

The work of foreign agents

Why is it that the National Film Board will not just roll over and die quietly? It has already been declared dead by Applebaum-Hébert, and even the most sympathetic of observers walking through its now empty halls smells an advanced state of decay — sans purpose, sans direction sans distribution, sans leadership. As a functionally effective organization, it has already ceased to exist and only waits the stroke of the bureaucrat's pen to put it out of its misery and will it, officiously, from the face of this earth.

And then suddenly — and it would seem out of nowhere — it hits the headlines south of the border. Its praises are sung by all three American networks on successive nightly news broadcasts. Editorials and articles appear in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and serious newspapers across the country. American senators and congressmen beseege Film Board offices with requests for films. This is no way for the dead to behave.

To understand what has kept the Film Board alive, one must look, not to the present, but into the past, to the very birth of the National Film Board and its reason for existence over forty years ago. And here we encounter some ironies. The U. S. Justice Department wants to label National Film Board films "political propaganda," the work of "foreign agents." The irony is that they are completely right. Many Film Board films are propaganda and, much as we like to think of ourselves as one big happy undefended border, Canadians are foreigners (although it does take a rather large stretch of the imagination to think of James de B. Domville as an agent). The U. S. Justice Department is right, but it is forty years too late. The foreign agent was, in fact, John Grierson who, working with the British government secret service, founded the National Film Board. Its express purpose was to gain access to American movie theatre screens and influence our isolationist neighbours to the south to save England by joining World War II.

But Grierson took a longer view as well, and breathed a fire into the organization — a fire which still burns today, despite the crippling organizational effects of bureaucracy and old age. He created a National Film Board that is truly an independent voice. Secure in its funding, it is able to put its considerable resources behind films expressing an independent viewpoint. It is free to make films on controversial subjects. It is free to make films which are not particularly popular. It does not have to rely on the generosity of large corporations and is even permitted to bite the governmental hand which feeds it.

The United States thrives on the myth of liberty of expression. But anyone who has experienced the actual workings of the American media will appreciate the ways in which the National Film Board is a truly unique organization. There are, in fact, no independent voices on American television. In the much vaunted private sector, there are a sprinkling of ill-funded, independent documentary films, but few people get to see them. In the American film world, you are free; as long as you are rich.

"Foreign agents," yes. "Political propaganda," yes; if you define propaganda as anything different from popularly held opinions. Grierson, who revelled in controversy, must be looking down on his child with amused glee. Damned from without, arthritic from within, the old place still has some kick left in her.

Ronald Blumer

Ronald Blumer, ex-NFB freelancer, has written and co-produced two series with Bill Moyers for Public Television and is currently working on a CBS science special with Walter Cronkite.

POLICY

Alberta consensus

A consensus of Alberta filmmakers has formed in response to impending changes in Canadian film and broadcast policy. The following four points state our major areas of concern:

1. The Applebaum-Hébert Report recommends drastic CBC cutbacks, while the DOC speaks of creating a \$30 million fund to augment the CBC's purchase of independently produced programming. Given the conflicting positions of the Applebaum-Hébert Report and the DOC on the future of the CBC, we would like to reserve our position on the CBC and state the following: Regardless of changes made in the CBC, our regional production industries need more access to CBC airtime and markets and more of an opportunity to speak to and hear from other regions of Canada via our national network. Centralized budgeting starves the creative potential of the regions. Broadcast policy plans for reorganization of the CBC network should include measured steps to enhance regional autonomy and to increase signifi-

cantly the proportion of the total CBC budget which goes to the regions for the purpose of stimulating and purchasing independent productions.

2. The Applebaum-Hébert Report speaks of a possible profit tax on private broadcasters to "upgrade the quantity and quality of Canadian programming" while the DOC speaks of creating a "Broadcast Program Development Fund," a pool of some \$30 million derived from the Consolidated Revenue Fund or by a program production levy on cable and pay television subscribers. We support strongly the creation of such a fund but ask what formula will be applied to its distribution? Will it stay mostly in Ontario and Quebec, or will it be used to encourage the creative energies of Canada's many regional film communities? Having already experienced the deluge of foreign signals via cable, and with more to come with the new technologies (DBS's, video-cassettes, etc.), we must resolve to develop our indigenous production industry so that we

may compete on a worldwide scale. We must capitalize on all our available resources and build upon our regional production communities as well as on those in Central Canada. The fund could be a tremendous asset to our industry, but its administering body must be flexible and responsive and composed of a balance of appointees acceptable to both the Federal Government and to industry representatives throughout the provinces. Key to the fund's success will be the degree to which its resources address the market problems unique to Canadian film and television.

3. Chapter 9 of the Applebaum-Hébert Report is written from a distinctly centralist point of view. For example, the report is unfair and inconsistent on the subject of the NFB. The regional production studios of the NFB have helped provide hands-on training for new filmmakers, aided innovative and exploratory projects, and provided access to tools in the very manner the Applebaum-Hébert Report suggests. Over the past few years, the NFB has opened up the sponsored film program, and we ask that there be an even greater reliance on our regional film communities in this area. The greatest complaint the regions have about the Board is its lack of regional autonomy. The structure of regional programming committees with Advisory Councils of local filmmakers, already exists at the NFB. All that remains is to grant local communities the freedom to be responsible for the works they create.

4. The Applebaum-Hébert Report calls for a vastly increased role for the CFDC. In such a scenario, we ask that there be greater recognition of regional production communities than the present token

"desk" that the Corporation has in Vancouver. Before the CFDC mandate is broadened, let it prove its effectiveness by increased support for our regional production industries. For the last decade, the focus has been on the Toronto-L.A. axis. In a renewed effort to enhance Canada's production industry, let more attention be paid to the talent of our regional filmmakers. Commercial profitability must be balanced with our developmental needs, and we must be certain that the maximum financial support goes directly to our artists rather than being lost in administrative structures.

The Consensus Committee

Nick Bakyta

President, Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association

Ted Barris

President, ACTRA Writers' Guild/Alberta Branch

Dave Billington

Edmonton Sun media columnist

Jerry Ezekial

Programme Director, Banff Television Festival

Wendy Hill-Tout

Calgary Film Co-op

Lorne MacPherson

President, Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation

Tom Peacocke

Actor

Tom Radford

Executive Producer, North West Production Studio, National Film Board of Canada

David Scorgie

Assistant Director, Film and Literary Arts Branch, Alberta Culture

LETTERS

Perverts cornered

As if it weren't sufficiently furtive and humiliating to be slipping into the newsstand, penniless, just to leaf through No. 93 of *Cinema Canada* and assure myself that my lousy little notice was still in your Production Guide, you just had to put some half-naked man on the cover holding a two-and-a-half-foot long thing.

I ended up with the other leafers in 'Perverts' Corner where I found you snuggling up to *Blueboy*, *Hot Load* and *The Salami Quarterly*.

Can't you guys think of anything in advance? Or did you do this to me on purpose? Answer fast with a free subscription or else this goes directly to the Canada Council. I've got the polaroids.

David Lieber

Montreal

Chetwynd winner

With regard to the recent announcement of the CFTA 1982 Awards in *Cinema Canada* (November-December, 1982), I notice that the Chetwynd Award was missing from the list of winners.

The Chetwynd Award went to Creative House, Vancouver, B.C., an organization

which has demonstrated the greatest imagination and achievement in business promotion in the Canadian visual images industry over the past year. Robin Lecky, a partner in Creative House, accepted the award for *Come Together in Calgary*, a twelve-projector, two screen audio-visual presentation which was largely instrumental in convincing the International Olympic Committee to award the 1988 Olympics to Canada, an event with a great deal of business potential for Canada's visual images industry.

Robin Chetwynd

President & General Manager
Chetwynd Films Ltd.

Eyesore

This is in response to the article "Burden of Dreams" by Emil Sher which appeared in your January issue.

While we applaud the support and coverage you have given to independent film co-operatives, (two successive issues including articles on same — we must be doing something right!), we were, however, somewhat disturbed by the actual layout and placement of the article — forced to the margins of an article on *Le Festival du Nouveau Cinéma*. Don't you think we have been mar-

LETTERS

ginalized enough? Moreover, does all discussion of independent alternative filmmaking have to be collapsed together - to the extent of affixing a title of an American documentary to a discussion of a Montreal film co-op? Apart from the dismal gray background on which the article was printed, (is this an unconscious metaphor for the economic situation facing independent filmmakers?), the omission of any reference to our very successful screening last year at Cinema Five (over 500 eager aficionados of alternative cinema!), is serious, indeed.

Again, we do welcome the interest of Cinema Canada and look forward to more articles dealing with the co-op situation in other parts of the country.

Brenda Longfellow
Mainfilm,
Montreal

Critique of judgement

The views of ACTRA's National Committee on Women's Issues, reported in your article "ACTRA women on offensive in film..." (No. 92), that women are under-employed, under-represented, and portrayed unintelligently in the media, and that influential media organizations like the CBC, the CFDC, and private broadcasters ought to be pressured to change these things, while no doubt offered in a spirit of fairness, are too strong, too militant, and in the long run too potentially harmful to what is really important: the freedom of artistic expression.

I refer primarily to the Committee's apparent attitude toward the portrayal of women, whose TV image makes them "sick to the teeth" and whose portrayal in feature films, in Nancy Rossov's view, "borders on soft-core pornography." Apart from the obvious difficulties in judging objectively the degree to which broadcast material is "sexually stereotyped" or "offensive", any legislated requirements on the social, or - to call a spade a spade - ideological content of broadcasts, whatever their intended purpose, can only entail a lessening of the expressive potential of film and TV artists. Whatever themes the artist considers most important must always then be subordinated to the requirement of official orthodoxy; he must dispense with scenes and characters not approved by the government. Programming which is broadcast on the basis of ideological orthodoxy is simply propaganda. (The ACTRA Committee may argue that the current broadcast system is an implicit and therefore more pernicious kind of propaganda, but I would reply that unconscious propaganda is not propaganda at all, but rather a spontaneous reaction to the demands of the market: except in a negative way, through censorship, the programming of broadcasters has always been determined by what people will voluntarily watch, not by the petitions of pressure groups).

As things stand, the control of programming is in the hands of television network buyers and film producers and distributors, whose decisions are doubtless influenced more by their perception of a program's expected popularity than by its ideological content. By forcing these people to select on the basis of socio-political content, we force the

creators to limit their thematic material, and as a result the audience loses the freedom of choosing what it wants to see. What exactly is gained by this?

Sexual "stereotyping" of men and women is as old as humanity. The types change with changing society, but always spontaneously, and not as a result of royal decree or legislation. "Stereotyping" is the meat and potatoes of popular drama; in trying to eliminate it we would not be doing our artists or ourselves any service. In fact, often those who most stridently insist upon the abolition of "stereotypes" simply want to substitute a new type for the old.

There is no reason to believe there will be an end to sexual "stereotypes" of one kind or another; dramatized sexual types will continue to exert a fascination on us as long as we remain sexual beings, and as long as sexuality remains the fundamental, consuming thing that it is. Now, if we could somehow legislate inept filmmaking out of existence... But alas, who am I to judge? Is anyone?

Paul Vitols
Vancouver, B.C.

Budget blues

I am writing to tell you of a project I am currently very much involved in - I hope you find it interesting enough to print in your publication. I am in great need of publicity for this project and I hope you can help.

First, I will give you a straightforward description of the project. I have entered into an agreement with a production company based in Jakarta, Indonesia (Umbara Brothers Films), the agreement has me co-producing, writing and playing the lead role in one film and co-producing, co-writing and playing the lead role in a second film. I have written the script for the first film (*Sojourn*), the idea has already been approved by the intended director (Danu Umbara) and the second script is now being formulated in Jakarta. *Sojourn* has many Canadian elements to it, the lead characters are Canadian; throughout the story they often make known the fact that they are from Canada - it's an adventure-comedy that is set 20% here in Canada and 80% in Jakarta and surrounding Indonesian islands. An interesting part of this agreement, and a rare element in films that originate here in Canada, is that we already have a distribution company (P.T. Parkit Films) lined up that is willing to distribute the picture throughout the Asian market. This company has a proven track record and is currently handling four films in that same market.

Now to the problem - \$1.3 million. I have made some headway with gathering a budget but I am getting stonewalled by the very people that I thought I could count on for aid: the CFDC is at the top of that list. My story is Canadian, in that it starts off in Toronto and concerns two Canadians on an adventure in Indonesia - violence is nonexistent in the story, it is quite funny but never offensive, but on the other hand a current CFDC-sanctioned picture *Videodrome* has something to offend just about everyone, but since they think that the picture is

"commercially viable" it gets the support.

I have been involved with the picture business for about seven years (I'm 23) and I have been recently working for a production company based in Barcelona, Spain (Figaro Films S.A.): I help get their Spanish language films distributed here, mainly in Canada's Spanish-speaking communities. I have acted bit parts in films. I have written and submitted a few screenplays, but now I want to make pictures on my own, so I started to make contacts with production companies all over the world hoping to get lucky. After about a year this Jakarta project began (last June), we have been working hard putting this project together, and now all that is missing is the budget money. I'm sure that I can raise a budget, if for no other reason than the money is almost guaranteed recoverable with the picture already having a distributor for the giant Asian market.

The people in Jakarta have expressed to me that they feel the picture could be a success in their market, and I feel that it could be likewise here.

So, as you can see, I need publicity for this project wherever and however I can get it, so if you think this is interesting enough to be printed in your magazine I would be deeply appreciative.

Christopher Heard
Oshawa, Ont.

P.S. Just a note to add that our project is in no way similar to the current Peter Weir film The Year of Living Dangerously. Our film takes place in a much friendlier Indonesia of the '80s rather than the revolutionary Indonesia of the early '60s.

Now is the hour

Now is the time for the Canadian Film Institute to come out of hiding. With the demise of the director and a staff now numbering one person, the board of directors must elicit the support of the Canadian film community by: re-constituting the membership, amending the constitution, soliciting members, calling for an annual general meeting and electing a truly representative board, calling for support both financial and political and seeking a solid funding base, defining CFI's objectives and role in the Canadian film scene.

Now or never more. Why should it die except by the apathy of us all?

Jack Horwitz
Ottawa

No one can hold a candle to us

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