

editorial:

"This National Film Board . . . is something absolutely unique in the world. And this is not a mere compliment, it is simply the truth. . . ."

—René Clair, 1961

This special issue on our Film Board is by no means a definitive or conclusive look at the greatest government film agency in the world. To attempt such a work would require the talents of more people than Cinema Canada's four full-timers, or more time than the two months allotted for preparation. (Even with all the help this time of our contributing editors.)

Nor was it meant to be a historical examination. The best such look we've come across is the yet unpublished history of the NFB by Marjorie McKay. We urge its publication, since it's a fascinatingly detailed and well written document.

When John Grierson, Stuart Legg, Raymond Spottiswoode and Ross McLean sat together in a General Post Office screening room to watch *Night Mail* it was Britain, 1936, and magic ideas and energies intersected to give birth to a concept. "I look on cinema as a pulpit and use it as propagandist," said Grierson earlier, and McLean was so taken by the possibilities of that philosophy when he saw it up on the screen, that he subsequently called its creator — the man who coined the word "documentary" — to Canada, to set up the NFB.

It is only fitting that the Board has recently produced a documentary called *Grierson*, which is a stirring portrait of the genius Scot, who revolutionized cinema, inspired his co-workers to greatness, was snubbed by this country after pouring his heart out to help it, and never worked one place long enough to collect a pension. A collaboration of many, including Don Brittain, James Beveridge and Roger Blais, this movie is a must for every aware person involved with Canadian cinema. Available free at your local NFB office, 27 of them cross-country.

In 1974 then, what remains of the Grierson ideals, where has growth taken this organization which has kept turning out outstanding films for over three decades now, and who are the people keeping the place energized and making those excellent cinematic creations? These are some of the questions answered by *Cinema Canada No. 15*.

One major omission — due to lack of time, space, and manpower — is our failure to interview a wider range of staff people, to get the employees' side of the story. Reading the back issues of *Corridor*, the tabloid of the house union SGCT, one finds a different story from management's official version. People forced to work in total darkness year after year in the laboratory, for instance, have to sing at the top of their lungs to keep from going crazy sometimes, and wouldn't mind if some of their suggestions to ease working conditions were implemented. These same people rarely get a chance to see the films they work on, which is not conducive to a healthy, creative atmosphere, to say the least.

So the Film Board is not without its problems at age 35, but the overwhelmingly positive force of their cinematic output over the years has to be taken into account by any critic.

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