

LETTER FROM LONDON

by Stephen Challis

It seems that there is a growing unease among European producers about the state of European cinema within the global setting. This assertion is borne out by the number of conferences that have been staged, or are upcoming, on the topic. In London, Jeremy Isaacs, Chief Executive for Channel 4 Television in the U.K. quipped: "Talking about the film and television industries is the largest growth industry in Europe today." Isaacs made his comment at a conference called European Film and Television: A Partnership, held in October in London. The conference was organized by the British Film Institute and supported by the Commission of the European Communities. It brought together some of the most powerful film and television producers in Europe to discuss, as it says in the conference brochure: "the reshaping of Europe's moving image culture and the development of a Community Film and Television Policy."

Most of the time, conference delegates spoke on this topic, although their views on the extent to which European cinema could and/or need be re-

shaped varied considerably. Jack Lang, the former minister of culture in France, who a week before had appeared along with Jeremy Isaacs at a similar conference in Rimini, Italy, spoke, at length, about building a European cinema based on its component parts: that is the various national film and television industries. Speaking in French, Lang said, "We do not want a cinematic esperanto. To build a strong culture you have to work with what you have at home." Lang commented that the reason that England has the best television industry and France has the best film industry in the world is that they are both national in focus.

Richard Luce, U.K. minister of the arts, took a position somewhat different to Lang's. He said that "increased practical co-operation on a European basis is a major objective which we should have before us." Luce called for a pan-national cinema which would be able to compete effectively on a world scale: "We must resolve to produce programs of equal appeal to Europe's mass audiences, or perhaps even more important, of appeal to

the specialized European markets which undoubtedly exist. This is necessary for all sorts of reasons, not least our individual cultural identities. But it is also important to correct the transatlantic imbalance, to project Europe's cultural identity in the United States and at the same time perhaps bring an honest profit to our program industries."

The notion of a pan-national, or pan-European cinema was central to much of the discussion at the conference. A majority of the speakers indicated that such a cinema will emerge in the coming years, but how and why it will do so remained moot points. Since no working filmmaker was asked to address the conference, the question as to whether or not the creative vision for a pan-European cinema exists remained unanswered, although there was a film series of contemporary European cinema happening in the evenings.

It was a conference of producers, bureaucrats and academics and the discussion focused on questions of policy and finance. Of highest concern was the question: can the film and television industries work together to strengthen European cinema overall?

Gunther Witte, Head of Television Drama in West Germany was asked to describe the experience in his country where co-operation between film and television has, arguably, produced good results. He noted that since 1974 over 300 films have been made with the aid of television, including work by Fassbinder, Wender, Petersen, Herzog, and Von Trotta. He also noted that the German system is not without its faults; notably that some of the films produced were aesthetic and or financial failures and that state involvement in production inherently introduces an element of censorship. Witte expressed doubt

about the workability of a pan-European production system based on the German model: "The worry is that the inclusion of film and television into the mechanisms of the European Community might well contribute to a bureaucratization rather than to a progressive development," he said.

Jeremy Isaacs of U.K. Channel 4 echoed Witte's comments: "We cannot necessarily take a model that works well in one society and impose it on another society, or group of societies, these arrangements have to grow from within."

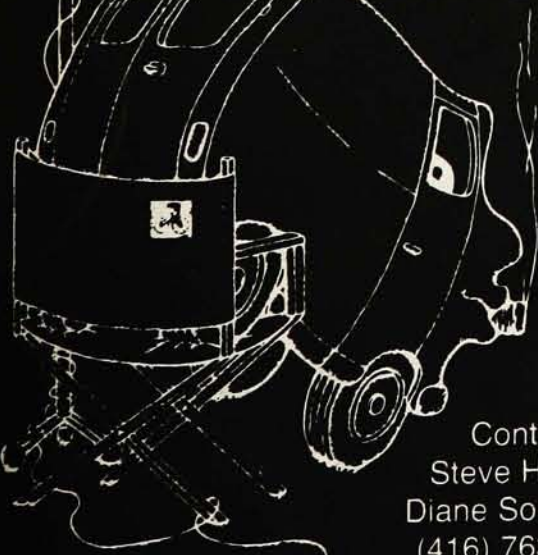
Some of the delegates spoke against pan-Europeanism, including Paulos Zannos, who recently resigned his post as head of the Greek Film Centre, an agency responsible for promoting Greek national cinema and Eckart Stein, a German television producer. Both Stein and Zannos argued for policies which will insure strong regional cinema. Stein reminded the audience: "We must remember that culture in Europe has always been highly regulated, there is no reason we cannot continue to regulate so as to preserve our indigenous identities." Zannos warned the audience against film/television collaboration: "they are different media," he

said, "if we are not careful we will allow the magazine to destroy the novel."

A collaboration between film and television does not necessarily impede the development of a high-quality cinema, argued Bjorn Muller, Head of Fictional Programmes, Danish TV. He recounted the experience in Denmark where the subsidized film industry is able to exist only because of agreements in place which allow films to be shown on television after they close in the cinemas. Muller was supported in his views by Owen Edwards, Director of Welsh TV and Michael Algar, Chief Executive of the Irish Film Board. Both Wales and Ireland are trying to develop indigenous film industries.

A policy paper prepared by the Commission of the European Communities for the promotion and development of a European film and television industry was circulated amongst the delegates. It calls for an aid scheme to be directed at the various components of a European audio-visual industry. The paper generated no concrete proposals amongst the delegates. However, it will be the subject of a review by the various national communications ministers in the European Community.

Car and Truck Rental Company with star quality wants a part in your next movie

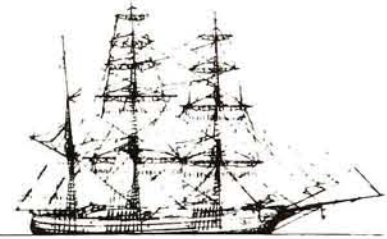


Contact
Steve Hacker
Diane Somerville
(416) 763-5591

SOMERVILLE
Car & Truck Rental Ltd.
1968 Bloor St. W., Toronto, Ont. M6P 3K9



Need A Tall Ship?
Take Your Film or Fantasy to Sea on the T.S. Merkür
T. S. Merkür



OWNERS :- Quicksilver Shipping MASTER :- D. W. S. Summerskill

Sailing Ship Available
for film, television, receptions, parties and other occasions

Details: The T.S. Merkür was built in 1969 with a 1890 design and a 1,000 horsepower engine. It is 153' long, 100' high, 26' wide, with 7,500 square feet of sail. The open deck has a space for 100 people. There are accommodations for 20, including all modern conveniences, sound systems, etc.

Exclusive Canadian Agent:
Lois Siegel Productions Inc.
(514) 481-0611

Final Offer tops

CHICAGO - The Chicago International Film Festival has awarded a Gold Plaque to **The Final Offer**, a National Film Board documentary about the trials and tribulations of the Canadian auto workers union.

Co-directed by Sturla Gunnarsson and Robert Collison, the 79-minute film is about the Canadian union's struggle for autonomy from its U.S. parent in 1984.

Final Offer has won a Genie Award, Grand Prize at the Banff Television Festival and the Prix Italia.

The Gold Plaque in Chicago was also awarded to the film, in the social/political documentary category.