

A layman's guide to one brief and many pyramids —

In the last issue I tried to explain the rationale, as I saw it, behind the interim recommendation of Direction Ontario's film committee. The final recommendations are printed in this issue of CINEMA CANADA. I think this brief is the most significant of all the myriad 'briefs' and reports popping up these days.

Like the rest of Canada's industry, the film industry is simply an economic pyramid with its base set firmly south of the border. That pyramid must be turned upside down if we are to repatriate economic control of film — without economic control there is no creative control.

One example of the illusion that economic control makes no difference is Vancouver. Is there anyone who still thinks that the fact **McCabe and Mrs. Miller** was shot in British Columbia helped the Vancouver film industry in any way? Where are those technicians working now? If they get any work in Canada it is with the David Acumbas and the John Bassetts — not the big businessmen from Hollywood who are now shooting in Spain or Samoa (and no doubt being toasted by the Samoan film industry).

The recommendations in the Direction Ontario brief seem particularly aimed at this pyramid — especially the problem of getting money from exhibition-distribution to production.

The first recommendation is the basis for all the others because one must define a Canadian film in terms that preclude non-Canadian films taking advantage of machinery set up to promote local development — such as quotas or tax benefits. This is happening now with films the CFDC invests in that either don't have a Canadian director (**Lies My Father Told Me** — to my knowledge Jan Kadar lives in New York) or line up a complete flotilla of 'international' stars (**Neptune Factor**). Whenever I hear people talk about the international market or international stars I wonder why they don't simply say the American market. It seems the definition of international is how acceptable it is in the United States. Ever hear of an international star who couldn't speak English?

Should we be making films for the Americans? They do it quite well. If we make films for them, who will be making our films? Don't point to Québec, they're busy with their own films.

The second point indicates the scope of the problem by recommending that all corporations operating in Canada be owned and operated by Canadians.

Having shot off the Utopian gun we will hold our breath until Canadian Kodak turns blue and leaves its \$8.9 million profit on \$100.3 million sales in Canada. (Those are 1971 figures which compare with \$9.4 million on \$94.8 million sales in 1970).

The third recommendation involves the psychology of the problem — we've sold out because we wanted to. I once heard a man from IATSE 873 say that he was in that union because he had to make a living. Then he said he made \$6,000 per year — which just proves again that Canadians sell out to the lowest bidder. During the shooting of **Last of the Big Guns**, IATSE in Los Angeles could not decide with IATSE in New York whether Saskatchewan was East or West of Mississippi River. The result was a holdup in production with the Canadian producer paying for an American union sorting out its jurisdictional problems.

I've heard a man from NABET say he would rather see one million dollar production, than ten hundred-thousand dollar productions (with ten directors and d.o.p.'s and ten chances of creative innovation and financial success). This is typical Hollywood thinking which says it doesn't matter if you have ten directors or ten prommen in town, if they get paid the same.

If you want to develop filmmaking in Canada, it sure as hell does make a difference. The men who run the unions in Toronto have a closed shop mind in too many ways as *l'affaire Leiterman* shows, or the fact that IATSE has not pushed for Canadian-only commercials on television. Unfortunately the union mentality in the Toronto film industry seems conditioned by subservience to the status-quo, whatever it might be. Feature filmmaking occurred in spite of them and not because of the them. In Montréal, the Syndicat National du Cinéma seems just as concerned about Québec filmmaking as about wages, and I think they do a good job in both respects.

Maybe the answer to these problems is not an English-Canadian production union, but that would seem to solve some of them.

The fourth recommendation is the cruncher. For those who think a quota is no longer necessary or might ram something down someone's throat, remember that as of this writing **Mon Oncle Antoine** has not had a commercial showing in London, Ontario. This is a city of 221,000 with a substantial Francophone community. I don't know the reason why the "best" Canadian film has not

yet played there, but I do know that a quota would have solved that problem two years ago.

The other part of this recommendation is equally important. This is the idea that a percentage of the box office gross goes directly back to the film producer. The present system is unfortunately a pyramid that is upside-down. The base of the pyramid is the box office gross; take off expenses; take off the exhibitor's share; take off more expenses; take off the distributor's share; take off more expenses; then the investors and people who may have worked for a percentage of the profits. Believe it or not, there are investors who have still not received a penny from **Goin' Down the Road**. How can a producer raise investment money with odds like this? Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's **Q-1** grossed \$150,000 in one Montréal cinema and the producer's share was \$7,000. If he had been guaranteed 15% from the gross, he would have received \$22,500, which still isn't much but is triple what he got.

The eighth recommendation is also important as another way of getting money back to the people who make the films, but it is more indirect. Some people would like to see a percentage of the ticket admission tax go back to the producer (as the Basset report suggests). However, Ontario insists that all tax revenue go into the general fund first, and then be allocated by the legislature. Ontario took in almost \$4 million in admission taxes in 1971. This recommendation suggests Ontario give \$2 million back to the producers.

Exhibitors and distributors like this idea better than a guaranteed box office minimum going back to the producer, because this money comes from tax share; not their share, as the other suggestion would have it.

The tax investment write-off idea in recommendation eight is unacceptable to the federal government. However, raising the capital cost allowance on film from 60% to 100% would accomplish much the same thing, and is theoretically acceptable to the Department of Finance. Change in this direction is needed to help the high risk films that are more likely to spawn innovative filmmaking style, than the so-called international films.

If all of these recommendations were put into action we would have an indigenous cinema that would be economically and creatively controlled by Canadians, with a correspondingly higher chance of seeing ourselves in this mirror. At that point, I think, we would have film industry of international significance.

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