

Obituary for a culture

IN MEMORIAM. Film distribution legislation (February 13, 1987-October 1, 1988). Death caused by atrophy of political will as a result of complications arising from Free Trade Syndrome (FTS), an apparently deadly virus which disrupts the immune defence system of the body politic. FTS is transmitted by indiscriminate, unprotected political intercourse.

Should the Tories pull off the free trade gambit it may be that more and more such obituaries for our cultural institutions will be written. The "Notwithstanding" clause in the Free Trade Agreement appears to nullify the intentions of the cultural protection provision in the Agreement. In particular it will likely make any new cultural policy initiatives very difficult.

That reading of the clause is supported by a Statement of Administrative Action appended to the Agreement by the White House. The Statement, passed by Congress with the Agreement, carries the force of law. The Statement notes that the U.S. "Administration would be mindful of the importance of discouraging, if at all possible, the exercise of and reliance on Article 2005 (protection of cultural industries) by the Government of Canada."

Any attempt by the Canadian government to "legislate, proclaim, or (take) other action having the force and effect of law, either directly or indirectly, which impedes the production, distribution, sale or exhibition of film, television programs, video recordings" would provoke U.S. trade retaliation. The aim of the

retaliation would be not only to balance the commercial effects of protectionism, such as they be, but also, as they said of hanging, *pour décourager les autres*. In the words of the Statement, "The President shall endeavour to fashion a response in such a manner as to discourage the creation of similar nontariff barriers in other countries".

Basically, the Statement clearly seems to suggest that not only is film distribution legislation dead, any attempt to resuscitate it, and similar cultural policies, under free trade will result in harsh economic penalties. What could the Tories have been thinking about when they assured Canadians time and again that culture was protected? Did they mean that Canadians will be protected from the ravages of Canadian culture?

Culture has, in fact, been an important element in Conservative rhetoric. The Tories can point to a series of measures which indicate that culture is cherished: increased funding for films, stronger cultural imperatives for Telefilm, public lending rights for authors and new copyright legislation. With these measures the Conservatives have taken the cultural high road. It is culture with a capital C.

There seems to be a drive to push culture into a social sideroad, supported through the public purse, and maintained as a distinct entity without a Canadian industrial base. Such a culture can indeed be protected and still be consistent with the Free Trade Agreement.

Telefilm can become a glorified National Endowment for the Humanities, CBC can become Canada's PBS, because that is a notion of culture which Americans and, it seems, many of Mulroney's cabinet can accept. But popular forms of culture - TV, film and video produced by companies rather than individual artists - are seen as business, the entertainment business, and

thus exempt from protection.

For Canadian companies thus abandoned by their government there seem to be two options for survival. The first is to extend coproduction alliances with Europe. On the whole, Canadian producers have become quite adept in manipulating the coproduction deal. The results, however, are debatable. Often, we are left with product that is neither fish nor fowl in the attempt to be all things to all media.

The other option is in a time-honoured Canadian tradition: become a branch-plant or service company. Alliance and Atlantis, among others, have played that game well. Even a company like Primedia, which has offered some of our more distinguished European coproductions, is looking to secure its future by servicing the American market.

Both options are fair elements of an overall industrial strategy which includes at its centre access to the Canadian marketplace for Canadian companies. Without that Canadian core the industry is fatally crippled. It is an industry whose *raison d'être* is technique and nothing else; it is an industry akin to the mechanical nightingale of the Chinese emperor in the Grimms' fairy tale: all glitz and no substance and once run down not revivable by all the emperor's sages.

If Mulroney can maintain that distinction between culture as an artist-driven activity supported through national funding, agencies and entertainment as a business he can indeed claim that culture is protected and by so claiming he implicitly proves the corollary: the Free Trade Agreement is nothing more than a simple business arrangement. In the process he deprives art of the context it needs to live and breathe; and the cultural industries of that which makes it a creator of nations. Is this what we want for our film industry? Is this what we want for Canada?

LAST

CALL FOR ENTRIES!

ENTRIES AND PARTICIPANTS' REGISTRATION WILL BE ACCEPTED UNTIL SEATING AND SCREENING CAPACITY IS REACHED.

The Ontario Centre for the Advancement of Cinema Graduates announces **CINEGRAD '88**-a celebration of works by the class of '88-at Sheridan College, Oakville Campus, November 19 & 20, 1988. **CINEGRAD** invites all graduate students in cinema or television studies at Ontario colleges and universities to submit films, videos and screenplays for recognition in this two-day festival of panels, demonstrations, workshops, screenings and craft awards. While only graduates may submit entries, participation in the **CINEGRAD** program is open to all.

FREE PUBLIC SCREENINGS. The general public is invited to attend screenings. Limited seating is available at no charge.

ELIGIBLE PRODUCTIONS

Dramas, documentaries, animation, experimental works and music videos are eligible for competition. Works submitted must be finished on either 16 mm film with optical sound-track, or 3/4 inch videocassette. Other formats cannot be accepted.

ELIGIBLE SCREENPLAYS

Screenplays must be original works (not adaptations) for films or video productions entered in the competition, and must be submitted in six copies with the productions.

AWARDS CATEGORIES

1. Best Director
2. Best Sound
3. Best Editing
4. Best Cinematography
5. Best Animation
6. Best Original Produced Screenplay
7. Special Jury Award

HOW TO SUBMIT

All works must be submitted through the faculty liaison person in a recognized film, video, television or broadcasting course at an Ontario college or university. Entry forms and entry fees must accompany each submission.

Entry fee: \$25. per film/video production
\$25. per screenplay

Make cheques or money orders payable to **CINEGRAD**

Cinegrad 88

Showcase & Forum



Sheridan College
Oakville Campus
November 19 & 20 1988

PARTICIPANTS

All participants may attend demonstrations, workshops, panels, screenings, working luncheons, the final reception and an awards ceremony. Participant enrolment is open to all.

Participant fee: \$35. per person (payable in advance)

Make cheques or money orders payable to **CINEGRAD**

PLEASE SUBMIT FILM, VIDEO, SCREENPLAY ENTRIES and ENTRY & PARTICIPANT FEES TO: CINEGRAD

c/o Sheridan College
Media Arts Department
1430 Trafalgar Road
Oakville, Ontario
L6H 2L1
(416) 849-2806

PLEASE NOTE: Producers and screenwriters submitting entries/screenplays are not entitled to participate in workshops, lunches, panels, receptions and ceremonies unless they have also paid a Participant's Fee

Cinegrad

Ontario Centre for the Advancement of Cinema Graduates

