

Saskatchewan

Film Developments in Saskatchewan

The idea of there being a Saskatchewan "film industry" would probably seem rather far-fetched to the film-maker in the "golden triangle". Indeed, that there is anybody making films west of the Lakehead and east of the Kicking Horse Pass will come as a surprise to many down east. No surprise however to the twenty or so film-makers who, along with people in government departments and others, got together for a two-day session in Regina March 31-April 1st. The occasion was the Saskatchewan Film Conference sponsored jointly by the province's Department of Culture and Youth, the Saskatchewan Arts Board, and the University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus.

The immediate purpose of the conference was to gather together as many of the province's film-makers as possible to discuss the future development of film in the province, and by the presentation of briefs give the government some idea of ways in which it can help the fledgling industry.

The proceedings commenced with a lively address from Gunther Henning, the president of Western Films, Winnipeg. Mr. Henning must be one of Canada's most dynamic and peripatetic film-makers having produced films in many parts of the world, as well as in his home province.

He emphasized that for there to be a true industry on the prairies there had to be "regular" and "continuing" employment for film-makers. A succession of Toronto companies sporadically shooting film out there was not enough. He also pointed out that a flourishing industry out west needs strong local markets to support it. The provincial governments could play a significant role in researching the markets, and this in Mr. Henning's opinion would serve a more useful and lasting role in the development of a film industry than the government being solely a giver of grants.

Mr. Henning's final comment, "When it comes to films on western Canada then we in the west should be entitled to produce our own films about our own part of the country, our people, our feelings and our wishes," was a theme taken up later in the conference during the presentation of briefs.

The National Film Board's much publicized policy of decentralization was seen as a mixed blessing. Does it mean that the NFB will hire people on the prairies, or send crews out from Montreal? As one brief put it, the NFB "has made some suitable noises to appease the natives up-country. All colonial bureaucracies eventually see their power threatened, and then feel the need to make a few paternalistic gestures in the hope that the natives will not rise."

The NFB has a very fitful relationship with western Canada. On the rare occasions that they do make a film out west the crews come like thieves in the night to make their definitive statement of the western situation. And how they seem to hate being out west! Or they come with forewarning as did one Executive Producer currently working on a series of films about the prairies. When asked if he would use local crews, came the easy reply, "There aren't any - except perhaps for an outfit in Edmonton who are trying hard. Let's face it, this is an essentially colonialist situation."

CBC had their share of the knocks too. Is anything more than the very minimal local programming allowed in that corporation? Does every decision have to be made in Toronto?

The role of the government in the development of film production is very debatable and one can easily hurt private enterprise sensitivities. A number of suggestions were given, however, to the Saskatchewan government for consideration or action. Chief among these recommendations were:

1. The Government should impose Canadian content regulations in provincial theatres (50% shorts and 10% features).

2. The Government should insist that local technicians be used on all NFB and CBC productions made in the province. It should also insist that more productions should originate in the province, especially from the local CBC station.

3. The Government should insist that the NFB and the CBC clarify their decentralization policies.

4. The Government should conduct a survey of provincial resources and develop a market research program that would be of benefit to the private sector.

5. The Government should examine the possibility of creating a Crown Cor-

poration that would serve as a facilitating agency helping Government Departments and private film companies as well as various community groups who have need of access to film and television production facilities.

6. The Government should devise community projects involving film and television technology along the lines of certain NFB "Challenge for Change" programs. These programs would be directed at underprivileged groups and rural communities.

7. The Government should develop educational programs in film and television technology. Currently the University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus has an M.F.A. program in film that could be built up to be of use to serve the increasing demand for media specialists not only in the private sector, but also in the area of cable television, educational television, etc. This degree program could provide a unique training program in Canada with students taking classes in addition to working in the field with private companies, community colleges, cable TV stations, etc.

After a great deal of discussion it was decided to form a steering committee that would look into the possibility of forming a more permanent organization of film makers similar to that formed in Manitoba last fall.

It remains to be seen whether the established commercial companies are going to come out of their relative isolation and think of transforming the provincial film scene through imaginative cooperative efforts and bigger joint productions. If they opt to maintain the present situation, then the initiative will lie with newer and more aggressive groups like the Regina Independent Filmmakers and Buffalo Film Productions, who have the energy, expertise and ideals to make a film scene on the prairies as radical as that in Québec.

Terence St. John Marnier

Author of "Directing Motion Pictures" and "Film Design" (to be published this fall). Currently Assistant Professor in the Film Program at the University of Saskatchewan Regina Campus. Presently at work on a series of ethnographic films concerned with the Slave Indians for the Institute of Northern Studies, Saskatoon.

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