

\$627,900 last year) and \$1,120,700 for distribution (compared to \$256,400 last year). The distribution monies should permit a wider circulation of the films made by the defunct Office de Film du Québec, and will help to build the Cinémathèque Nationale foreseen in the law. Only \$392,500 is earmarked for "information". This money will go to the classification and information sector which replaces the Cinema Supervisory Board and thus represents a reduction of \$31,200 compared to last year.

**L'INSTITUT.** No mention is made, however, of the budget

which should go to the Institut de Cinéma Québécois. The Institut is made up of representatives of the private sector, and should have about \$4,000,000 to allocate for the production and distribution of films. The members of the Institut have not been chosen though the word has gone out that they will be announced before April 1.

**APFQ.** The Association des Producteurs de Films du Québec will hold its annual convention on April 9, 10 and 11 in Quebec City. Guest speakers include Denis Hardy, Minister of Communications in the prov-

ince, who will open the convention Friday evening, and André Fortier, Under-secretary of State, who will speak Saturday night. The convention includes two days of discussion and the topics include labor relations, governmental agencies (especially the re-organization of the Direction Générale du Cinéma) and the future of production for television.

**RETROSPECTIVES.** The Cinémathèque Québécois is organizing a retrospective of Gilles Carle's works. It has published the program, which will run from March 30 to April 9, and

some accompanying texts written by Carle. Meanwhile the Cinéma Outremont ran a series of films by Arthur Lamothe from March 26 through March 30. These included **Carcajou ou le péril blanc, chronique des Indiens du Nord-Est.** The showings were concluded by a discussion, organized by the Conseil Québécois pour la Diffusion du Cinéma entitled "Are We Collaborators in a Genocide?"

**Connie Tadros**

## CBC Drama-ACTRA Confrontation

by Stephen Chesley

If you take an incredibly unsophisticated political move and position it against a bureaucratic weight, what do you have? A CBC Drama-ACTRA confrontation, of course. The situation played itself out in full public view, and all the real issues, and the chances to air them, were lost.

During the second week in March, casting was completed for a CBC tape drama based on the life of Canadian suffragette Nellie McClung. The lead role was accepted by American actress Kathleen Widdoes, and when the word went out, several members of the Association of Canadian Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA) picketed the CBC Drama building in Toronto to protest the choice of an American to play a Canadian heroine. Drama chief John Hirsch replied that twenty-four actresses had been considered for the role, and, because of other commitments or aesthetic reasons, none were suitable. So Widdoes was offered the part.

Radio host Peter Gzowski, usually level-headed, contacted Widdoes in New York and fairly castigated her for taking the place of a Canadian; he said that Frances Hyland had only earned \$12,000 in her best year, and wasn't it disgraceful that Widdoes was denying the opportunity for a Canadian actress to work? Widdoes replied that she, too, was unemployed at the time, that she earns the same amount every year and has to fight for work too, and made some other points, all in a lady-like manner.

Events escalated when ACTRA decided to deny Widdoes a work permit to appear in the show, and simultaneously made any ACTRA member who appeared with her subject to a fine. They couldn't appear with her anyway, because the immigration department wouldn't let her in the country; the CBC relies on the ACTRA permit to bring foreigners in (twenty roles out of several hundred cast last year, not including extras).

CBC brass cancelled the show, stating that the reason was ACTRA's refusal to grant the permit to Widdoes, and adding that any further questions should be addressed to ACTRA.

But the real story is not as simple, and it involves crucial inhibitions on CBC Drama and ACTRA people. To begin with, this confrontation was probably more severe because of a minor skirmish that took place recently over the casting of another American, Lois Smith (Who?), in the role of Stacey, the character created by novelist Margaret Laurence, and to be the subject of a one-hour drama. At that time, the CBC Casting Department went through the same futile search in Canada, and felt they had to go to the States. It's interesting that both Stacey and McClung are in the same age group for performers - about forty years old. If you consider that any actress of that age has made a definite mark in her profession - as opposed to thirty-year-olds who are still in the establishing process - and if she has not, has left the profession entirely, the number of actresses to choose from is not great.

And if you check a calendar and a list of summer festival companies, you will see that most of the actresses in this age group are committed solidly to rehearsals in March for summer festivals of theatre; and the main site is Stratford, whose massive company needs all this type of talent it can get, and which is already on tour in March.

If you're arranging a TV shoot based on a Canadian heroine, there is no doubt that a Canadian actress should be used. Why, then, does the CBC not simply re-schedule the show to accommodate the right performer? They can't. Every piece of equipment and every crew is so tightly booked that re-arranging a schedule, especially in tape, is not even considered. It's a matter of budget and dollars, and the squeeze is on CBC's inadequate facilities and inadequate budget to such an extent that they are virtually forced to go with a show in a time slot assigned much too far in advance.

The answer is to cast the part, if it is so crucial, and then assign the slot, and do it way in advance, certainly. But the real issue is whether John Hirsch and CBC who are supporting Canadian efforts, despite some grave lapses in judgment, can be expected to



fulfill such a large mandate with the financial and physical resources at their disposal.

They are trying, to be sure. And if Hirsch's first fifteen months have proven anything, it is that there is an incredibly large, varied, and talented fund of creative personnel in this country.

But ACTRA blew it, too. After letting the Stacey episode go by with only a murmur, they pounced on Widdoes. But Widdoes performed last summer at Stratford; no protest was lodged. And Jessica Tandy is going to play a character based on a Canadian bestseller, the novel *The Book of Eve* at Stratford this summer; no protest was lodged. The wrong choice was made to publicize a weighty situation, and thereby lost a great amount of effectiveness. A better opportunity would be the CBC-ACTRA contract negotiations; the current agreement expired this March, and the timing couldn't be better to raise the issue of who plays whom.

The rest of the McClung company aren't too happy about the cancellation. Twenty support roles were cast, and no actor would dare work in the production. ACTRA forced CBC into a position that left Hirsch no choice, given all the other circumstances I've outlined. And nowhere was any mention made of the influence of aesthetic considerations: ultimately the producer, director, and CBC Drama brass do the casting, and it's reality that personal opinion, prejudice and judgment are as important as the actor's agent's hustle, the timing of the shoot, and so on.

ACTRA does, however, have a legitimate grievance (although not really against the CBC directly) that has been completely overlooked. The jump on Widdoes was severe for another reason, and nationalism is put aside when discussing it. For years Americans have had easy access to Canadian film and especially to stage roles. There are really no bars at the border to them.

But if a Canadian actor wants to work in the U.S. he has to build up his reputation illegally. The Americans won't issue the coveted 'green card' unless a long period of starvation and a great deal of political pressure are both achieved, and it must be done in Hollywood. So the Canadians you see on U.S. TV are, if in small roles, probably getting paid through a legal friend, and, if in major roles, such as Susan Clark's recent successes, issued the cards after much high level influence, from Americans.

It's a perfect opportunity for CBC to support ACTRA in the union's efforts to either close the border to Americans or open the U.S. to give Canadians equal opportunity to cross. The most glaring example is the touring stage garbage that visits the city arts centres from the U.S. If those American companies would be barred, the pressure by American producers and Canadian theatre operators would make ACTRA's quest more obtainable.

As it is, the union's energy is being squandered and is being applied in a manner that, in a production, would be called amateurish. □

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