

A SOCIETY OF ALTERNATIVES

When John Bassett Jr. asked Sandra and myself to make concrete recommendations to his group studying film policy for the Ontario government we decided to be as low key and progressively conservative as possible. Our brief to the government of Ontario is printed elsewhere in *Cinema Canada*. It ends with the words "These recommendations are neither radical nor dislocating". So true.

While making conservative recommendations for the near future, one must not lose sight of our goals which can be nothing less than the shape of the society we want. The social engineers at LIP-OFY have had a greater impact on our cultural life than the Ontario Arts Council (too often LIP creates problems rather than solving them because they don't understand their role).

No film policy will ever be satisfactory unless it gets at the root of our problems and ceases to take the cosmetic approach. One basic problem is the need to provide alternatives within the film process at every stage from conception to consumer. We cannot depend on private enterprise to do this alone. We need government subsidized production companies (like the filmmakers co-op in Montreal), a distribution organization, and a theatrical chain (which would lower prices for the consumer).

The object of a film policy must be to maximize social and cultural profits and not simply economic profits. By doing the latter we have become an economic colony of the United States and our country will not survive unless we change our goals.

We must provide alternative channels behind production and this means nationalizing Kodak, opening government labs and equipment, etc. I am not suggesting a nationalized industry because I have no greater faith in government bureaucrats than businessmen. I am suggesting two parallel industries as there theoretically is in television. At least then the filmmaker would not be at the mercy of the big distributors and exhibitors. Unless they had a better deal, he could go somewhere else.

Our artists, our magicians, our soothsayers must have open access to the

means of production and the means of distribution. Our people must have the opportunity to see themselves when they look at the mirror which is the movie screen. The people who make films and the people who see them should have direct access to each other with a minimum of usurious middlemen. Profits from this process should go back to the filmmakers and not the shareholders in New York.

One step in this direction was taken at the "Direction Ontario" meeting held in Toronto January 19-21 under the auspices of the Canadian Conference of the Arts. Over 900 artists and others met to solve problems and present solutions to the various governments. The film caucus decided to become a standing film committee of the CCA. It will meet again to draft its final recommendations on noon, Saturday Feb. 3, at the National Film Board auditorium in Toronto.

Among the interim recommendations it made to the Direction Ontario conference:

1. *Censorship* – abolish all censorship including self-censorship at the CBC and NFB

2. *Alternatives* – set up alternatives to commercial channels wherever possible.

3. *Television* – demand the CBC present on-going programs of experimental Canadian films and Canadian feature films (paying for sub-titling if necessary). The CBC should abolish commercials, offer its productions for non-television distribution, and allow more independent production.

4. *Quota* – a minimum 15 per cent Canadian content quota in all commercial cinemas in Canada and 50 per cent for Canadian shorts.

5. *Exhibition* – set up a chain of cinematheques around the country to present films of limited commercial appeal (apart from the quota).

6. *Distribution* – the government should set up a public distribution organization with social and cultural ends rather than economic.

7. *Taxes* – more money through arts councils be spent to develop young filmmakers; half the tax on each theatre ticket of all films go back to Canadian

film producers; private financing of feature films be encouraged by new tax laws.

8. *Customs* – customs laws must be streamlined to help Canadian film industry.

9. *Education* – Boards of Education must rent, buy, and use more Canadian films at all levels; a 50 per cent quota be instituted for films of Canadian origin.

10. *Definition* – a Canadian film should be defined to exclude American co-productions.

11. *Museums and Archives* – Museums (like the Art Gallery of Ontario) should recognize film as art and acquire film collections; they should energetically preserve our film heritage.

12. *National Film School* – for students at all levels of proficiency.

13. *LIP-OFY* – condemned for giving cultural groups low priority, for not using a jury to help make cultural decisions. Specifically condemned for not giving a grant to *Cinema Canada* magazine.

14. *National Film Board* – must become a centre for all film information including legal aid; must provide some facilities for independent filmmakers; cease internal censorship.

15. *External Affairs* – should buy independent Canadian films for embassy libraries around the world.

16. *Canadian Film Development Corp.* – should invest in more low budget films; place less emphasis purely on scripts or fiction films; provide more aid to alternative groups and co-ops.

17. *Media Center* – in every major city there should be a space for filmmakers to meet and work; to show films; to have access to film and videotape equipment; to competent administrative help.

18. *Exchange program* – subsidize travel of filmmakers across Canada; subsidize shipping cost of Canadian films across Canada (via Air Canada or CN).

19. *Advisory Committees and Boards* – place more filmmakers on these groups – like the Secretary of State's film advisory committee.

20. *Declare ourselves the permanent standing committee on film of the Canadian Conference of the Arts (Direction Ontario).* ●