

Canadian TV Commercials

If radio frequencies are indeed public property they must be regulated for the benefit of the public interest rather than the multi-national advertisers' interest. The question of nationality of advertising material on television is inseparable from the larger question of Canadian content of the medium as a whole.

If we left our television screens to the fate of the North American marketing pattern, we would have seen it economically rationalized into oblivion long ago. We lost access to our commercial cinema screens through this process in years past and only the existence of the CBC and later the CRTC have saved television from disappearing in the same way.

If we must have commercials, we must have Canadian commercials. Advertising is a direct form of information and a strong reflection of the values of a culture. We are not only informed about products and services available, but socio-cultural expectations are reinforced. For too long commercials on Canadian television, like programs, have reinforced the American "way of life". About half of our prime time commercials are American-made as well as most of television's advertising revenue and over a third of ad agency billings.

Television advertising is controlled by ad agencies and national advertisers. 94 per cent of all television ads are placed through agencies and 80 per cent are placed by national advertisers which tend to be multi-national corporations. These U.S. subsidiaries command the largest advertising budgets and the largest slice of prime time. Since 1950, U.S.-owned agencies have grown much faster in this country than Canadian agencies according to figures in the Davey Report.

Thus we see foreign products and foreign values promulgated on television directly through advertising. The influence of commercial advertising is also indirect through pressure on programming via ratings and the lowest common denominator mentality. Some of the influence is not so subtle — as when programming schedules are shuffled to suit ad campaigns.

All of this simply means that natural economic pressures within the multi-national advertising world of television push the sale of American products (manufactured by a subsidiary but usually designed by a parent — like General Motors) through promotion of

the American social ideal as seen continuously on Canadian television advertising and programming.

A small but significant part of the problem lies with the dumping of American-made commercials on the Canadian market. American-made ads should not be acceptable for Canadian television. Therefore, the CRTC should institute a complete 100 per cent Canadian content regulation for all television advertising. This means all commercials should be produced by Canadians in Canada if possible. American ads beamed to Canada on American stations should continue to be cut out by cable substitution. Advertising directed at Canadians through American media should not be allowed a tax deduction.

Hopefully, the CRTC decision to phase the CBC out of commercials will not be sidetracked, and the CRTC should impose stronger Canadian content regulations on the private networks benefitting from this ad revenue advantage. The CRTC should also disallow public financing of television commercials through agencies such as the CFDC.

100 per cent Canadian-made commercials will inconvenience only the large multi-national advertisers who are presently dumping their U.S. produced commercials on the Canadian market. 100 per cent Canadian commercials will benefit the Canadian film production industry and help maintain continuity of employment for talent which might otherwise be forced to emigrate according to the vagaries of the speculative feature film industry.

I believe that any quota less than 100 per cent will be difficult to administer and will continue to subject advertisers who produce Canadian commercials to unfair competition from dumped commercials. The statistics of the Association of Canadian Advertisers claiming 67.8 per cent Canadian ad content now are misleading, because they do not include the percentage of total air time, or the percentage of total production budget, or the total prime time exposure.

However, the proposition that American commercials can meet Canadian marketing needs is unacceptable. Canadianizing the conception and production of our television ads is an important step in re-patriating our vision of ourselves. 100 per cent Canadian-made commercials will benefit the Canadian

filmmaker directly, but more importantly, it will benefit the Canadian television audience.

The Canadian Radio-Television Commission scheduled a hearing to discuss this subject October 8, 1974. Both the Council of Canadian Filmmakers and the Directors Guild of Canada have come out for the 100 per cent quota while the advertising lobby wants a gradually self-regulated increase to 75 per cent. A lot of people will look at the CRTC decision with interest — money is at stake.

The National Film Board workers who don't get the credit

I have decided to dedicate the last issue of Cinema Canada to everyone who works at the NFB and hasn't seen his/her name on a film or in this magazine. As the editorial disclaimer stated, there was not time or space to give everyone at the Board their fair share.

While producing *Dreamland* I have had the opportunity of working with many of these people and would like to pass out deserved praise. That film could not have been done without the support of André Lamy and Gerry Graham at the top of the NFB pyramid. However, I learned how indispensable are the people whose names never appear on the credits of NFB films.

Jimmy Bell and Clyde Owen did miracles in the lab as did Jean-Marc in titling. The neg cutters and timers and expeditors like Kay Ferris were always ready to do something extra. All of these people are taken for granted by the rest of us who admire the anonymous professionalism of their work.

Graham and Knowlton Nash at the CBC kept things moving in the clouds, but the people in the bowels of the Board made it all work. They do it every day.

One other thing about the last issue on the NFB. Exactly what is the Film Board supposed to be doing? Grierson is certainly alive and well in that place (now that he is safely interred), but he must be shaking his fist from whatever promethean height he now dominates. □