

Mapping the Serious and the Dangerous: Film and the National Council of Education, 1920-1939

Charles R. Acland

Volume 6, numéro 1, automne 1995

Le cinéma muet au Québec et au Canada : nouveaux regards sur une pratique culturelle

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1000961ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1000961ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Cinémas

ISSN

1181-6945 (imprimé)

1705-6500 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Acland, C. R. (1995). Mapping the Serious and the Dangerous: Film and the National Council of Education, 1920-1939. *Cinémas*, 6(1), 101–118.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1000961ar>

Résumé de l'article

Cet article met en valeur le rôle du Conseil national de l'éducation dans le développement d'un objectif national d'éducation pour le cinéma canadien. Le Conseil national de l'éducation représentait un pouvoir important; il était une force de pression puissante, un initiateur et producteur d'activités et de critiques culturelles. Le Conseil national de l'éducation était impérialiste dans son orientation et considéra le développement du goût populaire comme un de ses objectifs majeurs. Ses membres encouragèrent le contrôle des activités et des modes d'amusement populaires de façon telle que le temps de loisir serve à la nation. Leur agenda les amena à promouvoir le film documentaire et à écrire à propos des dangers d'un cinéma populaire, orientations qui firent leur chemin dans le développement ultérieur des politiques relatives au cinéma canadien.

Mapping the Serious and the Dangerous: Film and the National Council of Education, 1920-1939¹

Charles R. Acland

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article met en valeur le rôle du Conseil national de l'éducation dans le développement d'un objectif national d'éducation pour le cinéma canadien. Le Conseil national de l'éducation représentait un pouvoir important; il était une force de pression puissante, un initiateur et producteur d'activités et de critiques culturelles. Le Conseil national de l'éducation était impérialiste dans son orientation et considéra le développement du goût populaire comme un de ses objectifs majeurs. Ses membres encouragèrent le contrôle des activités et des modes d'amusement populaires de façon telle que le temps de loisir serve à la nation. Leur agenda les amena à promouvoir le film documentaire et à écrire à propos des dangers d'un cinéma populaire, orientations qui firent leur chemin dans le développement ultérieur des politiques relatives au cinéma canadien.

ABSTRACT

This article recognizes the National Council of Education's role in articulating the national educationalist objective for Canadian film. The NCE was a significant force; it was a powerful lobby, initiator of cultural activities, and producer of cultural criticism. The NCE was imperialist in orientation, and took as one of its goals the improvement of popular taste. Its members encouraged the regulation of recreation and modes of

popular pleasure so that leisure time served the nation. This educationalist agenda led them to promote documentary film and to write about the dangers of popular cinema, both of which find their way into later developments in Canadian film policy.

Beautiful trees in Canadian forests are being destroyed to provide paper on which is printed in the United States a class of magazine that may be described, none too vividly, as nothing but literary sewage. It is a crime against virgin Canadian forest to make it a medium for the filth which is produced in the republic and which is introduced into Canada in this detestable form. But if it is a crime against Canadian forests, what about the interests of Canadians themselves, their sons and daughters? [...] It is certainly true, as illustrated on the screen at the Educational Conference, that the news-stands of this country are ablaze with cover pages which represent vice, violence, licentiousness, and indecency of almost every form. No scruples of either manners or morals restrain these scummy emanations.²

Major Fred J. Ney, executive secretary of the National Council of Education (NCE), prepared a film and lecture for the NCE fourth triennial conference on "Education and Leisure" (1929) portraying the "[...] manner in which the morals of young Canadians are being assailed by a flood of foreign magazines depicting immorality, violence, vice, and crime." (Lang, p. 15) In his foreword to the NCE pamphlet *Canada and the Foreign Magazine*, Ney describes his filmic analysis of contemporary magazines "[...] as a startling revelation to people who had given little, if any thought to this source of Canada's reading material." (Lang, p. 2) Additionally, while Ney denounces



A. M. Crawley,
B.A., Oxon



Miss Jenny Brown, M.A.
Mrs. John Gilbertson



Captain A. J. Wilson
M.C.

popular magazines, he demonstrates a “proper” use of motion pictures, as an instrument of education, when he stands beside the screen and comments upon the silent images of vice in popular taste depicted in his film.

Canadian film history ignores the National Council of Education's role in the development of Canadian film culture. (I have never seen a single reference to it.) And yet, in its day, the NCE was a significant force; it attracted sizeable audiences and press coverage, and its members were key figures in other organizations and were often part of the Canadian business establishment. The NCE was a powerful lobby, initiator of cultural activities, and producer of cultural criticism. At every level, it laboured to produce a nationally minded, educated Canadian citizenry through culture. Imperialist in orientation, the NCE did so by attempting to improve popular taste, which the Council saw as a war against vice. Its members encouraged the regulation of recreation and modes of popular pleasure so that leisure time, instead of becoming an idle period, served the nation.

The NCE promoted “education for leisure;” its involvement with film was thus a part of an integrated strategy to influence the leisure practices of Canadians. Like the more widely recognized National Film Society (founded in 1935), the NCE acted as a clearinghouse for information about film and as a vehicle for the circulation of choice films, that is, those which the NCE saw as contributing to the development of a sophisticated film

culture in Canada. As film figured in the NCE agenda of nation-building, the interest focused upon modes of reception, especially on how films were understood and assessed critically.³

With mass circulation magazines, radio and film burgeoning during the early decades of this century, a general discussion grew concerning potential effects. Many spoke of influences upon the nature of work and leisure, often citing an associated deterioration of national standards. The observation that many of these mass cultural products arrived from the United States amplified this concern. American magazines, radio shows and motion pictures became part of the Canadian landscape as much as the Laurentian Shield had ever been. Apprehensions about this situation settled roughly into two questions: how does mass produced culture affect the potential for democratic life in the modern era and how does the overwhelming presence of American mass produced culture affect Canadian life?

The “making of citizens,” by design, is an ideological project involving the construction and circulation of arguments, judgments and regulations pertaining to the nation and its inhabitants. The cultural field is a fundamental site for this activity, especially as it affects knowledges about people and their cultural life. Terminologically, the precise distinctions between “popular culture,” “the popular,” and “the people,” as well as the corresponding relations among them, have posed ongoing theoretical problems for cultural critique. Tony Bennett recommends “[...] an approach which keeps these terms definitionally empty — or at least relatively so — in the interest of filling them politically in varying ways as changing circumstances may require.” (p. 8) For Bennett, maintaining the abstract and mobile nature of these terms is paramount to understanding how context inflects them differently. The shifting political stakes in culture and in its relation to the construction of “the people” highlight the various contests, agendas and qualities which appear in certain historical moments.

Importantly, alliances are struck, agendas are enacted and the abstract entity of “the people” does touch ground in a discursively concrete fashion; in other words, there exist moments of provisional stability in the meaning and qualities of “the people.”

Regardless of the truth value of claims made, it is possible for some to speak with utter certainty about citizens, about a diverse population, and about their characteristics. Central, then, is the project of acknowledging the mobility of the popular yet exposing the conditions under which it appears to have an imagined unity. What forces exist to make a citizenry "politically full" in a specific context, what alliances produce this imagined unity, and who ultimately benefits from that arrangement? Bennett ends his article with a call for cultural critics "[...] to make that construction of 'the people' which unites a broad alliance of social forces in opposition to the power bloc count politically by winning for it a cultural weight and influence which prevails above others." (p. 20) Still, it follows that the people can be "made," not in opposition to, but in service of a power bloc. This is not to say that opposition to this process does not exist; one must, however, give credence to the way in which leadership in the cultural arena can piece that bloc together.

The concentrated efforts in the making of a Canadian citizen during the inter-war period resulted in the emergence of what Antonio Gramsci termed organic intellectuals — those associated with a particular class alliance, and whose work serves to organize and produce its directions, intents, and boundaries. This intellectual stratum succeeded in creating both formal and informal cultural networks, or voluntary societies for those purposes. In effect, this new organic intellectual helped to establish a form of knowledge production, or a Foucauldian episteme, about the ideal Canadian citizen in the mass age, about Canadian nationhood, and about the role of culture in national development.

Historical focus on this development tends to fix upon those voluntary societies of the 1930s designated as left-leaning, nationalist, and interested in social reform. The Canadian Association for Adult Education, the Canadian Radio League and the National Film Society were powerful influences on cultural development and are often seen as exemplars of the period.⁴ However, many other organizations, with similar goals but differing political agendas, were also active. While Ron Faris suggests that the organizations of the period can be categorized as imperialist,

nationalist, or internationalist in orientation, he also indicates that there was much overlap in objectives and tactics. Multiple membership in each of the three types of organizations was not uncommon and "[...] some men assumed executive positions in all three types of association [...]." (Faris, p. 16)

As Faris notes, the NCE began as a direct response to recommendations from the 1919 Winnipeg conference on "Education and Citizenship," organized by the Canadian Industrial Reconstruction Association to discuss national unity in the service of industry (Faris, p. 4). The conference delegates agreed upon the need for a national organization for education and Canadian citizenship. When the NCE emerged the following year to fulfil that purpose, much of its support came from those same business interests, including Sir Edward Beatty, President of the Canadian Pacific Railway, who later became the Council's Honorary Vice-President.

At its peak, in the early 1930s, the NCE had 16 local committees across Canada, as well as offices for the national organization in Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg. There were also international branches in London and Paris. For the NCE, a conservative notion about essentially British character of Canada was the model for Canadian citizenship. In the minds of the Council's membership, British and Christian traditions defined the qualities and ideals of Canadian nationhood. Hence, the NCE engaged in the maintenance of cultural exchange with other Commonwealth countries and in the promotion of national cooperation on educational issues. In a typical initiative, the enormously successful National Lectureship Scheme brought Commonwealth luminaries to tour Canada. The ultimate goal was unambiguous; the NCE sought to make the modern Canadian citizen into an imperial subject of Britain.

According to John Lyons, soon after Vincent Massey became the president of the NCE in 1922, the organization was "[...] Canada's most active and vibrant educational body." (p. 409) However, Major Fred J. Ney remained by far the most influential member throughout the NCE's entire history. As executive secretary from 1920 to the Council's effective demise in 1939, his interests, his contacts, and his ideologies, more than any oth-

er person's guided the NCE.⁵ Lyons specifically credits Ney with developing the NCE's focus upon "[...] the pro-imperial lectureship scheme and an increased stress on cultural activities." (Lyons, p. 409)

In 1921, Ney toured Europe in order to familiarize himself with new educational developments. He recommended connections to the Worker's Educational Association, to those interested in the place of drama and music in education, and to the Duty and Discipline Movement. The latter's objectives found a sympathetic audience in the NCE: "[...] to combat softness, slackness, indifference and indiscipline, and to stimulate discipline and a sense of duty and alertness throughout national life." (Ney, 1921, p. 11)

During this trip, Ney's interest in new forms of educational technique had extended to film. He wrote favorably of Evans Brothers, a British firm which had begun to create "lessons with the aid of the cinema" which they called "Kinemalogues." (Ney, 1921, p. 16) They were "cinematograph lectures" for educational use; already available in 1921 were *Our Mighty Empire*, *Nature's Wonderland*, *The Glamour of the East*, *Gleanings from Great Writers*, and *The Conquest of the Air*. Ney commented upon the prospect of encouraging Evans Brothers to establish a Canadian library of their Kinemalogues. Though the recommendation was not acted upon, Ney believed it was important to pursue the film / lecture technique, for "[...] the method represents an entirely new departure." (p. 16)

The themes of discipline, youth, and "training for citizenship" encountered a growing concern about popular culture at the fourth and largest of the NCE conferences, on "Education and Leisure," which took place in Victoria and Vancouver, April 1929. This conference addressed the social influences of music, drama, radio and cinema, and their implications for educators. Ney acknowledged that this event represented "[...] the inauguration of a campaign to awaken and consolidate public opinion of the subject of the cinema and the foreign film" (Ney, 1930a, p. 1). There were 2900 accredited delegates and 30,000 attended various sessions over five days (p. 1). Experts from the BBC, academics from Britain and Canada, and organizers of youth

movements from Japan, Germany and Czechoslovakia gave speeches, later published in book form. Nobel Literature Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore gave the keynote address and other talks.

The conference proceedings reveal a string of assertions which says roughly, that the modern world — and this was taken to refer to the nature of industrial work, increasing leisure time, and the new mass media — has introduced unforetold pressures upon populations. The participants believed that the young were being equipped for work, through “education for efficiency,” but that youth also had to be educated for leisure. For instance, the conference organizers write, “[...] the generation which fails to equip its successors [...] has indeed committed the unpardonable biological sin.” (Lang, p. 3) Biological metaphors run throughout, and there is a clear association with the popular eugenics movement of the day.⁶ An extreme panic about popular taste stemmed from a racist argument that the promotion of immorality through popular forms will ultimately lead to the weakening of the Anglo-Saxon race. It followed, then, that without proper guidance in leisure activities deviance and criminality would increase, resulting in the erosion of national standards and health. For the NCE, the terms of moral and virtuous nationhood were set by an imagined notion of “Britishness.”

The two addresses specifically on motion pictures foregrounded film as a mental and physical health issue. “The Child and the Cinema,” by the Reverend Dr. E. Leslie Pidgeon from Montreal, notes that while character develops from “germ inheritance,” that is, genetic predispositions, the significance of “[...] ante-birth acquisitions, and post-birth acquisitions or ‘nurture’” cannot be ruled out.” (Lang, p. 111) Pidgeon reasons, because the cinema “[...] is an instrument which touches so vitally the aggressive potentialities of the child mind that it cannot be ignored.” (Lang, p. 112) He continues:

I do not consider that the doctrine of the survival of the fittest applies to the moral life. A boy is not made stronger by passing through a maze of evil influences, even if in practice he has resisted them. He is made

morally weaker by every evil picture of life he has seen, by every embodiment of wrong or injustice in the organised life which constitutes his environment. (p. 113)

After describing the seriousness of the influence of film, Pidgeon suggests that nothing will change as long as film is controlled solely by commercial interests. (p. 115)

The other lecture, entitled "The Cinema and its Place in Education," by Sir Aubrey Vere Symonds of the British Department of Education, underscored the importance of exploiting the educational potential of the new medium. Reinforcing Pidgeon's argument, Symonds pragmatically suggests that film is a fact of the contemporary world, hence outright condemnation is unproductive. Instead, the educational aspects of film had to be explored. As examples, he praises recent British education films, some of which had been shown at the conference, including *World War and After* about the League of Nations (Hans Nieter, 1926) and *The Epic of the Antarctic* about Captain Scott's last expedition to the South Pole.⁷ Symonds concludes that the key to successful educational use of film is that it be given a specific place in the curriculum and that "[...] it should be preceded by a preparatory and succeeded by a follow-up lesson" (Lang, p. 119). This idea of the film / lecture is subsequently taken up by the NCE as the "proper" use of motion pictures.

In this emergent discourse of nationhood, there was an articulation between nation, education, leisure, and youth. A final element grounds all the others if only as the source of material evidence for the emergency situation that is often described: health. As Ney writes, the conference demonstrated that "[...] health is a natural corollary of leisure." (Ney, 1931, p. 3) Ney represents the discursive links between modernity and health in the following statement:

In a world of strain and stress, of increasing anxiety and fear, the problem of health must take precedence over all others, for, given health, our standard of sanity would be higher, and, given sanity, many of the present problems which threaten the very foundations of our

civilization would automatically solve themselves.
(p. 2)

Here, health refers simultaneously to physical and mental well-being, or, to use the terms of the day, “social hygiene” and “mental hygiene.” Along these lines, the 1929 conference hosted a British eugenicist who spoke on social hygiene, and stressed the importance of treating deviance and criminality as disease, therefore to be addressed with drastic measures as one would an epidemic of smallpox.

The implications of this articulation are substantial, for if we are going to speak of the emergence of a discourse of cultural nationalism in this country, we also need to understand the conjuncture which produced particular formations of what this means. The historical instance demonstrates particular imaginings about the workings of the individual moral will and a related biological claim that someone must choose for “the people” — a combination of cultural critique and eugenics. Popular culture, here, is an educationally empty, and potentially disease ridden, entity. This contrasts with an image of British “cleanliness.” Where popular entertainment drains and sullies, British culture strengthens and edifies. Accordingly, where popular culture is homeless and foreign, British life and culture are healthy, serious and “at home” in Canada.

The conference ended with the NCE adopting a number of resolutions about education and leisure, with film as the main focus. Regarding “the influence of the foreign film,” the recommendations include the need for measures to limit the film attendance of children, a demand for the remission of duty on educational films, scrutiny of cinema advertising to “[...] eliminate the objectionable features,” and a review of theatre licensing” (Lang, p. 276-277). A mixture of surveillance of youth and state lobby efforts are put forward in these resolutions. Stated repeatedly is the obligation of educational authorities to be active in the process of assuring the quality of Canadian film culture.

These proposals formed the basis for subsequent NCE initiatives. For instance, Ney reiterates the concerns of the conference in his widely circulated pamphlet *Canada and the Foreign Film*.

After discussing the attraction and popularity of film, Ney writes:

What then of the Cinema and the foreign film, with its often false and fictitious values, its sex, its pandering to the things of the body rather than service to the intellect and spirit, its unceasing propaganda of the worst type, its insincerities and unwholesome lack of restraint and of artistic quality? (Ney, 1930b, p. 5)

Ney's contention is that the American film has an unnatural and undesirable control on the popular movie-going practices of Canadians, and second, that there is a relationship between these activities and "[...] the growth of crime, the ever increasing number of imbeciles, neurotics and neurasthenics, perverts and unfits." (p. 2) Ney even describes the results of studies by the British Social Hygiene Council, namely the conclusion that by lowering moral standards films promote the spread of disease (p. 8). Ney's argument is no simple moral panic; once again, there is a combination of cultural elitism and public health concerns.

Ney's essay restates the recommendations of the 1929 conference, and surveys the censorship and restrictive measures upon entertainment and foreign film taken in other countries. In the Canadian situation, Ney singles out block-booking as a particularly pernicious evil. R.B. Bennett, a NCE member, was now prime minister and at his specific request the members of the House of Commons and the Senate each received a copy of *Canada and the Foreign Film*. The pamphlet was seen as a powerful argument contributing to the establishment of the committee to investigate American film interests in Canada under the Federal Combines Investigation Act, in September, 1930.⁸

Ney and the NCE, as represented in *Canada and the Foreign Film*, provided a coherent response to the Canadian extension of the Hays Office, known as the Cooper Organization, which worked to assure the continued subjugation of a Canadian film industry.⁹ But the manner of influence, and the discursive arrangement of this cultural nationalism poised against popular entertainment, guaranteed a certain impossibility of imagining a

Canadian popular film culture. Ultimately, for the NCE, it was not the foreignness of films that threatened the “upward march of civilization,” especially given their subsequent role in the importation of British film, but the type of film (Ney, 1930b, p. 15).

In another initiative following the 1929 conference, Ney organized a series of Film Weeks beginning in 1930, which would present programs of quality, imported films and lectures. The first “Film Week” program was held in Winnipeg, and it included five films: *The Epic of the South Pole*, a British film about Scott’s journey to the Antarctic, *The Black Journey*, a French film about an African automobile journey, *The Sokol*, a Czechoslovakian film of the Prague festival, and a nature film called *The Magic of Flowers*.¹⁰ Shown in the Walker Theatre, 9,000 children saw the program as a school field trip, in addition to 17,000 general admission, all for free (Ney, 1930a, p. 1).

The next year, British Film Week included *Shiraz* an Indian film made for British Instructional Films and UFA in Germany about the building of the Taj Mahal (Franz Osten, 1929),¹¹ *Stampede* about a hunting expedition to the Sudan (Major C. Court Treatt, Stella Court Treatt and Errol Hinds, 1930), *Royal Remembrances*, *Scott’s Expedition to the South Pole*, and a selection of British instructional films, including some experimental “talkies.” In 1932, film expenses were substantial enough to be the NCE’s third highest category, after salaries and lecturer expenses.¹²

Other film activities began to occur with increasing frequency, often exhibiting a tendency to blend film presentations with the NCE’s earlier emphasis on lecture tours. In December 1934, the NCE co-sponsored an exhibition of photographs with Imperial Airways and *The Times* of London. The exhibit of aerial photography, “Flying over the Empire,” included 109 photographs and 100 slides as well as 123 images taken from Canadian Airways flights. A sound film, *Contact* (Paul Rotha, 1932), was the centrepiece of the exhibition, which then travelled across Canada.¹³

In Winter 1934-35, Jenny Brown arrived from Britain to travel through Canada and talk about her studies of the Scottish

Highlands. She lectured with her film *The Rugged Island* (1934), along with other shorts,¹⁴ describing herself as essentially a self-taught amateur filmmaker who wanted to capture the disappearing traditions of Scotland, in particular those of the Shetland Crofters. The promotional material includes many descriptions of the day to day hardships during *The Rugged Island's* shoot, the result of which was that "[...] Jenny Brown put the Shetlanders onto celluloid for the first time."¹⁵

Early 1935 saw perhaps the most ambitious filmic event of the NCE. Ney commissioned a sprawling silent film travelogue entitled *This England: As Seen in 1934*. Captain A. John Wilson, an amateur filmmaker, was asked to make a film on famous English public schools. He came back with a 42-reel chronicle of a "[...] motor journey, reaching almost every corner of England [...] intended to show the people of the country in their home-setting, participating in age-long ceremonies and customs."¹⁶ It played over a number of nights, with a running commentary by Wilson, and with slides, maps and gramophone accompaniment. The same year, Captain J.B.L. Noel presented his film *The Epic of Everest* (1924) about an ill-fated expedition to climb Mt. Everest. The event was described as a "lecture," dramatizing events through the aid of motion pictures.¹⁷ Thus, even in 1935, the NCE demonstrated a continued investment in silent film, if only to facilitate the film / lecture format.

Winter 1938-39 saw the tour of A.M. Crawley, a journalist and traveller. His lectures included the educational Bible film *From Abraham to Allenby*. The NCE promoted the film as a "text book," designed to be used "[...] as part of the normal school curriculum." In his tour, Crawley presented other films on diverse topics; one of the linking themes was "[...] educational films generally and discuss, and where desired demonstrate, the methods used by teachers in different schools in Great Britain." As the promotional material for Crawley's tour indicates, "These scenes, now permanently recorded, have a great historical value, for Palestine is changing rapidly, customs and sites are disappearing, and such incidents will not easily, if ever, be filmed again."¹⁸ And here again, as with Brown, Wilson and Noel, the story of the filming, and the filmmaker's role as

explorer / traveller, is fundamental to the event. In effect, the film acts as a testimony to the veracity of the filmmaker / adventurer's claims, that is, as a supplementary form of evidence.

From this survey of NCE film events, one can see the direction of their interest. The imperialist impulse of the NCE invariably made them one of the first Canadian champions of the British documentary film movement of the 1930s, particularly in their promotion of work of Paul Rotha and Jenny Brown. In general, film signaled the future, the possibilities for a new young country in the contemporary world, while it also implicated everything that threatened "wise" development in the modern age. The lecturer, the authoritative figure standing with the film and explaining the images, acted as an exemplar for youth and nation. The standard of the "good" film was marked in part by the nature of the filmmaker, which included his or her position as an amateur, as opposed to a commercially influenced professional working in the film business, as a traveller and explorer, hence the teller of truths rather than the fabricator of fictions, as lecturer and educator, in contradistinction to exploiter or profiteer. Further, there is a strong investment in silent film, which facilitates the active commentary of the lecturer, who can then act as an interpreter of the meaning of the film. This articulation of terms around the authoritative figure of filmmaker / lecturer was not unique to the NCE. However, significantly, here it is being mobilized inside a national and imperial educationalist agenda.

It is curious how the use of film indicated an exciting and stimulating lecture — that these individuals were engaging audiences with state-of-the-art educational technology. Yet, the NCE down-played the film itself, in so much as they promoted their guests as educationalists first, and not specifically filmmakers. In this respect, the situation of the film / lecture took the focus away from film *per se* and placed it into the capable hands of experts in other areas, including history and anthropology. For example, the NCE invited Crawley as a fitting representative of a younger generation and a purveyor of the proper use of film. In other words, the question of filmic technique was immaterial to the production of a good film; instead, a film's worth had to do with the character and expertise of the creator.

While 1934-35 saw the NCE's most extensive involvement in film, other activities were causing significant disruption. The Council's increasingly public support for fascism, as seen in its invitations for Italy Week, was drawing criticism from many.¹⁹ Some prominent politicians felt they had to withdraw, among them Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, for fear of being tainted by scandal. Vincent Massey, a past president of the NCE, resigned, writing to Ney, "I don't think I need tell you that I have always had a very sincere belief in the National Council and the work it set out to do; but of late, although the criticisms levelled against it are often unjust, sometimes I confess I cannot help sympathising with them."²⁰ The new voluntary societies in the 1930s also distanced themselves from the NCE, even though their objectives and strategies had much in common (Lyons, p. 402-439). With the formation of the National Film Society in 1935, one former employee of the NCE wrote to Ney commenting that they "[...] should have included you, surely, at least as a Toronto representative!"²¹ But they did not.

In his essay "Popular Culture and the State," Stuart Hall discusses key moments in the British experience, for instance around the press and radio, in which government asserted a formative pressure upon leisure practices. As Hall puts it, "[...] culture ceases to be the privilege and prerogative of the cultivation of private individuals and begins to be a matter for which the state takes public responsibility." (Hall, p. 27) In the 1920s and 1930s, similar developments were occurring in Canada. Interestingly, the new networks of cultural authorities operated "outside" the state in an effort to influence not only the making of people, but also the involvement of the state; if you will, the period was a transitional moment leading up to the situation Hall describes.

Early examples of the federal government's growing involvement in culture, all firsts in their area, include the tariffs established in 1930 to slow the saturation of the Canadian market with American magazines, the Broadcasting Act of 1932, establishing the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission, and the National Film Act of 1939, establishing the National Film Board of Canada. Clearly, beginning in the 1930s, the federal

state was becoming active in the cultural life of the nation. Driving this, in substantial manner, were the voluntary societies. The NCE's publications and activities were significant contributions to the notion of cultural nationalism. To combat what they saw as the slackening of Canadian morals, tastes, and health, the NCE promoted British culture through the film / lecture. It is also instructive to know that, with imperialism as the founding ideology of the NCE, the claim that popular culture was a national health risk led them increasingly towards fascism. In short, the NCE's actions were part of that movement to a central position of a discourse on education for leisure, ultimately, part of a hegemonic form of leadership in the cultural arena.

University of Calgary

NOTES

1 In preparing this essay, I received excellent research assistance from Ellen Eastwood, and invaluable research and editorial advice from Blaine Allan, Michael Dorland and Katie Russell. Thanks to all of you.

2 From *The Vancouver Star*, April 1929, describing Fred Ney's film about popular magazines. Quoted in S.E. Lang, *Canada and the Foreign Magazine* (Winnipeg: National Council of Education, 1930, p. 1).

3 There are many parallels here to the film education movement in the United States of the same period. See Lea Jacobs, "Reformers and Spectators: The Film Education Movement in the Thirties," *Camera Obscura*, n° 22 (1990) p. 29-49.

4 For more on the National Film Society, see my "National Dreams, International Encounter: The Formation of Canadian Film Culture in the 1930s," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 3, n° 1 (1994) p. 3-26.

5 Alf Chaiton, in "The National Council of Education: A Case Study of a Voluntary, Lay, Extra-Governmental Organization in the inter-war Period," *The Politics of Canadian Education* (Edmonton: Canadian Society for the Study of Education, 1977, p. 19-26) suggests that the NCE, while supported by the particular interests of business, had little coherent sense of direction or practical goals. Therefore, it was relatively easy for a single individual like Ney to set the agenda on a year to year basis.

6 It comes as no surprise to find key members of the NCE also involved with the various aspects of the eugenics movement in Canada. For instance, Vincent Massey and Edward Beatty were members of the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene. For a full history of this movement, see Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990).

7 Various film versions of Scott's expedition were a favorite of the NCE. With no dates or directors given, it is difficult to provide additional information about these films. Indeed, it is entirely possible that many were the same film, with only slight variations in titles (e.g. *The Epic of the South Pole*, *Scott's Expedition to the South Pole*,

and *The Epic of the Antarctic*). Rachael Low tells of the numerous re-issues, re-editing and re-titling done on films about Scott (*Films of Comment and Persuasion of the 1930s*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979, p. 80).

8 The NCE claimed total responsibility for the Combines Investigation; this seems more than slightly exaggerated.

9 For a complete rendition of this struggle, see Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Toronto: Garamond, 1990).

10 Not all reports of the "Film Week" program include this last film. I have no additional information on any of these films. From the description, and the crude translation, it is possible that *The Black Journey* is actually *Voyage au Congo* (André Gide and Marc Allégret, 1926). According to Richard Abel, *Voyage au Congo* was a popular item in the French cine-club societies' distribution system at the end of the 1920s (*French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 266-272). The other possibility is that this film is *La Croisière noire* (Léon Poirier), which was part of a series of film depicting automobile journeys, this one taking place in Africa.

11 See Firoze Rangoonwalla, *75 Years of Indian Cinema* (New Delhi: Indian Book, 1975, p. 60-68).

12 "NCE Accounts," March 26, 1932 (NAC MG 30 D245 v. 5 file 4).

13 "NCE Winter 1934-35" (NAC MG 30 D245 v. 5 file 4, p. 5-6).

14 The shorts were *Sea-Birds in the Shetland Islands*, *A Young Gannet*, *Shetland Ponies*, *Da Makkin' o' a Keshie*, and *Sheep's Clothing*.

15 See NCE Jenny Brown promotional material (NAC MG 30 D245 v. 5 file 8). Some of Brown's films had been bought by the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit, John Grierson's home at the time, and distributed in schools. Brown's tour ran from November 7th 1934 to March 22 1935, and included lectures in 14 cities. During her tour, NCE documents note an "independent visit to Yorkton, Saskatchewan" from January 28th until March 18th ("NCE Winter 1934-35", p. 2). There, she co-directed a film with Evelyn Spice, another figure in the British documentary movement and a follower of John Grierson, called *Prairie Winter* (1935). See Rachael Low, *Films of Comment and Persuasion of the 1930s* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979 p. 120).

16 "NCE John Wilson promotional material" (NAC MG 30 D245 v. 5 file 7).

17 "NCE J.B.L. Noel promotional material" (NAC MG 30 D245 v. 5 file 8).

18 "NCE J.B.L. Noel promotional material" (NAC MG 30 D245 v. 5 file 8).

19 For instance, *Canadian Forum* published a short, but scathing piece about the NCE's Italy Week titled "The National Council of Propaganda," vol. XIV (February 1934) p. 165.

20 "Massey to Ney," April 23, 1934 (NAC MG 30 D245 v. 5 file 4).

21 "Lilian Watson to Ney," May 21, 1936 (NAC MG 30 D245 v. 6 file 1).

REFERENCES

Bennett, Tony. "The Politics of the Popular and Popular Culture," in Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer and Janet Woolcott (eds.), *Popular Culture and Social Relation*. Milton Keynes: Open University, 1986.

Faris, Ron. *The Passionate Educators: Voluntary Associations and the Struggle for Control of Adult Educational Broadcasting in Canada 1919-1952*. Toronto: Peter Martin, 1975.

Hall, Stuart. "Popular Culture and the State," in Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer and Janet Woolacott (eds.), *Popular Culture and Social Relation*. Milton Keynes: Open University, 1986.

Lang, S.E. (ed.). *Education and Leisure*. Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1930.

Lyons, John Edward. *In Pursuit of an Ideal: A History of the National Council of Education* (Ph. D. Thesis). Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1980.

Ney, Fred J. "This Year's Program of the Council of Education." *The Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, november 20 (1931).

Ney, Fred J. "A Brief Survey of 1929." National Archives of Canada: MG 30 D245, vol. 5, file 4, 1930a.

Ney, Fred J. *Canada and the Foreign Film*. Winnipeg: National Council of Education, 1930b.

Ney, Fred J. "NCE Second Interim Report." National Archives of Canada: MG 30 D245, vol. 5, file 4, 1921.