

IN AND OUT OF THE MOVIES

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Since Jeanne Sauvé, the Minister of Communications, made her announcement concerning the introduction, in the future, of a pay-TV system, there has been a rash of hastily called conferences, belligerent briefs, and desperate discussions, together with clarion calls to arms, on the part of producers, performers, and owners of cable systems, who are worried about the implications inherent in unleashing this latest method of commerce in the field of communications.

How Canadian it should be (or is likely to end up not being), who should control it, who will run it, who will watch it, and what audiences will pay to see, are among the leading questions.

It seems very clear to most observers that all this fuss and bother is quite unnecessary. Pay-TV is simply the cinema of the future, the cinema in the home. Unless the public, over the years to come, turns completely away from motion pictures, to find some other form of leisure attraction (**Rollerball**, **The Gladiators** war games perhaps?), then it will quite willingly pay to see new films on the seven-foot home TV screen, as the Americans are now paying to see films on their standard-size pay-TV screens.

There will be big sporting events too, and some stage presentations for those audiences who cannot go to the theatre, but in the main, pay-TV will present new motion pictures. As the regular cinemas close down, one by one, throughout the land, leaving just the special houses for wide-screen spectaculars and cinemathèques for the preservation of the past, the exhibition circuit for distributors (if they still exist) will be the box in the basement (or in the bedroom) with its wall-screen.

As the Americans cannot possibly own our future big-screen television sets (or will they?) our concern over pay-TV should be simply that of who shall control the system which selects the films to be made available for our homes. Viewers will have several new movies, available as first-runs for several weeks perhaps, from which they will choose which they will pay to see.

Here we have the opportunity to start again. Where we once let our cinemas fall into the hands of the foreign devils without imposing quotas for Canadian films, the new agency, which should be a crown corporation, will see to it that Canadian films get a fair showing.

Producers, whether they are Canadian, American, French or Chinese, will sell direct to the agency, which will levy a distribution charge for its services. This charge will be high enough to cover administrative costs and help to cover losses for those Canadian films which, we are told, the public won't pay to see. (Perish the thought that it would not pay to see certain American films!) Private operators would not have this sense of

responsibility. Programs which sell readily would be their only consideration.

There's no need for Madame Sauvé, the cable systems and the Canadian Conference on the Arts to get so worked up. The new agency might rent the facilities and lines of the existing cable companies, much the same way the CBC rents lines from Bell Telephone; but ideally, it should own its own facilities. Because we don't want the provinces to feel that Ottawa is playing the role of Big Brother, there would be regional authorities just as the CBC is involved in regional and French-language programs today.

It will be interesting to see how the subject of censorship will be resolved, if there is any. On the grounds that what we **pay to see** in our own homes is our business, will the agency be tempted to have a 'big box office' one night with a daring film – or will we be so blasé, nothing will disturb us?

As provincial censor boards will have been abolished, will the agency have a little man from the Ministry of Justice first examine every film, on the lookout for obscenity? What will obscenity mean in the future? Few know what it means today. If we can now see **Emmanuelle** and **Stop It, or You'll Go Blind**, uncensored in our hotel rooms for \$3.50, might we not have them in the comfort of our homes? Children packed off to bed, of course.

Having thus established our pay-TV system, we must consider the future role of the CBC. Everything else of interest, apart from new movies and sports events, should be on CBC – not the CBC as we know it today, but one free of commercials.

Is it not appalling that no one, presumably brought up with a sense of what public broadcasting means, any longer advocates the elimination of commercials on CBC television? How can the CBC justify the use of commercials in view of the huge amounts of public funds which go every year to maintain it?

If the CBC, which is so over-managed, and run so clumsily, were to be stripped and recreated over again, it could present better Canadian programming on the money it now receives without having to seek commercials.

When we heard that the CBC received millions more



to cover the Olympic Games we felt the money was justified because we expected to see the Games free of commercials. But no, we were forced to watch more commercials than ever before. Few questioned this because, regrettably, commercials have become so much a part of life, regular viewers are dulled into accepting them, while people who cannot stand them either never watch any television or watch PBS from the USA, or, in Ontario, stay with OECA.

The CBC began to destroy its public when some dim-witted executive stopped the publication of the *CBC Times*. Ever since, year by year, it has continued to alienate its audiences and is now obsessed, like the private stations, with ratings and 'pop,' and the production of absurd, pseudo-American movies like **The Man Within**.

We need an entirely new CBC, which, together with a properly organized pay-TV agency, would herald a new era in Canadian broadcasting, one in which all Canadian artists would have a fuller and more complete part in the creation of our arts and entertainment.

It will take an earthquake to bring about this happy situation, of course, and as we all know that earthquakes don't happen in Canada, we don't expect anything to change. Our screens, like our lives, will simply become more and more American, and pay-TV will probably be run by Famous Players in association with Odeon Theatres, who will dutifully inform Madame Sauvé that yes, they will enact a voluntary quota for Canadian films.

Canadian Film Awards '76

It would be encouraging to read some intelligent after-commentary by qualified observers on the Canadian Film Awards, rather than just the results. All we get, however, is sensational reporting about the presentation of the distributors' award.

Few seem to have noticed, when reading the results, that the jury did not give an award for original screenplay writing – which bears out the contention that writing needs improving, and that many writers are not getting the support they need from producers, the CFDC, the CBC, and private TV.

CTV, which most commendably carried the presentation of the Awards (in the face of continued disinterest on the part of the CBC in anything relating to Canadian movies) left this out. The jury asked that the "no award" in this category be announced, on grounds that making it public would be more positive than hiding it, and might lead to better conditions for writers.

The jury also made a statement about the use by Canadian producers and investors of mediocre American performers. It read: "The jury takes note of the number of non-Canadian performers in Canadian films, among them Tony Lobianco, Michael Margotta, James Naughton, Lindsay Wagner, and others too numerous to name, and gives the best actor award unreservedly to André Melançon for his role in *Partis pour la gloire*." This too, was omitted from the TV show.

The fact that non-Canadian performers never win awards (they are eligible if the films they are in pass pre-selection) because the Canadian actors and actresses are so much better, never seems to penetrate the muddled thinking of producers – who go on using them. In accepting his award for *Lies My Father Told Me*, Harry Gulkin, who keeps his eyes on the south, made a somewhat misplaced plea to keep "the doors open to interna-



Best Canadian actress 1976: Marilyn Lightstone



Best Canadian actor 1976: André Melançon

tional talent." They have never been closed, but what we get coming through them is largely mediocre talent hired by Canadian producers too frightened to use the superior talents of their own country.

And what do we say about Canadian Press and those newspapers which haven't the interest or imagination to write articles about two such talented performers as Marilyn Lightstone and André Melançon, who won the acting awards in the feature category, or about two veterans such as Hugh Webster and Ed MacNamara, who won the acting awards in the non-feature category, and, because of this neglect, remain largely unknown to the public across the nation? But we can be sure that what NBC decides to do, no matter how trivial, will be given pride of place.

And what do we say about our new Secretary of State who comes to Toronto on Saturday night, but cannot accept an invitation to attend the Film Awards presentation on the following evening?

Finally, how many times does the CFA have to tell the press and the participants involved in a nominated film that everyone in a film nominated by the pre-selection committee is eligible for an award in the various categories? The Canadian Film Awards is not the Academy Awards and as long as the CFA decides to use the jury system it will continue to be this way because experience has shown that judging works best with this procedure. □