

# The forest from the trees

On March 1, the Canadian Association of Motion Picture Producers (CAMPP) sponsored a day-long seminar entitled "The Forest and the Trees: a National Cinema and How to Get It."

CAMPP gathered an impressive panel of filmmakers who spent the day sharing experiences, and fielding questions from the audience. Pat Lovell (producer, Picnic at Hanging Rock, Gallipoli) and Fred Schepisi (director, The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith, Devil's Playground, Barbarosa) spoke of the Australian experience while David Puttnam (producer, Midnight Express, Chariots of Fire) and Michael Hodges (director, Get Carter, Flash Gordon) spoke of the United Kingdom. Bo Jonsson (producer of Montenegro and past director of the Swedish Film Institute) shared his views on filmmaking in Sweden and Alain Tanner (director, La Salamandre, Jonas Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000) added notes from Switzerland. Louise Ranger (head of the Institut québécois du cinéma) represented Quebec while Allan King, vice-president of CAMPP acted as moderator.

King's opening remarks follow, punctuated with comments from the panelists. Connie Tadros sums up the day's proceedings.

We are first of all concerned with the place of our national cinema in an international community. We hope that each of our panelists will tell us something of the development of a distinctive cinema in their own countries and from their own perspectives.

Each of our countries has employed incentives to feature film production. We would like to hear how they have worked, what they have accomplished, what problems have arisen, what directions we might pursue for the future, and what notions we might develop for co-operative action.

In this country, there has been a fundamental confusion between an industrial and a cultural strategy for film. The Canadian Film Development Corporation was set up 15 years ago to stimulate an industry which, it was assumed, would be self-supporting. It hasn't proved so. And, I guess, no film industry is completely self-supporting in any Western industrial country, except the United States.

Thus, at least here, the premise for continuing government incentives would have to be the need for our own expression in feature films in order to preserve and enhance the distinctive qualities of the national culture. This is arguable, I suppose.

Will the culture wane if it doesn't express itself? Artists think so. Does the tax-payer agree? If we are headed for a global village, as the late Marshall McLuhan said, why drag our feet? Isn't it better to break down the barriers between countries rather than raise them? And how is freedom of expression served by barring performers, filmmakers and other artists from free movement across borders?

One way of answering these questions is to ask which one of us would hand over the electronic keys to virtually every circuit in our brain except under the extreme duress of an insane asylum. Yet our communications system is the brain of our society and we have turned over most of the circuits; along with the eyes, ears, voice-box, tastebuds, fingertips, and, especially, the erogenous zones.

In Canada we only occupy 3 1/2% of our own theatrical screen time, and about the same in television drama. Almost all the rest is American. Do all the countries represented on this platform together occupy 3 1/2% of American film and TV screen time? Probably not. What we are advocating in any case, is much less a matter of restriction than a major increase in our own production and a much freer access to the world for

the rest of us.

These are fundamental questions we should address and we are glad to have with us filmmakers who have played a major role in their own national cinemas and, at the same time, now deal with the working realities of the American film world from an international viewpoint.

On the question of incentives, we will be particularly interested in the operation of the Australian Capital Cost Allowance, the tough Treasury rulings on leverage which apparently brought that industry to a halt in 1980, and the likely effects of the new 150% Capital Cost Allowance, the 50% tax holiday on profits, and so on.

In part, we have had a similar experience in Canada. Our Department of National Revenue attacked many of the tax deferral schemes set up in the period 1975-78, which were the financial base of our first substantial crop of good films. The replacement schemes of '79-80 proved disastrous for investors and produced a flood of films, some of which lacked either commercial or creative merit. 1981 produced some splendid films but investment, wincing from the sour taste of the preceding two years, has almost disappeared.

So at the moment we open up pay-TV and direct-to-home satellite transmis-

"In the '60s, the government brought in a regulation that 50% of the content on television had to be Australian. And that really made a dramatic change concerning our indigenous presence on television. A lot of companies started turning out imitation American shows - police shows and soap operas and all of those things. But you couldn't get away from the fact that they were Australian. They were amateurish, they were very cheap, but they went straight to the top of the ratings. Within a very short time, four or five of the top ten programs were Australian, and now, I think, eight of the top ten programs are Australian... What brought the public around more than anything else were the comedy shows, because we have such a different sense of humour and such a different language. Nevertheless, in the cop shows the streets were our streets, they were our people, and our cars, and the people related to the familiarity despite the rawness of the programs."

Schepisi

"National identity? One can hide behind it and make a lot of bad films. It's hard enough to find your own identity, let alone the national identity... In the main the public doesn't care at all about U.K. pictures."

Hodges



● The panelists (l to r): Alain Tanner, David Puttnam, Fred Schepisi, Louise Ranger, Michael Hodges, Patricia Lovell, Allan King and Bo Jonsson

photos: R. Hugh McLean

sion, our capacity to attract investment to our own films has all but stopped; so has production.

Which brings us to a question which I don't believe we, in this country, have ever really addressed. I'd be interested in our guests' views on the same point with respect to their own countries.

If we do believe that our countries need popular, dramatic entertainment of their own, then we must determine how much. What level of dramatic production is necessary for us to retain a presence in the minds of our own audiences.

It is our position that this country requires, at a minimum, fifty feature-length films a year in the \$1.5 to \$2.5 million budget range - films mostly aimed at television but which might also have release, at least in this country, in theatres. We also need at least 12 to 15 theatrical films in the \$5 to \$10 million range if our audiences are to have special occasion feature films in which they can take special pride and which will have good prospects of release to international audiences. That would give us one Canadian movie per week nestled among the 15 free television, the two pay-TV channels we are likely to have, and goodness knows how many direct-to-home satellite signals - many of which will run 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is not a lot of films for a presence; some will say it's a lot to produce. We will argue the case with pleasure and confidence. It is, after all, no more than we produced in each of the two years preceding last year's collapse, and we produced those numbers in four months of each year.

I should underscore the fact that I am talking here about anglophone Canada and I would like to hear what Louise Ranger and her colleagues feel is an adequate presence for French language films in theatres and television in her province.

To achieve that level of production we will require an incentive at least as strong as the current Australian system. To achieve a useful industrial level of non or partially Canadian production, we would, in fact, propose a three-tiered system for discussion, namely:

First, a 150% Capital Cost Allowance for films with virtually 100% Canadian content, and in addition, a 50% holiday on profits from such films - as we understand Australia provides.

Second, a lower allowance - say 100% either claimable in one year or spread over two - for a lower level of Canadian content. This could be either the point structure in force this year or, perhaps, the one in force last year.

Third, a lower allowance still for films with no restrictions on content except with respect to reasonable expenditures in this country.

It would be essential to ensure that such allowances be applied so as to avoid bunching all production in the last quarter of the tax year. (Bunching has not only caused horrendous production problems in this country, but also to the rest of the world we are in danger of appearing to live in an eternal twilight of ice and slush. Not inviting.)

Will the government support this level of activity with a careful mix of tax incentives and pay-TV funds carefully adjudicated on a cost-benefit basis? Can government and citizens come to understand why Canada needs a distinctively national cinema and how to achieve one? Can the film industry itself unite on a set of proposals which will maintain an industrial cinema base and

achieve a distinctively Canadian film output in numbers sufficient to help us and our children remain Canadian?

It will be particularly intriguing to hear the views of our panelists on content regulations in their countries and their views of them - particularly with respect to stars, writers, and directors. The Australian films with which we are familiar seem virtually 100% Australian cast, written, and directed. With the notable exceptions of *Chariots of Fire* and *Get Carter*, Britain has often seemed as much a soundstage and special effects lab for American blockbusters as a source of British films. Levels of national

content have been intensely debated here. How do our guests feel about the matter?

I'd like to close on a personal note. You may have guessed that I am a strong advocate of national cinema; but as such, I resent the fact that the view is so often thrown into a false dichotomy of national vs international cinema. I've been lucky enough to make films all over the world and have treasured the experience.

This is a country of immigrants. At its best moments it has treasured its diversity, taken pride in its multi-culturalism, eschewed a melting-pot philosophy.

And at its most characteristic, it is passionately internationalist.

One of the great pleasures of cinema is its international character, its diversity, its many different and often enthralling voices. Advocating a national cinema is not about restriction, but, rather about preservation and liberation - making sure that we have as many voices as our ears can hear, as many visions as our eyes can see. It is not about restriction to one language, one accent. Our friends to the south are devoted to this in principle; we would like to help them improve their practice.

Allan King ●

"The U.K. could exist on an American diet completely, so one must fight public apathy. If you can't have a television industry, then you certainly can't have a film industry... Does the U.K. need a film industry? It's like religion. You believe it or not."

Putnam

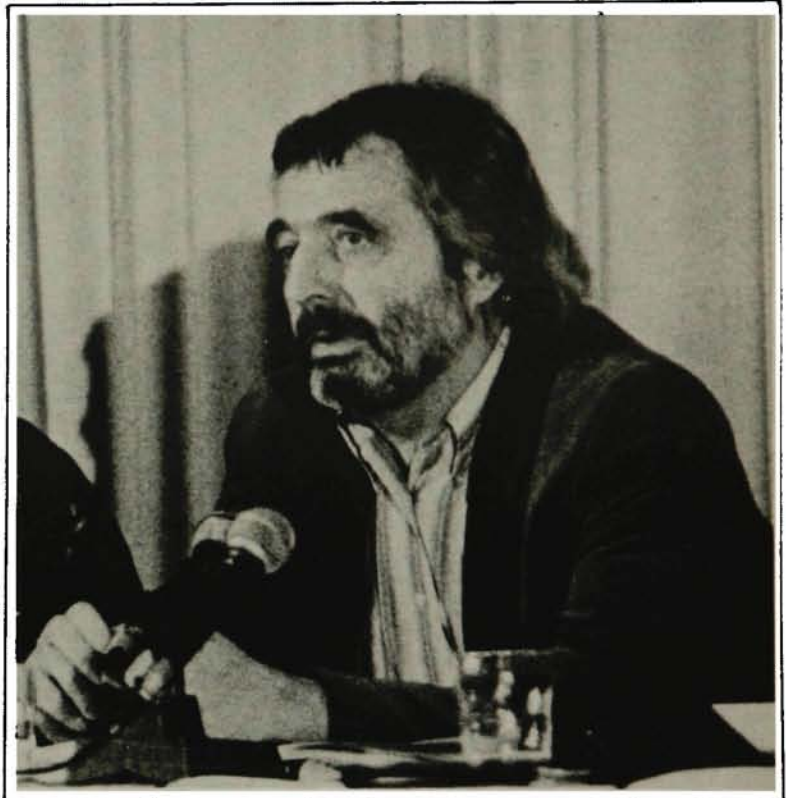
"The changes came (in 1969-70) because of us. We had been waiting in the wings too long. We had never been allowed to take major creative roles in any of the films we did, and we all had a lot of film experience and a great desire to make films. We figured we couldn't wait any longer for people to come and hand us scripts and hand us money and do all that."

It was happening on television because we'd lobbied for it. It was happening in our theatres. We were writing our own plays for the first time, and they were not being produced just in coffee-shop houses and experimental underground theatres, they were happening in the establishment theatres and being accepted. The writers were wanting to write the films, and the novelists wanted to write for films and we were being prevented from doing so.

So there was just a very very concerted and determined effect on behalf of all the filmmakers, and we hit at a political time. There was about to be a change in political powers, so the reigning government needed to do something to get publicity to reliven its image. These factors combined, and the film development corporation was soon established, as was an experimental film fund and a development film fund.

"You have to realize that Canada was the model for everything that's happening in Australia. That 'originally, we looked at the Canadian Film Development Corporation, the National Film Board of Canada, the Canadian tax incentives, and we used to get the Canadians to come out, years ago, and tell us how to go about it. What were the advantages and disadvantages. We used to get the Swedes to come out and tell us how to go about it. We examined their system, your system, the English system, everything. And a refinement of your system seemed to be what was best for us at that time. So now that the taxation incentives are coming, it's again a refinement of what you people were doing, and an extension of it, and an avoidance of the idiocies that were present in your legislation."

"I think that it's important that the whole situation is looked at, and not that individual bodies are responsible for individual things. One must have training grounds, experimental grounds, development grounds, culture, support in art - support as opposed to industry support and commercial financing. All



● Alain Tanner

of those aspects are important and should be seen as a whole and integrated. There should be integration with theatre and television. If you're supporting theatre, you are drawing on writers, ideas and actors. Hopefully, they will cross-pollinate with television and film."

Schepisi

"If the institutions prevent the making of 'sense', then they must be fought and they must be destroyed."

Tanner



● Fred Schepisi

● Michael Hodges



"The Australian Film Commission is not a free enterprise organization under any circumstance because, of course, it's under government and it gets a government allocation. This year, we are going to have to fight for that allocation to keep it on the level that it is at (roughly \$6 million a year). Because the tax incentives came in, various members say 'look, now the filmmakers have got this, why do they need that six million?' and you point out that you don't have filmmakers unless you're willing to invest in the early stages. No private sector is going to give seed money for scripts, is going to help our youngsters make short films, is going to subsidize things like the Australian Film Institute."

Lovell

## Dreams, anger, confidence

At the end of the day, there is no clear answer to the question of how to get a national cinema. There are suggestions of measures that have been taken in other countries, ideas about situations to promote and others to avoid. Mostly, there is recognition that the problems don't change very much from country to country. "Films and national identity go in waves," said Puttnam. "It's a question of confidence as much as anything else."

There was general agreement that some sort of political will must precede any attempt to establish a national cinema. In Australia, the Restrictive Trade Practices legislation opened the theatres to Australian films, and the Export Rebate Tax made it possible for filmmakers to take their films abroad. In Britain, the Eady Plan has worked for 30 years, providing funds regularly for production. Sweden, often in the avant-garde, has just levied a tax against the sale of video-cassettes. Revenues from the tax will augment the 10% levy which comes from the box-office of all films shown in the country, and all the monies will go back to the Swedish Film Institute for disbursement.

It would seem that the agencies which best support national cinema are those which are integrated. Jonsson insists that there would be no cinema in Sweden, were it not for the Institute which grants, invests, co-produces with television, runs film theatres, keeps the archives and represents the industry abroad. In Australia, the Australian Film Commission produces through Film Australia (similar to the National Film Board but having only 120 employees), makes grants to young filmmakers, invests heavily in script and project development, supports the film school, the national publication "Cinema Papers", and the Australian Film Institute (which runs three theatres), does thorough work in marketing/promotional strategy and even administers all revenues from films in which it invests, disbursing directly to investors.

Although CAMPP was obviously aiming to find support for its suggestion of an increased capital cost allowance, the panelists were wary. Puttnam remarked that a 100% deduction which had been available in the U.K. for 18 months would probably be withdrawn because of abuse. While the Australians were characteristically up-beat about avoiding the pitfalls which Canada knows too well, it is too soon to tell. "Since the incentives, known filmmakers have not benefitted," said Lovell. "Three-fourths of the films being made now are the hybrids we had been avoiding."

Financing was everyone's problem, and Tanner and Puttnam especially insisted that keeping budgets down was the battle to be joined. When the "mega-buck" projects take over, there is little left, and continuity of work becomes the problem. Puttnam felt he had lost some of the finest young talent - Alan Parker, Ridley Scott - because he, as a producer, could not keep them employed on a regular basis. Both Hodges and Schepisi were working in the States, and the consensus was that artists would move about, and that only the promise of secure and steady work would keep

them at home.

Everyone on the panel agreed that the government bodies must give priority to the younger generation of filmmakers. And most felt that support should be clearly made on a grant basis; that one must acknowledge that young filmmakers cannot turn a profit the first time out but that they must be able to try repeatedly if they are to establish themselves.

The barriers of "culture" and "commercialism" broke down as all acknowledged that no one knows whether a film is "commercial" until it starts its run, and that repeatedly, it is the unexpected film which makes a hit. To do away with the government agencies and rely solely on tax incentive plans to bolster a film industry would be disastrous, all agreed, seriously reducing the chances of making that unexpected film.

In the final analysis, creating a national

cinema seemed more a question of attitude than anything else. Puttnam insisted that dreams, anger and confidence were what made good films. Schepisi urged Canadians to pull together: "You can create an ambience for fellow filmmakers. It's a matter of persistence, determination and blackmail." Tanner, viewing the proceedings from the relative quiet of the Swiss 'industry' where two men make up the entire bureaucracy and where from one to five films are made a year, commented simply, "All our films are ambitious films. We make no crap."

The panelists all shared one thing: the passion for good films, coming from a centeredness of self-awareness. As the day grew to a close, the Canadians became less and less able to articulate just what the problem was in Canada, and Hodges became more and more aggressive. "I don't understand your

problem. You've made all these films. Explain it to me. What is the problem in Canada?" There was no clear answer, for no one in the audience was prepared to say to what degree the cynicism resulting from our film boom had wreaked moral havoc on our filmmakers.

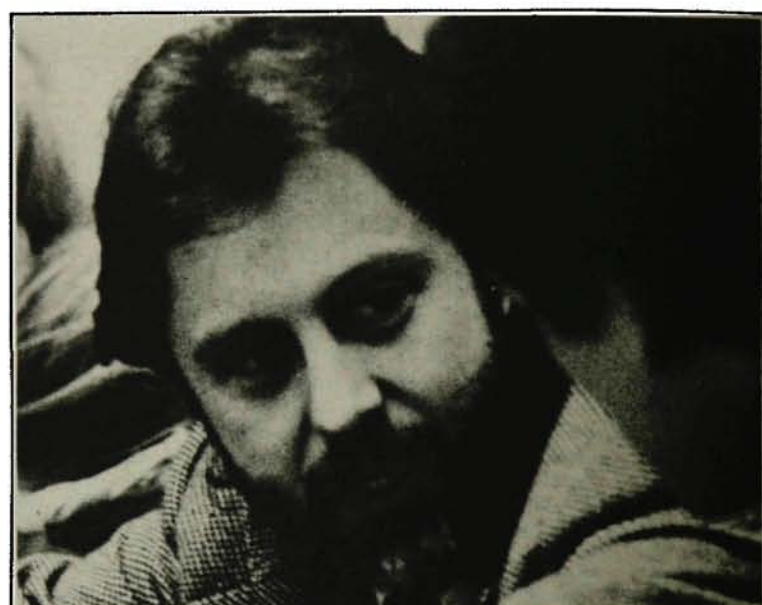
We need a break-through film to turn the situation around. One which does well and communicates a sense of pride and confidence. Puttnam had no idea, as he sat on the panel, that he would shortly win the Oscar for Best Film with *Chariots of Fire*. But what joy there was as the Oscar was accepted and the cry went out, "Watch out. The British are coming!" It was a moment which just might signal a revival of British cinema. When political will and creative enthusiasm come together in Canada, we might be ready for a real wave of national filmmaking too.

Connie Tadros ●

"I think it's incorrect to set up a structure that only supports very cultural and non-commercial pictures because then you're really out of touch with public tastes and, then, who are you talking to? You are talking to a handful of people. It is, however, important that the commercial desires don't overcome everything else because, then, everybody starts trying to assess what a commercial picture is and that is an impossibility. It has been proven in Hollywood, time and again, and everywhere else in the world. There are no formulas for commercial films. It is always a surprise when the next film becomes a major commercial success like *Kramer vs Kramer* or *Star Wars*. Neither of those films were believed to be commercial. Now of course, everybody is imitating them. That's always the way. What happened with both those films (and happens with many other films) is that they were made with a vision and a passion by filmmakers against all odds, and then turned out to be commercial successes.

"So my belief is as follows. If you've got government people involved in those boards, then they should take the permanent staff positions and they should co-op onto the boards, on temporary service, people from the industry that can advise and assess and judge. The boards should do very little reading of actual projects. They should encourage individuals, investing in their track records, and in their potential. They should be prepared to take a young director, and producer, and give them money to make a number of films in which they are going to fail. But you'll see an improvement in each film. And if you don't see an improvement then by the third film, you say, 'This guy's never going to make it. Cut him off.' They have to prove themselves like they do in any other area or art in the world. But unless you take the chances to allow them to develop - and they've obviously got to go through some raw processes - unless you give them that chance, they're not going to develop. They're not going to get good and become confident and capable filmmakers. So the program is multi-layered. I'm talking about experimental, training and development and all of those things. Don't invest in projects; invest in people. That is the major thing."

"You've got taxation incentives and you've got boards (government agencies). What's happening in Australia is that they are trying to get rid of the boards and just go into taxation incentives. This



● David Puttnam

would be a crime. The taxation incentives will take care of the more obviously commercial moviemakers, and the people with reputations. The boards, however, can support the development of scripts, the seeding money, the development of the talent and the more peculiar experimental or artistic or less seemingly commercial picture that is culturally important, that is esthetically important and is important for the development and progress of films. Those pictures should be supported frankly on a straight-out grant basis. Because you know you're never going to get the money back, so why bother? Why not just make it a grant basis. You do it for art, you do it for opera, you do it for ballet. Are we not an art form?"

Schepisi

"There are two important political questions: How to interface with government? And how not to get government to interfere?"

Puttnam

"I think the important comparison between Canada and Australia is the make-up of the full-time and part-time commission [Board of Directors of the Australian Film Commission]. We are all members of the industry... Although the minister has final say in the choices, usually there is talk, and that consultation leads to a workable commission. We on the commission often disagree and disagree heartily, but we have great respect for one another, and it's workable."

Lovell



● Patricia Lovell

"You are a very, very big market. Don't ever deceive yourself. A huge market. It does seem to me that quite clearly you haven't used your own clout with the American majors to elbow your way in. I mean you are a voice that must be listened to. The U.S. majors cannot afford, there is no way in the world that they can afford to ignore Ottawa. If Ottawa chose to be difficult, the U.S. majors would come into line very, very quickly. And you'd be surprised how much economic and other help you could get."

Puttnam

"Jack Valente came to Australia threatening, talking a lot about beef quotas quite as I believe he did here. I'm sure Jack Valente and the Motion Picture Export Association and all those people are connected to the CIA, and none of us have any illusions about when the plug is likely to be pulled.

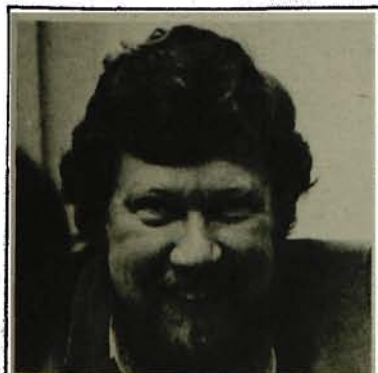
"It's because they are protecting a market that's very large that you have to realize that you're the second largest film market in the world. You have a very powerful position in relation to the American film industry. If you put the pressure on, both politically and economically, you are going to find yourself in a position where they will gladly help you in your own film production to preserve their market.

"What all this nonsense about coming in and teaching us means is that every independent producer who is unable to get his film produced in America wants to come up here and take advantage of the tax scheme... How long can you go on learning and being taught? And then why do you want to learn that system if you want to make your own stories and speak with your own voice? It's different, and it deserves to be different."

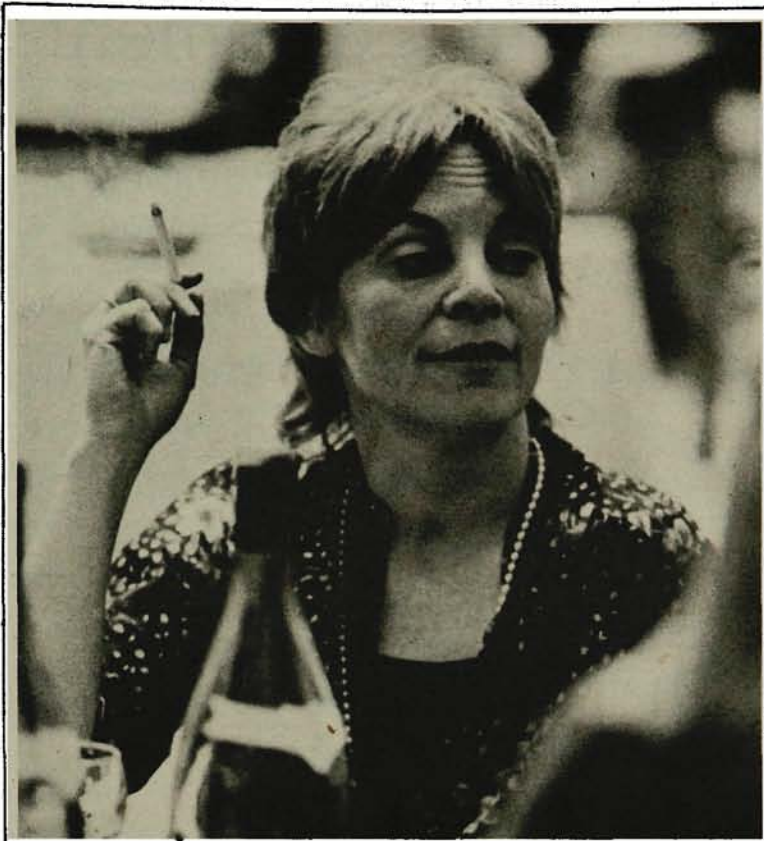
"We had to forget where we were and our distance. You've got to forget where you are and your closeness. You've got to start trusting in yourselves, being yourselves, and you've got to start believing yourselves. And once you do that, once you feel that, then the stories don't have to be that different, because you're not that different. You've got some different heritage, you've got some different approach, you have different ways of looking at things but you are very similar in a lot of ways. But if you are doing it with those differences, you are doing it with confidence, and in a way that you understand. And that's reflected. The pictures are then obviously being made with passion. They are centered and have an energy and an integrity that anyone will respond to, anywhere in the world."

"You have to start in your schools. Start educating in the schools about Canadian films, and about Canadian television, and Canadian plays. Then you have to get your press, and get the columnists and the critics, and romance them. Involve them in the problems, the problems of financing, the problems of distribution, in the agony of making the pictures so that they start to understand and get on your side. They will start to give you public relations and to educate the public. And get on television, and get on radio, and just barrage these people, romance them, you know, so that they start telling the public what they are missing out on. But they can only do that if you are going to deliver a real Canadian experience."

**Schepisi**



● Bo Jonsson



● Louise Ranger

"In the end, it's a question of self-regeneration. That's why my particular message to everyone is to put money into start-up situations and start it again. I believe passionately in film schools. Now obviously, a film school is only as good as the people who run it and the criteria under which it runs. But I think you have to accept as a given that you look for someone really first-class to run your film school. It always comes back to continuity, continuity of government interest, continuity of desire to make good films. And backing people's passions. Find the people you think have got the passion, make sure they've got the talent, and in the areas where they lack expertise, fund them to develop it. If you've got a film school, for God's sake send the students to L.A. Get them to queue up in Westwood, get them to get a sense of when an audience responds and why it responds. Get them to do the same job in London. Get them to do the same job in Rome and Paris for that matter. It's an international business and you need to get a sense of what audiences want."

**Puttnam**

"If you don't have a passion, you may just as well be making movies for a company, or for television or whatever—just slick, tack films. I do think that you Canadians were wooed and and over-wooed as it were, and because of a lack of confidence you thought maybe you had something to learn from the Americans. We are lucky in that we are so far away. That is our luck and, therefore, that very isolation helps us with our passion.

"England, right now is so depressing because of the lack of enthusiasm amongst a lot of filmmakers. I was there last year, and I thought, no wonder the British film industry is at rock bottom! I mean, nobody was saying anything enthusiastic or had any sort of verve or vitality about anything. Now that can be

got back. I think you need one breakthrough. What *Chariots of Fire* has done for the British film industry is tremendous. Nevertheless, they refuse in Britain, for instance, to consider that Alan Parker is any longer a British filmmaker. Alan is one of the best directors to ever come out of Britain, and his films, to my mind, have always been superb. Just because he works outside England some of the time doesn't mean that he is no longer British. I find that utterly ridiculous."

**Lovell**

"The only way of going about it [cutting down budgets and increasing the chance to recoup in the home market] is again, very clear and concise directives from central government. If central government is prepared to fund films of a specific size, the unions, in most cases, will go along with that kind of directive. Then a philosophy and scale of fees and crew sizes will be formulated which coincide with that. Most industries, in most countries, have only ever worked when they started from a secure domestic base. Only when you secure a

domestic base can you then develop the confidence to turn around and attack a foreign market."

**Puttnam**

"I don't want to fend people off [talking about HBO's visit to Australia]. I think they should all come. I just hope that we're going to be wise enough to look at the deals that they are offering. Very recently we had some people out who supported a lot of drama on PBS television. Now, to get the sort of thing they wanted, they're not going to interfere at all creatively. But I'll be wooed by anybody, but let's not say that I'm going to sign a deal if I think there's going to be tremendous interference, and if I think that the film will lose quality by being aimed at some section of the American market that is 'commercial.' Then I'd be very suspicious of any deals because I just believe fully that if you try to structure a film to appeal to the American market, and to the Australian market, you appeal to nobody. It's been proven again and again and again and again."

"I'm constantly looking at things to do because I really care. I desperately care. I will do anything, even get myself another job to support myself rather than do a line production job on a film that I really don't care about, because your name is on that film forever, and you have to live with that. Despite mortgages and all those awful things that happen in one's life, you do have to go back to the question, do you really want a film industry? And there's no easy explanation for how to get it except to try and get the confidence. You've got very good filmmakers here, but there doesn't seem to be that center because you're always asking, are the Americans going to like it? Damn it. Will the Canadians like it? Because I'm sure if the Canadians will like it, the Americans will."

"If you do something as we did with *Picnic at Hanging Rock*... the Australians nearly went off their heads because they thought, 'we didn't know we could do this!' Suddenly there was a feeling of 'oh, aren't we good!' And it has nothing to do with the filmmakers. It's the audience, it's feeling very proud of themselves. I think that's what the Canadians have got to do. They've got to make their audience feel proud of themselves and proud of their filmmakers. Once you do that, whatever film that is, that has an international emotion that will not only get to your home audience but will reach into America because it will be different to anything that's being screened there, and it will be so good they won't be able to resist it."

**Lovell**



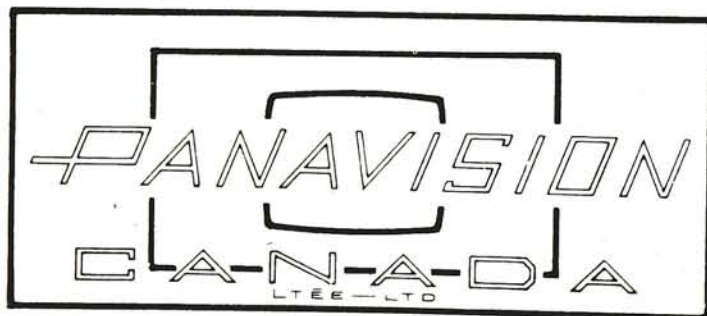
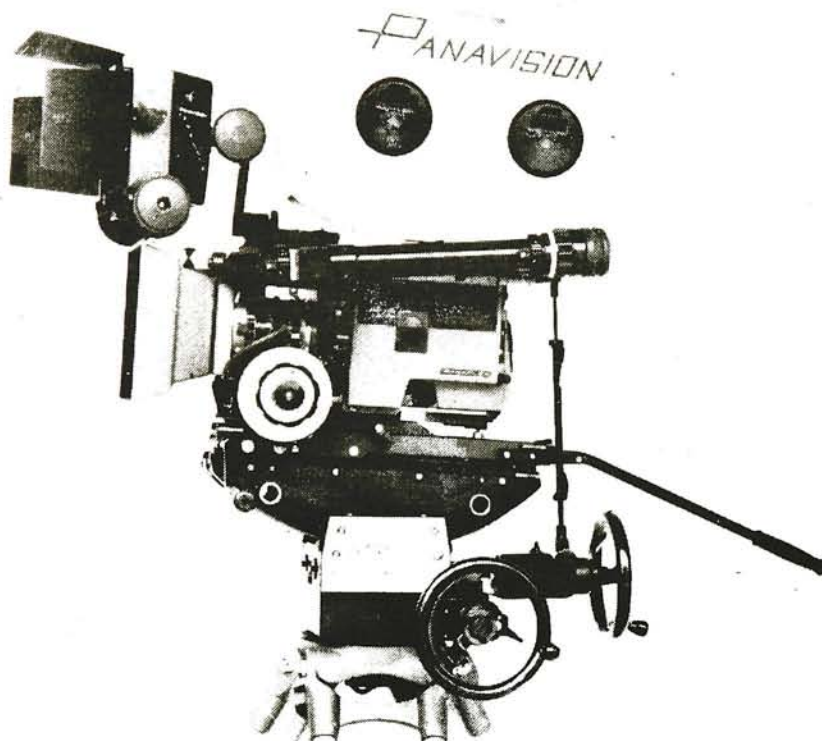
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