

# Winnipeg Symposium : The Turning Point

A. Ibrányi-Kiss

There has been a fantastic amount of coverage devoted to the famous Winnipeg Manifesto which reads:

We the undersigned filmmakers and filmworkers wish to voice our belief that the present system of film production/distribution/exhibition works to the extreme disadvantage of the Canadian filmmaker and film audience. We wish to state unequivocally that film is an expression and affirmation of the cultural reality of this country first, and a business second.

We believe the present crisis in the feature film industry presents us with an extraordinary opportunity. The half-hearted measures taken to date have failed. It is now clear that slavishly following foreign examples does not work. We need public alternatives at every level in the film industry. We must create our own system to allow filmmakers the option of working in the creative milieu of their choice.

We insist that the various governments of Canada implement the necessary policies to provide an alternative and a complement to the private production capacity in the Canadian feature film industry by providing a public mechanism and the resources to fully finance Canadian features.

Therefore, we call on the federal government in cooperation with the provincial governments:

1. To create a public production capacity that will allow full financing of Canadian feature films.
2. To create a public distribution organization with broad responsibilities for promotion and dissemination of Canadian films here and abroad.
3. To create a quota for Canadian films in theatres across the country.

David Acomba	director, Slipstream
Denys Arcand	director, Réjeanne Padovani
Linda Beath	New Cinema Enterprises
Milad Bessada	director, A Quiet Day In Belfast
Kirwan Cox	assoc. producer, Montreal Main
Jack Darcus	director, Wolf Pen Principle
Martin Defalco	SGCT, NFB director
Sandra Gathercole	Toronto Filmmakers Co-op
Jack Grey	ACTRA, writer
Ági Ibrányi-Kiss	A Quiet Day In Belfast
Len Klady	Cinema Canada
	Symposium organizer
	Winnipeg Film Co-op
Colin Low	National Film Board
Peter Pearson	DGC, director, Paperback Hero
Tom Shandel	director, Another Smith for Paradise
Don Shebib	director, Between Friends
Jean-Pierre Tadros	Cinéma Québec
Frank Vitale	director, Montreal Main
Les Wedman	Vancouver Sun
John Wright	director, The Visitor

## The Program

The program at the Symposium consisted of several panel discussions each day with film showings at night.

The feature films shown were: Réjeanne Padovani, *La Mort d'un Bûcheron*, *Between Friends*, *The Visitor*, *Coming Home*, *Slipstream*, *La Maudite Galette*; with *Wolf Pen Principle*, *Montreal Main* and *A Quiet Day in Belfast* having their world premieres.

The panel discussions and the people involved were: Canadian Content (David Acomba, Peter Pearson, Don Shebib, Milad Bessada, Jack Gray and Sandra Gathercole), Survival (Martin Defalco, Denys Arcand, John Wright, Jack Darcus, David Tompkins, Don Shebib and David Acomba), Film Financing (Guy Bergeron, Chalmers Adams, Penni Jacques, Michael Spencer, Peter Pearson, John Wright and Milad Bessada), Distribution and Exhibition (Michael Spencer, Linda Beath, Kirwan Cox, Tom Shandel, Guy Bergeron and Paul Morton), Publicity and Promotion (Marcia Couëlle, Colin Low, David Acomba, Sandra Gathercole and Linda Beath), and the Future of the Industry (Denys Arcand, Don Shebib, Peter Pearson, Chalmers Adams, Tom Shandel and Kirwan Cox).

Pretty impressive lists. . . . The panel discussions revealed very little that hasn't been discussed, proposed, argued, and chewed over for years. As for the famous Manifesto — it is self-explanatory. Everyone is frustrated. Money is tight. Government has been of little help in relieving the serious problems Canadian films and filmmakers are facing. If all this is true — then what value did the Symposium have, if any?

Quite a bit. For one thing, there was a unity amongst filmmakers Canada-wide that has never happened before. Obviously, we will all have to pull together to effect the changes so drastically necessary. But beyond all that, the Winnipeg Film Symposium was a great place to become aware of the moods and directions our film community is taking.

One of the most heartwarming spectacles was the discussion on distribution and exhibition. There was only one panelist devoutly against quotas — Paul Morton of Odeon-Morton theatres, president of the Canada-wide exhibitors association. No wonder! Mr. Morton represented the only group (however small) which might have something to lose — foreign-owned theatre chains. We can't expect him to be joyous over the possibility of legislated protection for Canadian films, can we?

Another interesting sideshow was the

attentive presence of Micheline Morissette of the Secretary of State's Film Office and Carole Langlois from the CFDC. Both women sat through four days of discussions while panel after panel heaped scorn and criticism on their departments. Not an easy task, and certainly deserving of an award for Gracious Diplomacy Under Enemy Attack.

Two other awards of Remarkable Performances should go to Len Klady, who surprised everyone by actually getting the event off the ground and running smoothly; and Chalmers Adams, who maintained his integrity even when outnumbered 30 to 1 and viciously attacked for his capitalist theories by yours truly.

## The Location

The whole week's merry-go-round (running from 10 in the morning to early the next) took place in a rather Felliniesque environment. The entire film contingent was luxuriously accommodated at the Ramada Inn — modeled in 1950's California Gothic Mafia Baroque style, and equipped with a sauna, an indoor pool, as well as a whirlpool bath which became the location for much serious discussion concerning Canada's Film Policies. Whatever could not be adequately debated in the pool was later carefully analysed at the late night parties. But the Ramada's highlights were its coffeeshop placemats depicting a US map with little green dots indicating where all the other Ramadas were, and a few stray ones which dropped on the wrong side of the States' northern border. These placemats prompted a spontaneous (if slightly inebriated) rendering of the Star Strangled (oops) Banner on the part of the Canadian Film Contingent. Result: next day, four waitresses called in sick and we all waited up to an hour for breakfast. Who says Justice is blind?

## The Lesson

On a more serious level, the most important wind of change among Canada's filmmakers is REGIONALISATION. Think about it. Make peace with it (maybe even learn to love it) because that's where films are headed. By the second day of the conference, certain patterns were emerging:

A. Quebec has already separated, at least as far as film is concerned. Nobody at Winnipeg talked about Quebec as being part of this country anymore — whenever the name "Canada" was used, it always meant English Canada.

B. Vancouver is starting to exalt its



All photos: Mohácsi

separation from the rest of English Canada. West-Coast consciousness is becoming readily apparent, and every Vancouver filmmaker prefaced his comments with, "Out West, we . . ."

C. Only Toronto is left espousing federalism. Yet, believing in federalism in Canada today is like glorifying motherhood when every woman in the world is sterile. Nice idea, perhaps – but totally impossible. Toronto keeps talking federalist because then the seat of power will always stay in Toronto. Maybe it's time to develop an Ontarian identity and stop speaking for all of English Canada.

D. The Prairie provinces are experiencing strong growing pains (see end of this article). Filmmakers from the Prairies have started lumping both Toronto and Vancouver in the same bag of controlling-power. This awareness will undoubtedly increase.

E. Although the Maritimes were not represented, they too are emerging on their own terms. Just look at all the filmmakers' co-ops – Atlantic Filmmakers Co-op, Association Cooperative des Productions Audio Visuelles in Montréal, the Toronto Filmmakers Co-op, the Pacific Filmmakers Co-op, and the newly formed Winnipeg Filmmakers Co-op. They all point to strong regional identities as a growing trend.

More than that – this new wave of regionalisation is one of the healthiest movements in English Canada. For one thing, maybe we'll stop trying to find ONE identity for all of English Canada. Maybe the answer to, "Just what is it that makes you so different from the Americans?" will only come about if we start looking at our immediate cultures, and stop trying to make-believe that all English-Canadians are the same.

But more importantly, regionalisation will bring about our badly needed unity. No, that is not a contradiction in terms. Good friendships can only be born among equals. In its own zany way, the week at Winnipeg started to do that. Once English Canadians stopped trying to "get Québec back in the fold", our true similarities and common problems could be faced.

### The Conclusion

The very last panel discussion – The Future of the Industry – sums up the mood of the Winnipeg Symposium:

First off, there was a revolutionary reading of the famous Winnipeg Manifesto (performed with great fervour by Jack Gray) resulting in almost-spontaneous applause. Several moments of sheer embarrassment ensued, broken by Chalmers Adams' suggestion that each panelist explain how he, individually, was going to continue.

Solemnity prevailed, and no one wanted to be the first to speak. Finally, Kirwan Cox started reiterating that we