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Some personal prejudices about films and film-making from the other side of the fence.

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THE SOCIETY OF FILM-MAKERS. Born early in 1964, an association of English-speaking producers, directors, editors, and writers and cameramen. Like the Association Professionnelle des Cinéastes open to all but in fact drawing most of its members from National Film Board personnel. Taking an obstetrical view of the Society of Fil mMakers birth, you could say it was an overdue pregnancy, a breech presentation, with the APC in the delivery room inducing labour. We, the English producers at the Board, had thought of forming an association when the APC was formed. They have one, shouldn't we ? One or two English producers joined APC, but it masn't really for us. Didn't we, the English producers, already belong to an organized yet tightly knit group within the NFB, a sort of film-makers Cosa Nostra, in fact ? So let the French form their group, we were alright.

N.D.L.R. On s'étonnera peut-être de lire dans LIBERTE qui ne fait pas profession de bilinguisme, un article écrit en anglais que nous publions sans traduction. Il nous a paru que les questions qu'abordait M. Bill Davies devaient être précisées dans la langue même de ceux qui les vivent et qu'une traduction ne pouvait qu'en infirmer la portée. Nous espérons que les lecteurs de LIBERTE n'en seront pas incommodés.

After a year of activity the APC began to make its presence felt. It began making demands. Demands for changes at the NFB — our NFB. Our NFB ? Well, alright then, it was theirs as well, but not really as much as it was ours. But 1964 wasn't 1939. And now the French wanted to go it alone. They wanted separation, autonomy in their own unit, their own production chief. And there was all that politicking, and briefs to government, and talk of feature films. Let's face it, the French were rocking the boat. If they weren't careful they would have us all overboard.

So there were many worried people on the English side at NFB, that winter of 1963-64. Why can't *they* leave things as they are. It's worked fine for 25 years, why are *they* trying to spoil things now. Maybe we should meet with them and find out what *they* were up to. A dialogue, that was what was needed. With a capital D. Where was the Dialogue between our two great races ? It was hard enough for Canada, even harder at the NFB which has the people of, not 2, but 52 great races working for it.

So one dismal winter night in 1964, in Theatre 6 at the NFB we, the English producers met with them, the French producers. A deputation from the APC arrived, led by Messrs Godbout and Côté. Everyone was smiling. And they told us what the score was. We asked our anxious questions, and they told what was happening. All the changes would be for the better, they said. You aren't going to ruin everything, then, we asked. Of course not, they said. The suavely bilingual Godbout, counsel for the defence (or was it prosecution, some weren't sure) put our minds at rest. But there were still a few who thought the smiling Godbout was blowing the whistle for the cineastes' jacquerie to start.

In a way we were sorry that the French producers felt the need to break away. We regretted the absence of Dialogue. So did the French, of course, but we regretted it more. Henceforward there would be more Dialogue. We wanted it, the French agreed to it — they would dialogue with us any time, any place. Je dialogue, tu dialogues, il dialogue etc. Just say the word. And then they filed out, and when they had gone we formed the Society of film-makers.

And, in the last two years, there has been a dialogue. The APC and the SFM have played complementary roles in voicing the opinions and demands of the majority of this country's film-

makers. The fears of the pessimists have not mterialized. We have worked together on projects which have helped to change and improve the climate of film-making in Canada. An interesting speculation : had Quebec not had its "quiet revolution", had there been no Montreal Film Festival, had there been no pressure from the Quebec cineastes, would Canadian cinema be the thrusting and burgeoning thing it is today ? We'll never know. But what we do know is that the initiative for the present state of film-making in this country came from Quebec.

FEATURE FILMS. Like an adolescent boy that suddenly starts growing overnight, our feature film industry (which isn't an industry) is a sprouting, disproportionate, ungainly creature. It's rebelious yet affectionate, and generally avoided by the public. You can never tell, with uncouth teenagers — they may beat you or bore you. So the features are popping up all over the place, with, perhaps significantly, the emphasis on the miseries and frustrations of adolescence. The teenage syndrome has exercised film-makers from Vancouver to Montreal. There have been at least six teenage dramas in the last three years, and some have enjoyed a succès d'estime ou de scandale. None have had, in this country, a succès de box office. "Nobody Waved Goodbye" was damned by faint praise here. It took New York to reassure Canada that "Nobody Weved Goodbye" was okay. Of course, we knew all along it was okay, we were just testing the Americans to see if *they* knew it was good, too.

Maybe we make a mistake in proudly labelling our film "Made in Canada". To the Canadian public this is the kiss of death. And who can blame the public ? Too often we say to it, "support your friendly neighbourhood film-maker, he's a member of your community too . . . Take a Canadian feature home for dinner national brotherhood week". It won't work. Perhaps film-makers are fated to be prophets without honour in their own countries. The Indians don't think much of Satayajit Ray, and the Swedes definitely do not go gaga over Bergman, the Danes probably find Dreyer's pictures a bore, and the Americans can't understand the French intellectual passion for Hollywood "B" pictures. Carle, Owen, Kent, Dansereau, Godbout, Patry . . . who are those guys ? What hockey team do they play for ? Question : Would a third-rate but well-meaning film like One Potato, Two Potato have had the success it did in Canada if it had been made here ?

There are, of course, feature films made in Canada which enjoy immediate and international success. These are the films which are not made by Canadians. Every now and again we are treated to the spectacle of big-time international film-making here. Like Ginger Coffey and the Rita Tushingham epic. They whip in, shoot their story against the rugged grandeur of the Canadian wilderness, and are out again before you can say Joseph E. Levine. And while we are assembling frame by frame our little masterpieces, there's Tush at your local theatre again, this time carrying on with a French Canadian trapper (imported from London, of course, where all French Canadian trappers live between movies.)

It shouldn't be frustrating, but it is. We get our films finished and packed off to the Festivals. They win prizes. Women journalists gush over them in our Canadian magazines. Our directors are solemnly interviewed, their every word committed to paper and magnetic tape. Conscientious critics tell us what is wrong with the films. Distinguished foreigners acknowledge in public the genius of our film-makers. But nobody actually goes to see the film. After its acclaim at the Montreal Film Festival and a short run (one week) at an art theatre, it sinks from view. One begins to wonder if the public and the distributors find many of our features just a teeny-weeny bit boring. Surely not?

CRITICS AND NEWSPAPERS: Canada is not well endowed with the film critics, though the situation has changed for the better in recent years. Your Canadian film critic can be divided into four categories. There are the journalistic hacks who have either been fired from the sports page or are waiting for promotion to the women's page. Film critic, on a Canadian paper, if it had one at all, also used to be a job given to cub reporters or unpaid freelancers who were grateful for the complimentary tickets. Then there are the women film reviewers, custodians of Canadian art and culture, who deal sternly with frivolity and ferret out superficiality whenever they smell it. They write mainly in the magazines or for radio, and are well versed in psychiatry and symbolism in art. A third group, to be found on the larger urban dailies, are the gimlet eyed professionals who know which side their bread is buttered on. They have developed the art criticism to the point where they can pan a film but at the same time not anger the theatre chain that is advertising the film. This critic will say, in

effect: "This film is not my cup of tea, but all ladies and young people are bound to enjoy it." There is also a group that loves films, know all about them, and can review a film with wit and intelligence. They are in the minority. They are the real critics, the others are reviewers. Count the critics on the fingers of one hand.

It's difficult to say how far a newspaper's policy affects a film review. Some years ago the film critic on a Winnipeg paper made impolite remarks about a movie, leading the theatre chain to suspend her free pass. The paper, rather than pay their critic's admission costs, simply gave up its film column. The Montreal Star has always been a generous supporter of film endeavour. During the Film Festival it has assigned some of its best reporters to cover the event, and devoted pages to reviewing the films. Readers have remarked on the difference between a review of a film at the FIFM and a run-of-the-mil review of a downtown release. Festival week is open season for films. The critics can say whatever they like, no one is going to complain. With what sardonic wit do they dissect the films. How righteously astringent are they when the Festival management makes a mistake. And it is right they do so. A pity they can't keep it up all the year round. How splendid it would be to have a brilliant film critic to read every week, as New Yorkers and Londoners do, for example.

Non-commercial film-makers like the NFB and the CBC have always been fair game for some critics.

Those arty longhairs at the NFB, wasting honest John Taxpayer's money making their incestuous little films, are always good for a blast. We saw an example of this in a recent attack on Norman McLaren in a Toronto paper. Not only was it typical of WASP philistinism, it was also cowardly because such an attack is always based on the premise that the victim will not defend himself, or even if he does there will be no economic reprisal against the publisher.

THE FIFM. Some English Canadians suspect the Festival International du Film de Montréal of bias in favour of Quebec films and film-making. How right they are in their suspicions. Their mistake is in thinking it is a wilful bias. How else could it be? The Festival is not only run by French Canadians, it's supported by French Canadians. Why are so few English people in the audience? Where are the cultivated elite of

Westmount ? Wherever they are, they're not at the Festival. Films do not "count" as art to the bourgeoisie, film events have not the same status as plays, opera and the symphony. . . . Schedule a performance of Beethoven's Fifth at the Place des Arts and Mr. and Mrs. Westmount will be out in force, dripping mink and black ties. But not for a premiere of the latest Fellini. Perhaps they would come if the Festival was held during "the season" instead of the unfashionable summer. . . my dear, one simply isn't in Montreal during August". So the Festival is patronised mainly by French Canadians, usually young, and they turn out to applaud their folk heroes. In fact the Festival now has its claque which is at its most vociferous and uncritical during the showing of Canadian films. Was the audience at "La Neige a Fondu etc." showing a critical acumen denied to the rest of us when they cheered the film at last year's Festival ? Or were they applauding it because it presented the voices and faces of beloved folk hereoes. Or were they cheering for "their" film, something to be proud of because it had been made "chez nous" ? Imagine the scene, on that closing night of the 1964 Festival, had the jury chosen "Nobody Weved Goodbye" as Best Film, instead of "Le Chat dans le sac". Interesting speculation : imagine a Festival audience comprising mainly English Montrealers. It would only need about 800 to 1000 couples to get their tickets in advance, and their presence would probably change the character of the Festival entirely. But it will never happen. It's not because we don't appreciate good movies, it's because we aren't passionate about them. "The English", said Tony Richardson, "simply don't have the cinema in their blood".

BILL DAVIES