



"There is no way to join my organization — you just have to be one."

—Richard Leiterman, independent

Back in August I spoke with a young actress in the lobby of the Poor Alex Theatre. She was waiting to audition for a part in *Goat Island*; I was waiting for the auditions to end so I could thread up *Mon Oncle Antoine* for the six o'clock show.

There was little work, she explained, for actresses without a great deal of experience. She would gladly work for lower pay on stage or in film for the experience. It was more important to be working than holding out for union scale jobs. But to work for lower than scale would cost her the union card from ACTRA.

At the Union Panel, sponsored by the Toronto Filmmakers Co-op on Nov. 6, several IATSE technicians told of their years of struggle and hard work getting their union card. They feared the unions were made out to be bad guys because of their regulations. But after all, they explained, they had families and mortgages and were entitled to a decent living for their labor.

The problem is difficult. Ken Post CSC, a cameraman who resigned from IATSE a few years ago, called it a "sorry thing."

"I hate to see all the animosity between the young people excited about film and the old timers with all their experience."

Post felt the unions' weakness was a lack of understanding of two basic concepts: change and the need for education.

"Allow for them or you are doomed," he warned.

The panel brought together Sam Jephcott, of the Directors Guild, Michel Brault, president of the Syndicat National du Cinéma, Richard Leiterman, an in-

dependent (there's no way to join my organization), Paul Siren, ACTRA, and Ron Chegwidden. IATSE local 873 and Bryan Lowe, NABET-AFC, Local 700.

The discussion centred on three inextricable points, low budget feature films, control of unions by members, and Canadian nationalism.

Leiterman thought unions should make concessions to low budget feature producers. The technicians would have more work, albeit at lower than scale, and young filmmakers would have experienced people on their crews.

Chegwidden insisted his union would not negotiate for lower than existing rates. "We have all the work we can handle," he said.

NABET was not so intransigent although Lowe said his union had argued against low budget feature investments by the Film Development Corporation.

NABET will not accept lower rates but they will allow for smaller crews. He objected to low budget features because he felt the films would probably be bad. And bad films, he reasoned, do not develop the industry. He felt it was better to have big budget productions because more people could be employed, the films would be more successful, and more people could learn.

Brault felt the Syndicat was struggling with the problem and making headway. Technicians in the Syndicat are free to work at lower than scale as an investment in the film. Two films have been made in this manner only recently and the technicians will share in all profits above an agreed level.

Chegwidden thought that system would allow producers to cheat technicians out of their share. Brault agreed that was a possibility, but felt it was more important to develop the system with adequate safeguards rather than dismissing them offhand.

At present, NABET allows technicians to work at no fee on video tape productions. Once sold, they collect a 25 per cent surcharge for their investment of labor.

John Board, the assistant director of *Wedding In White* and other major productions, thought it would help the feature industry tremendously if the unions, and particularly IATSE, would allow their technicians to work on low budget features.

Leiterman agreed, admitting that probably 90 per cent of the best technicians were IATSE. But he questioned whether the IATSE members would be allowed to work on low budget features even if they wanted.

Ken Post argued that the unions should agree to help so they could train younger technicians. But, he explained, this could not happen with IATSE controlled from New York.

Chegwidden insisted the IATSE locals were autonomous and were democratically run. As to helping low budget features, he said the union had a bad experience with these films.

"We are not entirely inflexible," he said, "but we do not get involved with low budget films."

He felt that by lowering rates to these producers, the others would expect the same rates.

SORTING OUT THE UNIONS



Sam Jephcott



Paul Siren, Bryan Lowe



Ron Chegwidden

jerry mcNabb



Photo: Tom Urquhart

"We prefer to call it film making, not film business."
 Michel Brault,
 Syndicat National du Cinema

Looking at the whole situation, it would appear the Syndicat is best attempting to deal with all the differences. But the Syndicat operates only in Quebec and Brault insisted they had no geographical expansion plans.

Leiterman would like a similar working situation in the rest of Canada but feels filmmakers will have to find an alternative to existing unions "pretty fast."

NABET claims it has an autonomous local but needs to be part of an international union so its technicians are free to work in the states. Aside from opposing low budget features outright, Lowe held out the possibility of their members participating if they voted to change their regulations.

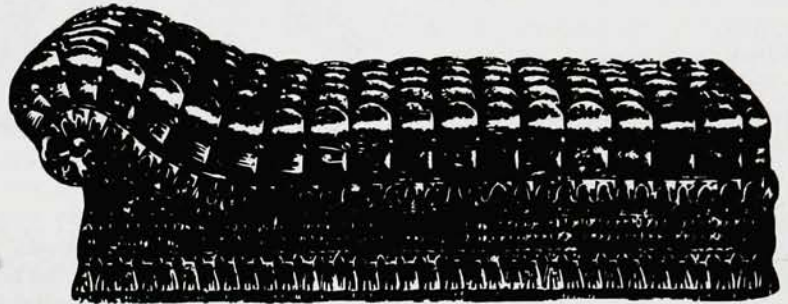
As for IATSE, Chegwiddden said they have all the work they can handle.

Ted Rouse, of the Film Development Corporation, explained that the low budget feature program was established because their big budget features had been tightened up and the low budget features would provide an opportunity for new people "even if only one in twenty works out."

But Rouse feared that a negative attitude from the unions could doom the program.

Canada is certainly trying to blossom forth a feature film industry. Its success depends on government, producers, writers, directors and technicians. But more than that, it requires a spirit of cooperation and trust by all these diverse elements.

The industry will no doubt go through many changes in the next few years. And to paraphrase that old timer, Ken Post, we must allow for change or be doomed.



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