of co-production treaties to include television.

This then is really the final chapter. The CFDC has shared with the private sector its policies concerning the administration of the broadcasting fund. It suggests watering down the Canadian content requirements for 24 months, and states that it will be autonomous - free from both the CCA requirements and those of the CRTC - in its decisions concerning that content.

Next month, a world premiere will take place - the official signing of a television co-production treaty between France and Canada. The intentions of the treaty are to increase the quantity and quality of francophone production, and one can hardly argue with that. But Canada's past experience with co-production treaties is that we have difficulty policing them (remember *Caro Papa*?) and no mechanism at all for verifying the source of the investment put up by a Canadian producer (remember *Little Gloria*?).

Having failed to make anything of our theatrical film production except an extension of the American system, the government has latched onto indigenous television production in a final effort to 'safeguard' Canadian culture. Yet experience shows that the government has an enormous problem bridging the gap between the intentions of its various strategies, and the concrete results to which these strategies lead.

With First Choice putting a freeze on its Canadian content commitments, with

Anglo-American interests offering financially desperate producers entry to their own private \$50 million production fund, the Canadian government's policy initiatives seem already out of date - even before having been tried.

And still no one knows what the film policy holds. That - the final piece of these piecemeal policies - was due in April. And then May, then June. Now the minister says we can look for it by late Fall. Late, indeed.

Too late.

LETTERS

Edmonton, eh?

Francis Fox has created a new fund of monies to be directed into television production. In Calgary this past week, two events occurred which focus on the assistance fund.

First, the Canadian Cable Television Association met for its annual convention. One of the sore points was the Lalonde budget's 6% tax which eventually ends up in the CFDC-administered fund. Cable operators couldn't accept being singled out and nothing the Minister or CRTC vice-chairman John Lawrence could say changed their minds.

Second, André Lamy and his crew happened to be passing through the same city to brief Alberta filmmakers about the television assistance fund. Which reinforces a fear that I have had for many years about the CFDC: it doesn't understand television, and it still doesn't know the specifics of regional activity in the industry.

My reason for coming to this conclusion is quite simple. Mr. Lamy met with film people in the city which aspires to be the film centre for our province. Mr. Lamy did not meet with the core of Alberta's television producers, because they reside in Edmonton and few knew of the meeting until a day after it had taken place.

I personally know of two major television producers who have independent companies that are well-known in the Canadian and foreign industries. Based in Edmonton, neither knew of the meeting until I mentioned it to them upon my return from the cable convention. I only stumbled across the meeting, held at the NFB offices in Calgary, when I went to the Board to pick up some papers that had been couriered in from Montreal for me. Mr. Lamy seemed quite indifferent when I suggested that the meeting should have occurred in Edmonton, but did say he hoped to get back west at some indefinite time in the future.

David Balcon
Edmonton

Quest for credit

Having just received your issue No. 95 (being on location working on *The Iceman*), I noticed that you made an error in the "Errata" on p. 13. There were only two people nominated for makeup on *Quest For Fire*, Sara Monzani and myself. We are also the winners. (We also won a British Academy Award.)

The reason our names were not called out at the Oscars was because Christopher Tucker felt he deserved an Oscar

also. He designed the three main characters' makeup but he never worked on the film. His claim to the award is being dealt with by the Academy on May 24. But there's no dispute as to our winning. I suggest you call the Academy for further details.

Michèle Burke
Vancouver

From Beverly Hills, a spokesperson for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences told Cinema Canada that a final decision had been reached May 24. But as "the parties involved have not been informed yet, we're not at liberty to divulge what that decision was." - Ed.

Kudos for Kupecek

I have just finished perusing the latest edition of your magazine and thought that I would pass along my commendations for Linda Kupecek's *Shoot Alberta* column.

Like the entire magazine, I find Ms. Kupecek's column articulate, and professionally reported. Although I am a resident of Alberta I use *Shoot Alberta* as a fair and accurate source of what's happening within the province... confirming and discrediting the many rumors and stories that seem so prevalent within our industry.

I'm glad to have taken the opportunity to congratulate Linda and the entire staff of Cinema Canada for a job well done!

Garry S. Toth
Toth and Associates,
Calgary

Format foibles

I would like to suggest that you change the size of your periodical. It is very difficult to shelve in the library. It is too high to stand in the boxes, and too wide to lie flat.

If you could change it to approximately 8 1/2 inches by 11 inches we would have less problems with it slipping off the shelf onto the floor.

Do you think it would be at all possible to change to a more generally used size?

Joan Hodgins
Library Technician
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