

EDITORIAL

Must We Wait Another Year?

Mr. Faulkner's testament to the film industry seems to be a leaked document entitled "Draft Film Policy," excerpts of which follow this editorial. It is rumored that John Roberts, the newly appointed Secretary of State, will delay making decisions on a film policy for at least a year. A quick look at the Canadian Film Awards, or the National Film Board regionalization program, or the CBC might make Mr. Roberts want to act more swiftly.

The Awards represent the pick of the crop in film production. The majority of films chosen for competition in the CFA this year come from the public sector: the CBC and the NFB. This alone substantiates the comment made in the Draft: "The domination of this significant informational and cultural medium by publicly owned enterprises is probably no longer a situation that best serves the national interest or allows for the kind of environment best suited to creative and professional development of Canadian film activity." Since the decision has been made to foster a private film industry, and since the national interest is not served by the present situation, when will a film policy come down to clarify things?

Private industry has been at the heels of the National Film Board for years now. A recent trip to Halifax and a look at the NFB regionalization program raised more questions than it answered. Why is the NFB expanding into the "regions" just when the Tompkins report and the Draft suggest that it should withdraw from areas which make it competitive with the private sector? Why is the NFB training filmmakers when the universities are already turning out greater numbers of eager filmmakers than the market can absorb? What kind of film policy is going to provide work for these young people?

Faulkner said, just one year ago, that the trouble with influencing or reorganizing the CBC was its size, its staff, and its hardware. Will it be any easier to 'rearrange' the NFB once regional offices are open across the country, inciting more and more to get involved?

One cynical conclusion is that the regionalization program of the NFB is a stopgap measure, one way to put off the day of reckoning which must surely come. Computer distribution can now be tested and expanded. Video workshops can be set up and new relationships built with organizations like co-ops, schools, universities and other groups. Witness the co-operation the NFB is giving the Festival of Festivals, for instance. Is it all in the national interest? Must we now wait until the NFB has proven its 'regionalization case' or failed to do so before the Secretary of State will announce a film policy?

The above is not meant as a wholesale condemnation of the NFB nor of the regionalization program, though serious reservations are inevitable. Changes in the structure of the NFB – major changes like the regionalization program – should be undertaken as a result of a global film policy. Changes which are made regardless of the functioning of the other federal agencies will only compound the difficulty for the Secretary of State when – if ever – a global policy is written.

How did it happen that while everyone was worrying about the National Film Board encroaching on private industry, John Hirsch of CBC Drama became the biggest film producer in Canada? Not only does he command the largest budgets, he has access to distribution and exhibition. The threat of the NFB to private industry is peanuts next to that of the CBC, especially as the importance of television continues to grow.

What isn't explicit in the Draft Film Policy – but is conspicuous by its absence – is that the CBC is untouchable, at least for the Secretary of State. By law, it is easy for the Secretary to adjust the budgets of the NFB. Perhaps that is one reason that private industry has applied so much pressure concerning the Board. Faced with the crown corporation which is the CBC, the Secretary's hands are tied, or almost. In speaking of the transfer of film production from the public sector to the private, the Draft states, "For the CBC, given the complexity of difficulties connected with such a transfer, in this case, the recommendation is in general terms only. ...The President of the CBC has agreed to keep the Secretary of State informed of progress." Sounds suspiciously like the voluntary quota the Secretary "negotiated" with the theatre chains.

The Canadian Film Development Corporation has had its appropriations extended for yet another year, but here too direction is badly needed. Will the CFDC get into TV, into short films, into distribution and the rest? The CFDC has started to make a little bit of money, investing in some pretty violent movies. Is this the direction in which the Secretary of State wants the industry to move? What is the cultural trade-off which will make the CFDC worth the taxpayers' money?

But then one can hardly blame a man for wanting to read through the files before making decisions. Perhaps the blame should be directed at the government, which time and again shuffles the cabinet just as the Secretary of State is starting to grasp the film scene.

At any rate, please read quickly, Mr. Roberts. We're all getting older and things aren't getting better.

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