

EXCHANGE OF LETTERS WITHIN THE C.S.C. CONCERNING THE C.F.D.C.

Last Fall Bob Brooks and Wally Gentleman exchanged letters within the Canadian Society of Cinematographers. Actually Mr. Gentleman's letter was in direct answer to Mr. Brooks' urging the Society to support the Canadian Film Development Corporation. Here we reprint the two letters, along with some additional comments written later by Wally Gentleman, as an indication of how deep the division is within the industry on this topic, and as an introduction to Sandra Gathercole's article on the subject. (Both Brooks and Gentleman were at that time members of the C.F.D.C. Advisory Group.)

November 18, 1971

Dear Member:

"At the conclusion of its 25th regular meeting, the Canadian Film Development Corporation announced today in Montreal that it was no longer in a position to commit further funds for the production of feature films."

The foregoing is a direct quote from a C.F.D.C. press release dated September 16th, 1971. The same press release goes on to state that at the completion of its fourth year, nearly 9-1/2 million dollars will have been invested in the production of seventy feature films by the Corporation. It also states that as the C.F.D.C. is usually in a one-third position with private money and distribution investment, it therefore believes its activities have given rise to a total investment of almost 27 million dollars in the feature film industry in Canada.

The C.F.D.C. has requested the Government of Canada to provide it with additional funds to carry on its work without interruption.

It is true that the Canadian Society of Cinematographers has not always agreed with the methods employed by the C.F.D.C. to inject money into the feature film industry but we do recognize that after the formation of the C.F.D.C., a great deal of experimenting was required - and, is still needed - to find the best methods and formulae to promote and foster a feature film industry in Canada.

In recent months, it has become evident that the efforts of the C.F.D.C. have begun to bear fruit both artistically and financially. It would also appear that the C.F.D.C. can expect in the future a better return for its investments.

As an example, during the week of November 7-12, four very good Canadian feature films were playing in Toronto - three of them produced with the financial assistance of the Corporation. To our knowledge, this has never happened before and it is certainly a healthy and encouraging sign. There are several other feature films, both French and English, due to be released shortly.

The C.S.C. realizes that some of its members will probably never be directly involved in the feature film industry. However, the production of feature films could become the base for a permanent viable feature film industry in Canada, therefore creating opportunities for many of our own members and members of our allied crafts.

The Canadian Society of Cinematographers believes strongly in the efforts and activities of the Canadian Film Development Corporation and further believes that it is necessary for the Corporation to receive additional funds immediately to carry out its mandate.

With this in mind, we ask that you support the C.F.D.C. and if you feel so inclined, write immediately to the Honourable Gerard Pelletier, Secretary of State, and your own local Member of Parliament, asking that they support the financial request of the C.F.D.C. for an additional appropriation of funds so that they may carry on their work.

Robert H. Brooks, C.S.C.
Canadian Society of Cinematographers'
representative on the C.F.D.C. Advisory Group.

Wally Gentleman replies:

It is clear that the Corporation's interpretation of its mandate bears little resemblance to the needs of Canadian Filmmakers. Without a doubt, the injection of Government money into film production projects has inspired reluctant financiers to commit themselves to what all too often is a risky venture, and the knowledge that films have been made, sometimes in spite of Corporation activities. I believe that there should be an accounting to the trade of policy, criteria, involvement with foreign distributors, an examination of their attitude toward the Advisory Group and an explanation of recommendations, or lack of

them, to the Government to press for the legislation required to insure the grass roots development of a truly strong Canadian basic film industry that can effectively compete in terms of world cinema.

The last meeting of the Advisory Group to the C.F.D.C. that I attended as a representative was time-wasting folly. I observed that meaningful discussion was stifled and that no attention was being paid to the basic ills that plague the industry nor time allowed for any exchange other than mere superficialities. I protested the proliferation of the Advisory Group membership at the instigation of the C.F.D.C. which was so diluting formative opinion that little progress was possible in any case. I also could not condone private and separate meetings of the Corporation with Groups in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal without the minutes of those meetings coming under discussion at subsequent meetings of all Groups.

I also felt that the secrecy with which the Corporation has cloaked its activities has proven to be divisive; those filmmakers favoured by the CFDC grants or hopeful of receiving such grants no longer voice any true objections, which would benefit the filmmaking community-at-large, for fear of losing C.F.D.C. favours.

I tendered my resignation as a member of the C.F.D.C. Advisory Group with a letter of explanation to the Secretary of State. I truly believe that justice for the Canadian film industry can only be achieved by a resolute action of total Advisory Group resignation, in order to bring to the Government's attention the deplorable state that a totally ineffective group of industry representatives finds itself since it has no strength to voice and have implemented policies beneficial to the film community as a whole.

I think that the professional associations are shamed by the excellent proposals of the young filmmakers of the Toronto Filmmakers Co-op, who call into question matters that the filmmaking community has repeatedly aired to the Corporation throughout the three years of its (C.F.D.C.'s) feeble existence. (See the list of proposals submitted by the Filmmakers Co-op to the Secretary of State included in the subsequent article.) In addition to their very excellent proposals, other questions requiring immediate consideration are:

- investigation of wage parity and job classification of film making personnel
- reciprocal exchange of film personnel with foreign countries
- policies that allow government employed personnel on leaves of absence to work in private industry
- a fund to finance registered, chartered film companies in addition to monetary assistance to specific approved film projects
- the compulsory turnover of personnel on committees and such organizations as the C.F.D.C.
- the production and distribution of short films as a training ground for aspiring filmmakers
- the question of the dumping of foreign films in the Canadian market must be settled
- co-production of the private industry with the N.F.B. and the CBC
- the standardization of provincial attitudes to film working agreements
- the promulgation of finance for filmmaking through large industrial organizations.

These and many, many more pressing problems are more important than large financial handouts to the favoured few by the Corporation!

Though it is true that possibly the Canadian Society of Cinematographers has not always agreed with the methods employed by the C.F.D.C. to put money into the development of a feature film industry, I cannot agree that a great deal of experimenting is required. The Corporation has never been composed of any filmmakers, nor people elected into office on recommendations from filmmakers, furthermore it seems to feel itself above considering the legitimate proposals of those within the industry intimately concerned with making film on a day-to-day basis.

The permitted re-financing of the Canadian Film Development Corporation without a thorough exposé of its activities demonstrates the weakness of all film associations, and clearly shows the need for a strong Canadian Film Academy, so that filmmakers can make their voices heard loudly not only in the Corporation offices but in the corridors of Parliament itself. This is a greater interest to take to heart than one's own pet film project. These additional funds we are so blindly called upon to recommend are not composed of just filmmakers' taxes, they represent the taxes of all Canadian citizens and require wise investment. The industry must be the custodian of such investment and we have the moral obligation as concerned filmmakers to see that they are applied in the public interest.

Wally Gentleman, CSC, BSC, FRPS