

New Manitoba Minister Dept: April 26, 1988 was a special day in Manitoba. Not only was it this columnist's birthday (celebrated, I might add, in fine style at Mr. Steak), but it also happened to be Election Day in our fair province. Fed up with rising provincial car insurance rates (and other indiscretions), the people of Manitoba elected a minority Conservative government. The seemingly all-powerful NDP was relegated to third place in the race, with the Liberals coming in a close second to the Conservatives.

A few weeks later, Manitoba's new Premier - Gary Filmon, the dashing Ward Cleaver of provincial politics - revealed his virgin cabinet. Filmmakers waited with bated breath for the following announcement: Who would be the new Minister of Culture, Heritage and Recreation?

Well, Filmon made his announcement; the new Minister would be one Bonnie Mitchelson. Filmmakers didn't exactly breathe a sigh of relief. However, they didn't begin to pack their bags for greener pastures, either, for several questions remained unanswered. Who was Bonnie Mitchelson? What was her commitment to culture? What was her commitment to Manitoba film? And most importantly, would the new government support Film Manitoba (the office which fits snugly under the umbrella of the Canada-Manitoba Cultural Industries Development Office - CIDO) and to what extent?

At press-time, the new government's August budget had yet to be announced and the new Minister had not yet responded to this reporter's queries. However, if a speech made by Mitchelson at the June 21 World Premiere of *Einstein Tonight* is any indication, Manitoba filmmakers should be able to rest easy. Mitchelson had nothing but kind words to say about Manitoba film.

First of all, Mitchelson acknowledged that "the film industry in Manitoba is still in its fledgling stages" and that continued development will ultimately be the key to the industry's continued success. Further to this, Mitchelson said, "I recognize the important role played by government programs in supporting film development in Manitoba. Programs like the Federal-Provincial Cultural Industries Development Office, the jointly-funded Agreement On Communications and Culture and Film Manitoba, have all been major public players in developing a viable film industry in Manitoba." However, in spite of the Minister's verbal support, nobody seems to know what the bottom line will be.

One independent filmmaker, who preferred not to be named, expressed concern that Mitchelson's support is merely verbal. "If the new government applies any cutbacks to Film Manitoba," said the filmmaker, "it will be a death-blow to a fledgling industry."

This, however, seems unlikely, since Mitchelson herself acknowledged in her June 21 speech that "the support of film development has not been a one-way street; the industry has paid back many dividends to the Manitoba economy. In the past year alone, independent film production in Manitoba provided work for more than 350 Manitobans and generated millions of dollars of related economic activity in the province."

Mitchelson's expression of support for programs such as CIDO has also been echoed by the industry itself. "I can't think of a better time to be a filmmaker in Manitoba," said Gabriel Markiw of O'Meara Productions. Markiw's two-million-plus feature *Mob Story* begins rolling in Winnipeg this November. "Since CIDO began, filmmakers have gotten further ahead," said Markiw. "It's not only funding, but part of the vast jigsaw puzzle that makes up filmmaking. CIDO's been a terrific liaison between regional filmmakers and Telefilm and in terms of *Mob Story*, CIDO was first on board. In fact, without CIDO, there wouldn't be a *Mob Story*." Another filmmaker, John Kozak, applied to CIDO under their non-theatrical film-fund for his short experimental drama *Running Time*. "It was a terrific business relationship," said Kozak. And that, of course, seems to be the key to CIDO's success; the business relationship between their office and Manitoba's filmmakers. And in terms of the industry's growth, especially in the area of drama, CIDO's contributions are extremely vital. "It's not a matter of survival," said producer Merit Jensen. "Without CIDO, filmmakers could survive, but the industry wouldn't grow."

However, in Mitchelson's own words, "film in Manitoba is a viable venture. With the support of private industry, the Manitoba public, as well as government, I believe it will continue to grow and develop."

Saskatchewan Development Dept: Ron Braun has been appointed to coordinate the professional development component of the Saskatchewan Film Development Project. Producer and Project Coordinator Barbara Stewart claims that Braun is under a six-month contract to oversee the "development of an indigenous industry." Key production personnel on the upcoming *Great Electrical Revolution* will be trained and identified "through rigorous workshops designed around the requirements of the production." Additional training and development will be available as needed throughout the rest of the project which involves a total of six half-hours produced in association with STV-Regina and STV-Saskatoon (Sask West Television Inc.). Stewart estimated the total cost of the training component to be in the neighborhood of \$400,000.

Braun himself was born and raised in Regina and has been producing and directing numerous law-related films, documentaries, commercials, promotional and educational films and videos with OMNI Film Productions Ltd. in Vancouver since 1983. Stewart welcomed Braun's expertise, but says he has his work cut out for him. "It's about a 10-month job, crammed into six months," said Stewart.

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