

U.S. TV series, *Amerika*, prompts propaganda controversy

TORONTO — The filming of the ABC television mini-series *Amerika* throughout the summer in Toronto has generated opposition from various individuals and groups and spawned protest over the controversial show.

Amerika, budgetted at \$30 to \$35 million U.S., looks at life in the United States in 1998 — 10 years after the Russians take over control of the country.

Propaganda Alert, a group that calls itself a Canadian public information project about the ABC series, is loudly protesting the script which it describes as supporting stereotypes that promote global mistrust. Propaganda Alert is also opposed to any spending of Canadian tax dollars to support the series.

Propaganda Alert member Laura Sky said the group does not support government censorship in any way, but is strongly opposed to government financial support of the

series. Propaganda Alert, in a letter sent to Ontario Citizenship and Culture Minister Lily Munro, says it does not support the subsidization of the series through the Ontario Film Development Corporation (OFDC).

Propaganda Alert says the OFDC has been paying for the services of a location manager since the production began. Sky added the group has evidence that the OFDC has been paying up to three location managers to work on the project at various times.

But Brian Villeneuve, the OFDC's executive co-ordinator of marketing, says the provincial film development agency has had nothing to do with finding daily locations for *Amerika*, which is being shot in Toronto and at other Ontario locations.

Villeneuve said the OFDC did provide some preliminary location scouting services in October and November 1985 for the series. But he said the OFDC has done the same kind

of work for 112 other productions so far.

While the OFDC wouldn't support certain types of productions such as pornographic films, Villeneuve said the agency doesn't make judgment calls on the basis of a script.

"We are not a censor board here," he said while adding that it is part of the OFDC's job to promote Ontario as an attractive place to make films.

Villeneuve said *Amerika* has provided speaking parts for about 125 Canadian actors, work for about 110 Canadian technicians and parts for 5,000 to 6,000 Canadian extras. He said the 12-hour mini-series, which is scheduled to wrap around the end of September, will bring about \$10 million into Ontario.

Despite opposition from various individuals and groups like Propaganda Alert, Villeneuve says the OFDC has no intention of changing its policy about reviewing scripts.

"There are those who are violently opposed and there

are those who see nothing wrong with it," he said about *Amerika*.

With a cast including Kris Kristofferson, Robert Urich and Mariel Hemingway, *Amerika* looks at the United States after the Soviets disrupt communication networks and take over a weakened America. With the Soviets controlling American political institutions, peacekeeping troops from a Russian-controlled United Nations help with the occupation. The area from Mexico to South America, called Greater Cuba, is also under the control of Soviet forces. Characters from collaborators to resistance fighters emerge in the script.

Sky, an independent film producer and director, described the script as pure McCarthyism. Russians are depicted as monsters that have taken over America with a minimum of opposition, because liberal and progressive political and social values have undermined the United States, she said.

"ABC says the series is just about 'what it's like to be an American.' But we've read the script and found it ridicules the goals and values of trade unions, the peace movement, civil rights groups, women's organizations, and almost everybody else who holds humane or progressive ideas," a Propaganda Alert newsletter states.

Sky said not only are the Russians vilified, but so are Cubans, Angolans, East Germans and Vietnamese. Women are portrayed as traitors and collaborators in the story, she said.

Dick O'Connor, producer of *Amerika*, opposed criticisms levelled at the mini-series, which is scheduled to be shown next year.

"I think it is a dramatic piece of work. It is fiction..." said O'Connor. "Obviously a lot of people like it and support it. Otherwise we wouldn't have got funding from a major network for it."

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Amerika

O'Connor said the Russian characters in *Amerika* are multi-faceted and present a challenge to the actors por-

traying them. He said the script examines issues like the nature of American values, what democracy is and the relationships between people. He said it is not a depiction of an actual military takeover.

O'Connor also said that the production of *Amerika* is not being subsidized by govern-

ment in any way. "We are paying our own way..."

Sky said productions like *Amerika* raise ethical questions of whether actors and technicians should work on particular projects the content of which they don't agree with. The Canadian film industry, with its boom-and-bust nature,

often leaves actors and technicians in a difficult financial position, she said.

"They often feel they literally can't afford to make those decisions," she said. Sky added that between 12-20 Canadian actors have refused to participate in *Amerika* and that in the first week of production

two technicians left because of the content.

O'Connor said that some people may have turned down acting roles, but that can happen on any production. Those who have chosen not to take parts made their own decisions, he said. O'Connor said rumors of Canadian actors being blackballed for refusing to participate are "pure nonsense."

But Sky said some people are afraid to take a public stance in opposition to the filming of *Amerika* here, because they are worried they won't find future work. The series shot for about 10 weeks in the U.S. prior to coming to Canada.

Sky said some members of the group feel the script for *Amerika* was developed as a reaction to the showing of *The Day After* on ABC, a 1983 television movie that depicted life in the U.S. midwest after a nuclear war.

She also said that Propaganda Alert, which is made up of various artists from the groups Performing Artists for Nuclear Disarmament and Media People for Social Responsibility, would like to see 12 hours of peace programming run on television as a counterpoint to *Amerika*.

STCQ

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budget," he says.

Two clauses, said to be a sore point in the failed round of negotiations in May, were settled in July during preliminary talks with the new APFVQ executive. The first clause recognizes that a new job classification related to a job classification already in the contract but not specifically described in the same way is also covered by the contract.

No longer, explains Leclerc, will the union have to argue that there is no difference, where wages are concerned, between the hiring of a painter and a latex applicator. A second clause entitles the STCQ to general film screen accreditation.

Contract negotiations were broken off in May when accusations of negotiating in bad faith flew back and forth across the table. Since then, the APFVQ has elected a new executive council and Leclerc has become acting president of the STCQ following the resignation of president Michael LaVeaux and three executive members due to internal political differences.

The 700-member STCQ will hold a general election on a yet undetermined date this month.

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