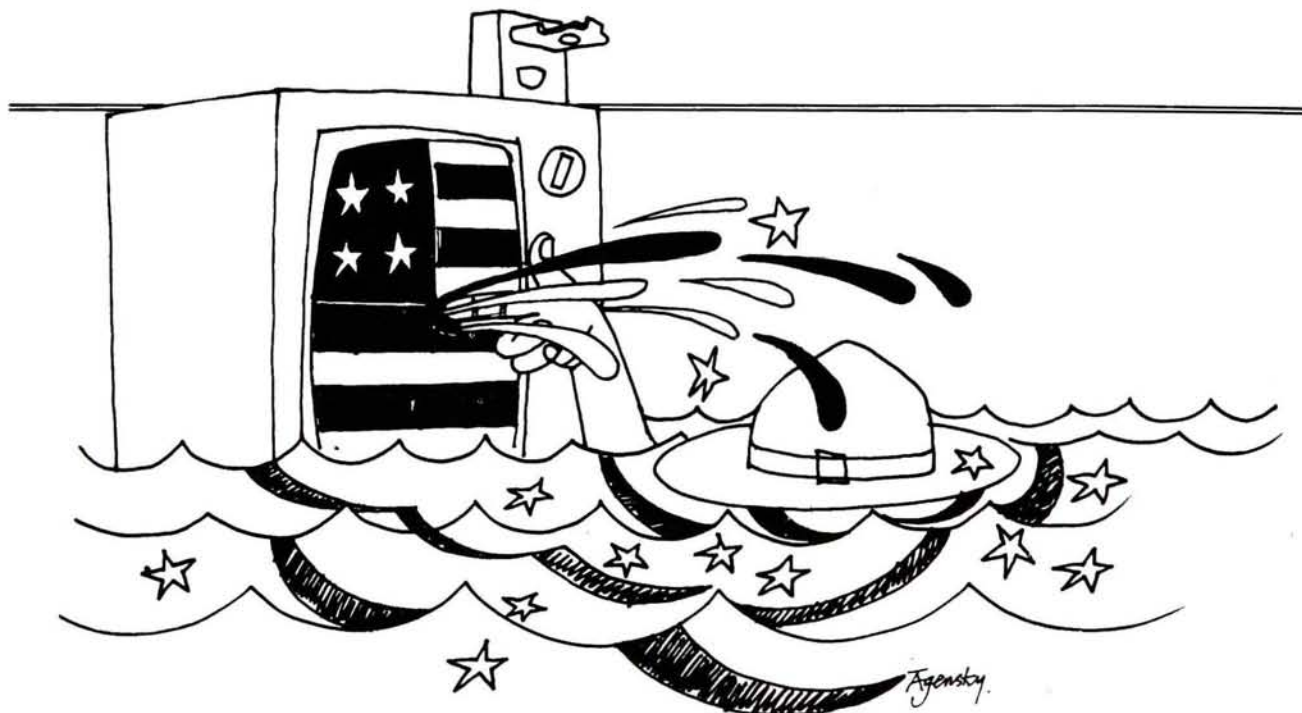


# oh, say! can you see?

Cox is warming to the subject after all these years of researching and writing about the problems of Canadian film and broadcasting. The article which follows comes from his notes to the Task Force on Canadian Unity. It outlines the political dimension of the cultural problems we live with and is just too good not to print.

by Kirwan Cox



On February 14, 1977, the CBC National News reported that an isolated community in northern Minnesota had protested to their government because they could only receive CBC-TV from Winnipeg. Without the benefit of American television, their children were acquiring strange attitudes and even preferred rooting for the Blue Bombers instead of the Vikings. No expense was spared to erect the necessary transmitters to bring a few hundred people their American channels.

*Kirwan Cox is the chairperson of the Council of Canadian Filmmakers, and producer of the films Dreamland I and II.*

While the United States vigorously protects its cultural and mythic territory, Canada has spared no expense to undermine its own cultural foundations. We live in a country which imports its culture wholesale, and in the process we have destroyed most of the elements that build a nation. Our children belong to a television country which knows no borders and is inhabited by the six million dollar man and Kojak who overpower the King of Kensington by size of their budgets and the quantity of their air time.

The danger to Canada does not come from nationalism in Quebec, but from the lack of nationalism in Ottawa, among other places. The question before you is not "What is wrong with Quebec?". It is rather, "What is wrong with the rest of



us?”. The issue is whether English-Canada can separate from the United States before Quebec separates from Canada. Quebec separation resembles a desperate manning of the lifeboats as the English-Canadian Titanic sinks quietly, even willingly, into the American ocean.

The evidence of that sinking is all around us. In Toronto, with more American television available on cable than any American city, Canadians spend 80 percent of their television viewing hours watching American programs. That figure rises to 90 percent when there is no hockey. Overall, Canada is the largest foreign market for American television programs in the world. In our movie theatres, 96 percent of screen time is held by foreign films and Canada remains the largest foreign market for Hollywood despite our small population. Over 90 percent of the paperback and record markets are also held by foreign products. We ship hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars out of the country to pay for our own denationalization.

For one reason or another, Canadians have been pushed, or pushed themselves, out of their own country. Nearly every report from the Aird Commission in 1929 on down to today have decried the Americanization of Canada. This process has been abetted by governments too fearful to interfere with American control of our cultural markets, and businessmen who see greater profits and fewer risks acting as branch plant agents for foreign companies instead of taking their own initiative.

As Senator Keith Davey wrote in his 1970 Report on the mass media:

“This country should no longer tolerate a situation where the public interest in so vital a field as information is dependent on the greed or goodwill of an extremely privileged group of businessmen.”

John Grierson, founder of the documentary film movement and the National Film Board of Canada, said in 1969:

“You have got to husband your resources and really use them creatively. You cannot run them on a laissez-faire basis.... You cannot afford it. The laissez-faire of information will merely feed you into the belly of the United States in no time at all.”

Despite these warnings, and the creation of public enterprise cultural institutions like the CBC, NFB, CFDC, and Canada Council which were established to counter the failure of Canadian private enterprise in these fields, we have allowed our cultural markets to fall completely into the hands of foreign producers with disastrous results. We support Canadian production with public enterprises funded by tax dollars and we leave the marketplace to American producers on a laissez-faire basis. The creation of cultural products in Canada is thus less of a problem than their distribution.

We create ever-proliferating lines of communication running north and south and wonder why our lines of identity to run east and west. We allow our subconscious American culture to dominate our shelves and channels and wonder why our indigenous culture is self-conscious and often immature. We export our talent along with our pulp and paper, and we wonder where our world-class artists are. We reward the colonial mentality and punish the nationalist mentality, and we wonder where our nation went.

While the policies of Canada's leaders remain colonial in their outlook, as usual, there is evidence that the country is changing, becoming more nationalistic in its cultural concerns, and moving away from the Government. According to the

Gallup Polls, the percentage of Canadians who believe the Canadian way of life is being influenced too much by the U.S. grew from 27 percent in 1956 to 57 percent in 1974. The percentage who believe the Canadian way of life is being too influenced by American television grew from 49 percent in 1970 to 59 percent in 1975. Even if buying back control of the Canadian economy meant a “big reduction in our standard of living”, the percentage of Canadians in favor increased from 46 percent in 1970 to 58 percent in 1975.

Yet, in the present crisis, the Canadian Government insists on denying the equations between nationalism and national unity and copes with the issue of Canada's colonial status, as a cause of our disintegration, by a series of public relations gestures such as FIRA. We have not seen any substantive policies in the cultural industries since the Trudeau Government came to power. We look to the future with fear as we wait for the decisions on film policy and Pay-TV policy.\*

What is to be done? First, we must legislate primacy to our own cultural products in our own markets. Equally important, we are going to have to alter our priorities in terms of what our cultural development is going to cost us. We believe the best hope for a united Canada is a partnership of equals, each confident in its own identity and survival. Quebec must believe that its long-range future in North America is better served by partnership with English-Canada than it is by independence. Only a confident and assured English-Canada can give such an undertaking.

The cultural problems of English and French-Canada are different because of language, but similar in many other respects. The solution of these problems will be expensive, but that is the cost of keeping the country together and independent. This will involve reversing a lot of our existing priorities and changing many assumptions.

In this regard, we would like to propose what we call the “Policy of Rational National Defence”. We would like to give the CBC the defense budget and give the military establishment the CBC budget. We believe this would better reflect the true role these institutions play in defending Canada. The military would defend the north with its patrol planes and the CBC would defend the 49th parallel with high quality programming, national heroes, superstars, myths, symbols, and a vision of our common purpose. If we're not prepared to consider this policy seriously, then we are not prepared to consider ourselves seriously as a nation. Only as an independent nation do we have a common future — not as an American colony. □

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\* Despite recent announcements, we still look to the future with fear on both these policy issues. Since the Government has chosen to again ignore the problem of American control of the marketplace by putting forward a vague voluntary agreement with a one year deadline, we continue to wait for a real film policy.

As for Pay-TV, the Government has not announced its policy yet. The CRTC decision to postpone the introduction of Pay TV, because it would become an American channel contrary to the Broadcasting Act, may be overruled by the Minister of Communications.

The Hollywood companies are the current and potential beneficiaries of Government positions in both cases. When foreign business interests take precedence over the national interest so consistently, we have clearly lost the sovereignty needed to run the country.