

donations to the party after Cabinet had passed on a government contract awarded him. Crown attorneys investigated but found no grounds for charges.

The important fact, however, is that the film works this tissue of actuality into what passes quite convincingly for the whole cloth. There is even a subplot involving organized crime, a subject dear to Ontario editorialists. This subplot also helps make the Blake-Shulman connection. Shulman once made accusations resulting in a contract on his life, and then went about for weeks packing a sidearm. What's more, even though Pearson was not able to film in the legislative chamber itself, he has skilfully used other locations – the actual apartment blocs, the prefect street-corners – where such devious and quintessentially Toronto action would, and undoubtedly does, take place.

In one way the film is true to the course of Pearson's career to date since it concerns a rebel thwarted by the dominant society. (This theme predates **Paperback Hero** and goes back to his NFB documentary on Saul Alinsky.) But in another sense, **The Insurance Man** is a breakthrough, and should be taken notice of as such. It's a tight convincing thriller and non-violent gangster film – more importantly, a *political* thriller and an *upper-middle-class* gangster film. It's thus a fine piece of folk art for Toronto, a place that – in film as in life – has hitherto always taken a back seat to Montreal in these matters. □



political it's not

by Ronald H. Blumer

Television action thrillers are not a Canadian speciality. Dramas about corruption in high places are also a trifle un-Canadian but Peter Pearson packed both and a bit more into one of the most dizzying paced television hours one is likely to see in a long time. "Canadian films have the image of being slow moving with no story," director Pearson said with a smirk. His answer in **The Insurance Man from Ingersoll** was to jam together three stories and pace things so fast that the viewer is at the edge of his seat just trying to figure out what's happening.

Many people feel that Peter Pearson is one of Canada's most talented dramatic directors. Starting with **Calabogie Fiddler**, a haunting documentary-like drama about what it's like to be on welfare in rural Ontario, Pearson has repeatedly demonstrated a very special talent. Even in his less

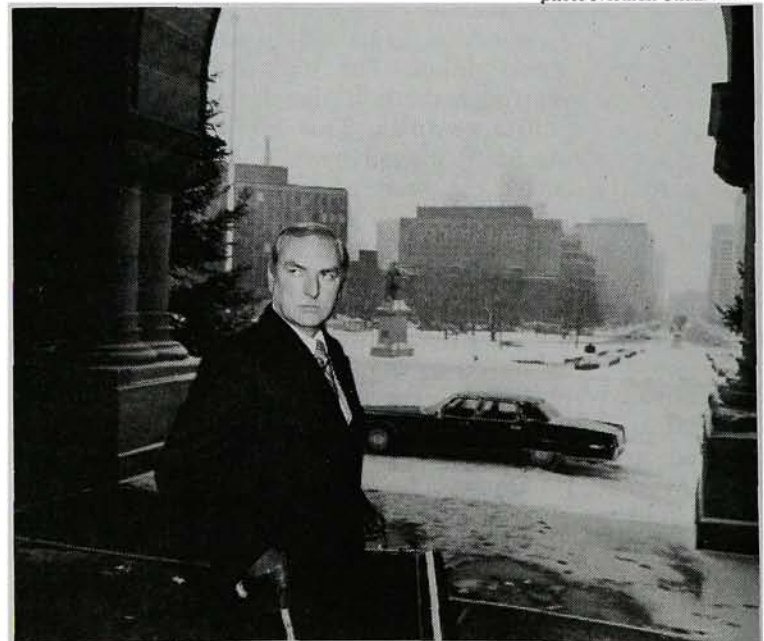
Ronald H. Blumer, professor of film, freelance critic and filmmaker has just completed a half-hour documentary entitled **Beyond Shelter** about housing and care for the aged.

successful films, his handling of actors is flawless and he has that rare property of being true to how real people think and act. **Paperback Hero**, his first high budget feature, for all its erratic pace and weak ending had moments which rank with the best of Canadian dramatic cinema. This latest action drama, made quickly and on a low budget especially for television, is still not the definitive Pearson masterpiece, but better a near miss from someone with genius than a ringer from a hack.

The Insurance Man from Ingersoll is the story of high level corruption in provincial politics and the building industry. It is an Ontario **Rejeanne Padovani** with a couple of important differences. A film about politics, it is not a political film, a fact which can be considered to its credit or debit depending on which side of the manifesto your movie preferences lie. The high level collusion between contractors, organized labour and the Ontario government take place during the building of "Ontario Tower", one of those multi-million dollar projects in which everyone gets a chance to line their pockets. It is an exciting story with lots of fast cars, pretty girls, a dash of blood or two and wall to wall action. All in all conventional television prime time fare with one important difference – Pearson co-wrote the script with long time *Globe and Mail* reporter Norman Hartley and while, as the saying goes, the names have been changed to protect the innocent, the actual story-line is an amalgam of the truth. In this film, Pearson is venting his spleen against an establishment which a lot of people across Canada dislike without entirely being aware of. This Ontario establishment is represented by a wasp, cynical smugness and a firm belief that the various ethnic and regional disparities which make up Canada are somehow a bit of a mistake. It is God's will that the mandarins in Toronto should continue running things. Quebec is hopelessly corrupt as are all the greasy Italians, Greeks and Jews which we have unfortunately let across our borders, but at least Ontario and its leaders are untouched and pure.

Of course, it's not that way at all and Pearson (cousin of Lester B) with his Seven Days muckraking experience and his old boy connections knows it better than most of us. Ontario is as rotten as the rest but it has a rottenness with lots of class. People don't talk about it, there are very few scandals, officials quietly resign and are quietly replaced with others of their kind. The government-educational-industrial complex has its gears well oiled and the kickbacks, patronage and nepotism are an established way of life. It's only when a maverick like Morton Shulman gets in there and starts stirring up the dust that we begin

photo Norman Chamberlin



Warren Davis as Pearson's Insurance Man... a political Mr. Fix-It.

to see what's going on and it is for this reason that a character very much like him is chosen as the hero of Pearson's attack. It's a film with real cowboys and real Indians and by rights it should be a real shocker; but it isn't.

How is a film about politics not political? It has a lot to do with both the form of the film and ultimately, what it has got to say. The style of this film is based on what we see in the action series on prime time television but like most new converts, Pearson is more than 100% true to his creed. If Kojak or Adam 12 are fast paced, this is doubly fast paced, if Harry-O keeps your belief suspended by not quite telling you what is going on, **Ingersoll** tells you nothing and everything at the same time. Parts of it border on outright parody. As if three plots, the car chases and the murders aren't enough in fifty-two minutes, Pearson throws in a couple of parades, television news teams and even a bit of sex, just in case we get bored as we are gasping for air. It's hard to be raising one's political consciousness as one is clutching for the plot, and as is so often the case, the very power of the filmic experience (the very fact that it manipulates us so well) detracts from any force it might have in making us think about the issues. There is talk about this film being censored by the powers that be, of it coming libelously close to the bone, but if I were a Conservative politician in Ontario, or a Liberal in Ottawa, I would welcome such a film. There is already a general feeling of hopelessness about politics in the mid-seventies - "oh, we know they are all corrupt, but what can we do about it?" The ultimate message of this film is "sweet fuck all." The Shulman-like hero, after having discovered scandal after scandal and watched the middle guys go down one by one like so many ducks in a shooting gallery, concludes, quite correctly, that nothing has changed. The power brokers behind the scenes remain untouchable, and the system is firmly in control. The viewer of the film feels equally powerless, and the Toronto Stock Exchange lives happily ever after.

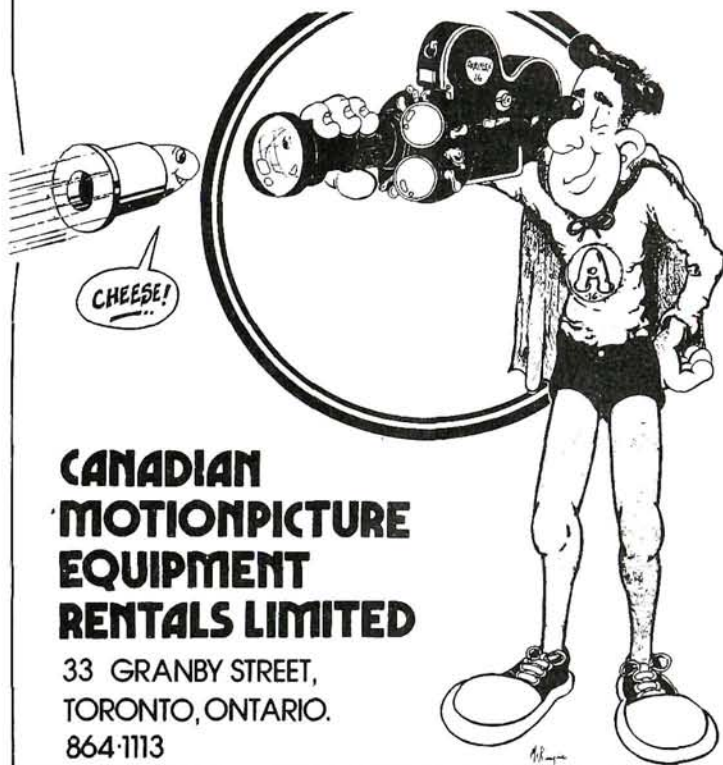
If this film leaves little hope for a reformed society, a society where politicians are genuine servants of the people, it again shows great hope for Pearson the film director. If the pace of this exposé is bad news from a political education point of view, it makes for excellent cinema. Simultaneity, after all, is in this year and while this film is not Canada's answer to **Nashville**, it certainly points in the right direction. There is a scene in the middle of the film in which a particularly nasty cover-up is going on in the legislature. As it is building up to a climax, Pearson's camera lingers on a group of school children getting a tour through these hallowed halls of government and being appropriately impressed. This touch is typical of the style of the film, a style where a lot of things are happening at once resulting in a delicious sort of irony which is the meat of great cinema. This is not a deep film, not a politically significant film, but it is certainly riveting entertainment and Peter Pearson still remains one of Canada's most promising dramatic directors. □

The Insurance Man from Ingersoll

d. Peter Pearson, **asst. d.** Don Buchsbaum and Charles Braive, **sc.** Pearson and Norman Hartley, **ph.** Vic Sarin, **ed.** Myrtle Virgo, **sd.** David Brown, **sd. ed.** Jim Hopkins, **a.d.** Roy Smith, **m.** Eric Robertson, **l.p.** Al Bernardo, Charlotte Blunt, Warren Davis, David Gardner, Dan MacDonald, Michael Magee, Mavor Moore, Franz Russell, George Sperdakos, **p.** Stephen Patrick and Ralph Thomas, **p.c.** Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1976 16 mm, color, **running time** 51 minutes 8 seconds, **dist.** C.B.C.

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