

EDITORIAL

Fine for culture, but how's business?

The Minister of Communications, Francis Fox, has acted to bolster the use of Canadian talent in Canadian films, toughening the application of the "Canadian definition" in the categories of director, screenwriter, and leading players. He has also increased the amount of money available to the Canadian Film Development Corporation for interim financing, and broadened the CFDC's mandate to include short films as well as features.

Certainly, these regulations move the Canadian production industry along the path it has already, naturally, chosen - that of making better use of native talent. The fact that the best films of last year's crop were signed Don Shebib, Ralph Thomas, Zale Dalen, Claude Jutra, David Cronenberg and Gilles Carle already indicated that the days of the 'hired-hand' director are over.

Never have the traditional producers' associations been in a better position to take advantage of the government's willingness to move on film policy. One can hardly accuse APFQ president Michael Spencer (former executive director of the CFDC) or CAMPP president John Eckert (veteran of *Running Middle Age Crazy* and, now, *Incubus*) of not knowing the score. Nor is CFTA president Pat Ferns about to give up his dream of bringing all three associations together under one lobbying umbrella. Important strides are being made in this direction.

But the production industry is only part of the picture. Because of government use of tax incentive, the bottom line is seeing that distribution and world sales net enough revenue to return money to the investor. Only then will federal film policy generate production on a stable basis.

One has only to look at the Los Angeles Market and the recent Cannes festival to evaluate the strength of the world sales/distribution arm of the Canadian film industry. It is not well.

Filmaccord was the only Canadian company registered to sell films at the Los Angeles market. While Canadian distributors could buy American product, all Canadian sales, save those made by Filmaccord, went through authorized American sales agents.

At Cannes, it was a bad year for everyone. But the situation among English Canadian distributors is such that only Pan Canadian and New Cinema thought it worthwhile to go. Quebec's distributors were there in force, sheltered by the Americans' disinterest in distributing French language films in North America.

In the weeks which followed Cannes, Canadian producers were unable to talk about their films' sales, not yet having been informed by the foreign sales agent. Responsibility for a film's career has moved out of the hands of the producer and into the hands of those agents.

Yet Canadian producers could make their own deals if the government would only free their hands. "There is only one thing I want to hear Fox say," confided one producer at the APFQ. "That is that we can make bonafide pre-sales without jeopardizing tax shelter investment."

The point is crucial. The point is tricky. It requires some heavy, formal discussion between the Department of Communications and the Ministry of Revenue. It also requires that the DOC address itself, not to production points, but to the trade aspects of the film industry.

The new policies announced will be applied next year, and the cultural benefit which will accrue from them should be evident in the years which follow. Meanwhile, will the investors have seen adequate returns for anyone to care?

Rather than build an ever bigger bureaucracy to monitor production, perhaps the government should tackle the questions of sales and distribution to see that Canadian investors get their fair share of the better films we are already producing.

The Editors

LETTERS

Letter of the law

I refer to your publication of January-February 1981, and specifically to an article by Barbara Halpern-Martineau entitled "Canadian Women Filmmakers." This article contains a section pertaining to "NFB as in charge of certifying films produced in Canada as educational material." I would be happy to correct

several factual errors which appear in the article and would appreciate your printing them as a correction to the statements made.

The National Film Board administers a Certification Programme under an international UNESCO Agreement which serves to facilitate the international circulation of visual and auditory materials of an educational, scientific and cul-

tural character: it is also called the "Beirut Agreement." The National Film Board, under the provisions of an Order-in-Council of 1948, is charged with the duty of certifying on behalf of the Government of Canada qualified audiovisual materials upon application from Canadian organizations and individuals who own basic rights to them. These materials must meet the criteria of the "Beirut Agreement." This treaty is to facilitate the free-flow of certified audiovisual materials between nations by eliminating import duties and other restrictions.

The quotations in Ms. Martineau's paper are taken from the National Film Board Statement on the Certification Programme and, in fact, are direct quotations from the UNESCO "Beirut Agreement." The statement that "The NFB has added some requirements of its own" is completely unfounded since the quotations are from the "Beirut Agreement" as shown in the attached excerpt from the Agreement.

As Certification Officer under this international Agreement I like the positive aspects rather than the negative aspects. But, if the programme is to succeed then the criteria for certification must be followed. If it is not, the flood gates would be opened and Canadian Educational Certificates would become worthless internationally. Any Canadian filmmaker wishing to have films certified for international circulation should certainly keep the criteria for certification in mind. Please note also that non-certification does not stop circulation of material under other regulations.

Mrs. Patricia Kirk
Certification Officer

Setting the record straighter

Wittingly or unwittingly, *Cinema Canada* has perpetrated a fraud on its readers (at least its heterosexual ones), namely that your article on our documentary *Sharing the Secret: Selected Gay Stories* ("Gays Set the Record Straight," by gay activists Joyce Rock and Tom Waugh) is the 'gay response' to our film. It is nothing of the kind.

A great many gay organizations and gay individuals, from coast to coast, have praised the film, on the airwaves, in the press, by mail and by telephone. Among the many gay plaudits for the film (I have enclosed some for your perusal) is a review by gay TV Columnist Richard Labonté, who, in the *Ottawa Citizen* calls the documentary "the best film on gay life," and a "penetrating revelation of... a narrow but not unrepresentative sample of the gay world." (Labonté, incidentally, is also a respected contributor to *The Body Politic*). The GAY PEOPLE OF UBC wrote to "extend their thanks (to the CBC) for... the relatively positive attitude taken by the documentary." Jim Church of the Gay Resources centre in Calgary called the show "excellent" on a TV program, *Hotline*. And in a follow-up article in the *Ottawa Citizen* (headlined "Documentary Pleases Gays") leading Ottawa gay spokesmen praised the film.

This incident only confirms one of the great discoveries we made in researching the film - that gay activists frequently do not represent the views of the majority of gays, which is why we so pointedly left them out of the film. The gay majority - who are still tightly closeted - must listen in silence as various activists (I call them 'gay deceivers') pretend to represent their views. This

pretence was made thunderingly clear in two Toronto elections, recently. Canada's best-known gay activist, George Hislop, ran twice for office in November and February, in an area which supposedly contains the densest concentration of gay people in Canada, conservatively estimated at 20,000 gay voters. In the first election, Hislop (who, that same month had revelled in the title 'the mayor of Gay Toronto' on CBC's *The Fifth Estate*) ran a poor third to two straight candidates, drawing only around 6,500 votes! His gay support in the next election - for MPP - was even more dismal: around 2,500 votes!

I think that tells you all you need to know about how "representative" of gay people such "gay spokesmen" are.

In trying to wade through Joyce Rock and Thomas Waugh's meandering jumble of quibbles and arch-cutenesses, I gather their central complaint is that *Sharing the Secret: Selected Gay Stories* is not "positive" enough because we focused on the "misery" of being gay, instead of portraying gays as "happy" and "well-adjusted."

This is the most astonishing - and unexpected - criticism of the film I have heard to date. You would think that a film which has been almost universally perceived by (presumably) heterosexual critics as extremely sympathetic to gays would be applauded by gay "spokesmen," wouldn't you? (Robert Fulford, in *Saturday Night*, cited the film's "sympathetic view of homosexuality"; the *Montreal Gazette's* Mike Boone praised *Sharing the Secret* for going "a long way toward correcting the traditional misconceptions about homosexuality"; and the *Toronto Sun's* anti-gay columnist Claire Hoy deplored the film's sympathetic view of gays as a "90-minute commercial for homosexuality"!

But no. On the one hand gay activists have spent the last decade proclaiming that gays are victims of straight hatred, of straight oppression, of straight violence, of police brutality, job discrimination, etc., etc... And yet they are angrily insisting gays must be portrayed as happy victims, well-adjusted victims, proud victims, etc.

Or: gay activists forever point out that an estimated 90% of Canada's estimated two million gays are still in the closet. Well, that presumably means 90% of Canada's gays are leading harrowing double lives, full of fear, dreading exposure which could wreck their jobs, their marriages, their friendships, lose them custody of their children, i.e. a pretty miserable existence. But gay activists are annoyed that gays are not shown as happy, well-adjusted, etc... This is just plain gobbledygook, if you ask me, from the perpetually-dissatisfied, chronic complainers within the gay movement. Do you know of any other persecuted minority whose "spokesmen" demand they be portrayed as "happy" victims of persecution?

And if they are right - if gay people are mostly happy and well-adjusted - then why should society waste another moment's sympathy on them? If 'straight oppression' has left many gays so untouched, why change the laws, the Human Rights codes? *Gay Liberation?* Liberation from what? In short, if gays are so happy, who the hell needs gay militants like Joyce Rock and Thomas Waugh?

John Kastner
Producer/Director
Sharing the Secret: Selected Gay Stories
CBC TV Current Affairs