

OPINION

ANOTHER BIAS TO EXPLORE

by Peter Pearson

Since our Prime Minister has encouraged us, I would like to write you about bias in CBC-Radio Canada.

As a sometime viewer of the French network, I certainly detect a slant but it doesn't appear to be a bias in the sense the Prime Minister was talking about. It seems rather a preoccupation with ideas and concerns of Quebec and francophone Canada. After all, the network must be doing something right, if eight of its top 10 shows are made within Radio-Canada. That is cause for inquiry in my books.

Interestingly enough, the top seven shows on the two French language networks are all *téléromans*, stories about and for Québécois.

It wasn't always thus. Back in 1960, at the beginning of the so-called Quiet Revolution, Quebec artists were boxed between the high culture of French traditions and the American control over the pop fields. What was left, primarily folkloric, was their base for departure. Songs, poetry, weaving – quaintness that is impeccably safe. And ultimately humiliating.

When Frère Untel lashed out at *joual*, many Québécois, instead of recoiling, latched onto the identification. They were founders of a new language, and rejoiced in it. Gilles Vigneault and Monique Leyrac in song, Yvon Deschamps in monologues, Michel Tremblay in plays, Marie-Claire Blais in the novels.

So when you start looking for bias... it is not only in news and public affairs. It is indigenous in the accent, in the story preoccupations, in the local and regional references.

The battle has been two-pronged: against the high culture traditions of education and the church, and the American control over the pop media.

In the early days, Québécois artists trooped up to Ottawa to make representations. But Ottawa has a high culture bias. All the recent Secretaries of State – La Marsh, Pelletier, Faulkner and now Roberts – have been high culturalists, generous in their support of symphonies, ballet, opera, galleries and so on. Thus, the Prime Minister claims that Quebeckers speak a lousy French, or the Secretary of State complains that Canadian film technicians are inept and incompetent, and when Ottawa turned a cold shoulder, Québécois artists went to their provincial government for assistance.

Northrop Frye, one of your commissioners in this inquiry, wrote in *The Bush Garden*: "...when the CBC is instructed by Parliament to do what it can to promote Canadian unity and identity, it is not always realized that unity and identity are quite different things to be promoting, and that in Canada they are perhaps more different than anywhere else. Identity is local and regional, rooted in the imagination and

in works of culture; unity is national in reference, international in perspective, and rooted in political feeling."

In Quebec, the forces of unity are in a bitter struggle with the forces of identity. And among the artists, there's not much question who's winning. So if artists reflect their society, the fight for hearts and minds is to some extent over.

It has always been my supposition that the rest of Canada trails culturally behind Quebec by five to ten years. Thus, first Michel Tremblay with his *East Montreal joual*, then David French from Newfoundland. First Vigneault then Lightfoot. Bias then Munro. The forces of identity – be they the Vancouver Committee of 100 or the ACTRA battle for Canadian talent – are raising angry voices now in English Canada.

English Canadian artists, as much as Quebeckers, are awakening to fears for Canada's survival. Right now, for example, there are only two hours a week of Canadian drama on television. Both produced by the CBC. Assuming two Canadian and three American channels across the country, on the average – that means 0.016 per cent of Canadian prime time is filled with Canadian stories, myths and legends.

The English service of the CBC is making its first brave steps to develop a popular network. Gone are all those Oxford-accented announcers. Plays of Carol Bolt, David French and David Freeman are making their first appearance. Canadian writers and directors are employed increasingly.

But Ottawa's colonial prejudices die hard. While the European cultural traditions are lavishly supported, Canadian pop culture is languishing. And the American merchandising machinery has been allowed untrammelled access to fill the void.

So that if you are truly exploring bias, you could do no better than explore the pro-American one, so deeply rooted in Ottawa.

You might start with the Prime Minister himself, and his flippant discarding of the commercial deletion policy before the American Congress; or the conditions attached to CTV's licence which allow it to abnegate programming responsibilities, while the member stations reap unseemly profits; or the Canadian Film Development Corporation, where a vigorously pursued policy of international coproductions and a diluted definition of a Canadian film have all but annihilated the Canadian film industry as a program supplier. You might even go back to your own conditions for CBC licence renewal, or your policy papers on the introduction of cable. God knows, pro-American bias appears in almost every decision out of Ottawa.

But to kick the stuffing out of the one broadcasting service that has reached and communicates with its

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audience, has fulfilled and exceeded the highest expectations of Parliament – just because a few Cabinet ministers caterwaul – seems somewhat worse than mere bullying. It seems folly.

Quebeckers are now talking to each other through their broadcasting service, and no amount of censoring or manipulation will arrest that dialogue.

In English Canada, television should provide the

central forum for our own dialogue. As the advertising industry long ago discovered, the fight for hearts and minds is not waged on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera.

Ottawa, with its high culture bias, has all but abandoned the pop fields to the Americans. And with it, the most vital forum to unite a country.

Perhaps, sir, that bias might also be explored.

THE WHORES AND HUCKSTERS

by Gerald Pratley

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, on television and on radio too, seems these days to be incapable of devising programs about filmmaking in this country which are in any way a fair and accurate representation of what is actually happening in this field of endeavor. Come to think of it, the CBC seems to be out of sorts with Canadian films no matter in what way it becomes involved. If it shows feature films, they are interrupted by countless commercials; if filmmakers are interviewed, the persons carrying out the interviews seldom know what they are talking about. For years the CBC ignored the Canadian Film Awards; this year, it did a program about them which can only be termed a disgrace. Now we have just seen a CBC Newsmagazine program which purports to be about the so-called 'film industry' which can only be described as stultifying in its lack of understanding, its crassness, its superficiality. One would not object so much to it being 'superficial' if it could be termed at least a 'superficial report,' but it was not even that!

It had a good premise to start from: that four films, **Outrageous**, **J.A. Martin, photographe**, **Why Shoot the Teacher**, and **Who Has Seen The Wind**, have made a great impact on audiences and critics alike. But Newsmagazine chose to concentrate on **Outrageous**, barely mentioned **Teacher**, and the other two not at all. True to form, the production crew rushed off to New York City to photograph shots of dollar bills going into the box office of a cinema showing **Outrageous**, and gasped with delirious delight over the fact that *imagine, New Yorkers like our films, so it must be OK, we've made it at last!* While many Canadians, unfortunately, still think this way, one would expect the CBC to be above such immaturity. But it seems that the program did not think it necessary to go to Montreal, our largest centre of film production.

Quebec might already have left Canada so far as Newsmagazine appeared to care. Perhaps they did try to get some of the Montreal filmmakers to participate and perhaps they refused. But this was no reason to exclude any mention of the many films made there during the past year. There was no mention of the National Film Board's feature films, no mention of Robin Spry's **One Man**, no mention of the Saskatchewan government's involvement with Allan King's film. Instead we had the whores and the hucksters of the international trash brigade telling us yet again that we need American stars, and to back them up, a Canadian supplicant who says "I'm glad Peter Fonda's here or I wouldn't be working." Was this supposed to be a program about Canadian filmmaking or Toronto filmmakers? Those who weren't on the program (and these include all our best filmmakers) should count themselves lucky. The show was edited on the principle that viewers should be smothered with fleeting shots of unidentified films, and no one participating should say more than ten words before cutting to something or someone else. The only exception was Craig Russell, who was allowed to say far too much. If the producers of Newsmagazine think that the success of Canada's films is to be equated with his peculiar talents, then it sums up what little the CBC as a whole knows about motion pictures.

The above opinions have already been expressed elsewhere. Peter Pearson, filmmaker, sent his to the Globe and Mail and Gerald Pratley syndicated his on the CBC network. Given the importance of the debate around the CBC and the fact that the CBC's license comes up for review by the CRTC soon, we thought it was important to reprint these opinions. Ed.

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