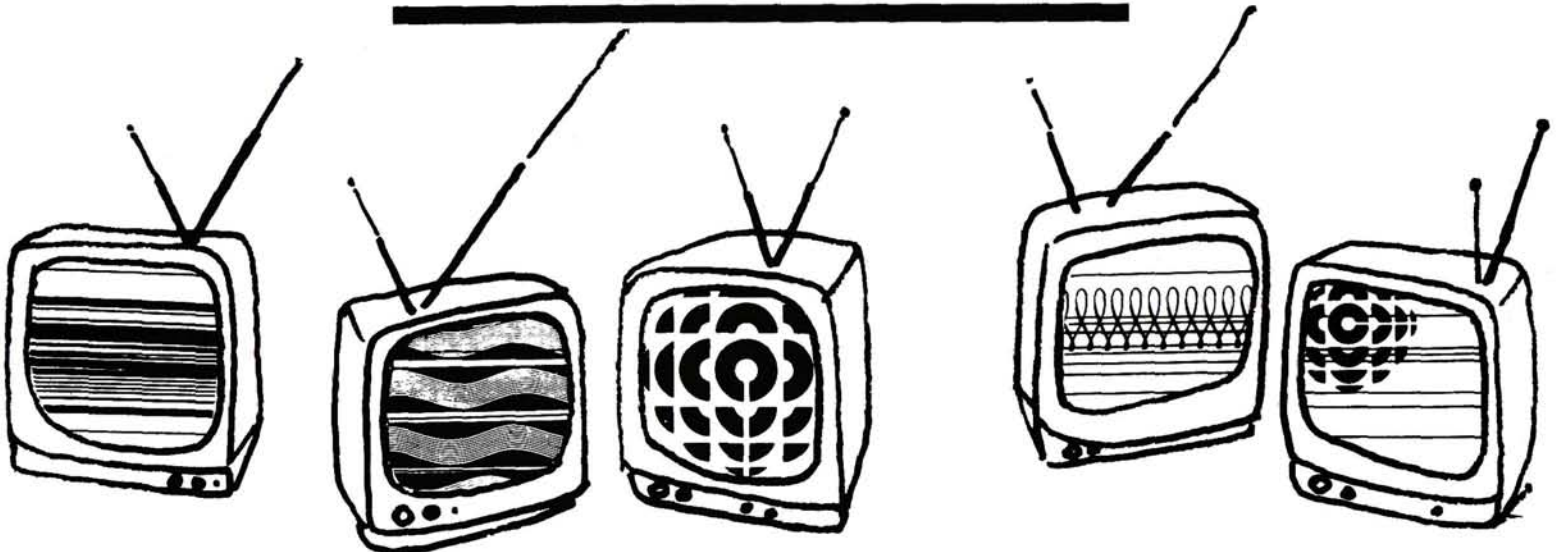


glacial movements

by Jack Gray

Continuing the cultural discussion, Jack Gray suggests that we use the CBC as a barometer to measure the government's commitment to the arts. As film and television become increasingly interdependent, the future orientation of the CBC – and of broadcasting in general – is of vital concern to those who hope for a healthy Canadian film industry.



Some years ago I expressed optimism that the Federal government was moving toward the enunciation of a film policy, even though that movement seemed to most of us to be glacial.

I am a little alarmed tonight – looking at the agenda – to see that this slight skill at geological forecasting has precipitated me into what might be construed as meteorological speculation on the cultural climate.

So be it.

Some things are clear: the high over Los Angeles continues; there is a stationary cold front over Quebec City; a low pressure system seems permanently centred on Ottawa; we are experiencing heavy fog in Toronto; and the general

forecast is for high winds and stormy weather throughout Canada.

In spite of which it isn't all that discouraging for film makers.

The objective remains as it was: the development of a *Canadian* production industry. In this regard it is essential to reiterate that when speaking of such an industry we emphasize the interdependence of the various systems the Canadian production industry must serve, not just film, but also broadcasting, the performing arts, the recording industry, publishing – what we generally refer to these days as the cultural industries.

We are, however, in trouble.

There is, as yet, no film policy, and especially, no levy or its equivalent.

The Canadian Film Development Corporation has – had its request for funding cut back.

Jack Gray, writer and scriptwriter, was a founding member of the Toronto Writers Branch of ACTRA and is the newly elected chairman of the Council of Canadian Filmmakers.

Co-productions are causing many problems.

Yet it is on another of the cultural industries – on broadcasting – that I want to dwell tonight.

Many of us are increasingly concerned about what is happening in Canadian broadcasting, and especially about what is happening to the CBC/Radio-Canada.

The CBC is important to us for many reasons, and film people will do well to play close attention to events there.

In practical terms, the CBC is essential to the maintenance of the Canadian talent base; without that base no film industry is possible in this country.

But more important than that, what now happens to the CBC may provide an indicator of what is going to happen to the other cultural industries.

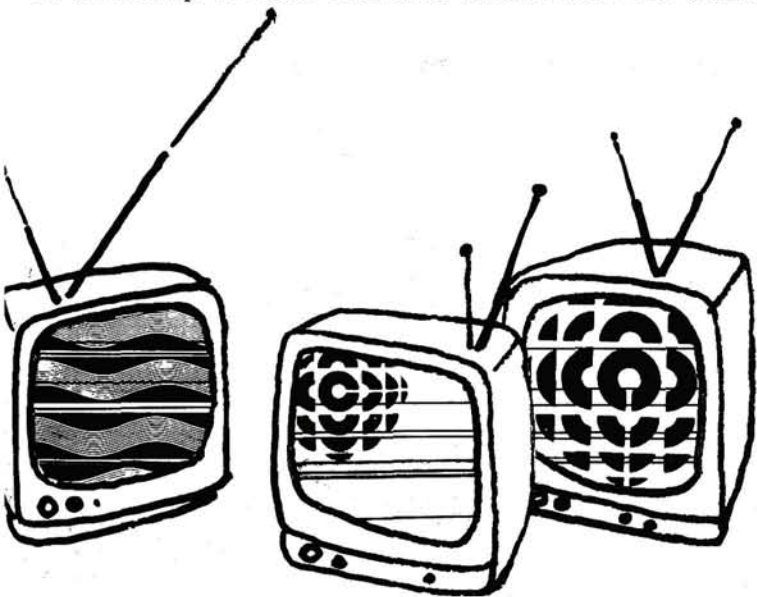
If the government takes positive action on the CBC (and on broadcasting in general), action that is in the public interest, that may indicate that it has finally begun to truly understand the critical nature of the role the cultural industries play, and will play, in the survival of this country.

If the government does not take such action, or if it acts against the public interest, then we have a major fight on our hands, not just for our jobs, not just for the cultural industries as such, but for the country itself.

Make no mistake: the CBC is in great trouble.

The CBC is in trouble with the talent of Canada, as we have seen in its fight with ACTRA over the importation of foreign talent – which isn't about foreign talent at all, of course, but about the nature of the CBC and the programming it produces.

The CBC is in trouble with its programming. The political censorship of Peter Pearson's controversial *Tar Sands*



is one sign of CBC senior management's apparent failure of will.

The CBC is in trouble with the regions: witness the formation in both British Columbia and Ontario of Committees for the Reform of the CBC.

The CBC is in trouble with some of its staff, as evidenced by the extraordinary in-house dust-up between Radio Arts producers and management.

The CBC is in trouble with the public. Those who care don't like what's happening – in the case of the new radio programs, for example. But much more serious, those who don't care are growing in number.

The CBC is in trouble with the politicians. On the one hand, they are seeking ways to control the media – in this case by measures included in Bill C43 which would allow ministers to issue directives to the formerly independent CRTC, and many fear, through the CRTC to the CBC. On

the other, we have the spectacle of cabinet ministers crying public havoc over alleged biased political reporting on Radio Canada.

What are the present results of all this trouble?

The CBC is deeply demoralized.

The CBC is less and less Canadian.

The CBC is the subject of an Official Enquiry by the CRTC, an enquiry requested by the Prime Minister, and which is due to report on July 1.

There is probably going to be a Royal Commission on Broadcasting.

There seems to be an increasingly articulate group – some of whom are blatantly self-interested – who want to carve up the CBC. Many of their proposals do not seem to me to be in the public interest.

What is done with or to the CBC will be of critical importance to us all, as citizens, as broadcasters, and as film makers.

The basic policy decisions that are being made, or which will be made in regard to the CBC, to broadcasting, or even (hopefully) to communications in Canada generally, will shape the future of our interdependent cultural industries – all of them – for possibly several generations. And these decisions are, in my opinion, of critical importance to the future of Canada itself.

Even in the narrowest terms, what is done about broadcasting will have great effects on the film industry, in terms of possible increased production in the private sector, of methods of distribution, and of the share of the production money that will return to film producers.

Is any long range forecast possible at this time?

To me the future looks bright, which may, in the present climate, seem paradoxical.

It is a bright future, however, only to the extent that we are prepared to organize, to work, and to fight for it.

It won't just happen.

There are important technological changes to be understood, absorbed, and put to work in the public interest – such things as videodics, pay television, satellite delivery of programming, the mystical optical fibres that threaten to revolutionize cable – again.

There are fundamental social questions that must be faced. How influential are the media? What are our responsibilities as creators of programming? Can Canada survive under the steady onslaught from the most effective propaganda ever produced – that endless flood of American entertainment programming that comes to us on television and film?

There are profound political problems. Is 'Canada' an idea that is capable of regeneration? Are we prepared to survive as Canadians, or are we determined to balkanize the northern half of the continent? And in tackling such problems, are we prepared to face up to the present facts of Canadian life, and finally admit that a branch plant economy can only support a branch plant culture?

In all of this, the role of the film maker and of the Council of Canadian Filmmakers is clear.

We must clearly understand our objectives.

We must focus our energies and talents on the basic questions. The proper way to do this, in my opinion, is to identify what will best serve the public interest, and to then work to ensure that this public interest is properly and effectively served.

If we are able to do thus, and to the degree that we do it well, the practical concerns will fall into place, and we will be able to develop the tactics, the strategies, the institutions, the funding, the talent, that will give us that strong Canadian production industry – and all its products – whose first commitment is to our first audience, and to our collective future as Canadians. □