

# OPINION

# RADICAL SURGERY

The film industry in this country is the most unbelievable hodge podge of conflicting needs, desires, aims, and values. Lest there be any confusion let me reiterate the major points raised with surprising and precedent-setting unanimity in the Winnipeg Manifesto (printed elsewhere in this magazine). The purpose of filmmaking in Canada is not to make millions for a few entrepreneurs who can then retire to Florida. The filmmakers at Winnipeg reached the consensus that the primary responsibility of the film industry was to define and expand the cultural horizons of this country. The cultural industries (including music, publishing, and television) are not commercial activities like any other.

Without a culture we simply do not have a nation. Since it is the business of our governments to manage our nation, they must defend and promote our cultural industries. Culture is usually not very profitable, and most of those things which give us our national expression have been examples of the government doing a job private enterprise wouldn't do — the Canada Council, the National Film Board, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Gallery, Air Canada, CN, and on and on.

We now are confronted with the abdication by government of its responsibility to successfully finish what it has rightly begun: a feature film industry.

It is almost two years since the Secretary of State's office announced the first phase of a film policy which was to solve the problems of the young industry. Today we see the results of that policy — indecision and procrastination. The best example of this is the Film Advisory Committee which was created to design phase two of the federal film policy. This group is conspicuous by its silence while the film industry crumbles around it.

Statistics are always difficult to get in the film industry. However, it seems that 46 major feature films were finished in 1972 and 40 in 1973. Then the

tax loophole bubble burst. Now there are 20-odd features in various stages of pre-release and only one set to begin production in 1974.

The filmmakers the Canadian Film Development Corporation helped develop, like Claude Jutra, cannot now raise enough money to make a movie. Production is at a virtual standstill and the solutions offered by the government, such as the so-called voluntary quota, or putting the CFDC into television production, simply sidestep the real issues.

Culture and filmmaking are not big vote getters. Government priorities seem to be set by financially influential lobbies and vote getting strategies. As a result, the warnings and briefs outlining a disastrous crisis have been met with silence or impotent rhetoric. If Judy LaMarsh started the feature industry, Hugh Faulkner may be remembered as the man who lost it.

Only the most drastic action can now save a truly Canadian feature industry. We have seen years of effort, and a substantial outlay of public money, bring in disappointing results. Whether we look at the problem culturally or financially, we are clearly doing something wrong.

Most of the measures undertaken or proposed to date are details or mechanisms strung together without a governing concept. In the midst of government policy for years, no one has really defined what it is we are trying to do — build an industry or define a culture.

We have failed to answer the historic question: Is film an art or a business? Government policy has been trying to serve both masters simultaneously, rather than identify the dichotomy between them and deal with each separately. This is the primary contradiction of our film industry. This contradiction, and the failure to resolve it, has led to the present paralysis of policy. The result has been confusion, and finally crisis, in film production.

The problems of film as art and film

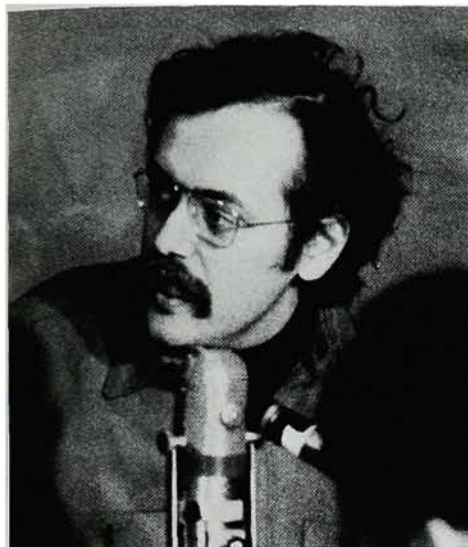
as commerce are separate and distinct and require separate policies. Of course good films make money and commercial films are good. They do not live in separate worlds and Hollywood is the best example of that. However, the CFDC has been given a mandate to foster a commercial industry and promote an identifiable Canadian culture. I'm not sure both of these things can be done with the CFDC's resources.

I propose that the future of film in this country be radically rethought on this basis and that the two functions of film be divided clearly down the middle as with a meat cleaver. Government must make two clearly defined sections of this unruly jumble — public and private — and stop this schizophrenic requirement that both fit into the same mould.

Because commercial exhibitors/distributors/producers and Canada's filmmakers are proving not educable to each other's realities, they are too often working at cross purposes in resentful compromises with both sides confused by what is expected of them and both sides unjustly maligned. If we continue to force a marriage which is so incoherent, the present confusion will continue *ad nauseam*. If we allow them alternative arenas both will function more effectively and fill the demands of the marketplace as well as the demands of the cultural imperative. If we define unequivocally the public side and the private side with different premises, values and priorities, but with a dividing wall low enough that filmmakers can move freely back and forth between the two, then they will know what is expected of them on each side.

I believe that there must be a public film industry which will provide an alternative to the private industry at every level. We see it all around us in this country where the public interest is not well served by private enterprise alone — there is a public and private railroad, airline, television system, and so on. The purpose of one is to make money within well-defined boundaries of legislation

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and the purpose of the other is to protect the public interest. The public interest is poorly served in the film industry.

One reason Canadian films are so unprofitable is the antiquated exhibition/distribution system. This system must be radically altered so the film producer shares in the box office revenue at a fair and predictable level. Horror stories abound. For example, Rejeanne Padovani grossed \$100,000 at the Vendome Theatre in Montreal and the producer received \$500. *La Vie Revée* did about \$20,000 in Montreal and the production Co-op that made it didn't see a penny.

We need a quota to get Canadian films into every theatre in the country, but we also need legislation to protect those films from box office robbery. We need a public distribution organization to allow filmmakers an alternative to the private distributors. Such an organization must have sufficient funding to do the job better than most private Canadian companies which are simply too small to compete with the Hollywood companies. We need to return monies from every film screened in this country back to the production industry of this country. We need government sources of financing to break the paralysis that private investors now exercise over feature production. We need imagination and action by our governments. We need a public industry and alternatives everywhere. We need a system designed for the good of Canadian filmmakers and filmgoers rather than the present system designed for the benefit of American companies.

Finally we need men of action leading this country rather than men of rhetoric or we simply won't have a country.

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