

So near... and yet so far: a topographical look at the scene

It was perhaps prophetic that Secretary of State Gérard Pelletier chose July 4th, American Independence Day, to announce that Canada would soon have a film policy. The year was 1972, the same year that *Cinema Canada* began publication.

Now, 150 issues later, the climate has changed considerably though film workers and artists, producers, distributors and concerned others are still waiting for the necessary legislation to define the territory we wish to occupy. Just now, the landscape looks pretty desolate.

There are no more villains, only those in Ottawa who refuse to move on issues which are absolutely critical to the welfare of the industry. The current approach is so piecemeal and incoherent, it boggles the mind.

Close to home, we have the situation at Telefilm. How can the government entrust so much money to an agency without ensuring proper supervision? Now that the Pearson papers are public, it is clear to everyone that the appointment of Jean Sirois as chairman of Telefilm was unfortunate, and that to reconfirm him in his position would be negligent.

The industry should not have to prove gross misconduct to get the government's ear. Telefilm needs an ambassador, one who can go forward in the world without embarrassing the industry. If there is any doubt in the minds of the minister of Communications or the Prime Minister, both friends of Sirois, about the appropriateness of removing Sirois, let them speak to any producer or any staff member of Telefilm. There is a certain consensus on the question.

Further afield, we have the removal of the tax incentives for private investment. Why does the government give with one hand and take away with the other? And why is it a better idea to have the industry wholly dependent on Telefilm funds than to allow the private sector to participate in what is, after all, supposed to be a business?

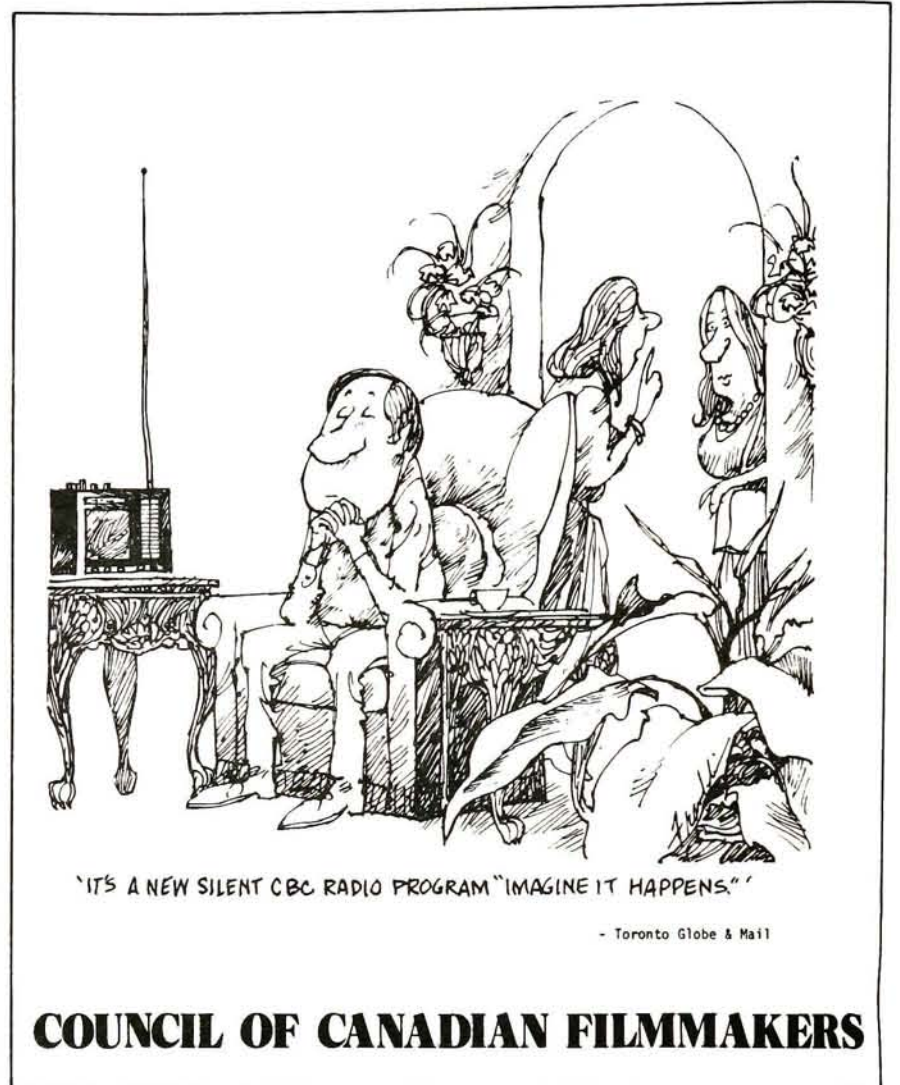
Beyond the pale, we have the Cabinet interfering with the CRTC to stall the CBC's all-news network. Is there any reason to have a regulatory body consider a question as complicated as specialty stations when a politically motivated government reverses its decisions? The precedent is dangerous in the extreme, and editorialists have been unanimous; the Cabinet's position will not withstand scrutiny.

One can only conclude that the American hold over all-the-news is less threatening to the Tories than allowing our most capable news journalists to do a different job. How sad.

And finally, we reach never-never land, the home of distribution and broadcast legislation. On these items, the studies and hearings are complete and the vision clear. What is lacking - and what has been lacking since 1972 - is the will to do something. To dare. •

The growth of the industry has been phenomenal since 1972. It has been fed by tax shelters and a weak dollar and, most importantly, by the Broadcast Fund and Feature Film Fund, for which we owe considerable thanks to Peter Pearson.

It has not become an independent industry, despite the rhetoric. The producers who seem most



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solid today are those working with Americans on projects for the U.S. market. Paradoxically, the filmmakers we show off at festivals have nothing to do with this part of the industry.

Americans have complete independence today to work in our market and claim it as theirs. Whereas they have long dominated distribution, they are moving into production through partnerships with Canadians which will make us dependent upon them. When Gérard Pelletier started us down that road, was this where he meant to get?

Agreements not the same

I refer to the article entitled "ACTRA Settles Half" in the February issue of *Cinema Canada*.

Unfortunately the article contains certain errors regarding the Independent Production Agreement for Writers and the Independent Agreement for Performers, negotiated between ourselves and the producer

organizations.

It states, correctly, that the Writer Agreement was accepted (last August) by vote of Writers Guild members, while the Performer Agreement was rejected by the performer members (also last August), resulting in the Performers Guild returning to negotiations.

Since the Writers Guild and the Performers Guild are united as constituent parts of the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA), the re-negotiated Writer Agreement will not be applied until there is a ratified Performer Agreement.

The principal error in the article is the

statement that "The writers ratified the same Agreement that was rejected by the performers". It is obvious that your reporter has no knowledge of performer and writer Agreements. The ACTRA Performer Agreement and the ACTRA Writer Agreement are no more "the same" than the U.S. Screen Actors Guild Agreement and the Agreement of the Writers Guild of America are "the same". The problems which gave rise to the performer rejection of their Agreement are not reflected in the Writer Agreement, because of the entirely different payment pattern in that Agreement.

The members of the Writers Guild support the

Performers Guild members and join them in hoping that the current negotiations will soon result in a satisfactory Performer Agreement - which will not be the same as the Writer Agreement. The art and craft of writing are not the same as the art and craft of the performer and the respective Agreements reflect these differences.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Collier
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Writers Guild