

REVERB

Dumping on Knelman?

At a time when Canadians want and need a serious journal of the film industry, it is disheartening to see Cinema Canada allowing its columns to be used to settle personal grudges.

You may recall that, in early 1976, you ran a catalogue of complaints by John Hofsess, pretentiously titled "Enemies of Promise," which gave a self-serving script which, in his critical judgment, was the best thing he had ever written. It was a hash of injustice collecting and warmed-over luncheon gossip of the he-said-you-said-I-said variety. At the time, CC readers could only have been mystified at your reasons for agreeing to publish it.

Even more alarming, in view of the above, is your decision to have Hofsess review *This is Where We Came In*, by Martin Knelman, one of those who, in Hofsess' view, had wronged him. Knelman's book, whether or not one agrees with all its judgments, is indisputably interesting and useful to those of us seriously concerned with Canadian film.

By allowing Hofsess to settle scores, you may have robbed some readers of the opportunity to read the book in question. You have thus been less than fair to an author and, more important, have done your readers a disservice. That Hofsess' motives are open to question is further evident in the fact that a shortened version of the review you ran has appeared in *Books in Canada*. Do you propose to encourage the man to make a career of dumping on Knelman? Cordially,

Sheila Kieran
Toronto

Mr. Hofsess's review was printed because, upon submission, it was judged to be a well-argued and competent review. There were no other motivations. Cinema Canada tries to judge articles on their own merits and not in function of the personal relationships - either friendly or hostile - which may exist between authors and subjects. Ed.

Mr. Hofsess replies: *Ultimately a review stands or falls not by who wrote it, and certainly not by what real or imaginary motives one may attribute to a critic, but simply by what sense it makes. Sheila Kieran's criticisms of my review of Martin Knelman's This Is Where We Came In consist entirely of innuendoes; she makes no attempt to defend the passages I cited, nor does she address herself to any of the issues I raised: for example, when a book is underwritten with a Canada Council Senior Arts Grant, and further assistance from the Ontario Arts Council, don't we have a right to expect more than a slim volume comprised mainly of already-published and*

paid-for journalism? Kieran attributes a personal dislike of Knelman to me - which I certainly do not feel - and then proceeds to express nothing but personal dislike of me.

As a writer and critic I function entirely in the open. I count such writers as Margaret Atwood and Jack Hodgins among my friends, but I have done reviews of their work for Books-in-Canada which were sceptical or negative. Paul Almond and Claude Jutra are similarly good friends, but I have written negative reviews of certain of their films.

Difficult as Kieran may find it to believe, it's the work that matters in reviewing, not the personal relationship. Urjo Kareda, a long-standing friend of Knelman's reviewed This Is Where We Came In for "The Globe and Mail". I don't see any letters in that publication from readers such as Kieran charging conflict of interest.

Raw Initiative Is the Marrow

Dear Editors,

I enclose a letter from the Department of National Revenue cancelling my tax exemption number because my one-man film production business now comes under the category of "Small Businesses." From the Department of National Revenue's point of view, this new ruling enables them to eliminate the paperwork and supervision connected with all the little enterprises that don't sell more than \$10,000 of their product in a year. Some small businesses in this category might welcome the new regulation, since they now do not have to pay the Government tax on the sales they make: i.e. they can sell competitively and in effect pocket the money that would go to taxes. But the other side of it is that we must now pay the 12% Federal Tax on the materials we use.

In some enterprises this sum may be very small compared with the sum equal to the tax on the selling price; but in many small businesses, including filmmaking, there is certainly no advantage in this new situation, and in my case I now very simply face a 12% increase in the cost of raw stock, processing, and many of the services I have to have from other businesses in order to complete a small film. And in the end I am not able to sell any copies of the film, and if I do, it is to tax-exempt educational institutions, who would not expect to pay me the tax equivalent any more than they would expect to pay the Government.

We are talking here about filmmakers who are not in business full-time and get their living either on salary in the film industry or elsewhere, but still like to feel they can make a film independently and try

to market it as their own work. I have no idea of the total number of people doing this, but I am sure that many important filmmakers have begun their careers this way. The new ruling is simply a deterrent to initiative, and a bad blow to the film industry of Canada at its roots, in the individual hopes and aspirations of talented people. What can we do now? We can struggle along with an extra 12% added to our basic costs, or we can join in some going concern which sells more than \$10,000 in films a year? But these seem impossible from where I stand.

To be blunt, I always looked upon the tax exemption as a subsidy from the Government in helping me make the films I wanted to make. I welcomed it, and thought it not unjustified, since I was putting a great deal of my savings and spare-time effort into the work. In effect, the Government, in a really thoughtless bureaucratic way, has withdrawn this "subsidy." What I am proposing is that the Government Departments concerned should give the matter some thought, and perhaps they will see that filmmaking, and perhaps a few other valued enterprises - valued for their contribution to the future of Canada as a nation - should be singled out as exceptions and granted exemption from the 12% tax even though they are technically "small businesses."

I am not at all satisfied that the Canada Council or CFDC is the only means the Government should use to subsidize films. It is unhealthy that only those films are produced which a committee has approved of. Absolutely raw individual initiative should be the marrow of the film industry, but the beginners and small producers now have a 12% load on their backs that the established companies don't. What help is that at all?

Ralph Maud
Cultus Lake, B.C.

One Problem Solved

This letter was received in answer to one published in issue No. 44 concerning the Canadian Student Film Festival.

Dear Mr. Vitols,

Further to your letter dated January 4, 1978, I would like to clarify the points you have brought up regarding the Ninth Canadian Student Film Festival.

Concerning the absence of two members of the jury: Mr. Chuck Jones, as you may well remember, was present on the night of the opening but he took ill the following day and was forced to go back to California. As for Mr. Michel Brault, due to circumstances beyond his control, he was unable to make the Festival. But, may I point out that of the remaining jurors we had Mrs. Karen Arandjelovich of the Academy, Mrs.

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Francine Laurendeau of Radio-Canada, Mr. Les Wedman, film critic of the Vancouver Sun and Mr. Michael Spencer, Director of the Canadian Film Development Corporation, all of them more than qualified to judge films.

As for the practice of distributing critiques on the competing films, it is quite impossible for the jury to do so since the Festival is a competitive one. With regard to the films which you have mentioned, I would like to say that it was the jury's decision to award the prizes, and that I am in no way responsible for their decision since I was not a member of the jury.

However, concerning professionals working in any way on students' films, you will find that for the Tenth Canadian Student Film Festival, a very clear and precise rule has been added stating that proof will be required asking that both the Director and his crew give us sufficient evidence that they are students. In the past, we trusted students and thought that a tighter control would be against the spirit of the Festival. I strongly believe that these rules will put an end to such problems in the future.

Hoping that the above is satisfactory, I remain.

Serge Losique

Director

Canadian Student Film Festival

Film As Kraft Pulp

The Editors
Trade News North

I write in outraged response to a quote which appeared in "John Turner in Film Financing," (**Trade News North**, no. 2) which stated: "...It should be clear that C.F.I. is not interested in supporting self-indulgent producers who want to use film (and investors' money) merely to make personal statements..." Although I abhor censorship, I think perhaps it would be best if **Trade News North** were restricted to readers over twenty-five years of age, due to the shock such a quote can give to a young filmmaker's artistic sensibilities. For Mr. Turner, if he is indeed responsible for the above quote, has endorsed a system which is antithetical to the creative process.

Art is no more than an expression — a personal statement — by a creator who has something to say to humanity. If the creator is not allowed to make his statement, no art is produced. Surely it may be taken for granted that film is an art form. Therefore, films sponsored by the Canadian Film Institute, if they adhere to the edict quoted above, cannot, by definition, be art. They can be only an industrial product, like auto parts and kraft pulp, and can possess no more artistic merit than these products. Money invested in such films would be far better spent elsewhere.

Non-art films are one of the plagues of modern society. Not only do they add

nothing to our culture; they actively suppress the critical ability of the film viewer. Innumerable films have been made with the (to quote the article) "...tried and true formula of the safe 'family' film plot, coupled with one or more 'immediately recognizable stars'..." and there is certainly no need for further tedious additions to the list. The meager content of such productions is invariably simple-minded and almost always offers a false view of life. Repeated exposure to such inane drivel in the cinema, and particularly on television, has left the modern viewer all but devoid of the ability to appreciate art, or even to distinguish between good and bad.

No doubt, more worldly members of the film community than I will scoff at what appear to be my artistic pretensions, and proclaim that the box-office receipts speak for themselves. It is true that the figures, although certainly influenced by the heavy promotion given to strictly commercial productions, indicate popular taste. However, I am convinced that "popular taste" is largely a product of the critical suppression for which the commercial producers are responsible. The system perpetuates itself.

Who, then, cares about the nature of film productions, if no physical or demonstrable mental harm is being done to the film viewer, and the commercial producer is making a profit? The art filmmaker, the one to whom film is a sensitive and essential mode of expression, suffers at the hands of the commercial giants. The government-financed National Film Board, with its mandate for teaching Canadians about Canada, leaves the fiction filmmaker almost nowhere to turn for support, and the C.F.I., offering lucrative investments to big-time profiteers, has withered one of the few hopes for Canadian art film.

I regret to say that it may be partly because of John Turner, and powerful people of his ilk, that Canada does not have its own Ingmar Bergmans, and, if we continue to chase the big American carrot, we may never have them.

Paul Vitols
Vancouver

We thank Mr. Vitols for his comments. The investment company C.F.I. must not be confused with the Canadian Film Institute. Although both have headquarters in Ottawa, the first pumps money into film production while the latter is a non-profit organization which mans a publications division, a film library, an exhibitions divisions and organizes an international film festival each summer in that city. Ed.

Question of the Month:

Who is the Canadian producer who bought five fur coats and a car for friends of a director during a shoot last fall just to keep the latter happy?



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