

COUNCIL OF CANADIAN FILMMAKERS

Just at the time when everybody should be out shooting his or her movie, filmmakers are sitting around wondering what will happen next. There still has been only one major feature shot in English Canada this year. A few other lower budget ones are being made, out of absolute determination.

But things look bleak. And prospects for change are not immediate either at the provincial or the federal levels.

Some notes of mid summer activity:

On June 5th, Peter Pearson, as Chairman of the Council presented the following Viewpoint on CBC after the news:

John F. Bassett, football entrepreneur, and John F. Bassett movie mogul, are closing up their shops in Canada – both on account of Canadian content.

The football entrepreneur can't operate with it.

The movie mogul can't operate without it.

For a couple of years, Canadian movie moguls were able to operate here. Rowdyman, Mon Oncle Antoine, Wedding in White, Kamouraska, The Pyx, Paperback Hero, and most recently, Duddy Kravitz. Ten or fifteen hits in Quebec, seven or eight in English Canada. Not bad for a country starting from a deadstart, some sixty years after everybody else.

Unfortunately, most of the above films were financed through a tax loophole, a kind of corporate welfare bummery – and the Department of National Revenue said – no more boys. Production ground to a halt as the word got round.

Thirteen major films in 1972, six last year. One so far in 1974. It's one of those arithmetic progressions that gives

film people a wobbly sense of insecurity.

What went wrong? Well, it was never right in the first place. The Canadian Film Development Corporation, known hereafter as the CFDC was set up in the hope that a little pump priming would encourage private investment.

Some hope.

The multinational consortiums, with their integrated financing, production, distribution and exhibition have their own thing going – and they are definitely not interested in Canadian movies. Canada, after all, is their second best market. Hollywood films carted \$40 million out of here last year. And talk like good corporate citizenry doesn't really wash in head office.

To be fair, George Destounis of Famous Players has tried. Over the years he's invested well over a million bucks.

The Liberal government has also tried. They have invested some \$15 million of taxpayers money in films to date. In the next couple of weeks, Secretary of State, Hugh Faulkner will be trundling out his Second Phase of the Federal Film Policy. One more plank in the Liberal platform. But I doubt that will help either.

Why? Well basically the system doesn't work. The financing system doesn't work, the distribution system doesn't work, the exhibition system doesn't work. For Canadians or for Canadian films.

Except for the United States and Canada, every industrial nation protects its domestic cinema – quotas, blocked funds, box office taxes, incentives. Canada, because the theatres are under provincial jurisdiction, has none of these aids.

We can all blame Sir John A. Macdonald for this mess. Well, not exactly John A. but the BNA act – which gives jurisdiction over property, thus theatres

– to the provinces.

Unfortunately, neither the Big Blue Machine in Ontario, nor the Soft Pink one in British Columbia – the two principal markets, have shown the slightest interest in anything other than their tax receipts.

When John F. Bassett was a movie mogul, he was commissioned by the Ontario government to provide some solutions. That excellent report, suggesting quotas, (eight weeks per theatre every two years) was quietly tucked away as a dust collector, and the Ontario government moved stalwartly on to give lip service to some other cause.

It's ironic, because the provinces have been the flag wavers, by and large. The nationalists in Quebec, the socialists in the west. Even Premier Davis, when occasion demands, can unfurl a mean maple leaf. So with scant production foreseeable this year, the CFDC sits with a wad of a million and a half to invest in English production and few takers.

But rather than knock heads with the distributors and exhibitors, rather than nail the provinces for their obligations, the CFDC is trying to get its act changed so that it can, and I quote:

invest in short films, documentaries, TV commercials, TV movies and the like. Maybe even pilots for TV series.¹

Let's take our money and go elsewhere, Fund TV series, fund TV commercials.

TV Commercials, indeed.

I can see it now. After a happy minute of "Things go better with coke", we will then see the famous credit: PRODUCED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE CANADIAN FILM DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION.

1. Toronto Star, Entertainment Section May 25, 1974.

SOCIETY OF FILMMAKERS



Box 1003, Station A,
Toronto M5W 1G5

P.O. Box 1118, Place D'Armes Station Montreal, Quebec H2Y 3J6

That Viewpoint arose out of a comment Michael Spencer passed on to Sid Adilman in the Toronto Star May 25, 1974:

The filmmaker of the 70's is a versatile guy. I want to help these guys out, by aiding them to make short films, documentaries, TV commercials, TV movies and the like. Maybe even pilots for TV series.

Michael Spencer is at it again.

On November 22, 1973, he outlined this scheme for changing the CFDC's mandate in great detail before the Advisory Committee to the CFDC in Ottawa. All the film organizations, English and French were there. The subject was debated for more than three hours.

At the finish, Gratien Gélinas took a vote of the organizations to see who approved of the change in policy. The first vote was who approved of the CFDC changing its mandate to allow for the production of short theatrical films. The vote was 14 to 4 in favour of this policy.

The second vote concerned the CFDC expanding its mandate to include the financing of television series, television pilots, commercials, videotape, live production and the like. The vote was 14 to 4 against such a policy.

So here is Michael Spencer, true democrat that he is, expanding his mandate.

The CCFM has acquired information indicating that Spencer and the CFDC have gone to the Secretary of State with precisely this proposition. Against the overwhelming opposition of the industry spokesmen. We have further indication that the Secretary of State is thinking of accepting it.

Within the next month, the CCFM plans to draft a paper outlining in great detail, the perils of such reckless ventures, and we will publish the text here in this space.

The Society of Film Makers is made up of professional film makers in Canada and is a member of the following associations: The Canadian Conference of the Arts, The Canadian Broadcasting League, the Canadian Film Awards, The Canadian Film Development Corporation. The Society of Film Makers is not a guild or a union, but is the organization made up of film professionals from all disciplines, training, and vocation.

Following a consensus of the Executive, the membership of the Society of Film Makers is at the present time being asked to voice their decision on a constitutional amendment which, if passed, would increase the term of each Executive from one to two years, thus eliminating the need for annual elections. It was generally felt that we seemed to be in a near-constant state of elections and that at least a two-year mandate is necessary for any Executive to accomplish meaningful or longer range tasks. Each member should have received instructions and a ballot for recording his vote by mail, and we urge each member who has not done so to mail back his or her completed ballot as soon as possible.

Members are reminded that membership to the SFM includes free subscriptions to the magazines *Cinema Canada* and *Take One*. Any member who has not been receiving issues should contact their nearest SFM Executive member.

The next SFM Family Night will take place on August 2nd, in the Montreal region. Members will be advised on the family feature film to be shown, plus details on place and time later in July by mail.

SFM Director Wally Gentleman has been very active this summer. After completing the filming of three television commercials for Montreal's Disada Productions, he flew to Rome to begin work on an upcoming Italian feature. Our Secretary-Treasurer, Peter Benison, has been kept busy with sponsored films, most recently in Vancouver. Our Assistant Secretary-Treasurer, Pierre Decelles, has been working on principal animation for the cartoon Television Special, "Winnie Witch and the Giant Potato" at Disada Productions. SFM member Elias Cicvak is currently writing a screenplay based on his novel "The Sun Rises in the Evening".

The SFM deplors the cancellation of this year's Canadian Film Awards. The Awards took up the lion's share of external SFM activity last year, both in terms of time and funds. Problems could have been ironed out, we feel, and we intend to make a full disclosure of our views in a report this summer to our membership and to the other Executive Members of the Canadian Film Awards.

We wish to remind members that we are seeking news of their professional activities for publication in this magazine and also in mailings to members.

Memberships are now being accepted for the 1974-1975 season. Applications for membership to the SFM are available from the Society of Film Makers, P.O. Box 1118 Place D'Armes Station, Montreal, Québec, H2Y 3J6.

Memberships for a one-year period which entitles each member in good standing to all privileges, and to subscriptions to *Cinema Canada* and *Take One* are still available at \$1500 per year. Persons who have never been an SFM member in addition pay a once-in-a-lifetime initiation fee of \$10.00.