

After years in a supporting role, B.C.'s ready for the spotlight

The film industry of British Columbia is ready to make choices. It has racked up two record-setting years in a row and expects a third in 1988. *Cinema Canada* feels that the decisions to be made in the months to come are crucial, not only to British Columbia, but to the health of the national industry. That's why we established an office in Vancouver and why we chose to dedicate this issue to activity in the westernmost province.

The film portrayed on the cover, Bill Forsyth's *Housekeeping*, is also about a choice. The two young actresses play sisters who, because of the death of their mother, are brought up by their extremely eccentric aunt. One of the girls longs for conventionality; she wants to be in fashion and popular at school. The other is a free spirit-in-waiting.

There are analogies to be drawn with the B.C. film industry, not the least of which is the fact that *Housekeeping*, while shot in the province using local talent, is set in the United States.

Circumstances of economics (the low Canadian dollar) and incomparable photogenics (scenery that just won't quit) have made it easy to pursue fame and fortune as a branch plant of the American production machine. Popularity is profitable and, after years of virtually no activity, B.C. filmmakers can hardly be faulted for enthusiastically embracing the opportunities offered.

But British Columbia is not without eccentrics. Its geographic separation from Central Canada has made it as different from Ontario and Quebec as Newfoundland is from Saskatchewan. There are stories here that could have only happened here, stories that beg to have films made about them.

A handful of those films have been made, the most notable recent example being Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin*. However, even (perhaps especially) the most enthusiastic promoter of indigenous B.C. filmmaking would not describe the films as significantly

successful or comprising an important filmography.

As you'll read elsewhere in this issue, the time is ripe to push for the production of more of these films, to tell the stories of the eccentricities of British Columbians. The long awaited establishment of a B.C. film fund, in conjunction with the expertise and experience gained from working for foreign producers, means that the pieces are in place.

In one way, the delays have been invaluable. We've been able to learn from the mistakes of other provinces and of the various federal efforts. Those filmmakers who have managed to make a living in the worst of times have established themselves as both tenacious and talented, well-equipped for what could turn out to be the best of times.

There are those who say the situation of indigenous B.C. filmmaking is at a point similar to that of the national effort when this magazine was launched 16 years ago. True to some extent, perhaps, but we enjoy advantages that weren't even dreamed about in the early 1970s. U.S. production has primed our pumps, and rapidly strengthening ties with Pacific Rim countries provide opportunities limited only by the imagination.

At the end of *Housekeeping*, the conventional sister chooses to live in the comfortable predictability of a small town. The aunt and the other girl are last seen walking, in the dark, across an infinitely long railway trestle. Neither they nor the audience know what lies at the other end. But we do know that there will be adventures and it is with them that Forsyth clearly has sympathy.

British Columbia's filmmakers are poised at the beginning of what could be an equally precarious path. We hope they will proceed, fortified by experience, to tell our stories to the country and the world.

Mark O'Neill •

Letter

A nagging suspicion of bias

The following letter was addressed to the editor of Afro-Can:

Vues d'Afrique, a conference/festival of African films has decided to exclude my recently produced video tape: *Red Star Over the Western Press, Archive: Algeria 1954-62*.

The work was made with the generous support of The Canada Council and has been shown at the London Filmmaker's Co-op (U.K.); The Grierson Documentary Seminar in Toronto; Algiers, Algeria, in the context of an international conference on Black activist Frantz Fanon (*hommage à Frantz Fanon décembre 10-15, 1987*). As well, the work has been studied in graduate and undergraduate classes at Concordia University, The Ontario College of Art, and will be shown in other contexts in the near future.

Red Star is the first attempt to dramatize the work of Frantz Fanon.

What is unfair, and in the final analysis, utterly disgusting about the decision made by Nathalie Barton, Dominique Jutra and Gérard Le Chêne is that the criterion used for the exclusion is the following:

1. The work is not in French (There are some elements in French).

2. The work was not made in Algeria (Not true. The archival footage was made in Algeria and the commentary is made by American journalists and Canadian academics).

I need not stress the fact that critical documentaries produced in English in Quebec ought get international exposure - it goes without saying. Critical media work like *Red Star* ought, particularly, to be shown to francophone Africans visiting Quebec in the spirit of internationalism to say the least. And, that the relatively small tangle of language and suspect criterion for inclusion/exclusion, should not get in the way of preventing a work like mine, (which is deeply concerned with the representation of Third World liberation struggles in the western press) to be in effect erased from

Quebec history.

I feel that the reasons for this rejection are really part of a larger political project of an elitist nature: for example, just to make a tape in Algeria or in any part of Africa for that matter, requires extensive funding. I did not get a large enough grant to enable me to actually make a work in Algeria. For the most part it is large television corporations who can afford to take crews to Africa to make their very special kinds of ideological projects. As for the fact that *Red Star* is in English; it is the language I work in in Quebec.

Their reasons for rejecting *Red Star* are actually part of an agenda to exclude critical small-budget filmmakers like myself. Vues d'Afrique is going the way of so many festivals taking place in Quebec - lots of trend and little substance.

It is doubly snide on their part to practice this sort of cultural terrorism given the current racist culture (and minimal official anti-racist resistance and funding) in Quebec.

The jury that freed police officer Allan Gosset for the shooting of black teenager Anthony Griffin (shot November 1987) was white. The jury that has made an unjust and superficial

decision to exclude my work is white. A political factor which *Does Not* trouble Nathalie Barton (office phone: 514-284-3322).

The directorial brains behind Vues d'Afrique are white. At Vues d'Afrique no blacks or Arabs saw my case against French imperialism in North Africa; no black sat on the jury that acquitted police officer Allan Gosset.

Minority expression is being continually killed in Quebec. The African filmmakers who are going to be invited to Quebec ought to be told about the violent interpretation of CBC and the western press is being squeezed out by an essentially compromising white cultural elite, who seem, by the way, to be arrogant smug and content.

There is one final point that I think needs to be raised: I have the nagging suspicion that an unsaid reason for the exclusion of *Red Star* is that it ends on a pro-Palestinian note. The cultural non-political left in Quebec may at the best of times be able to contain some kinds of political debate but it is unable to take any serious criticism of Zionism for the usual reasons.

Julian Samuel •