

which way the co-ops?

Film co-ops have played an important role in Canadian filmmaking over the last years. Although they have sprung up in most of the larger cities, the granddaddy of them all is the Toronto Filmmakers Co-op. In April, that co-op had a meeting to decide on new orientations. At the same time, we heard from the Filmpool in Regina, the newest of the co-ops. The following réués give some idea of the problems and aspirations of those who want to make films co-operatively.

toronto struggles

"An epic struggle climaxing in solvency" is how the new executive of the Toronto Filmmakers Co-op describes its determined efforts to keep the co-op from sinking into bankruptcy.

The well-attended general meeting of the co-op that was held on Sunday, April 9, at the co-op's offices at 67 Portland Street, was a cross between a Rochdale reunion (the co-op was founded at Rochdale College in 1971) and a ritual debate (one observer called it déjà aura, which meant he'd heard it many, many times before) between "commercial" filmmakers on one hand and the "independent-experimental-personal" filmmakers on the other.

Bill Boyle, stepping down after four years as co-ordinator, kicked off the debate with the observation (which was not brought up again by anyone else during the meeting) that Canada Council had, in 1976, spoken of eventual self-sufficiency for the co-op and "eventual phase-out" of the Council's financial support. Boyle said he had felt at the time that "the only way we could continue in existence was to maintain some kind of money-making ventures."

Later Boyle also said that he opposed having the co-op dedicated to the production of low budget films by young filmmakers, on the grounds that the size of the Toronto film community made the co-op different from other centres. He acknowledged that "there are other people who disagree."

Boyle also argued that the changes seen in the last four years were simply the result of decisions made by members who were active in the co-op, and that people who had complained about the co-op's direction had not been involved in the co-op.

George Csaba Koller, who described the co-op in its present form as a loose alliance of small businesses, remarked in turn that the reason experimental filmmakers had stayed away might have something to do with the way Boyle had been running things. Other observers argued that the co-op's growth to its present form had actually lessened its ability to serve a greater number of people, and that the co-op's founders had envisaged a grant-supported production facility for beginner filmmakers, instead of a commercial pay-as-you-go operation charging high rates to members.

Raphael Bendahan, an experimental filmmaker who had stayed away from the co-op for four years, charged that in recent times "a lot of people have come to the co-op who are independent production companies, which is a different thing from being an independent filmmaker." He said Boyle's role had been essentially that of a businessman: "He seems to be fulfilling the needs of companies who want to make 30 prints at Quinn's... Instead of using commercial facilities they come to the co-op." Bendahan said that before deciding on the future function of a co-ordinator, the co-op should first decide what a co-op is and does. Others, including Boyle, agreed.

However, Boyle disagreed with Bendahan's comments on commercialism: "Everybody who's... receiving any kind

of services out of this co-op is making blood and guts films like everybody else." And anyway, he asked, what is commercialism? "I don't know what it is. Is it the one that makes the money back?"

Some other speakers said that the two approaches aren't mutually exclusive: that it's possible to make personal statement films and to make money from them at the same time. Still others said there is a clear distinction between information that is, and is not, marketable within "the corporate money system."

Iain Ewing, a director of commercial films who described his own trials as a beginning filmmaker 12 years ago, said that if people were willing to become shareholders in a company to keep the co-op going, then they may as well run it as a business and try to make money with it. But he said that if the co-op gets government grants then it should not use its tax-supported equipment to compete with private sector businesses such as Patrick Spence-Thomas and Mirrophonic Sound. Ewing also received strong support for his suggestion that anyone using co-op facilities should return to the co-op a specified percentage of any profit.

Sandra Gathercole was also at the meeting. She mentioned that it was four years since she had been involved with the co-op and that the fact that it was still running was a major achievement: "Whether it's gone in one direction or the other direction - I understand that there's an ongoing debate: it'll probably be a permanent tension - this co-op is the oldest film co-op in the country. It still exists and I think Bill Boyle deserves credit for the fact that it exists."

Neil Livingston of the Atlantic Film Co-op, which many members see as a model in the co-op's efforts to re-group, remarked, "It sounds like you're going to elect a co-ordinator who's going to be with you four years and you'll say, 'Oh,... we'll see what happens in four years.'"

He said that, in contrast, at the Halifax co-op, policy grows directly out of the strong involvement which results from members having to sit on committees that look after funding, scheduling and the like. He suggested a similar system for the Toronto co-op. He also said that in his co-op's experience, the best choice for a co-ordinator is a filmmaker (who isn't allowed to make films while in office) who knows how to handle the books. He also spoke about the Newfoundland co-op, which is even more tightly knit than the co-op in Halifax.

The Canada Council, through the participation of Film and Video Officer Françoise Picard, played a key role toward the end of the meeting. Picard drew attention to the equipment fee (\$25 a day for a Steenbeck) which is on top of the membership fee (\$75) and noted that the equipment is not really a co-op asset — "The equipment was funded by all the grants and there is an alternate owner." She also emphasized that the constitution hasn't changed: "There must be in-house production that is accessible to the members" — and that at the same time, if people get editing jobs in connection with other work, they should pay for the use of the equipment.

Patrick Lee read a letter to the co-op from the Canada Council in which Picard said that the second instalment of a \$20,000 grant — the letter included a first instalment of \$5,000 — was conditional on the prompt election of a new co-ordinator.

The meeting also passed a motion by Jim Murphy which called for a monthly meeting of the executive (with public posting of minutes); monthly financial statements; and the stipulation that a member of the executive who misses more than two consecutive meetings without good cause would be forced to give up the position.

Also passed was a point-of-order motion by George Csaba Koller calling for the election of the new executive by all those present, instead of only by paid-up members.

The old executive — that is, Nelson Smith, Patrick Lee, Mark Irwin, Michelle Moses and Don Haig — earlier made a presentation calling for a production unit for low budget films; the ending of the co-op's role as landlord; getting out of the running of the mixing studio as much as possible; more opportunities for people to get to know each other; a newsletter; new bylaws; and a system of financial controls.

The new executive elected at the meeting includes: Ross McLaren, Patrick Lee, Sally Dundas, Keith Lock, Lacia Kornylo, Jim Murphy, George Csaba Koller, Kalli Paakspuu, Tom Urquhart and Jock Brandis. The executive undertook to choose a new co-ordinator by April 29, based on a job definition decided upon by the general membership.

Jaen Pill

filmpool begins

Aspiring Saskatchewan filmmakers met in Regina last March for a three-day intensive pre-production workshop with resource persons Barbara Green, a producer with the National Film Board in Montreal and Rick Patton, an independent filmmaker and professor of film at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver.

The workshop was held in the National Film Board office on the Easter weekend and included film screenings and discussions about film marketing, scripting, budgeting and production management. About 22 people attended the sessions.

The workshop was sponsored, with the NFB, by Saskatchewan Filmpool, a co-operative of Saskatchewan filmmakers and film production personnel formed one year ago.

"We formed Filmpool as a mutual support organization for Saskatchewan film people, both to work towards goals common to the membership and to put on educational programs for the community like the Easter weekend workshop," said Ian Preston, president of the six-member co-op.

Filmpool was set up mainly as an equipment co-op, Mr. Preston said. 16mm production equipment was purchased with Canada Council seed money

and some programs were begun which, hopefully, will make it possible for the co-op's members to learn filmmaking skills and to practice them on productions of their own.

Aside from the equipment pool and education programs, Filmpool will be creating a file of Saskatchewan film production talent and making it accessible to existing producers.

The co-op began shortly after the shooting of Allan King's film **Who Has Seen the Wind** south of Regina. Most of the people who started Filmpool had worked on that production and have subsequently been doing freelance film work in and around Regina.



Rick Patten at Filmpool.

The main objective of Filmpool is to promote film production. The group hopes to do this, first by creating an awareness of film in the community, and secondly, by developing its member's skills so that the film needs of the community can be met. Ultimately the group hopes to produce films that reflect something about this region and of the creativity of its members.

The Easter weekend workshop was the first in a series of programs planned by the group. Others include workshops, film screenings and discussions and, of course, continued involvement in the Saskatchewan art community.

Jerry Horne

Those interested in learning more about Filmpool and its activities should contact the Filmpool office at 527-8818 during office hours on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, visit the office in room 210, 1821 Scarth Street (Northern Crown Building), Regina, Saskatchewan or write to Box 3927, Regina S4P 3R8.