

Song of experience

The following letter was addressed to Robert Hookey.

I thought that *Sing Beast Sing* was the most quizzical experience of my life, until I read your review of the same movie.

Marv Newland

NFB rebuts

In this letter I would like to respond to the CineMag article "NFB in Unfair Competition" (Cinema Canada, April 1983) and to explain the Film Board's policy and role in developing and supporting Canadian cinema.

The NFB's mandate is to produce and distribute Canadian films of social and artistic importance which will contribute to the cultural life of Canada.

We realize that the film milieu in this country has evolved since the inception of the NFB in 1939. Today collaboration with other partners can only enhance and improve the quality, and quantity, of Canadian films on our screens. Without this collaboration between the public and private sectors it would be almost impossible for either sector to produce and distribute feature films.

It is in this context of cooperation and shared interest that we welcome the private sector to co-produce. We have developed a number of guidelines, in consultation, for co-production with the private sector in the fields of documentary, fiction and animation.

Concrete examples of how this kind of cooperation can work are the three feature films, *The Wars*, *Les beaux souvenirs* and *For the Rest of Our Lives* (Tin Flute). There is unanimous agreement that these important films would never have been produced without the collaboration of CBC/Radio-Canada, CFDC/SDICC and NFB.

En passant, in the case of *Au clair de la lune*, I find it ironic that the NFB is described as having "stepped into" the project when in fact the NFB was asked to come in to assist with some \$130,000 of services to complete a film in which over \$700,000 of public money had been invested. I should add that it is our sincere hope that NFB's assistance, which enabled the producers to complete this film, will permit the private lab involved to recover its investment.

The Film Board is prepared to discuss new ways to collaborate with the private sector and has in fact done so in the past. Three years ago the co-production program, "co-production par jumelage," was discussed by the NFB and four representatives of the APFQ. An agreement was reached by all parties but was rejected by the APFQ's general assembly. At the time, François Floquet was president of APFQ, followed by Claude Godbout.

In addition to our co-productions with the private sector, the NFB also provides assistance to young filmmakers through the Program to Assist Filmmakers and Films in the Private Sector (PAFFPS). Those eligible are individuals who have made less than four films, and non-profit organizations created to develop filmmakers and promote film-

making in Canada. Assistance to this program is limited to one production per year per filmmaker. In our regional production studios the program is administered by the local producers and the objectives are broadened to spot talent, provide training and to make non-professionals part of the filmmaking community.

The NFB offers this assistance to help new filmmakers get a start and let them show what they can do. Furthermore, by supporting this new talent and cultivating the industry, the NFB is in fact developing future clients who will use the private sector labs. We have consulted with the APFQ and the CFTA on this programme but have received no response.

In reference to our rental of services policy, it is clearly not a productive exercise for the NFB and we share the private sector's reservations about this activity. The difficulties of administering such a service have resulted in our setting up strict guidelines; however, there have been problems and abuses by both NFB employees and members of the private sector. We are open to reviewing these guidelines in discussions with the professional associations.

In conclusion, I would like to underline the NFB's willingness to consult and to cooperate with the private sector. As a publicly funded film agency we are committed to playing a key role in the development of Canadian cinema and Canadian filmmaking talent. These goals can be best achieved through the concerted efforts of the private and public sectors.

François Macerola
Deputy Film Commissioner
National Film Board of Canada

Unsung writers

"There is a Women's Liberation term called shitwork and it means work that when it is well done is unnoticed. Well, screenwriting is shitwork."

I was reminded of this passage from William Goldman's *Adventures in the Screen Trade* upon reading Michael Dorland's otherwise literate and intelligent review of *Empire, Inc.*, which leaves the reader with the impression that the series owes its success to everything but the script.

Nothing could be further from the truth. There are no good productions from bad scripts, period. To quote Robert Evans: "The biggest star of any picture is the writer. I'd rather have the next five films of Robert Towne than Robert Redford."

As for me, I'd rather have the next five scripts of *Doug Bowie* than any performer or director I can think of.

Mark Blandford,
Executive producer
Empire, Inc.

Having seen the film *The Grey Fox* and having been delighted by it, and proud that it was a Canadian film, I began to read your long, detailed and enthusiastic review with pleasure and with interest.

By the time I had finished reading, my pleasure had declined but my interest

had greatly increased - interest in how a reviewer could praise the structure, the authenticity, the dialogue, the overall excellence without once mentioning the screenplay or the screenwriter.

For years the (unjustified) plaint has been that we don't have writers in this country. Apparently your reviewer still believes that we don't have writers - and that films don't have screenplays.

For the record: *The Grey Fox*, written by John Hunter.

Margaret Collier,
National Executive Director - Writers
ACTRA

Erratum

Alberta Consensus (see CineMag, Cinema Canada, March 1983) chairman Geoff Le Boutillier informs us that Wendy Hill-Tout was erroneously listed as representing the Calgary Film Co-op and should have instead been listed as representing Marie-Anne Films.

Next month in Cinema Canada

- Maria Chapdelaine and the films of Gilles Carle
- John Harkness on the films of David Cronenberg
- Alberta: profile of a film industry

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