

Opinion

by Kirwan Cox

At the June 27th meeting of the Council of Canadian Filmmakers, I was elected its executive director. Some people would say that writing about something you are involved with is a conflict of interest, others might say it is an invitation to foot-in-mouth disease. I risk the above hazards to present a personal opinion of the state of the Council of Canadian Filmmakers.

As the advertisement elsewhere in this issue points out, the Council of Canadian Filmmakers is a new group within the English-Canadian film production community which hopes to take action that will improve the way that community functions. The action the Council takes will be aimed at the "development of an economically and artistically viable motion picture industry."

The only weapon the Council has to effect changes (either within the industry or with government-industry relations) is the quality and quantity of its membership. This brings up the first unique aspect of the Council — it is the most broadly representative film group in English-Canada. There are now about 300 individual members and six organizational members (ACTRA, NABET 700, IA 644c, IA 873, DIRECTORS GUILD, and TORONTO FILMMAKERS COOP). Through these groups the Council represents nearly 5,000 people.

This representation is still not broad enough. The first task of the Council is to include the Vancouver and Montreal production communities so it becomes a truly national English-Canadian group rather than a Toronto group posing as such. We have begun a dialogue with a number of other groups and hope the Council will be greatly expanded by this fall. So far the reaction from other film organizations has been enthusiastic. The Council invites inquiries from any film production organization.

The Council is just as interested in individual or unaffiliated members. The response to our ad in the last issue of Cinema Canada has been encouraging. In two weeks we've received nearly 60 new members. The important thing is that many of these new members live in places like Charlottetown, or Calgary, or even New York. They are Canadian filmmakers working outside the major centers and their problems will become an increasing concern of the Council.

The executive of the Council will have to be expanded to represent these new members from the far reaches of the country. Exactly where we will get the money to bring these people together is one of many financial problems. At present the Council's only income is from membership fees (five dollars for individuals and 200 dollars

for organizations) which have totalled about \$2,200 so far. The executive has approved a budget of \$42,500 which presumes half can be raised within the industry and half from other sources. Within the next couple of months we will know whether we can meet this budget. If we can't then it is obvious the effectiveness of the CCFM will be circumscribed.

Now I will outline some of the directions the Council is taking. One direction is with the Ontario government. They asked the CCFM to prepare a critique of the Bassett Report. Sandra Gathercole wrote the critique which was approved by the CCFM executive. In short, this brief supports the Bassett report including a quota for Canadian films; a provincial film office which would include film classification and investment of provincial funds in the film industry; and asks that \$4 million be invested in various ways (this amount is equal to provincial revenue from box office tax).

At present the Ontario government's film policy is hampered because film is under the jurisdiction of three separate ministries. The Council is taking an initiative in presenting programs to the appropriate ministries along the lines of the above brief. We look forward to results soon. Another direction is television. It is apparent that the largest audience for Canadian films is via television. For most Canadians this is the only access to their culture. The Council sent a detailed plan for CFDC and CBC financing of feature films for the television market to the Secretary of State's advisory committee. We were told this plan would be discussed at the next committee meeting in September. Meanwhile, we received a response from Michael Spencer, met with him, and learned the CFDC would look forward to any proposals which may be submitted along those lines. We are continuing work on this "Kelly Plan" (Ron Kelly first proposed the formula) with extreme optimism.

The next direction is union relationships. On the one hand there seems to be a strong desire continually voiced by the CCFM membership at open meetings to change the union structure so that members of different unions can work on the same crews. There is also a strong voice raised for setting up a Canadian union. This last desire seems to falter when it comes down to the dotted line. At the June 27th open meeting a lot of time was expended on the union question and there is a need to try to sort out the results of that meeting.

First, both IATSE 644c and 873 tabled a letter supporting the CCFM. It said in part: "The IA enthusiastically supports the concept of the Council of

All photos: Baltazar/Koller



The CCFM's Executive Committee



Glen Ferrier and Bill Wood



Sandra Gathercole



Kirwan Cox and Robert Desjardins



Canadian Filmmakers . . . it is our view that such an organization is long overdue and deserves every consideration from a solid labour front to back up the CCFM's steps to develop capital investment, to create jobs and to pursue the most elusive of goals — the securing of a Canadian identity and presence in the film industry.

"It is our opinion that some of the problems which exist today in our industry are directly derived from the isolated experience and often one-sided outlook of each group in the CCFM. Upon self-examination, the IA realizes that we, ourselves, have not been as outward-looking or as quick to respond to the growing needs of other related segments of the film industry.

"The planning and discussion stages of the CCFM to date have not only brought out these short-comings but also produced many benefits. Where there was suspicion, there is now open dialogue. Where there were conflicts, there are now solutions emerging . . ."

What solutions? The letter went on to detail program. IA would encourage producers of low-budget features and documentaries; it invites new members and promises prompt assessment; it announced a new series of open training seminars; and admitted past neglect with a new willingness to improve its

image.

"Now that we have agreed to work together on meeting the needs of the Canadian film industry, admitted some of the shortcomings and outlined the beginnings of our open-end program, we should like to re-affirm our conviction that the progress and achievements of the CCFM can only be triggered by a solid, enlightened, labour front. Without this cohesion, the end results will always be the same . . ."

The IA letter was interesting in tone rather than particulars. For the first time they seemed to be saying there was a difference between Hollywood production in Canada and Canadian production. They seem to be backing the latter. However, the CCFM inter-union committee had hit a snag. So did the June 27th meeting, which decided to add four free-lance members to the inter-union committee and keep trying.

I personally think real change can be made in this area, but it will have to be a matter of what the film workers want. I think the value of the CCFM is educative. Here also that value has been demonstrated both in the tone of the above letter and the fact that Glen Ferrier announced at the June meeting that IA 644c was applying for a Canadian charter because of the formation of the CCFM.

The CCFM executive decided that the Council could not become a Canadian union under any circumstances. If such a union were formed it would welcome it into the Council and give it moral support. However, there was the feeling expressed at the open meeting that a new union would splinter an already splintered situation. A number of people seem to feel a Canadian union is the only long term answer that would be in the interests of Canadian filmmakers and workers and the country as a whole.

The first steps have been taken in working out this problem whatever the answer might be. That first step is dialogue. The CCFM has just begun and is suffering from the predictable growing pains of any organization which encompasses such diverse elements. That diversity is the strength of the CCFM as long as there is a common goal — to make more and better films and get them seen.

Intertwined in that goal is the question of the cultural survival of Canada. More than anything else that is the *raison d'être* for the Council. Whether the CCFM succeeds in helping to achieve these ends will depend on the support and input it receives from the filmmaking community across the country. ●

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