

RADICAL SURGERY REVISITED

"Either we have a country or we don't"
— Pierre Juneau

"The State or the States" — Graham Spry

"What, me worry?" — Alfred E. Neuman

Living in the age of Neuman makes the concerns of a Juneau or a Spry seem anachronistic and naïve. The sea will never go away no matter how many little boys stick their collective fingers up the dike. The pragmatists know that the profit picture is the only picture and cultural nationalism is acceptable only to the degree it helps that end. Canadian independence is simply not as profitable as dependence, so why bother.

The question of Canadian independence and the role the cultural industries play in that question is the issue. The Canadian record is not inspiring because it has always been more profitable for local businessmen to act as agents in the Canadian market for foreign goods and services than develop indigenous products and compete on the world market. The result of this type of pragmatism is that Canada is the world's model economic colony — the original home of the branch plant.

We cannot afford to have our cultural industries under foreign control any more than we can our banking or communications industries. Culture is a key sector of the economy and must be recognized as such. This does not mean capital 'C' Saturday night culture. It means the values that make our society unique and the means of expressing those values. If you don't think we have a unique society, try living in New York or Detroit. It's different.

If we are going to have a cinema, there is absolutely no point spending public money to develop a film industry unless it is indigenous — ours in every sense. Sex films are a part of our culture, and I dare say an important part. Yet if we want sex films, they should be Canadian. If we are going to clamor for horror, let it be Canadian horror.

It is time to decide what we mean when we say we want a Canadian film industry. Either we want an indigenous cinema of quality which is popular at home and speaks to the international market from this place without importing actors, actresses, writers, directors, and clichés; or we want another branch plant industry.

I don't think we will long have a clear choice between the two. If we cannot develop a truly independent cinema we should stop fooling ourselves and call it quits right now. The public money could be better spent in other areas and the private money would be better advised to buy Paramount stock or invest in Hollywood movies directly.

Considering feature films alone, the "Canadian film industry" is several distinct industries operating more or less separately from each other with very different goals. These distinct parts have different problems and different solutions for their problems. Thus we see the plethora of conflicting advice going to the people who have to make a decision — the government — and watching as the governments are rendered confused and apparently paralyzed by the situation.

These different industries must be recognized for what they are and treated differently. Exhibition/distribution has really been the only Canadian film industry (with many exceptions) until recently and it is almost exclusively dependent on foreign films. Our theatres and major distributors act as agents in the Canadian market with greater loyalty to the foreign product than the local market they serve. Thus we can understand Paul Morton (Manitoba theatre owner) when he says that forcing Canadian films into Canadian theatres will destroy the "Canadian film industry". His film industry is centered in Hollywood and his theatres are the Canadian part of that industry. That is the way it always has been and if left to men like him, that is the way it always will be.

Within the CFDC — spawned feature film production industry there is one group of producers which has firmly grasped Adam Smith and suggests that economic pragmatism demands that Canadian films be made interchangeable with Hollywood films to better sneak into the American domestic market. They say that the Americanization of Canadian films is necessary to secure greater profits and that is the name of the game. In the short run that is true. In the long run it is a formula for disaster.

These producers wish to follow in the well-worn trail of the theatre industry making faster profits acting as agents for the foreign entrepreneurial talent rather than competing with that talent.

It's the old Canadian homily all over again — "we can't beat them anyway, so let's join them and get rich".

Then there is Quebec with its different language, sensibility, and understanding of the meaning of survival. That industry is just as fragmented with Denys Héroux going in a different direction from Michel Brault and the NFB/CBC on one hand and Michael Costom-type deals on the other.

Where does the Canadian Film Development Corporation fit? It has spent its short lifetime trying to balance these pieces off against each other: French and English, American co-productions and cooperative productions, Vancouver and Toronto, investors and exhibitors, and so on forgetting that the market for these films is unsecured. That oversight in their mandate and their interpretation of their mandate cost everyone, including the CFDC, dearly.

Less obvious than the differences between the Quebec and English-Canadian film industries are the differences between those who are in the money business and consider film another vehicle (Irving Kott is a prime example) and those who are in the film business and consider the money a necessary vehicle. I don't think ACPAV can be balanced against August Films much longer because they are pulling against each other. Something has to give.

The "business at all costs" approach to Canadian feature films inevitably means economic rationalization with Hollywood. Several months ago in *Cinema Canada* I wrote a piece called "Radical Surgery" which suggested splitting the production industry along public/private lines because they were incompatible. If that is not done I believe the film industry in Canada will sink the Canadian film industry.

Those entrepreneurs who feel they must depend on Hollywood to make popular films should do it. Hollywood companies that want to use Canada as a location should do it. But let's not confuse these films with Canadian films. Or support them with public money.

The CFDC is now reconsidering its role and a new mandate. The old question of securing the market and a fair return from that market is now recognized. Yet the basic question seems still unresolved and the CFDC must answer it: Do we simply want a film industry in Canada or do we want a Canadian film industry? □

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