

# response to historical issue no. 56

## A Revealing Study, But...

Cinema Canada's special issue on the years 1939-1953 is certainly one of the most valuable and revealing studies of Canadian film history yet published. In all respects, the authors deserve compliments of the highest order.

However, as we are dealing with facts, it is important to correct a few statements made by Kirwan Cox, who appears to have dashed off certain comments about Odeon and Rank without his usual thorough approach.

Page 52, 1st col., last para: The British Government's Ad Valorem tax was imposed only on American films in order to ease the acute drain on Britain's limited supply of post-war dollars. The American companies refused to pay the tax and stopped all films going to Britain for about a period of six months. The tax did not have anything to do with failing production in Canada by Rank or anyone else. So far as South Africa and Australia were concerned, it is news that Rank owned any studios in these countries to shut down! This leads to...

Page 53, 2nd col., 3 para: To fill the gap left by the absence of American films, the Rank Organization (and some other British producers) embarked on a "crash program" to double production. Lord Rank's studios made truly heroic effort, but by the time the films were ready for showing the Ad Valorem tax was replaced by a "frozen assets" agreement whereby receipts were left in the UK to be used for production there. The great flood of US films which then entered the country engulfed the Rank films, resulting in a great loss of money for the company. Yet it continued as before, and made many fine films. It is rubbish therefore to say that "Rank's English production operation collapsed from Hollywood pressure and the advent of television."

As for Leonard Brockington not having Earl Lawson's "energy or knowledge of film business," this too, is inaccurate, and obviously Kirwan never met Mr. Brockington. Had he done so, he would not have forgotten him, or

described him as he did. Although physically handicapped, he had an amazing amount of fire and energy, and was a much sought after lecturer and after-dinner speaker.

He was literate and widely-known, and although he was not of the trade, there was little which escaped his attention, and not much about what was going on that he didn't know! And it is silly to say in the following paragraph that all this ended Odeon's expansion period. The expansion ended because Odeon completed its plans for the number of theatres it required, and there was no necessity for more. And Odeon certainly did not become Famous Players' Junior Partner. A Lively Rival was more like it which gave Famous Players a run for its money. No company which had the immense resources of the Rank Organization behind it could be called Junior!

Page 53, 1st col., 2nd para: Odeon did not sell its circuit "because of the possibility of legislation" (of a Canadian quota). It might be argued that the wave of sentiment expressed strongly at that time by the trade and its supporters in favour of Canadian owned enterprises, influenced the Rank Organization in accepting the offer made by Canadian Theatres. But a quota would not have panicked the company into selling, nor would it have put it out of business by any means. Anyway, Odeon knew, as we all knew, that the likelihood of disinterested federal politicians ever introducing a quota was zero.

And while we are talking about British films, Alistair Brown's opening paragraph of his review of Riel betrays ignorance when he states that "the BBC has brought more prestige to Britain than its film industry ever did." The work of the BBC is certainly to be admired, and it may have reached more people internationally via television than British films did in world cinemas, but British film history is certainly not lacking in prestige. Only someone lacking a knowledge of film history would make such a comment.

Gerald Pratley  
Director  
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## History Repeating Itself

Editor:

I greatly appreciated the articles on the history of the National Film Board and its problems with the politicians of the day. History repeating itself as the NFB is once again under fire, from the economists, cutting back the needed funds, and the private sector wanting the NFB production section to be pretty well scrapped.

From what I have read in past issues of Cinema Canada and CinéMag, I believe that the private sector — and that includes me and many other small operations — has a very legitimate beef in terms of projects being held by the NFB for their own film groups (i.e. government sponsored films), leaving the remaining 15 percent to the private sector. Apparently this also hurts the post-production and laboratory services, since the policy of in-house processing prevails.

The latest act of the NFB is to muscle in on the non-corporate sector of sponsors, namely the Red Cross, National Institute For The Blind, etc. (these are quoted as examples only). So, not only does the NFB want to deprive us of needed government projects, but also steal our remaining sources of revenue as well. The provinces have, also, film departments which produce local sponsored films for government departments.

I think now is the time to remove the right of production of government sponsored films from the NFB. (The latter should be totally scrapped and all work done by the private sector in the provinces.) The NFB would retain some production, say an average of 5x30 minute films per region per year (a total of 25) with equal budgets for each region and regional choice of programme selection, without referring to Montreal or Ottawa. The budgets would be more carefully controlled and be more in line with the private



sector, using all local i.e. provincial freelance crews. Expensive hotels would be out, unless the crews were to supplement expenses personally. Transcontinental plane rides would be at the individual's own expense (here I am referring to bringing producers or cameramen from Quebec to film in BC). All post-production and lab facilities would be handled by the private sector, where available.

The Film Board's forte is in its library and distribution system. This is where most of the effort should be concentrated. I have it on good authority that because of last year's cutbacks, the libraries have totally inadequate funds to provide the required number of prints for use. The NFB would continue to carry films (and hopefully 3/4" video-cassettes in the near future) for the CBC. I fully endorse this and hope that it will grow. The NFB research and development would be increased, with co-sponsorship from the CBC (new video techniques, cameras etc.) and film corporations such as Kodak. The NFB could use its in-house processors for research into new film stocks, equipment testing etc.

The idea of a national film school sponsored by the NFB is truly excellent except it would be based on film craft rather than the cinema theory, so loved by university academics. A graduate with the ability to get the best out of his tools is a hell of a sight more use to the industry than an intellectual critique on Bergman, or whomever.

The NFB's best work is in animation and I hope this will continue with more funds being diverted to it. We cannot afford to lose such craftsmen as McLaren to the European animation studios.

To make the most of the funds presently available, the administration and clerical staffs will have to be cut back, probably by 50 percent. The top administration could be cut by two thirds and joined with the Canadian Film Institute, sharing the same offices and personnel. Both could be united with the National Film Archives. The staff would be reduced by attrition and non-renewable contracts.

I envisage the CBC showing more NFB and independent productions, under a weekly 60 minute programme named the "Grierson Hour." Sunday evening, around 8 pm would be a good time, followed by a movie (preferably Canadian). This would comply with the "CBC commitment" to increase Canadian content to 80 percent over the next few years.

There is a large group of film societies known as the Canadian Federation

of Film Societies (CFFS), numbering some 70 members as of August 1978. The CFFS would form a very good nucleus for an "Alternative Circuit" for the exhibition of films, especially Canadian productions. I would like to see the NFB co-operate with the CFFS in setting up a "more professional" system of film exhibition, using high intensity light(Xenon Arc) portable 16mm. projectors and a "round robin" programme of feature films and shorts. Such a programme of films is offered by Pacific Cinematheque for a very reasonable cost.

The National Film Board does have a future, there is no doubt. It is greatly envied by U.S. filmmakers, who cannot understand why we bitch so much about the NFB's faults. Let us in the industry and the NFB support each other and stop fighting. Don't let politics get in the way of film production. We all have our roles to play in the industry, let's keep it that way.

R. Tarplett,  
Exec. Producer

## Errata

*We extend our apologies to Kirwan Cox who has called to our attention certain errors appearing in his article, "The Grierson Files," Cinema Canada, issue 56. The word "Pricy" was printed in place of the word "Privy" in the following sentence that appeared on page 16: "Arnold Heeney, Clerk of the Privy Council, described the Grierson he knew at this time to an American Embassy of-*

*ficial, who recorded Heeney's thoughts." On page 24 the word "never" was omitted from the sentence: "Obviously, Hoover never checked his own files before spreading Sinclair's allegations." We are sorry for any confusion this might have caused. Ed.*

# REVERB

*We received the following letters from CFA after Andrew Dowler's article, "Toronto's Super 8 Festival: Increasingly Professional," was published in Cinema Canada issue 57:*

I would like to point out that on page 22 second column "Further support from Gunther Hoos view came from TRM Labs of Toronto who gave Festival goers guided tours of their Video Transfer facilities," please be advised that it should have read CFA Labs not TRM. For your information TRM is our competition in Super 8mm, also note CFA is the only Film/Video Lab in Canada and the U.S. that can transfer Super 8mm to Broadcast quality with wetgate.

As a matter of fact since the Festival, we have been doing a lot of work for the U.S. Market, like MIT in Boston, Chevrolet in Detroit, various producers in New York City, Providence Rhode Island, and others.

Yours truly

Andre Desroches  
President

# 15th Yorkton International Film Festival

November 12-17, 1979

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