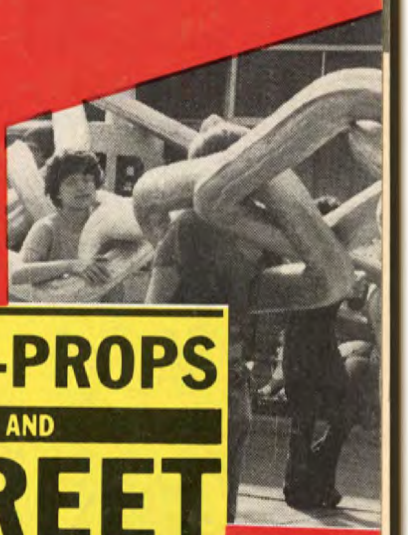
SEXUALITY AND
THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN FILM

FUSE

THE AUSTRALIAN REPORT PART 2

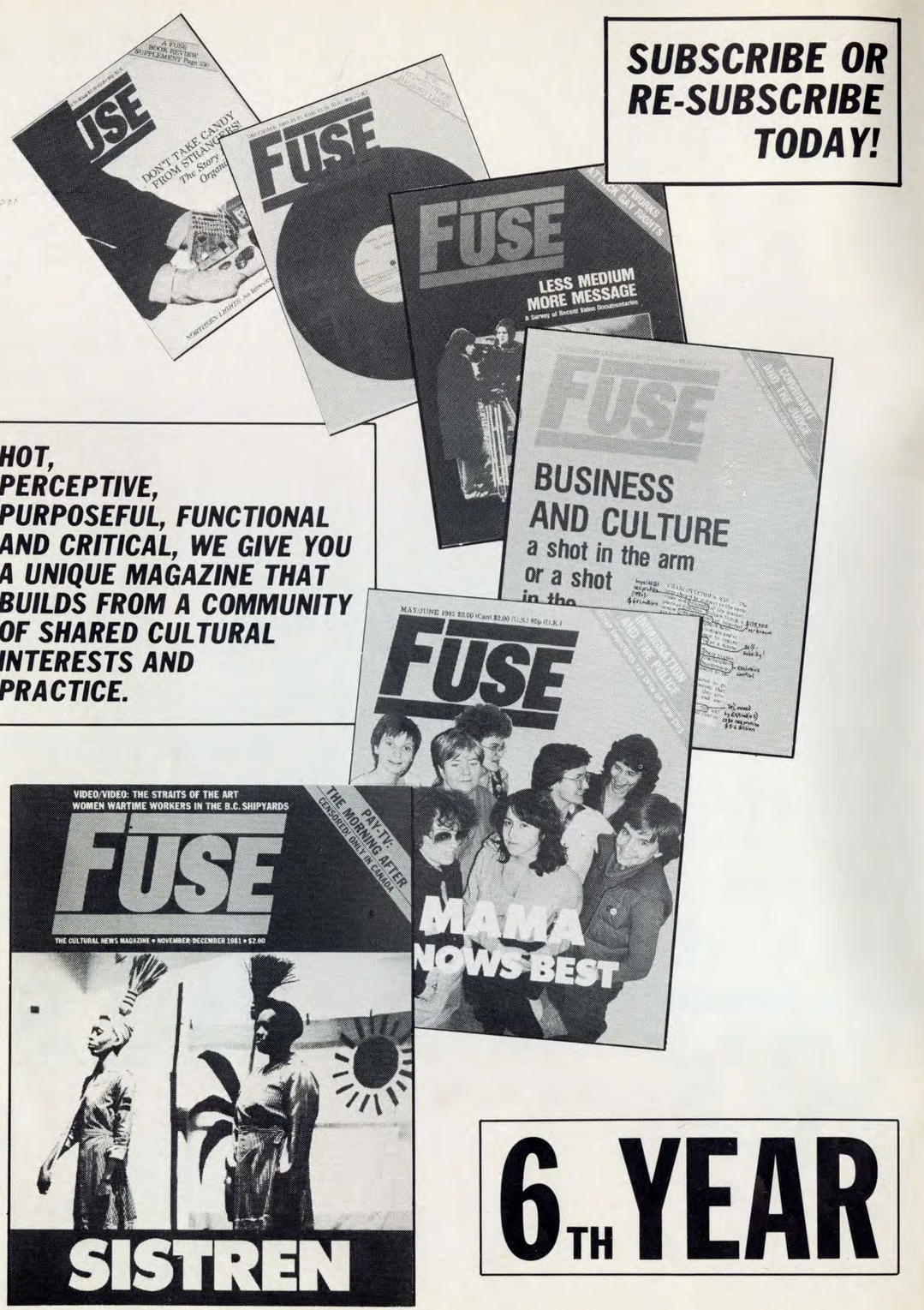
THE CULTURAL NEWS MAGAZINE • MAY/JUNE 1982 • $2.00



CANADIAN AGIT-PROP AND WORKERS' THEATRE IN THE 30's

AGIT-PROPS AND STREET THEATRE FOR THE 80's

DOUBLE ISSUE



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6TH YEAR

May/June 1982 Volume Six No.'s 1 and 2

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FUSE

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CFU Update

It is with great interest we read the article about the "Canadian Farmworkers Union — the effects of an automated agribusiness on workers' lives are often hidden" in your March issue by Karl Beveridge and Carol Conde. It accurately reflects the conditions of tobacco workers as we found them last year. However, the article is relating one small segment of our (CFU's) overall struggle. Not only are we working in Ontario, but for the past two years (April 6th was our birthday) we have been successfully organizing in British Columbia. One major difference is that farmworkers have been included in the B.C. Labour Code since 1975 — we have the right to unionize.

Most of our work is based in the Fraser Valley with some in the Okanagan. In the Fraser Valley the work force is predominately from the East Indian community and in the Okanagan, it is Quebecois. Many of these same Quebecois workers also harvest Ontario's crops.

We have won major victories. We have six certifications of which we have signed three contracts. The average starting wage is over $6.00 per hour (up $2.00 per hour). This summer we signed one voluntary agreement with a small berry farmer who employs 50 workers. Piece rates are $3.00 per flat with a guarantee of 9 flats per day at the end of the season when the crops are thinning out.

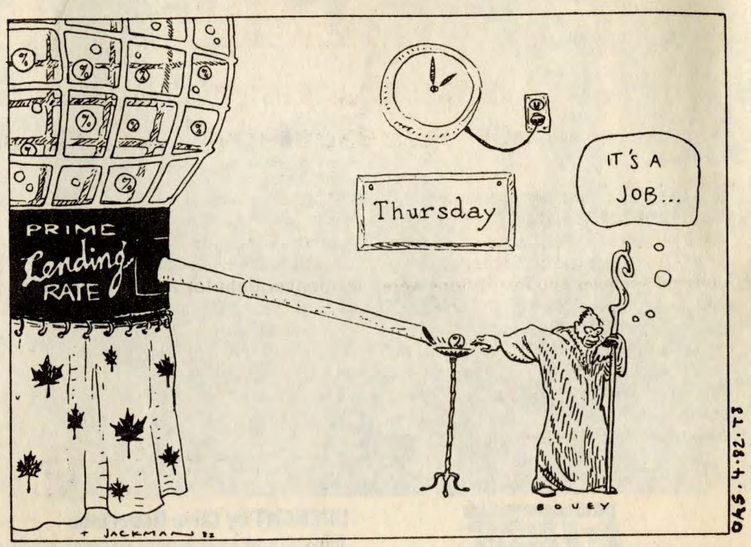
Farmworkers across the country suffer from various aspects of legislative discrimination. In 1981 under a revised Employment Standards Act, piece rates have been standardized to a minimum rate, labour contractors are licensed and bonded and wages are to be paid every two weeks.

In March 1982, we won the right to compulsory workers compensation coverage for all agricultural workers in B.C. — a major victory. Also in March, we gained access to the migrant workers' cabins on eight growers' property for the purposes of organizing. We are presently negotiating the terms of access.

Working conditions are slowly improving because of our collective strength. We now have a voice — our own union which was absent in the past. We continue to organize and continue to reach out to as many people as possible to let them know about our struggle. We have a long haul in both Ontario and B.C. A march for dignity and justice does not happen quickly.

FARMWORKERS STRUGGLE ZINDABAD!

Judy Cavanagh
National Representative



Persky's Poland?

"There are questions as well about the official-line, Party use and misuse of ordinary language and subsequent conceptual appropriation and manipulation that are touched on in this book but are sadly unelaborated."

If you understand this use of ordinary language, you got more than I from Robert Reid's review of Stan Persky's book, **At The Lenin Shipyard** (Feb/Mar, 1982). Where was the trenchant criticism of other FUSE reviews, such as the one on the Rosedale gentleman in China?

To sadly unelaborate, two more quotations from Reid:

"In the situation of a deteriorating national economy inextricably linked with the world-wide general contraction of productive growth and a shift in balance-of-trade mass deficits . . ."

"The consequent questions for investigation with much less curious demure in a more leisurely attended book are still contained within the premise and much of the material of this one."

Indeed. Demurely yours, Eric Mills, Winnipeg.

P.S. Readers who want a real taste of Persky's book can read the first chapter in **Canadian Dimension**'s March, 1982, issue.

(or, a less mediated source is: "Labour Focus on E.Europe Vol.4 No.4-6", Winter-Spring 1981. Available from, LFEE, Box 23136, Kingland High St., London E.8. U.K. - ed.)

Sheppreciation

I enjoyed the Archie Shepp piece very much(Norman Richmond, FUSE March 1982) and was flattered by your write up on *Collusion*. Our third issue is due out in May.

Steve Beresford, *Collusion*,
London, U.K.

Warmth

Just wanted you to know how much I enjoy each issue of FUSE. It is an invaluable aid to me in my work, and fills a gap that no other publication in the northern hemisphere does.

Congratulations,
Lincoln Cushing, Oakland, Calif.

CORRECTIONS:

We incorrectly stated in FUSE (March 1982) that Ian Murray co-founded (with Brian McNevin) the Centre for Art Tapes, Halifax. Although Murray with others assisted in the formation of the Centre for Art Tapes, Mr. McNevin was the founder and continuous Director for over three years.

Is the changing political era reflected in our 'representative' cultural Associations'?

Before the Applebaum-Hébert Commission hearings (see FUSE, August 1981) real and necessary changes such as the democratisation of cultural agencies and institutions were demanded by feminists, native groups, and the-then Cultural Workers' Alliance. Remarkably, the United Steelworkers' presented a brief (now endorsed by the CLC) in a rare display of cultural initiative by Canadian organised labour. For the most part however the cultural Left and its concerns were regrettably unrepresented. Possibly the absentees' recognized a probable 'shuffle' when they saw one and so abstained from the debate. It is quite possible too that in looking for the changes in our standing 'representative cultural organisations' it's quickly understood that we might not only be looking for a needle in a haystack, but absurdly, for the haystack itself.

For at least the last decade we have grown accustomed to the presence of the anglo-Canadian cultural umbrella organisations known as Associations. That they are not formed around social groupings but instead around occupational trades, fields or disciplines is indicative of their limited purpose. Such associations cover publishing, music, dance, television, journalism, film, theatre, visual arts, galleries and more. In strict union models this method of organising through work has proved effective even though now, within the union movement itself, women are being recognised as a special organising group within the workforce. If unions can adapt to include women as a political group and deal with women's issues both at the workplace and outside, then could not associations reflect the changing social composition and form around nascent ideological needs?

Peace-keeping

Associations as we know them are bodies which malfunction by reinforcing the apolitical relationship between artists and government funding agencies, between media producers and mass media, and between indigenous cultural small-business and foreign (or domestic) corporate ownership of distribution. Run by aspiring professional managers that favour wide smiles and smoothly-elected slates, associations no longer fight for their memberships as they have instead perfected the art of shadow boxing. For many, picking up the scraps that the big boys drop has been elevated to an endless and valid achievement in, and of, itself.

This portrayal may seem to some

...Pluralistic Confusion?

unnecessarily harsh for without the development of these associations, as cultural producers, wouldn't we just be between a rock and a hard place? In reality that's exactly in economic terms where we are. When we legitimately speak of an 'oppositional culture' (and many for short-term convenience use the term) we are not addressing merely a temporary objection to this or that institution, piece of TV or journalism or film. We mean to call a spade a tool. We expect that those organisations that supposedly represent us can, on short notice, articulate the issues, historicise them and explain in precise terms why demands are being made. This however is rarely the eventual case.

The end product is familiar: more statistics, more studies, more 'regulating' bodies, more attention given to federal bodies without first gaining ground on first the civic and then the provincial level. (Why is it always done backwards?) And then — no quotas, no confrontations and finally no action.

Truly the peace-keeping force to which Canadian hotels from coast-to-coast bear witness on these prolonged post-war years of shuttle diplomacy, in all disciplines, in all fields.

Ironically this legacy of cultural humiliation (used domestically and exported perversely as 'national pride') is one compartment in the liberal deep freeze most likely to evoke the politicisation that is so abhorent to the liberal mind — as many Quebecois artists and filmmakers have so amply demonstrated.

"The Canadian way of doing things" surfaced again in the explanation by politicians and the media of the long struggle to patriate the Constitution. This 'prolonged paralysis' instead of being identified with the recent liberal era (to which it truly belongs) instead is drawn into some historical vanishing point. The function of this characterisation is to effectively disconnect us from the militant and active periods of our cultural history, particularly where others unashamedly culturally articulated the events of class struggle and self-determination.

Post-liberalism

This present era of liberalism (which is rapidly disintegrating before our eyes and wallets) has been based upon the fortunes of a 'strong economy' that has provided in Canada a predominant temporarily stable middle-class, grateful for their access to leisure, real estate and sanguine occupational therapies. As we know, when the political struggles of the Thirties collapsed, due in part to the political abberations of Stalinism and later the Right's own campaign through McCarthyism, the Left, especially in North America, was scattered and pushed underground. In further developments, with the 'disposal' of both Right and Left ideologies we reached a liberal reign of non-politics. It is only following the Viet Nam war and now in the current economic crisis that we see politics re-emerging as a necessity.

So, can we see or should we expect those representative umbrella bodies to reform themselves to face what is essentially a new era? If we look back at the art that was produced in the last thirty years we can say that with few exceptions, anglo-Canadian artists,

true to their function did indeed articulate what was the liberal spirit of those times. To what degree now will there be a change, based upon what understanding, and with what experience?

For 'representative cultural organisations' that are not simply trade associations — how will they adapt to what is becoming in essence a series of ideological crises, one set being the re-emergence of politics, the other being an essential diversely active politics that truly reflects the needs of many self-determined social groupings? Will there exist in Canada new cultural organisations representing those whose position is somewhat redundant? Or will those same people instead maintain control of the associations they now hold? And will those in pluralistic confusion stay and keep them warm?

Clive Robertson

WOMEN'S CULTURAL BUILDING
Putting the practice before the architecture

Last fall a group of women artists and cultural producers began meeting to discuss the need for a women's cultural building in Toronto. Although these meetings began as a response to the rumoured bankruptcy of the Pauline McGibbon Cultural Centre — the only self-declared women's art space in town — they quickly progressed from possible take-over plans to more fundamental discussions. One of the first actions taken by this groups was to draft a statement of intent which declared that the group would function as a collective and that "(t)he collective will initiate, encourage and support cultural work and programmes which address feminist and community issues." This statement makes it clear that the "building" under discussion by this group is as much a verb and a current activity as it is a future address. And that the business at hand is to create a focus and an environment within which the cultural work of women can be produced and become visible rather than to simply play the numbers game and plug women's work into the system which already exists, aiming for a fifty/fifty split.

Writing in 1975, in the catalogue for the 9th Biennale de Paris, artist and critic Lucy Lippard sums up the problem for women cultural producers quite clearly. In her essay, she pointed out that the Biennale that year contained twenty-five female participants out of one hundred and forty-six artists in total, and went on to say: "No figures are available on the international artists' population, so it is anybody's guess whether only 20

percent of the artists in the world are women. However, I suspect that this figure marks a barrier rather than a fact, a barrier which will have to be a target of the next wave of the women artists' movement — should there be such a wave . . . The great danger of the current situation . . . is that this barrier will be accepted, that women artists will be content with a "piece of the pie" so long dominated by men, satisfied with the new found luxury of greater representation in museums and galleries (though not yet in teaching jobs, not yet in the history books) rather than continuing to explore alternatives. These alternatives will, hopefully, change more than mere percentages, more than the superficial aspect of the way art is seen, bought, sold, and used in our culture. The pie so eagerly sought after is, after all, neither big nor tasty enough to satisfy all appetites. The pie, in fact, can be seen to be poisonous . . . The worst thing that could happen at this time would be a false sense of victory. Some things have changed a little, most have not."

AGO ressurrects The Dinner Party

Although Lippard's comments were written some seven years ago from an American perspective, it's possible, here in Toronto in 1982, to simply say — ditto. Especially in view of the recent announcement from the Art Gallery of Ontario that it will host Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* after all. One hardly has to declare oneself a cynic to say that this decision does not represent a born-again commitment to feminism on the part of the AGO. In fact, content has little to do with this. It is less a curatorial decision than an economic one. *The Dinner Party*, which was undoubtedly seen last year as a bunch of ceramic cunts and table-cloths and hence of little "general interest", can suddenly become attractive to Gallery administrators — a potential mini-Tut — given the exhibition's current successful run at the Musee d'art Contemporaine in Montreal where 30,000 people saw it during the first two weeks and another 30,000 projected for the final two weeks. (These figures almost equal the Musee's average yearly attendance figure of 65,000.) You can almost hear the motorized turnstiles now.

But what of building women's culture, the idea that is being

addressed by this group? *The Dinner Party* of course should be seen by as large a public as possible. We all accept that role models are important at the present time. But the above example should make it clear that inclusion in 'major' shows in 'major' institutions really does little for women's culture as a whole although it may assist individual women in making a living and reaching a wider audience, both of which are necessary. Democratisation and de-centralisation of cultural production have never been within the mandate of the AGO or the MOMA, or the Kunst Museum (Berlin). "Excellence", however, is. Tim Porteus, newly-appointed head of the Canada Council has declared this to be the relevant yardstick for measuring art, and while his commitment to keeping the Council at arm's length — or at least breathing distance — from the overtly political manoeuvrings of government is to be admired, it should be remembered that art is not the 100-metre hurdles. "Excellence" implies a standard of measurement which is not available within cultural production. Where is the world record against which one can measure one's own performance? Where is the field of competitors in year-round training? Where is the starting line? Or, for that matter, who's the time-keeper? Without the aid of the Bulova digital read-out clock, "excellence" is in the eye of the curator, the critic, the gallery director in this race called art. Selection, by definition, involves exclusion. Many will not be allowed to run. At the best of times, this process will simply be a fragmented choice and at the worst, a clever exercise in trend-spotting.

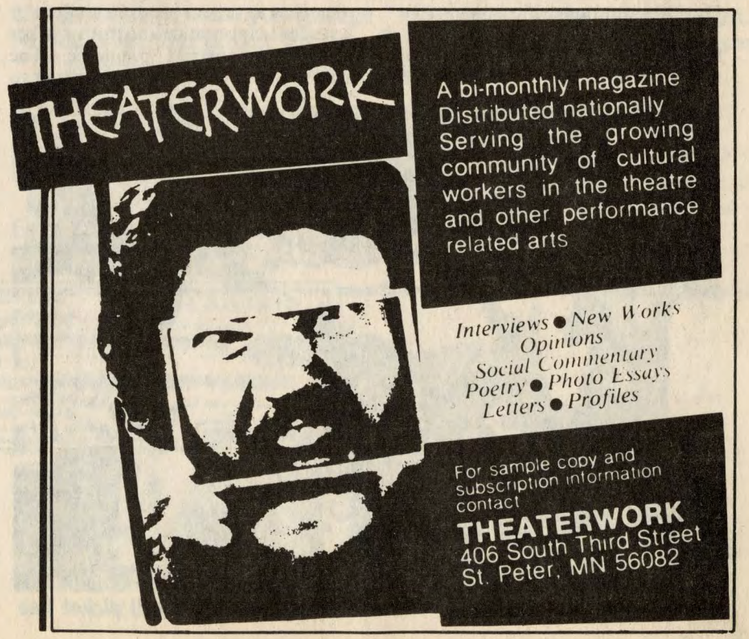
At a time when artists must scramble for the inflation-shriveled dollars available to them, cultural democracy may seem like an idealistic dream. But for women, it is the only method which will make possible accurate representation of their lives and their concerns. The Toronto women's cultural building (as yet homeless) would seem to recognise this. Not surprisingly, the rigor mortis-ridden McGibbon Centre has risen from its deathbed, a self-declared "business-women's club" ready and waiting to service the Creed's crowd. In a way, this makes things easier for the new group which has formed. There can be no question about who is working toward building women's culture and who's just warming up the quiche.

Lisa Steele

Editorial co-operative

Beginning with the next issue, FUSE will be compiled by a newly-formed editorial co-operative. The purpose of this shift - and in some cases shuffle - is to further focus and strengthen the editorial position which FUSE has come to represent in its development. Independent production and oppositional cultural needs will continue to be addressed from what is essentially a coalition structure.

The editorial co-operative initially consists of: Karl Beveridge, media artist/writer; Carole Conde, media artist/writer; Sara Diamond, (Vancouver), media artist, womens's labour historian; Jeffrey House, writer/lawyer; John Greyson, (New York), media artist/writer; Lynne Fernie, artist/contributing editor of Fireweed; Norman "Otis" Richmond, writer/Black media journalist; Robert Reid, artist/writer; Clive Robertson, media artist/writer; Lisa Steele, media artist/writer; Tony Whitfield (New York), artist/critic; Alexander Wilson,writer/former member of the Body Politic collective.



Fleck Strike II

Patricia Wilson

On March 30, 1982, at 6:00 p.m., members of Local 576, unit 2, of Ontario College of Art, went on strike. Unit 2 of this local is comprised of four groups: monitors, models, building and bar attendants, and class assistants. These are all part-time employees. It is not a simple matter to organize, legitimize, and have recognized, bargaining units for part-time workers. To begin with, the labour laws available in Ontario to protect and nurture part-time workers are at best narrow in scope and weak in intention. And secondly, historically, the pervasive prejudices against these four groups in Local 576, Unit 2 were to be (and still are) major stumbling blocks to the formation of an effective dialogue with management.

On January 10, 1982, Dr. Paul Fleck, president and major negotiator for management, stated he would like to maintain O.C.A.'s ". . . tradition of paying slightly above the minimum wage, as it was never intended that people make a living at these jobs." In this case, Dr. Fleck was referring to models and monitors. March 25, 1982, Dr. Fleck announced in a memo that ". . . a seniority system, in any form, is foreign to the principle which underlies the selection of models and monitors." These two quotes indicate the monolithic character of the mentality that came with management to the negotiating table.

Finally management and the union bogged down in negotiations over the issue of a "grievance procedure" with "binding arbitration." Dr. Fleck did not want Unit 2 to have access to grievance procedures of any meaningful nature. He was further appalled at the thought of "binding arbitration" for any of these job categories as he advised "unfair judgements" could be worked out as they always had been with the immediate Supervisor or himself. The ideas, of course, seemed ludicrous to a membership, who knowing Fleck for almost 6 years, had seen ample evidence of his indifference to the real needs of the students, the faculty, the workers and finally the original aims of the school charter.

Student as worker

Management further expressed fear of "iron-clad job seniority" for those who work 4 to 20 hours a week as monitors. Here was drawn a new battlefield . . . the student as worker. The deep rooted idea that a student is only a student or a student/apprentice and not a worker is a pre-industrial prejudice. The student as monitor for four hours or so a week is a monitor/student. But a student who works as a monitor for twenty hours or more a week becomes a worker. And it was, and is, the Union's contention that as a worker the student deserves the protection, rights and pay scale due to a worker of his/her skills.

The evolution of the student and the working class continues in spite of the saurian mind of management a-tumble in its private desert of prejudices. The management of O.C.A. disguises its predilection in the fine garb of tradition, but exploitation by any other name is still exploitation.

At no time during negotiations did management deviate from its definition of student, student/monitor. And thus many hours of debate floundered before the altar of traditional Baal.

Sides of beef

The seniority system for models, proposed by the Union, was denounced by management. Tom LaPierre of the Fine Arts Department contended that any seniority clause or job protection offered to models would be destructive of his artistic freedom. In brief, he could not choose a new and delectable model every week, or every day. It was, and is, the contention of the Union that artistic freedom should not be confused with artistic licence. And that artistic freedom does not exist in an arena where men and women are treated like sides of beef with no claim on those human qualities and human needs common to us all. And that further, professional models deserve seniority rights, benefits and job protection.

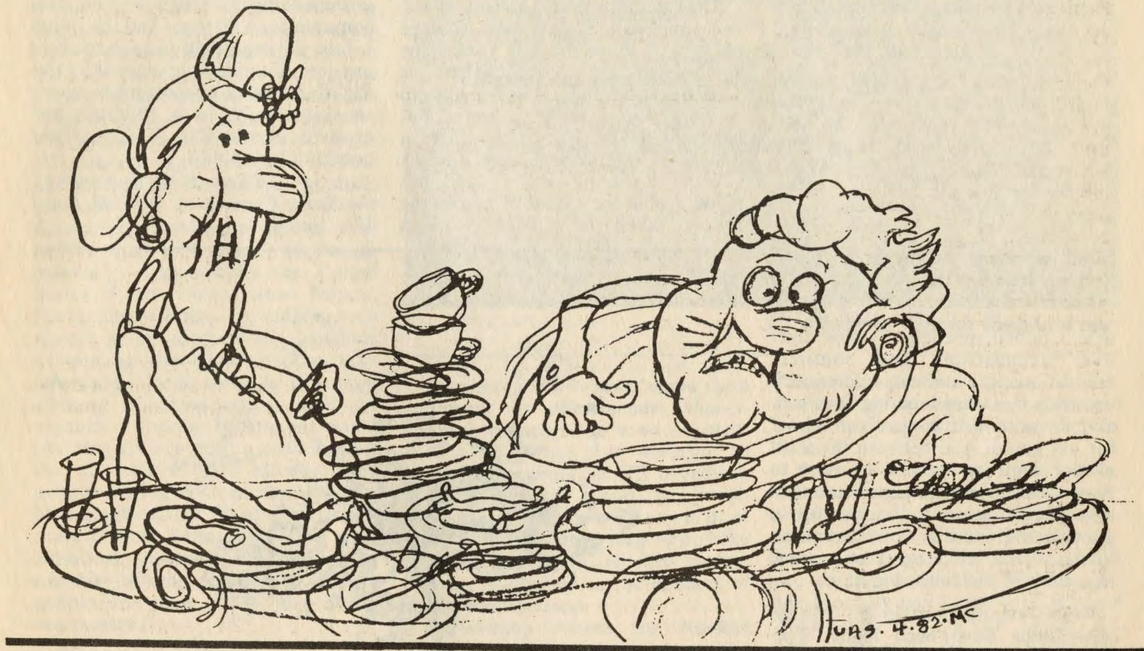
An open forum was held on campus on April 1. Students and faculty met first with Dr. Paul Fleck; then with Union representatives. The philosophical and practical problems of giving these people a "grievance clause" and access to "seniority rights" was debated. The ripple effect, of all this stirring up of minds with doses of truth, was seen over the next few days.

The April 2 Faculty Association moved ". . . that for the duration of the strike, no part-time or replacement people will be hired by faculty to fill-in

OPSEU

'Artists' Day' on the OPSEU picket line

A NEW WAY TO SUPPORT THE ARTS IN CANADA: A LITTLE SELF-DECEPTION



American Express has been blowing $10,000 on full page ads telling us to 'splurge on an intimate dinner for two' and they'll donate one cent to the arts.

One cent, wow!

American express doesn't talk about the other 99 cents you're donating, the 99 cent service charge they get when you splurge 50 bucks on that dinner for two.

It's a great scheme: if you want to donate one dollar to the arts you would have to munch through 100 dinners, that's what the folks in the cartoon did . . . FAT CITY.

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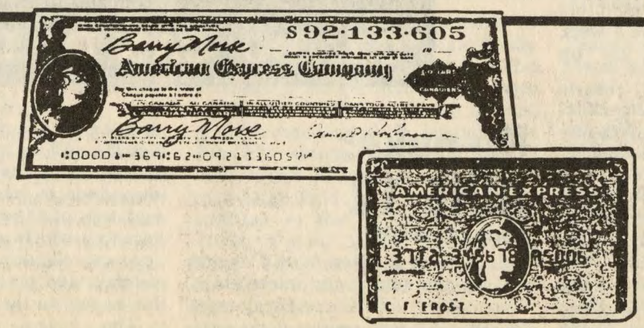
So save on the calorie count.

Deal with the arts direct, go see a local play, buy a Canadian novel, subscribe to an arts magazine, visit a gallery etc.

And next time you go out for a night on the town take a look at the card below and be sure to leave home without it.



or replace the duties normally performed by any of the people presently out on strike." On April 5, 150 angry students rose up in the Governing Council expressing disgust with Dr. Fleck and his tactics. It was moved, seconded and passed that Dr. Fleck dismiss his hired security guards, Securicor. Articles from *The Globe* and from *The Toronto Star* exposed Securicor as a potentially dangerous goon squad presently under investigation (by the OPP) for illegal activities in labour-management disputes. One such activity included spying on a Steelworkers strike, joining the union and thereby provoking violence on the Union line.

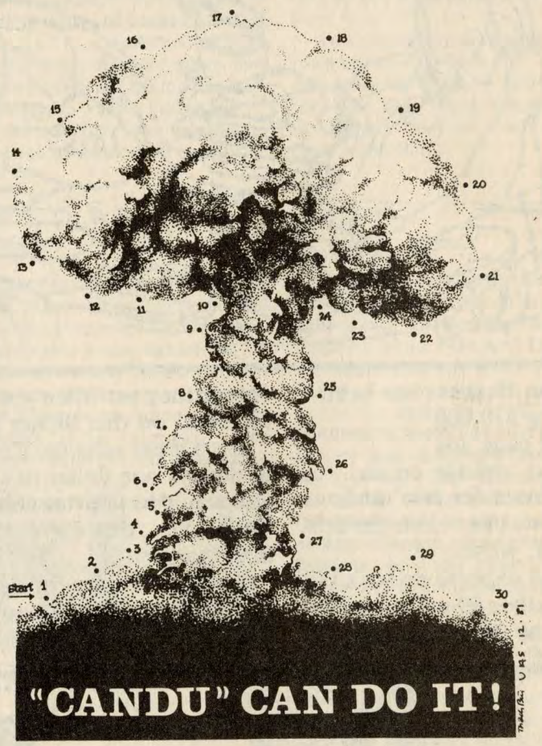
It was also moved, but defeated that the presidency come under review. It was moved and seconded that management be investigated. This motion was tabled until April 21, the next Council meeting. By this time, over accusations and counter-accusations, the students and council members had been debating Dr. Fleck and his administration of the school for 4½ hours. And between the third motion and the decision to move to closed session, the students demanded that Fleck return to bargaining in good faith. He said he would extend an invitation to the Union to resume negotiations the following day.

Negotiations continue. Many concessions have been made. The management designed a "grievance Clause," but the definition of job seniority for the models and building attendants seriously limits the number of models and attendants who will actually have access to this clause. The issue of student monitors has been driven into the descriptive cave of "return to tradition." Extended or exaggerated exploitation of the student as a cheap source of skilled labour will be lessened by guidelines without our first agreement, but the job protection necessary for monitors working more than 20 hours a week has not been agreed to by management.

April 21st and the preceding statements have changed little. Negotiations April 19th indicated management was still enamoured with stalling. The Union was confused and the executive decided to enter the final stages of escalation toward the destruction of Open House. The decision was not made public, but within 12 hours of the decision there was an about face and suddenly on the negotiating table appeared all the cards, one by one, and both sides played out the final stages of bargaining. The final settlement on wages was below expectations for all four categories, but the Union membership, after brief squabbling, agreed to the wages and thus the entire package was ratified.

The total result was a victory for the part-time workers at Ontario College of Art. The contract between the employer and the employee exists. It is a contract with flaws that will have to be worked on over the next year. But basically, Local 576, composed of a bunch of freelance artists and models, existing in the milieu of O.C.A., has made visible the invisible, and in the process taken the students, workers and faculty on a searching trip, concerned ultimately, not with final solutions, but with the continuous evolution of the strengthening of human rights. And, of equal importance, by this process the Union (and its members) has made a powerful powerful move into the larger context of the established artistic and political community. A victory. And the Union will be paying attention so as to avoid any loss of momentum gained by this slightly miraculous moment won, not so surprisingly, by a stubborn and creative membership, and a strong community support.

Patricia S. Wilson is Chairwoman of the Strike Committee, OPSEU, Local 576, Unit 2.



No-nuke: JUNE 12

Murray Rosenblith

This summer the New York City area will be the setting for international disarmament activities on a scale equal to last fall's tremendous demonstrations in cities across Europe. The meeting of the Second UN Special Session on Disarmament (SSD II) for five weeks beginning June 7 will bring thousands of international delegates and tens of thousands of demonstrators to a whirlwind series of protests, forums, religious services and artistic displays and performances all calling for an end to the arms race.

The largest single event will undoubtedly be the June 12 march and rally for nuclear disarmament and human needs. Though it is still early in the organizing to project the size of the turnout, Leslie Cagan of the June 12th Rally Committee staff noted that groups were coming from every part of the United States, Canada, and many foreign countries. For those who might not be able to make the trip from the far west, a corresponding rally is planned for San Francisco on the 12th. The other events taking place during the UN meeting include an ad-hoc coalition of activist groups who will sponsor a series of sit-ins at the UN missions of the five major nuclear nations on June 14. The group, calling itself the *June 14 Civil Disobedience Campaign*, is inviting people to come to New York to "blockade the bomb-makers" — specifically the United States, Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, and China — by staging non-violent sit-ins at their UN Missions demanding that these nations take affirmative steps towards unilateral nuclear disarmament. June 14 organizer Sharon Kleinbaum noted that they are expecting a good turnout for the action: "We already have people writing in from the Midwest, New England, the Southeast (United States), and from Vancouver and Montreal, saying they would like to organize affinity groups. We expect people to come from just about everywhere."

Cultural role

By far the most diverse response to disarmament organizing in New York has come from the cultural community. Since last fall, groups within the artistic disciplines have been spontaneously organizing events for disarmament. The rally organizers have set up a Cultural Taskforce to co-ordinate events, but, as one organizer pointed out, they are having trouble keeping up with the plans that dancers, visual artists, poets and writers are making on their own. "I suppose it's something like when the Angry Arts Against the War in Vietnam got started," Kathy Engel, a writer working on the Cultural Task Force, said. "Groups have just taken off. One dancer came to talk to me and the next week, there were two hundred dancers organized. It's the same with the video and film people; and now there's this whole group of *Performing Artists for Nuclear Disarmament*. They're all just moving forward. There's a tremendous sense of urgency and focus."

Ronnn Robertson

$3 million of Federal Passive-Prop

Dancers in New York made up a statement on disarmament with a coupon for people to use to contact their group which they managed to insert in Playbills on Off Broadway theaters. They hope to crack Broadway itself soon. There will be at least one major poetry reading on May 26 and dozens of smaller performances leading up to the opening of the Special Session.

Performing Artists for Nuclear Disarmament will host a Community Meeting of Performing Arts Professionals on April 5 to launch their campaign. On April 15 yet another new group, the *Cultural Media Task Force*, is issuing a Call to Disarm. They intend to organize film, radio and video artists, producers, technicians and programmers for disarmament activities.

Morality and Legality

The **Cultural Task Force** intends to make the June 12 rally a multi-media event. In addition to the speakers and performers on the main stage, there will be series' of dance, poetry, murals, perhaps even videotape viewings. The June 12th march is planned to start at the UN and go across New York City to a large field in Central Park. In addition to the Bread and Puppet Theatre's giant figures, there will be bands, dancers and maybe even some moving sculptures and floats in the line of march.

In the days immediately preceeding the Special Session, New York's Theater for the New City will host a continuous spectrum of dramatic presentations with disarmament themes.

A series of events are aimed specifically at the international community which will gather for the UN meetings. Included in the most recent schedule (new events are added almost daily) are an International Symposium on the Morality and Legality of Nuclear Weapons on June 4-5; an International Peace Activists Conference from June 8-11; and an International Open Air Gathering on June 13, which, organizers say, will provide activists from outside the United States to meet in a festival setting somewhat less hectic than the June 12 rally.

All the organizers of this year's SSD II activities agree that attendance will dwarf the actions around the SSD I in 1978. The mass rally then drew 30,000 and over 400 were arrested at a "Sit-In for Survival." The tenor of the times and the sabre-rattling postures of the Reagan administration in the United States has given the movement a new urgency.

For more information on organizing activities for the SSD II events, contact:

June 12 Rally Committee
853 Broadway, Suite 2109
New York, NY 10003
(212) 460-8980

June 14 Civil Disobedience Campaign
339 Lafayette St.
New York, NY 10012
(212) 777-4737

Censor Board challenged

The Ontario Film and Video Appreciation Society (another organisation, related to FAVAC, formed to fight film and video censorship in Ontario, see FUSE May, August, November 1981) recently challenged the Ontario Censor Board to allow four films *A Message from Our Sponsor, Rameau's Nephew, Not a Love Story* and *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* to be seen by adult general audiences, as opposed to temporary permits for selected groups.

The OFVAS which is not a group given special status by the Board (for special screenings) is making the challenge under guarantees within Canada's new Charter of Rights protecting freedom of expression. OFVAS announced on 19th April that they would go ahead with a constitutional test case if the Censor Board persisted in unconstitutional practices. As the Board on April 29th tried to get around OFVAS' new challenge by allowing **temporary** permits for only two films, OFVAS will now go ahead with action in the Supreme Court.

The main issue is 'prior restraint'.

Ric Amis

OFVAS press conference at Trinity Sq. Video

The first free speech fight centuries ago was against a scheme to control the press by licensing the right to publish. It was determined then that prior restraints where impermissible in a free society. Only film and video of all media, are subject to prior restraint today.

'Constitutionality' is becoming for Canadians a new watchword: watch for provincial amendments that negate and neutralise new Rights. It not only can happen here, it's more a matter of when. The word is: don't let it happen!

Sitting pretty

Timothy Porteus, long-term friend of long-time Prime Minister Trudeau recently was moved from Assistant Director and appointed Director of The Canada Council. Mr. Porteus is best known for his insistence that Canada's prime arts funding agency keeps its distance and independence from Canada's prime legislative body. We found the following anonymous verses by looking for them:

Queen Street Magazine

We 'cheered' when Porteus reached the top
(Better him than local boy greedy)
But we booed when we read his words in the *Star*
Says he won't have no truck with the needy

"Art is Art", he outspokenly said
(As he stood behind glass walls so flimsy)
"It's not nationalism, it's not politics"
(It's for professionals who search for a whimsy?)

"You say what you like," the ugly mob cried
(You could hear 'em from St. John's to the 'Rim)
"But we are the ones that know what we do
And you haven't caught-up Mr. Tim"

"Oh do what you like!"
(Tim said to himself)
"Just give me the methods of measure
As long as it's **excellent**
I'll let you in
To do whatever's your pleasure"

"We'll keep you to that
(you've a bright legal mind)
but let's see it down on white paper,
Don't give us this, "You know what's right for the world" . . .
You're a servicing man, not a shaper."

"Well that's not very nice", Tim remorsefully sighed
"But it could be much worse I reckon,
Without them I'd be over on Parliament Hill,
Sharing the ill-fate of MacEachen"

Having struck lucky once we kept looking under the layout table hoping to find similar verse that would tell us something about Geoffrey James' replacement, who will become the Canada Council's new Head of Fine Arts. We drew a blank, though the rumoured job description demands that the suitable applicant must be good at: blowing up balloons, looking vacantly around the room when spoken to, and preferably be someone relaxed enough to play the Fiddle while the office waste-paper bin burns. Should be a tight race.

DON ADAMS and ARLENE GOLDBARD

SOUTH OF THE BORDER
Cultural politics in the U.S. - the rich get richer, the rest get squeezed.

NAPNOC (the Neighbourhood Arts Programs National Organizing Committee) is a national membership organization made up of theatre groups, mural projects, dance companies, small press distributors, community media projects — in short, many types of progressive, community-based cultural groups.

NAPNOC does three kinds of work. First, we publish *Cultural Democracy*, a newsletter which covers issues relating to neighbourhood arts work and public cultural policy. Second, we write and speak — both for an arts audience and a more general progressive audience — on the movement for cultural democracy in the U.S., on community cultural work, and on public cultural policy. Third, we help neighbourhood arts workers to communicate and share resources, and we offer advice when they need it.

NAPNOC has a tiny budget, and we two make up its entire staff. We've had some grant support from private foundations, and the rest of our income comes from members and subscribers (about 200 at this writing) and from money we earn speaking, writing and consulting.

Cultural policy is a main focus of NAPNOC's work. The task of covering public policy in this field is complicated by the fact that a tenet of the U.S. arts orthodoxy is that our country has no cultural policy — just a bunch of private and public actors duking it out in "creative chaos," as the Librarian of Congress recently characterized it.

The truth, of course, is that we do have a cultural policy. But instead of a coherent set of articulated principles, U.S. policy is an aggregate of sacred cows and ad hoc decisions that just happen to add up to a public stance that can be expressed quite simply: Support the large, established arts institutions with all the money that can be mustered; if seriously pressed, throw the others a bone; and let business interests take precedence wherever possible.

The federal agencies

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) are two federal bureaucracies whose role has mostly been to support arts and humanities institutions along with a few individuals. This year the combined budgets of the two agencies equals about $275 million; the lion's share of each budget goes to conservative, establishment institutions in the big cities. When minority, or radical, or experimental, or community-based projects have gotten Endowment support, it's generally because they've managed to deflect the taste — and status — bias of the agencies long enough to slip through the guidelines — or they've lobbied long and hard for a spot in the small (and rapidly shrinking) grants programs the two agencies have maintained for fringe activities.

Despite their small budgets — and narrow purviews — NEA and NEH come first to mind when people talk about U.S. cultural policy, because they set the tone for the other actors in the field. The public arts and humanities agencies in the states and territories take their cues from the Endowments.

Aside from NEA and NEH, there's a whole array of federal agencies having to do with culture. The Federal Communications Commission has the power to regulate radio and television, but is using it now even less than during former administrations. The quasi-public Corporation for Public Broadcasting, has had its federal funds cut, so we'll see even less public support for programming from now on, and a new wrinkle — tasteful, low-key advertising accompanying the programs underwritten by corporations.

The Department of Education presides over drastically-reduced funds for arts programs in the schools; and Reagan has proposed downgrading it to a quasi-public "foundation." The Department of the Interior retains a few vestigial cultural programs — most son-et-lumiere and interpretive exhibits at historical sites. The Department of State handles foreign cultural exchange; the General Services Administration commissions some art for public buildings; and before public service employment was summarily eliminated by the Reagan administration, the Department of Labor's CETA program (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act), a job creation scheme, provided probably the largest single source of public arts subsidy this country has seen.

This list is by no means exhaustive: it doesn't mention the key role of the judicial branch, or the Registrar of Copyrights, or the Smithsonian and other national cultural institutions, or . . . But this apparent bustle of activity adds up to a government that has never taken its cultural responsibility very seriously, preferring to leave such things to arts patrons, cultural industries and the like.

The Reagan era

Reagan has already had a significant effect on public cultural policy and programs; but it would be a mistake to see the U.S.'s overall stance as an invention of the Reagan administration. Since the success of its New Deal cultural programs in the 1930s (and the Red scare in Congress that closed them down), U.S. government has had an automatic aversion to a public role in cultural development. The designers of the New Deal programs talked a lot about the common good and their broad public responsibility, but when the NEA and NEH were created in 1965 they were modeled after the goals and methods of private patronage: agency representatives declaim loud and long that their role is to support "quality" and "professional excellence," and say very little indeed about community service, artists' unemployment, minority cultures, and a long list of related subjects.

The Reagan administration has been taking cultural policy more seriously than its predecessors, however. Its role has been to make appointments, budget cuts and recommendations that together form a coherent, unified and reactionary policy — all the while masquerading behind the same pious statements about "quality" that have camou-

Linda Eber, Sparc

Great Wall of Los Angeles (1981 section)

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY™

Cultural Democracy (formerly *NAPNOC Notes*) provides analysis of government policy with regard to arts and cultural funding and direction, as well as offering a forum for exchange between groups of neighborhood and community artists. Frequently the newsletter contains articles which correlate research into the history of cultural policy in the U.S. particularly as this research relates to current polices and actions. As well it is an excellent resource for finding out about other publications and newsletters which deal with communtiy arts. The following excerpts are taken from recent issues of *Cultural Democracy*.

Freedom and Diversity:
U.S. history and the challenge of cultural democracy
(Issue #12, May 1981)

Israel Zangwill, an English Jew, coined the phrase **melting pot** and it was quickly taken up by the press and the politicos. In fact, President Theodore Roosevelt gave Zangwill permission to dedicate *The Melting Pot* (produced in 1908) to him.

Roosevelt, like many influential Americans during the turn-of-the-century wave of immigration, saw more problems than promise in the United States' growing diversity. His solution — to downplay differences in favor of a "truly American" identity, to look only to the future and forget the past — was for many years the official prescription. Like Zangwill's play, this prescription presumes that the United States is a kind of crucible — that it has a cultural character and identity apart from the people who make up its population.

This imaginary crucible was fashioned in the image of those who held power in the U.S.' early days. They found it useful to believe that the dominance of the Western Europeans who settled here in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries was a God-given right — even a duty.

Listen to Andrew Jackson speaking to Congress in December, 1830, on the subject of removing American Indians from the South:

"What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms, embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion?"

From New Deal to Raw Deal:
Learning from the WPA
(Issue #18, January 1982)

In essence, the New Deal cultural projects acted as producers of arts events instead of supporters. In some cases, this distinction was striking: for example, the FTP set up 10 Black theaters in cities where economic and social conditions had made it impossible for Black theater to exist outside the vaudeville stage. The Federal Writers Project (FWP) compiled regional histories and a collection of oral histories that preserve for us a past that the private sector has had no interest in preserving — neither in the '30s, nor in the present. The Federal Music Project (FMP) compiled an Index of American Composers — all 5,500 works it includes were performed by WPA groups.

In other words, the New Deal cultural projects took responsibility for our cultural commonwealth. The programs took on the task of recording and preserving our cultural history — including many parts previously deemed too painful or embarrassing to mention — and more than that, the task of promoting cultural life where private action had failed or where it had done positive harm. "Irony" is hardly adequate as a term to describe the feeling with which composers and playwrights of today, unable to find publishers or producers for their work in a marketplace bent on blockbuster box-office, would respond to the prospect of a national program of

flaged previous administrations' biases and inadequacies.

The administration's first step was to eliminate practically every program of federal support for non-establishment cultural work. CETA went first, early in 1981; quite a few neighbourhood arts programs lost half or more of their staffs with as little as two weeks' notice. CETA had been a big support source for groups that have difficulty overcoming the arts agencies' prejudices. For instance, arts agencies like institutions that train "professional artists," such as the schools attached to ballet companies. But projects that enable neighbourhood kids to create their own shows — without the promise that they'd go on to make it in the big time — have had a much harder job finding arts agency support.

CETA, on the other hand, had job creation as its goal. Neighbourhood arts work was labor-intensive, and being photogenic, generated good publicity for local CETA administrators. So in Baltimore, San Francisco, San Diego and other cities across the U.S., cultural groups received sizeable grants to employ artists as teachers, technicians, performers, community workers and office workers. When President Reagan took office, one of his first moves was to eliminate all the CETA programs that permitted this kind of public service employment, so the first impact his election had on the neighbourhood arts movement as a whole was to drastically reduce the paid workforce.

In the year that followed, Reagan took a number of other steps. He appointed Daniel Terra (an Illinois manufacturer, art collector and political donor who accompanied Reagan on the campaign trail) to fill a new role: Ambassador-at-large for cultural affairs. Terra's job seems to be to attend endless testimonial dinners and tell, over and over again, an anecdote about how Reagan's favorite campaign relaxation was to "hunker down and talk about the arts."

The Presidential Task Force

In May, Terra was appointed Co-chair for government of the newly-created Presidential Task Force on the Arts and Humanities, which was charged with spending the summer answering the President's questions on the Endowments' structure, on increasing private support for the arts, and on some related topics. Terra's two Co-chairs were, for the arts, Charlton Heston (remembered for his role as Moses in *The Ten Commandments*); and for the humanities, Hanna Holborn Gray, President of the publication and distribution.

Public officials today view this kind of government participation in cultural development as bureaucratic control on the marketplace, or unfair competition between the public and private sectors — and of course, these objections were also raised during the New Deal. The standard snappy comeback was to ask whether the establishment of public libraries had amounted to unfair competition with commercial publishing. But beyond snappy comebacks, it must be noted that the New Deal cultural programs were designed with the consultation of the artists' unions, commercial producers and others who were seen as arts community leaders. In many cases it amounted to the federal government taking the risk for private entrepreneurs who were no longer willing or able to gamble on new material.

Community Radio:
Making waves
(Issue #15, September 1981)

Most radio in the United States is one long commercial: programming is "formatted" for a particular "market," so that the airtime between commercial advertisements exists only to attract consumers of the desired age and income-levels. Standardization is the key — radio stations across the country can purchase the same 24-hour programming package, complete with advertising slots, and just plug themselves in, eliminating overhead and most station personnel.

This spring the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that "market forces" alone should be permitted to determine the kind of music and talk that commercial radio stations air. The Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) current rush to deregulate is helping this market monopoly along. Some predict dire consequences: if stations are sold to the highest bidder without consideration for community diversity, people across the country could find themselves with only one or two Top-40 and country-western pre-recorded formats on their radio dials.

But there are alternative futures.

In dozens of communities around the country, people have organized to reclaim a place on the air through community radio stations. There are over 50 such stations on the air now in 28 states, and more in the offing. They are united through a national membership organization called the National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB).

In many respects, NFCB and its members are radio stations with neighborhood arts consciousness. From NFCB's Statement of Purpose:

". . . We believe it is important that the full range of opinion in our communities finds expression through our stations; and that a wide variety of cultural, racial, political and social groups should have use of the broadcast spectrum. We believe that to insure the foregoing, broadcast outlets should be controlled, in substantial part, by representatives of the communities they serve . . . We have an active commitment to public affairs, exploring a broad range of issues — local, national and international — and presenting political and social alternatives for action . . . We present diverse cultural, musical, and dramatic offerings, produced locally and drawn from across the country and the world . . . We care strongly about the people in our communities and what we broadcast. That is why, at each of our stations and across the country, we work for the growth of vibrant, responsive and human broadcasting."

Community radio stations relate to the neighborhood arts movement in two important ways: They can provide broadcast outlets for the work of community-based cultural groups; and they are important community cultural institutions themselves, offering the airwaves to communities otherwise at the mercy of advertiser-controlled media.

Cultural Democracy is printed twelve times a year and is distributed free of charge to NAPNOC members. Subscriptions are available for $25 a year. For information on subscriptions or membership, contact:

NAPNOC
PO Box 11440, Baltimore, MD 21239 (301) 323-5006

University of Chicago. The Task Force's 36 members included many titans of industry — and even these leaned toward staunch right-wingers. Two of the members — Joseph Coors of brewery fame and the mysterious Richard Mellon Scaife — had previously teamed up to fund such far-right opinion-molding ventures as the Heritage Foundation; Scaife is generally considered to be the biggest single supporter of the "New Right" in the U.S.

The Heritage Foundation had already made its opinions on cultural policy clear when, back in January, 1981, it released a tome entitled *Mandate for Leadership* telling the government what the Right thought the Reagan administration ought to do. It was a foregone conclusion that Coors, Scaife, and most of the other Task Force members would second Heritage's view that the Endowments had become "politicized" and needed to be "redeployed" toward "quality."

The Task Force created a big splash in the establishment arts world when it was made known that it would consider restructuring the Endowments; pro-NEA and NEH testimonials poured in and the Task Force members quickly got the idea that everyone who mattered liked things exactly as they were. This knowledge was amply reflected in the Task Force's final recommendations that "the current structure of the Endowments be maintained; . . . coordination among . . . cultural agencies be strengthened; . . . adjustments in the tax code be made to stimulate private philanthropy . . ." and so on.

Tax breaks for the rich

The Task Force's recommendations on tax breaks for rich arts patrons were made in a most respectful tone ("Cognizant . . .," read the report, "of the possible adverse, unintended and unanticipated consequences, for cultural support, of the Economic Recovery Tax Act . . ."). What the Task Force didn't mention is that while Reagan cut non-military spending and gave a lot of inspirational speeches about how the private sector would increase its giving to make up for these cuts, his tax program made charitable contributions economically disadvantageous to such an extent that the estimated decline in private giving over the next three years amounts to nearly $20 billion.

As dear to the arts world ideologues as the notion that the U.S. can't have a cultural policy are the extravagant claims made for our tax system, which allows private donors to take tax deductions for their contributions to nonprofit organizations. This system is repeatedly described as unique, implying that the U.S. is the only country clever enough to think of tax-deductible contributions; but in fact the system costs the government an enormous amount of tax revenue and returns very little public benefit. For instance, right after the election the Reagans announced they didn't want to spend public money to redecorate the White House, so they returned a $50,000 fund for this purpose to the public coffers and asked "the private sector" to foot the bill. It's estimated that the taxes on the $823,000 that had been donated by last spring would have amounted to at least $350,000 (that's if the donors were in the 50% tax bracket; in fact, most of them would be in higher brackets). In other words, the Reagans' magnanimous gesture cost the government at least $300,000. So much for our unique system of tax-deductibility.

In other words, the recommendations of the Task Force were more interesting for what they omitted than what they contained. By omission, the Task Force perpetuated the idea that the private sector is the mainstay of cultural development in the U.S. — despite the fact that almost no private support has gone to neighbourhood arts groups and the like. And by omission, the Task Force perpetuated the idea that what's worth the government's attention in U.S. culture is white, Right, and rich.

New faces in high places

President Reagan's appointments to head the National Endowments have been another step in the administration's cultural strategy. Reagan appointed Frank S.M. Hodsoll, a Reagan insider and ex-State Department bureaucrat with no arts experience, to head the NEA. Hodsoll kicked off his tenure with much talk about the agency's "imprimatur" being more important than its funds, an idea with little appeal for arts groups.

> "By ommision, the Task Force perpetuated the idea that the private sector is the mainstay of cultural development in the U.S."

Hodsoll has been making hay out of his ignorance of arts work. He's currently holding fourteen seminars — at a cost to the taxpayer approaching $350,000 — designed to educate him about the various arts fields. Each seminar is for twenty invited guests — split pretty evenly between established figures in each field and private philanthropists — and each one is aimed to give Hodsoll information about "needs" (though what these successful, well-to-do participants "need" is a matter open to question).

He's also been holding back grants already approved by the agency's "peer review panels" — appointed panels, mostly comprising current and former grantees, charged with making recommendations on grant applications. NEA legislation actually gives the Chairman the right to approve or reject grants, so panel recommendations are, legally speaking, only advisory. But previous Chairs have claimed that the panel system is the backbone of the agency, providing at least the appearance of accountability where this government agency's decisions might otherwise appear too much a matter of the Chairman's personal taste. In almost every case in the past, the panels' decisions have been automatically approved. But this time, Hodsoll selected a considerable number of approved applications — most of these political or otherwise controversial in subject or style — and returned them to staff, asking for further justification. It appears that Hodsoll will eventually sign and approve these grants, but the delay has made his message quite clear and Endowment staff members are warning applicants to tone down controversial material in their applications.

William Bennett is President Reagan's choice for NEH Chair. Bennett is the former head of the National Humanities Center, a kind of think-tank based in Research Triangle, North Carolina. The battle for NEH head came down to a contest between Bennett, the favored candidate of "New Right" intellectuals, and Melvin Bradford, a professor at the University of Dallas (Texas) who was the favorite of old-style rightists. Bennett has a long string of "neoconservative" credentials, including the authorship of a book attacking affirmative action, and he, like Hodsoll, inaugurated his administration by holding back controversial grants that had been approved through the NEH's review process.

Both Bennett and Hodsoll have gone before Congress speaking on behalf of Reagan's budget recommendations for Fiscal Year 1983, which would reduce the Endowments' funding by nearly one-third. This has created quite a bit of consternation, since these cuts are unanimously opposed by artists and arts organizations; committees of both the House of Representatives and the Senate have recommended that the Endowments remain at current-year funding levels, despite Bennett's and Hodsoll's pleas. For as long as Reagan remains in office, though, we can expect these arts and humanities agencies to follow the right-wing policy line he favors. We hear rumors that "what are his politics?" is the first question asked about prospective grant panelists these days, and imagine that in the next three years political considerations will often take precedence over cultural ones.

> "We hear rumors that "what are his politics?" is the first question asked about prospective grant panelists these days."

A resurgence of activism

The response to Reagan's policies from the kinds of groups NAPNOC works with has led in two different, and possibly contradictory, directions. On the one hand, we've seen an encouraging upsurge in arts activism — both in arts work that addresses social and political concerns, and in meetings and other events that bring socially-conscious artists together. And on the other hand, there's been a growing interest in entrepreneurial activity of all types, with arts groups formerly supported by public funds looking for private income to sustain themselves.

We can't provide a comprehensive guide to political arts activity in this article, but we can point out a few trends. The last year or so has seen a significant increase in regional and national organizing. In theater, The Gathering was probably the most important national event, bringing some 500 progressive theater workers and people in related cultural work to the small town of Saint Peter, Minnesota, for a week of performances, workshops and discussions. The Gathering was a surprise on several scores: it was encouraging for ten and fifteen-year veterans of alternative theater to see so many young people, newcomers to the field. The lack of sectarianism was also encouraging — there were disagreements, to be sure, both aesthetic and political, but not the kind of petty, holier-than-thou stuff we remembered from ten years before. And it was thrilling to see how good people's work was, how many different approaches to theater could be consistent with a progressive analysis, how many different techniques could be brought to bear on, say, theater which took work as its subject, and how some of the most interesting work could come from places like South Dakota and Tennessee, giving the lie to the establishment arts notion that New York is the center of cultural creation.

Visual artists too have been organizing. The February 26th Movement held by PADD (Political Art Documentation and Distribution) in New York City this year is a good example. PADD is an alliance of progressive artists trying hard to accommodate in one organization differences that would mean war in the establishment arts world; for instance, muralists and performance artists working together towards the same ends. PADD has sponsored a number of art actions like "Death and Taxes," which focused on military spending and income tax last April. Allied organizations have sprung up around the U.S.; for instance, L.A.P.A.D. in Los Angeles, which sponsored "Thanks, But No Thanks," an action that focused on Thanksgiving imagery in highlighting destructive social policies.*

The February 26th Movement, a collection of panels, workshops, exhibits and so on, attempted to bring people from other parts of the U.S. together with PADD artists to look at the political art movement nationwide. At a follow-up meeting on February 28 a group of us decided to participate in a national effort; people from California, Washington, Ohio, New York and elsewhere agreed to engage in a kind of round-robin discussion. Between now and the end of May we will use our various forums — our meetings, publications and so on — to discuss the question of why there is no support for progressive political artwork in the U.S.; to describe past experiments in finding support, their successes and failures; and to propose ideas for the future.

NAPNOC will use a summer issue of *Cultural Democracy* to summarize the discussion thus far (people will send us copies of their papers or the documents generated in their meetings); we'll distribute it as widely as possible; and then another round of the debate will begin.

The problem of support

We chose to concentrate on financial support for this first national debate because the problem is so pressing now. In the U.S., we've been operating

for the last decade on the notion that some forms of cultural work must be a public responsibility. A mural project which employs artists and gives neighbourhood teenagers a chance to learn has to be supported by some public source — be it a job creation program, a recreation program for kids, some sort of neighbourhood beautification scheme, or an arts agency that funds public works of art. This kind of project just can't turn a buck — or at least, it hasn't been able to so far. There's been no private investor or entrepreneur who's suggested a way that cultural work which is essentially public service might become income-generating without public support.

The trend in our movement has been to look for non-government agencies with an interest in the cultural common good, or to shift to work that can generate income. The first quest — for trade unions, community organizations, religious groups, and so on which might support community cultural work — has been slow and not very productive so far. With hindsight, it's easy to see that this effort should have commenced when working people had a little more money to spend on things like art. As it is now, the same budget and tax shifts that have taken their toll on neighbourhood arts groups have also made life difficult for unions, churches and all sorts of associations of working people.

Neighbourhood arts groups aren't abandoning this effort, but they are wondering how to stay afloat in the meantime. While federal programs like CETA don't exist anymore, some groups are located in states with substantial public arts agencies, or have sympathetic local governments, or find themselves in one of the few pockets of liberal private philanthropy. Others have reverted, after years of salaried work, to volunteering their time for arts work and supporting themselves in other jobs — when the other jobs are available.

Kathy Arnold distributing "Freeway Giveaways" PADD

L.A.P.A.D. Billboard Nov. 1981-Jan. 1982

Barbara Margolies

The entrepreneurial possibilities are equally iffy. Some groups have saleable products — a theater piece that can earn income, one with a potentially large paying audience or one that is of educational value and can earn fees from sponsors. For instance, theater companies have received commissions from city agencies to create and perform theater: the Baltimore Theater Project did "The Rat Squad," which aided the city's rat eradication program; At The Foot of The Mountain in Minneapolis did "Junkie," a play about addiction and recovery that earned sponsor fees from drug and alcohol treatment programs; Dell'Arte theater in Blue Lake, California was commissioned to prepare a play about birth control; and there've been quite a few other experiments in applied theater.

Other groups hope their publishing and distribution ventures will be profitable or that cable television programmers will buy their tapes or that they will be able to sell posters or find commissions for murals. The question of how useful conventional marketing techniques can be to unconventional arts groups is still open.

Many neighbourhood arts groups can't raise prices — or engage in slick marketing campaigns — without losing the audience for whom their work is created. But even in the poorest neighbourhoods people spend money on cultural activities — they go to the movies or buy records or buy and watch TV or purchase magazines and so on — and by and large, that money doesn't go to progressive, community-based groups, but to the giant, centralized, consumer culture industries. This fact must be faced. It must be conceptualized as a problem, and it must be addressed if the movement's aims are to be anything more than a dream. ●

We would be happy to correspond with *FUSE* readers who are interested in particular aspects of U.S. cultural work or cultural policy, or who want to know more about NAPNOC. Please write to NAPNOC at P.O. Box 11440, Baltimore, MD 21239, USA; or call 301/323-5006.

LEILA HEATH

Boule Noire in Loto-Quebec campaign

THE INVISIBLE IMAGE:
Non-white portrayal in Canadian media

Media in Canada collects over 1 billion dollars in advertising revenue and this figure has tripled in the last two decades. Advertising accounts in private broadcasting, newspapers and periodicals are a whopping 93, 65, and 70 per cent respectively.

Testifying before the 1970, Special Senate Committee on Mass Media, Jerry Goodis, a Toronto advertising executive puts it this way, "The business side of mass media is devoted to building and selling the right audience . . . those who buy, and more importantly those who can choose what they will buy, those whose choice is not dictated by necessity."

Harsh, though it seems, Goodis' punchy comment is the type of marketing research principles which governs the Canadian advertising industry. Advertisers, especially those in the private sector are guided by the profit motive and they make no excuse about that. To them, media buying is a vehicle for conveying their advertising messages, for which they pay handsome amounts. That the talents and lifestyles of this country's visible and ethnic minorities are shelved in the process, hardly seems to ruffle the industry's conscience.

Those who have been the object of this exclusion are fighting back. Native peoples, Asians, Blacks and other non-white minorities are making known their resentment to industry representatives, government policy makers and the Canadian public. Their argument? They claim, advertisers systematically under-expose, intimidate, under-rate and insult them via television commercial messages, posters and billboard advertisements which fail to represent them.

Hardly idle speculations of paranoid activists, a series of commissioned studies undertaken by both the federal and provincial levels of government seems to have confirmed these claims. As early as 1971, the Elkin Report, conducted by York University sociologist Frederick Elkin, stated unequivocably that non-whites were not being represented by advertisers. Initiated by the Ontario Human Rights Commission and restricted to the private sector, the findings could easily have applied to government advertising. It too was guilty of excluding non-whites in its portrayal of life in Ontario.

Recently, another commissioned study undertaken by the federal government's Multicultural Directorate has tried to quantify the problem of non-white representation in Canadian media. After monitoring Canadian network primetime television in Metropolitan Toronto, where estimates of the total non-white population is between 11 and 20 percent, Asians scored an unimpressive .8 per cent while their Black counterparts received only 5.6 per cent (television exposure). In the latter case, it was noted that the Black performers being monitored were most often Americans.

Piggybacking U.S. advertisers

Anyone familiar with this country's media snarls and controversies knows only too well, how unsuccessful 'Canadian content regulations' have been. In spite of nationalist fervour, statistics show that 75 per cent of all viewing is foreign, usually from the U.S. It should be remembered, that due to civil rights struggles in the Sixties, our southern neighbours are now required by law, to present a fairer portrayal of that country's population mix on the tube.

Here is one case where 'American cultural imperialism' certainly benefits Canadian advertisers. For by 'piggybacking' American advertisers, the absence of Blacks and other non-white performers in Canadian T.V. has gone relatively unpublicized.

Mike Boone, entertainment critic of Montreal's anglophone daily, *The Gazette* chose to blow the lid. Writing in a recent column he stated: "... there is precious little on television to suggest to viewers that there exists a significant black minority in our society with lifestyles and problems that would make for interesting T.V. drama."

One obvious spin-off of such exclusion is low non-white employment in Canadian media. If non-whites register low visibility in dramatic roles, their chances for employment in news-reporting, public affairs programs and advertising are no better. Denied professional roles in stage and screen productions, non-white artists are often forced to go outside their respective fields to ensure an income. Furthermore, since membership eligibility into the industry's prestigious unions entails first acquiring professional contracts, within a slated period, the Catch 22 nightmare which results (for the average non-white performer) is surely not enviable.

The unacceptability of this situation has precipitated other reactions. These include, the formation of the Black Performers' Committee in centres like Toronto and Montreal as well as the outspoken interventions of influential personalities Alderman Ying Hope and Wilson Head, President of the National Black Coalition of Canada.

Both branches of the Black Performers' Committee (B.P.C.), are duly constituted bodies of the Association of Canadian T.V. and Radio Artists (ACTRA). B.P.C.'s raison d'être is to encourage the Canadian advertising industry to make commercials more representative of Canada's multicultural, multi-racial and multi-ethnic character. Composed of ACTRA's Black members, B.P.C.'s dancers, singers, actors, announcers and writers are lead by seasoned professionals like Dolores Etienne in Toronto and her Montreal counterpart, Anthony Sherwood. Armed with a battery of conventional lobbying tactics, both Committees under the direction of its respective chairperson are now waging a non-relenting battle against the advertising industry.

After only a short two year existence, the B.P.C.'s Toronto branch is now renegotiating the terms and conditions of the National Commercial Agreement. If achieved, this Agreement could make racial discrimination against non-white performers illegal. In March, 1981, Henry Gomez, actor and co-chairperson (also of the B.P.C. — Toronto branch) submitted a formal brief to the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee. Gomez' statement before the Committee was only partly encouraging. "Seldom represented on Canadian primetime television, Blacks and other non-white performers are excluded from commercials which continue to depict Canada as 'lily white'", he said.

The conclusiveness of non-white representation in commercial advertising is further revealed in the findings of 1978 government study, which stacks up another incriminating case against advertisers and casting agencies. Native people who number 1 million were totally absent, while Blacks were depicted only four times (two of which were Federal government ads). All other non-white representation fell into the following categories: U.S. made; charity appeal and tourism commercials.

Pointing fingers

To accusations of callous indifference, national and local advertisers prefer pointing fingers. In 1971, when the Ontario Human Rights Commission surveyed non-white employment in the mass media, advertisers invariably blamed the casting agencies whom they claim chooses the models. Not wishing to be saddled with such 'unbecoming publicity' the engagers say they only provided the kind of models the advertisers wanted.

Whatever reasons or excuses advertising clients offer for these practices only one seems valid. Canadian advertisers are scared. Most of them are convinced that using non-white performers to promote their products would be detrimental for sales. This despite proof to the contrary. By stereotyping non-whites as 'penny-pinching, low-income earners' the advertising rationale of steering away from this group is further reinforced and perpetuated.

The bias which feeds this rationale couldn't be further from the truth. Numerous studies have already attested to Black children's 'unblinking fascination' with television. On the other hand, common sense tells us that Chinese drink milk and that Blacks use soap and toothpaste. Non-whites are just as much a part of the consumer culture as anyone else!

In a letter addressed to advertisers, Anthony Sherwood, chairperson of the B.P.C.'s Montreal branch wrote: "It is time for Canadian television to catch up with the times." Sherwood refuses to mince words. He wants advertisers to stop passing the buck and start responding to the changes within the Canadian marketplace. Changes which suggest that continued media exclusion and stereotyping not only hurts a small group of professionals but the communities to which they belong.

Subsidies to 'prop-up' ethnic media hardly seems an equitable concession. Furthermore, as long as Canadians of colour are relegated to a 'media hinterland' racial harmony will remain an unaffordable commodity. Certainly, another media survey is not needed to prove that both the bicultural and multi-cultural models of Canadian society have failed miserably in providing avenues of mobility to members of its ethnic communities.

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an interview by LISA STEELE

PORNOGRAPHY AND EROTICISM
Feminist Varda Burstyn talks about sexuality and the representation of women in film.

This year's Canadian Images Film Festival (Peterborough, March 11-14, 1982) presented an extensive programmed entitled "A New Look: Women and Filmmaking 1982". In addition to over fifty film screenings of Canadian and international films by women, a series of three seminars and open discussions were presented. The seminars included: Feminism and Film Theory, a discussion of the relationship between the theory and practice of feminist filmmaking, Women in the Industry — Integrity and Control — a discussion of the roles and realities of women in the industry today, and Pornography, Eroticism and Censorship. The planning committee for "A New Look" included Joyce Mason, who was co-ordinator, Kay Armitage, Renee Baert, Patricia Gruben, Barbara Martineau, Allison Read, Varda Burstyn, as well as Canadian Images co-ordinator, Sue Ditta.

The following is an interview with Varda Burstyn, a member of the organising committee and co-organiser of the panel Pornography, Eroticism and Censorship. Burstyn is a writer, therapist and political theorist currently teaching film theory at York University.

Lisa Steele: I know that there were screenings as well as the panel discussion and several other meetings around the issue of "Pornography, Eroticism and Censorship" which you helped to organize (with Barbara Martineau). Could you tell me something about the whole event?

Varda Burstyn: The night before the panel, there was a screening of **Ned**, Nelly Kaplan's film about a young girl who decides to write a pornographic novel and has a relationship with the man who is going to be her agent. It's a kind of feminist **Emmanuelle** — and I say that advisedly because it is both much better than **Emmanuelle** in strictly a feminist sense but it's also very trapped in class limitations I think. We also showed **La Cuisine Rouge** by Paule Baillargeon.

The day of the panel several films were screened that morning. **Not A Love Story**, **Orange** and Kay Armitage's film **Striptease**. After lunch Barbara Hammer showed her films and led a discussion with the audience on a whole range of questions about the form and content which she used, what it was that she was trying to convey about eroticism.

L.S: Was it a mixed audience?

V.B: Yes, it was and she handled it beautifully. Then, two shorter works were screened. One was Paule Baillargeon's **Anastasie o ma cherie**, which is a film about what men do to women, how they define them including sexually. And then Elizabeth Chitty showed her videotape **Desire Control**. After these screenings, about 200 people got together for an informal discussion about a whole series of issues. What we wanted to do was to leave questions about censorship aside until the evening panel and to just talk about the problems of erotic representation: How do you represent eroticism without it being degrading to women, what do people like, what don't they like, what about the definition of women's eroticism by men, how does that work? Bonnie Klein and Ann Henderson, who made **Not A Love Story**, and Paule Baillargeon were there as resource people and I moderated. Bonnie Klein started off the discussion with an interesting story about how they came to make **Not A Love Story**. She was working in a women's film collective and they set out to make a women's erotic film, but after a year and a half of discussion, they could not agree on one single image. Every time somebody would bring in an image that would turn her on, somebody else would say either that it left her cold or she found it degrading. From there two of them decided to find out more about pornography. For them **Not A Love Story** is the product of that search.

L.S: In this discussion, what were the positions taken on the part of the audience? Was it, for instance, ever acknowledged that while pornography, of course, is made to excite desire (among other things) eroticism may have a similar intention?

V.B: I think that most of that particular audience would have agreed that they were for sex and for eroticism, but there were a lot of different voices representing different points of view as well as different stages in thinking about this problem. So that you had a lesbian feminist talking about completely male definitions of sexuality and about such things as "non-genitally centered sexuality", issues raised by the lesbian erotic discourse. Other voices were saying that one person's eroticism is another person's pornography; that you have to be careful not to take the sexuality out of life; that you have to allow for the playing out of fantasies. Of course this doesn't take into account the fact that there is a tremendous amount of violence against women in this society and a certain amount of pornographic material makes use of this kind of violent imagery. Then there were young women — and not so young women — who were seeing **Not A Love Story** for the first time and were really affected by it. They had never seen that kind of imagery (heavy sadistic) before and were very, very angry.

Who controls the erotic image?

L.S: But what about the representation of eroticism? Just to think in utopian terms for a moment, do you think that there would be any differences in imagery — or at least in intent or certainly in effect — of eroticism produced by women? That's really central to the question of power over imagery — power over one's own image which makes a discussion about pornography or eroticism so difficult to pursue at this time. There just hasn't been much produced by women at this time.

V.B: Well, first it's important to consider that what people call images of domination and submission do not necessarily — or exclusively — arise out of conditions of gender inequality. For example, psychoanalysis tells us that much of the pleasure gained in the sexual act comes from a kind of psychical regression to an infantile stage when, because of physical helplessness, one is of necessity "abandoned" to the caresses of others — especially one's parents. Likewise the ability to act on one's desires produces a sense of mastery which also connects in a powerful way with infantile feelings. So at least at this level, there is nothing wrong with assuming active or passive postures at all. Things get problematic when stances of activity or passivity are infused or overlaid with two less neutral factors. First, when they incorporate or reflect the initial repressions of sexuality. For example, lots of 'kinks' are really only reflections of original prohibitions against sexuality, which were, at the same time at least fundamental recognitions of it. Second, when these stances incorporate sexism and misogyny, which in the realm of sexual life include the notion that women exist to please men, not to please themselves. When men make sexually explicit material in which these two factors combine to give specific content to stances of activity and passivity, a lot of women get upset.

To me, eroticism today in a woman's voice would consist of women making films — that's what we're talking about in this case — which show woman defining what she wants. It is not a question of the practices *per se*, but a question of who defines them and what will happen with them. For example, in **Not A Love Story** there's a clip from a porn film which shows a woman on a park bench who comes on to a sailor, and it looks as if she is a "liberated woman" seeking out her pleasure. She takes the initiative, true, but what happens? She goes down on him in the alley. He doesn't go down on her. For most women this rings false indeed. What you have here is the *appearance* of women's initiation but in the service of male pleasure. If men want to do that, okay, but to me erotic material made from a woman's point of view has to do with women defining, controlling and obtaining what they like. It's the dynamic of the situation as opposed to the particular practices that counts.

NFB

from *Not a Love Story*

The social construction of gender

Another important thing: men and women have often different sexual responses because gender is constructed differently in our society. In general terms, male socialization is about denying identification with women, with the feminine and with the character traits associated with these. Thus men are more likely than most women to find sex divorced from certain kinds of human relationships, nurturing and emotionally intimate ones for example, to be exciting. Where for women the opposite is true. No wonder that men and women have difficulty communicating about sexuality. In a society of equality between the sexes one would hope this would be different — that men would take more responsibility for feeling and women would be freer to express lust.

L.S: Isn't part of the problem of talking about pornography — you must have encountered this in the open discussion in Peterborough — that people are always coming into the discussion for the first time. For women this usually means their response is rage, for men it's defensiveness. And, unfortunately, there's no common definition of a lot of the terms necessary even to continue the dialogue.

V.B: Bonnie Klein said she thought that the discussion that was happening now was a healing discussion and while I usually stay away from terms like that, I think she's right. Even though there's still a lot of rage from women and defensiveness from men, when people are given the opportunity to talk about the issue of pornography in a safe atmosphere, the expression of these feelings does not seem to stop important steps toward communication. For instance, in Peterborough there were men who also said that they found a lot of the material which they saw in **Not A Love Story** or even in magazines like **Penthouse** really offensive and they couldn't relate to it either. One man said "I feel really trapped by these stereotypes of men. They say things not only about what women are supposed to be, but also about what men are supposed to be. I don't recognize myself in that. I can't live up to that." To greater and lesser degrees of articulateness, a number of

VARDA BURSTYN

No to Censorship: a feminist view

On Tuesday, April 6, 1982, four eminently respectable members of the Canadian arts community stood before a magistrate in a county court in Ontario, facing charges of showing a film proscribed by the Ontario Censor Board. Was this a salacious film, reeking of sex and violence? Did it exploit women and warp the sensibilities of its audience? Far from it. Entitled *And Now A Message From Our Sponsors*, this experimental film by Al Razutis links the images used in advertising to those found in hard-core pornography. For many Ontarians, this may bring to mind another film censored by the zealous Mary Brown: *Not A Love Story*, also critical of pornography.

Because of the hyperactive Ontario Censor Board, there has been a lot of discussion about pornography and censorship around these parts. But the discussion is also raging in many other places. In the exchanges between a variety of Canadian and American groups in the women's movement, artists and civil libertarians, and puritanical, authoritarian forces, a lot of people have gained the impression that most feminists subscribe to the idea that prior state censorship of sexual material deemed degrading to women is a good thing. In fact, many feminists reject this approach vehemently, and with good reason. The treacherous snags in this position are highlighted by the recent experiences in Ontario.

Let's step back from these cases for just a moment and try to understand what is going on. In the kind of pornography many feminists of both sexes find objectionable, a number of different things are all mixed up together. First, of course, there is sex, which is in general a wonderful thing. But alas, there is also **sexism** — social relations expressing and reinforcing women's subordination — and that is a bad thing.

Often we also find a number of qualities which reflect the incredible commercialisation of sex in the post war period. American sex industries are bringing in billions of dollars in profits, rivalling profits from all other 'entertainment' industries combined. These have a lot more to do with selling goods (from cars to vibrators to more pornography) than with sexual joy. They're a bad thing too because they tend to fragment sexuality from other aspects of human relationships and to encourage already deeply disturbing tendencies for people to treat one another as commodities — objects to be manipulated, flaunted or consumed — rather than as humans to be loved, appreciated and pleasured.

Commodified sex

When this kind of commodification combines with sexism, one gets particularly repugnant images and narratives. And one does not have to go to hard-core material to find it, either. The soft-core film *Emmanuelle*, a regular Saturday night favourite for the young adult set, is one of the most horrendous concoctions of sexism, consumerism and racism imaginable. It plays all the time at local theatres. And the Ontario Censor seems to have no trouble with it at all.

Well, there's the rub. Before we even get to important issues concerning the interpretation of material that has come under feminist fire, we have to begin by asking: can those of us who fancy ourselves pro-sex but anti-sexist allow ourselves to believe that any state authority in our society can be trusted to tell us and our neighbours what is 'acceptable' and what isn't in ways representative of our point of view? I submit that the only answer to that is a resounding no, and I don't believe for a moment that any government agency in a male dominated and capitalist society can ever be made truly accountable to that point of view. We need films like *Not A Love Story* and *And Now A Message . . .*, films that make the sexism and consumerism visible and distinct from the sex, and yet this is precisely where the Censor Board intervenes.

Dangerous in the short term, prior censorship is corrosive in the long, for it encourages people to think that it's alright for a powerful agency to stomp on the symptoms of a problem, while letting the roots grow unchecked. There are other forms of social policy that work much more effectively towards liberating eros and killing sexism. With respect to pornography the most important of these would be a series of measures to ensure that no women ever had to sell her sexuality to survive.

The sex trade withers

As the residents of Malino, a town on the border between Sweden and Copenhagen, discovered: when warm hostels, adequate stipends and training programmes for decent trades and professions were made available to prostitutes and sex performers, every woman except the hard-core drug addicts took advantage of these opportunities. (Funds ran out before these women could be helped.) The sex industry simply withered away, and with it all manner of regulatory problems. The Cuban experience, under totally different conditions, is identical.

Policies like this, linked to laws prohibiting the sexual exploitation of children, and taxation policies that would make profits from sexploitation illegal (if health and education are unacceptable fields for profit, why should sexuality be any different?) would all ensure that erotic material came from people's desires to express their own sexuality, not the desire to make money off that of others. I also believe that those men, women and children who don't want to look at pictures of naked women at every milk store counter should be respected through regulations asking that this material be put in designated spots where it can be avoided, as well as found.

This brief list does not exhaust the ways we can deal with the fusion of sex with sexism and other forms of human oppression. Sex education for example, is necessary for adults and for children. But the state already has far too great a power to determine what we see, what we know and what we can make known; any further extension of this power won't work for feminism. All of us who want to see the charges dropped against the Canadian Images people before the trial begins again in June would do well from now on to oppose prior censorship on all occasions.

men did speak up.

"Nurturing women's rage"

During the evening panel discussion which was supposed to address a number of these same issues but to focus it more on a discussion of censorship, Julia LaSage spoke about the importance of nurturing women's rage. She said that we live in a rape culture and because of this, women's anger is very important.

L.S: As a mobilizing force?

V.B: Yes, and as something essential for men to listen to and as something legitimate for women to feel and to express. But while I can't emphasize enough how important this is, I also think that for women who are taking a leadership role in discussions around the issue of pornography that rage has also to be tempered with a certain degree of understanding of men's pain if we are ever going to be able to have useful discussion in mixed groups. If we're not ready for mixed discussion where men and women participate together that's fine. There's no reason why we should have a discussion with men if we are not ready for that. It's not just a right, it's quite legitimate for women to say this. But if we go ahead with a mixed discussion, we have to be ready to at least listen to what men have to say. Men have responsibilities here too and I wish they'd take them up more vigorously. For instance, in Peterborough, I thought that it would have been good to have had a mixed discussion, a woman-only group and a men-only group. I think it's time that men took responsibility for their own feelings and they can't do it only by piggy-backing off the women's movement.

L.S: The evening panel was on issues of censorship. What other material was presented?

V.B: Kerri Kwinter spoke about the history of censorship in Ontario for the past five years and also talked a bit about why film in particular is subject to state intervention. She explained that film drew the ire of the censors more than any other medium because of its intensified capacity to arouse desire. Susan Cole talked about, in her words, "the need to consider the possibility of censorship". She spoke of pornography as an industry which is basically degrading to women. To my mind although she tried to make a distinction between pornography and erotica, she did not present a clear enough definition of either of those terms to allow an interpretation of what she meant. She also talked about a series of measures to regulate pornography, such as taxing the industry, regulating working conditions and distribution etc. Although I agree with the need for most of these regulations, I had opened up the panel with a statement against state censorship, talking about the nature of the state and how it is not a neutral arbiter between interests of common power within the community but that it represents very specific interests — the interests of capitalism. And given the fact that it is a male-dominated state, I feel that it is the last thing we should do is to give it any more power.

L.S: Susan's argument is based, I take it, on the idea that as pornography becomes more violent, there is at least some potential that it will not just *reflect* existing values but help to *create* a climate and environment of violence toward women.

State censorship: who'll make the choices?

V.B: That's right. It's a reflection of the problem and it reinforces the problem and we can make the state accountable to us in enforcing certain standards, that if we can get cases into court where we can fight on legal grounds, this atmosphere could change. I think that's a wildly utopian view because it again presupposes that someone is out there who can make the 'right' choices about what can and cannot be seen.

Barbara Hammer's presentation was a kind of prose-poem on a lesbian erotic aesthetic. She didn't address the issue of censorship directly except to say that she was opposed to it; that her films had been censored and for her this definitely ran counter to her need to get her material out to an audience. Paule Baillargeon spoke about the problems facing women actresses and directors in Quebec. One of her films, in which she appears as an actress, **Vie d'ange**, was in fact banned in Ontario and she talked about some of the differences between Ontario and Quebec around issues of censorship.

I would like to comment on a statement made by Barbara Martineau in her summation at the end of the panel. She said that lesbians were in the vanguard in the fight for feminist eroticism.

L.S: Isn't the term "feminist eroticism" a kind of contradiction in terms?

V.B: Well, yes, or perhaps a combination of two things that don't quite go together. For me feminism can be summarized very simply: a recognition of and a determination to change the fact that women are oppressed. It is a political stance. Eroticism while certainly amenable to influence by the presence or absence of women's oppression, should not be, ideally speaking, imbued with the political; it should be a free place for playing, for deep emotion, for a release from the intellectual into the emotional and physical. Now, I think that much of the sexual material that has come from the lesbian feminist community has been very important for women of all sexual preferences — it has legitimized certain feelings many women have about certain kinds of erotic responses and possibilities, and underlined the fact that our sexuality belongs to us, autonomously, and not to men. But, important as it has been, by definition it is only one part of the erotic landscape for women. The fact that until very recently, feminist heterosexual women have remained essentially silent about their erotic lives, desires, fantasies is not a good thing, and I am very glad that at last that silence is starting to break. One of the reasons it lasted so long was because of the (in my opinion mistaken) notion that *men are the enemy*. This notion implied that even though you might be out there fighting women's oppression, the fact that you were fucking with the enemy meant that you were masochistic, or politically incorrect, or both. There was a kind of tyranny against loving men, especially in bed (it was okay to love your son, or maybe your brother or father) that many women felt — either as an explicit or implicit aspect of the anti-male ideology. So to insist that any group occupies the vanguard position is I think destructive in this particular discussion, because it resonates with this problem and discourages open discussion. It also ignores the contributions of heterosexual pioneers, like Shere Hite and Bonnie Klein, to name only two.

Hetero sex

L.S: For a long time social contracts, such as those which occur within marriage or common law relationships, have been the focuses for heterosexual women's analysis, rather than specific issues of their own sexuality, so there is still very little representation of sexuality from that perspective.

V.B: I don't think that you can talk about the feelings which heterosexual

NFB

from *Not a Love Story*

women have within a radical feminist perspective because it includes the idea that men are the enemy. And this excludes a lot of other things in turn . .

L.S: Such as an analysis of class . . .

V.B: That's right, and specifically in terms of sexuality, it excludes the notion of men's pain and denies that men suffer from this system of class domination and gender arrangement. Men have male privilege, they're the enemy, they're the cause of women's oppression and they get off on the enslavement of women — all of these ideas become connected and equated. Women *do* experience oppression at the hands of men (although not equally from all men) — there's no question about that. But in my work as a therapist, not to speak of my own life experience, I've come to see how much men pay in emotional, spiritual and sexual terms for these particular "privileges". I think that heterosexual women can speak about this now and they should. There are also many lesbian women who recognize the humanity of men — Barbara Hammer is one, but there are many others. And there are many lesbians who have become socialist feminist for this very reason.

This raises the whole question of the identity or the autonomy between politics and sexual practices. I don't think they are identical — but there are different kinds of indirect connections in different cases, and we have to evolve an understanding that takes all of this into account. For instance, in the particularly vexed situation of the 's and m' couple, you have a 'top' and a 'bottom'. If you take that abstract configuration of top and bottom and fill it in with two women (yes, there are lesbian s and m devotees) or two men, it feels rather different — providing that you can wrap your head around homosexuality without difficulty — than if you fill it in with a woman and a man, especially with a woman in the masochistic position. Why? Because the difference in *real* social power between women and men, which doesn't exist between homosexual lovers, lends the intimate act a different meaning. Gayle Rubin, a lesbian, a feminist, an anthropologist, and a fairly isolated voice at this point in the women's movement, argues that you can be a communist, you can be a liberal, or you can be a fascist and still be into s and m, that there's no relationship between the politics and the sexual practice. She may well be right as far as gay people go. But it's a little harder to see how a heterosexual feminist could occupy the position of 'bottom' for her whole adult sexual life and not feel some sort of contradiction between what she does in bed and what she does outside in politics, painful enough to cause her to question and change some of her sexual practices. I'm not saying it would be impossible — but very difficult.

There's a lot we don't understand yet, and so it is really important for all women to speak out. That means heterosexual women have to feel safe from the feminist superego. The whole notion that if you like to make love on your back, in a missionary position, over 50 per cent of the time then you aren't really a feminist has got to go — or at the very least get put on hold. The fact that a number of heterosexual women are speaking of their sexual feelings is very positive; it complements rather than undermines the nobility and courage of the lesbian women who have already spoken and who will continue to express themselves.

Back to film, it seems to me that it can play a part in exploring some of these issues of sexuality. Film can explore desire quite effectively given that sexuality plays itself out in so many different ways.

The mixed message from films

L.S: I would agree but I also can understand some women's hesitation to jump into the representation of their own sexuality — especially using the moving image. It seems to be a hard medium to control, in terms of message and the perception of that message by your audience. Film has a tremendous potential for . . .

V.B: Ambiguity?

L.S: It's not just ambiguity alone. It's ambiguity to the point of reinforcing — completely unbeknownst to the creator of the work — outright fascism. It's a combination of a moving image depicting or representing something within a narrative structure which is then located within a social context and is then viewed within another social context — the layers of the film experience are so numerous. And depending upon what is occuring around the event of the film itself, when it is shown, you can have an almost entirely different story. You can take a film which was made within one context and place it within a city which for some reason is politicized around a certain issue — such as a crack-down on prostitution or pornography — and then that film acquires a different meaning. Through its representation or realism, that film may call up certain responses in this particular audience or audiences which have fascist overtones. I recently saw **Raging Bull** in an audience which laughed and applauded when Jake LaMotta hits his wife in the face and decks her. They loved it. The entire analysis of the male/female relationships within the film would appear to have been lost on them.

V.B: I think it was Julia LaSage and Chuck Kleinhaus who first made the

point that all Hollywood films have a built-in ambiguity to them and can be read in different ways. **Raging Bull** won my Oscar in the category of 'What Men Have Learned About Themselves', so I'm a little amazed by that response — but only a little. I don't think that this kind of thing is intrinsic to the medium of film. Context, of course is crucial — and it can't always be controlled — as well as how the film is put together. I would go so far as to say that women should risk making films in order to make their own representations. They can build into their films — in ways which I would hope would be less laborious than some of the British experimental filmmakers — devices which really reinforce the notion of female control. This, in and of itself, breaks so many filmic conventions. You can do it at the level of the gross structure of the film or you can do it in the fine detail, or within narrative and action by bracketing these, incorporating and emphasizing a commentary on them. **Celine and Julie Go Boating** is a good example of this method.

Women and experimental film

L.S: So what about women's film-making now? Do you think that this particular programme pointed in that direction?

V.B: It was very clear that within experimental film, women showed themselves to be very capable of making work which was accessible, beautifully executed and also very powerful. I'm thinking particularly of Sally Potter's **Thriller** and Patricia Gruben's films. Also in documentary and political films, women showed that they had definitely passed the apprenticeship stage with such films as **P4W**, **You Have Struck a Rope** and **Women in Arms**. They have come into their own. And especially given the continued existence of prejudice against women within the film industry, it's amazing what women have done within the last ten years.

L.S: But women's films, for the most part, are still not being viewed by mass audiences yet.

V.B: It becomes a question of how we fight. And that's one thing that wasn't really discussed in Peterborough — strategies. It would be good to continue this discussion, almost like a part two of what happened this year at Canadian Images, to get some working plans.

I think one of the most positive results of "A New Look" was that a lot of people have to begin to consider what women are saying. There's an article in **Millenium**, the theoretical film journal out of New York, with an article in it by Noel Carroll — an interview with Yvonne Rainer. In his introduction, Carroll says that the day of the formal film is over, even though experimental filmmakers are still working with form. Now the form has to cope with content. He gives **Thriller**, **Sigmund Freud's Dora**, **Song of the Shirt**, and **DaughterRite** as his examples. He says feminism and psychoanalysis and to a certain extent marxism are informing the content of experimental films and that's the wave of the future. In many ways that's pretty amazing. He says — well not in so many words — but it's kind of like Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, etc. eat your hearts out. ●

CANADIAN AGIT-PROP AND WORKERS' THEATRE IN THE 30's

cut by Patterson, Masses

from Canadian Masses, September 1933

Interviews, Text and Review

CLIVE ROBERTSON

1. Historical sources of Workers' Theatre

Though it's not easy to set an historical context for workers' theatre as it existed in North America and particularly in Canada it is possible to inspect the locomotive that, so to speak, pulled the agit-prop train.[1]

The story of the beginnings of modern workers' theatre rightfully begins not in the USSR but in Germany. The late nineteenth century movement for a People's Theatre was built upon the many court theatres that had existed in each of Germany's past kingdoms or principalities. The most successful and effective being the Freie Volksbune, set up in 1890 in Berlin. The organisation's function was to recruit subscribers for performances which would bring 'Art to the People'. What that should be, as always, was contentious. According to John Willet,[2] "almost from the outset this body was divided as to the political angle to be given to such Art, the one faction splitting off to form a Neue Freie Volksbune which hoped that plays of real quality would enlarge the People's horizon, while the other still aimed to promote class-consciousness and the aims of the SPD (Social Democratic Party). Even so the movement grew, till in 1914 the former alone had 70,000 members and could build its own theatre."

It is often popularly assumed that the Russian Constructivist theatre of Meyerhold and Popova was primarily responsible for the technical developments that in fact had long been part of the German theatrical tradition. German technicians were the first to develop electric stage-lighting, revolving stages and mechanised sets that had evolved through the demands of many operatic productions including those of Wagner.

Piscator and the KPD

In Germany in 1918, the unsuccessful Spartacus rising led to an identity change from the Spartacus Union to the KPD (German Communist Party). Later the KPD through the work of its artist members would challenge the SPD's hold on theatre in Berlin. In 1918 this included artists George Grosz and John Heartfield, publisher Wieland Herzfelde and actor/director Erwin Piscator.

Though the KPD was cautious about Piscator's early **Proletarian Theatre**, in 1920 this breakaway theatre itself had 5,000 subscribers. The KPD's 'change of heart' came in their winter election of 1924/5 when they asked Piscator to produce a political revue. This *Revue Roter Rummel (Red Revue)* became an important model for the agit-prop movement that escalated in the late 1920's until it peaked in 1930 with an estimated two hundred groups in Germany.[3] Working with George Grosz, Piscator made use of earlier cabaret in *RRR*. "Piscator had discovered the value of the revue form as a kind of elastic montage which covered a wide range of theatrical devices and could continually be changed and brought up to date."[4] *RRR* used two slide projectors to illustrate scenes of police repression and portraits of political leaders.

In 1925 working with director Ernst Niekish, Piscator was involved with *Trotz Alledem! ('Despite All!')* a

1. This introduction barely touches on the complexities of early USSR cultural policies and associative organisations. Neither does it present more than a glimpse of both the German and Russian theatre participants. Because Piscator had a more immediate effect on North American workers' theatre, Brecht is barely mentioned. The two sources for this sketch are both invaluable books by John Willet: **The Theatre of Erwin Piscator — Half a century of Politics in the Theatre,** Eyre Methuen, London, 1978. **The New Sobriety: Art and Politics in the Weimar Period 1917-33,** Thames and Hudson, 1978.

pageant for the first KPD party conference. This production marked another German theatre development as the show was described as being an 'Historical Revue from the years 1914-19 in 24 scenes with interspersed films'. The Party criticised the project as being too documentary and despite its packed performances and overwhelming success *Trotz Alledem!* was limited to two performances.

The climax over the struggle for control over the **Volksbune** came in 1927 when it had grown to 140,000 members. The Communists were not alone in supporting Piscator's struggle to control the theatre (his allies included Thomas Mann). The Piscator group finally gained 16,000 members from the split and his first company was launched.

The first **Piscatorbuhne**, like its later North American counterparts, was to have a school to train actors in collaboration with writers, musicians and technical staff. The company had 'dramaturgical collectives', teams of writers to supervise the literary programme and play texts. Bertolt Brecht was an early member of such a collective.

From 1918-33 (when Hitler took control) Germany and Russia shared both a political and cultural alliance. Though the effects of each were dissimilar, both had Revolutions initiated from similar causes and strategic tactics. For a time there was the maintenance of a Western Bureau of the Comintern in Berlin and a formal kinship was strengthened by the Rapallo Treaty of 1922 — the first attempt to normalise the USSR's relations with the outside world. So it became natural for German artists not only to visit Russia but also later on to take jobs there, particularly in architecture and film.

Until 1930 this exchange produced many congenial results. When for example Eisenstein's *Potemkin* was shown in Berlin (only a month after its first screening in Moscow in 1926), it was the film's success in the more industrialised city that convinced Moscow's Party skeptics that *Potemkin* had achieved its propagandistic objectives. The USSR-German ties were maintained not only by the KPD but more importantly and overwhelmingly by the IAH, (International Workers' Aid) set up on Lenin's instructions from within the KPD to organise famine relief. In reality the IAH was a more ambitious complex for putting Germany in touch with Soviet ideas and needs.

Proletkult initiatives

As it is fundamental to the understanding of what workers' theatre was, it is important to trace the ideological conceptualisation of 'proletarian culture'. In Russia the development of the arts organisation, **Proletkult** was parallel to, but nonetheless separate from, the formation of the Communist Party. The **Proletkult** had originated in the pre-1914 Social Democratic Movement. Its theoretical basis came from both Anatoly Lunadharsky and more directly from his politically active brother-in-law, Alexander Malinovsky. "It was conceived as a workers' organisation with a strong arts bias like others founded in Europe following the examples of Ruskin and Morris. The **Proletkult** intended to become a third force in the Revolutionary state, balancing the political element (the Party) and the industrial element (the trade unions) and ultimately serving to create a new working-class culture to replace that of the bourgeoisie."

Following the Russian revolution, Anatoly Lunacharsky was appointed Minister for Enlightenment, (a term embracing education and the arts) a position he precariously held for twelve years. Willet described Lunacharsky as being, "somebody with a closer knowledge of the avant-garde and their work than they had any right to expect."

There was never any question that Lenin, though Lunacharsky's 'protector', would not allow any large movement to exist parallel to the Party, a position mirrored by the KPD in Germany. However the aesthetic ideas of the **Proletkult** remained autonomous until 1929 when a new 'single proletarian' international organisation became its replacement finally cementing the executive arms of the Party in cultural matters.

By the time workers' theatre began developing in Canada the struggle between the German SPD and KPD parties over the control of the left resulted in Hitler's victory for the Right. Before that event had taken place Meyerhold's theatre had visited Berlin in 1929 and among the plays he presented were *Roar China!* and *The Inspector General* which Toronto's **Theatre of Action** performed, the first in 1937, the latter in 1939. Making any specific assumptions about how confused the Party line was in Canada, particularly on cultural matters, would be speculative — for that history is yet to be written. We do know that after 1935 a broad range of progressive writers and artists would be available under the 'United Front' policy and that up until 1935 it seems evident that Canadian workers' theatre was not affected by Stalin's conservative Socialist Realism policy. What would have happened had workers' theatre survived as a popular movement after the Second World War is unfortunately too hypothetical.

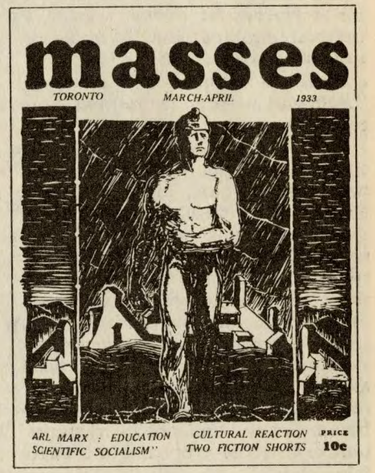
What is finally important is that such a movement took place in Canada. It lasted for ten years (1931-41) without the traditional subscriber support that benefited German workers' theatre, without the Government support that existed in the U.S. through the Federal Theatre Project, and without the Revolutionary state apparatus that gave Russian theatre both its historical moment and prominence.

Akademie der Kunste, E.Berlin

Piscator's *Schweik*, 1928 with cut-out drawings by Grosz

2. **The Theatre of Erwin Piscator** — John Willet
3. Brecht's **Weg zum epischen Theater**
4. **The Theatre of Erwin Piscator** — John Willet

CANADIAN AGIT-PROP AND WORKERS' THEATRE IN THE 30's



2. Toby Gordan Ryan interview.

FUSE: The Workers' Theatre in Toronto emerged from the Progressive Arts Club (PAC) which formed in 1931. Would you describe the organisation and its magazine, *Masses*.

Toby Ryan: It (PAC) started out with a group of writers who felt that the period really needed some people who would write about it, try to offer some inspiration and hope and ways of dealing with it. A group of people including Ed Cecil-Smith, my husband (Oscar Ryan), and a couple of poets managed to gather a group of writers. They met in people's homes, and later rented small rooms in the Grange. They also interested some musicians and artists but the big thing that happened for PAC was the theatre. I know when I got back (from N.Y.) the theatre had not been organised. I had had some training and was interested in theatre when I joined PAC. At the same time from the Students' League on the U. of T. campus came people like (Jean) "Jim" Watts, Stan Ryerson, Dorothy Livesay — those three anyway — who had had some experience. We set to work to find a group of people for what we called agit-prop theatre, which simply meant plays that we could take out anywhere — the street, on a truck, on a picket line, in a hall. I had seen the **Prolet-Buhne** in New York and I was really enamoured with their work. They were superfine, extremely theatrical in a simple way. Their choral work was beautiful. I saw them on May Day in Union Square and they were magnificent. Those were the days when you didn't have microphones everywhere so they could play to a huge crowd and really turn them on. I came back and realised, yes, that's the kind of theatre we should start. Then Dorothy, who was a poet, started writing some material for this kind of theatre. Other people in the PAC also wrote, including Frank Love. The material dealt with very timely themes: deportation, evictions, unemployment, war, arrests of political prisoners in various parts of the world. We also gathered material from other places so we were able to assemble a considerable repertoire.

FUSE: In the book quotes from the *Masses* refer to a number of branches that PAC had. How did it develop as an organisation?

T.R: That development happened when *Masses* appeared (1932). A magazine draws interest. Other cities wrote to find out what was happening and soon there was a network of Progressive Arts Clubs. *Masses* started reprinting some of the plays we were doing so there was an active exchange of material.

FUSE: You say in your book that workers' theatre was the first form of theatre in Canada to use its own social context as content. Wasn't it also the only form of indigenous theatre that has ever existed simultaneously in both rural and urban centres?

T.R: Yes, there were workers' theatres in rural areas across the country as well as theatres in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal. The Montreal theatre wrote its own agit-prop material which was especially interesting. It was very hard for me in writing the book to document all of the theatres. There must have been many young groups in Ukrainian and Finnish organisations who used some of the material we did, but I hesitate to put a number on the total.

FUSE: You mentioned the important model of the **Prolet-Buhne**, did you

have much knowledge then of the developments in German and earlier Russian theatre?

T.R: We didn't have too much contact, though some of us had read about developments there. When John Bonn brought the **Prolet-Buhne** to the United States, they stayed in New York because Fascism was on the horizon. John Bonn, their director, eventually became the Executive Secretary of the **New Theater League** in New York, and one of the editors of the magazine, *New Theater*. It was a very lively magazine distributed nationally in the States. As our theatre developed, our interest in *New Theater* grew — we learnt of the new theatres as well as the new scripts being written.

FUSE: Did *New Theater* ever document any of the workers' theatre in Canada?

T.R: There was a review of *Eight Men Speak*. Some **Theatre of Action** members came to us through reading *New Theater*. New members came also after seeing our production of *Bury the Dead* or *Waiting for Lefty*.

FUSE: Do you know if the **Prolet-Buhne** wrote new material specifically for New York?

T.R: The performance I saw was pretty general. It dealt with the dangers of war, unemployment — these were universal themes which affected every country. I came back from New York in '32, but more than likely they wrote material for American conditions.

FUSE: In your book, Irving Myers from Montreal's **New Theatre Group** describes that the workers' theatre consisted of "businessmen, old-time socialists, intellectuals, kids who came from Socialist families" — would this make-up hold true for most of the groups?

T.R: I don't think it was so true in Toronto and **Theatre of Action**. In Toronto people came, particularly when the transition was complete (from Workers' Theatre to Theatre of Action) into a school. You see we began with a school which was needed both for the development of techniques and to attract more members. To that school we attracted many diverse kinds of people, many were young and wanted to study theatre.

FUSE: Was the school the prime means of supporting the theatre?

T.R: It developed that way even though we charged nominal sums of money like $5 per course for a summer. Only our director was paid: everybody else, no matter what we did, was not.

FUSE: You mention in the book the change from the **Workers' Theatre** to the **Theatre of Action** and you say there were accusations that in switching over you were accused of being less militant.

T.R: That's a question I'm dying to answer. At the time it seemed the most logical thing to do — just like any organisation doesn't stand still, doesn't take a position and stay there forever. For a theatre this is doubly important because if a theatre is going to have the impact that it should have, it has to move in some direction, it can't stand in one place. It seemed logical that after *Eight Men Speak*, which was our first experience with a full-length play, that we lacked a lot. We needed training. We needed to do plays that would appeal to more people. Not a change but a moving forward. We wanted the thrust of the theatre, more deeply and emphatically to reflect its times, to organise, to inspire. It's only in the last few years when **Theatre of Action** comes up for discussion that someone starts suggesting that once we became the **Theatre of Action** we somehow allegedly began to "water-down" our objectives. We did want to be part of the drama festivals where we certainly added a very special quality. It's kind of ironic that the term 'agit-prop' has been turned into a prejorative — it's denounced as too militant. And then **Theatre of Action** is downgraded for not being militant enough!

Our transition was logical. Being on stage in *Eight Men Speak* with the audience booing or cheering or making comments, suddenly I thought, My god what a vehicle! How it gets to people, how it affects them. It was so potent. Remember too that at that specific time in North America there was a considerable growth in new writing. People like Clifford Odets, Irwin Shaw, George Skiar, John Wexley and others were writing very relevant scripts for the times. Unfortunately I have to say that in Canada few were writing about those things. Strictly speaking, there was no professional theatre in English Canada and what there was was not doing Canadian, but British plays. So we turned to the United States for scripts. Our defence was that *Waiting for Lefty* could be anywhere, and *Bury the Dead* is universal across the board. It's interesting to me that while we were doing those plays we were also accused of being further to the left than we should have been. The people who make these judgements were not involved with our theatre. But I was there and took part in the decisions.

Artwork for cover of Theatre of Action's *It Can't Happen Here*, 1938 designed by Lawrence Hyde

FUSE: On your first tour out of Toronto you performed *Eviction, Joe Derry, Meerut* and *Farmers' Fight* among others. Can you tell us something about these performances, how they functioned, what they were concerned with?

T.R: Mostly they were quite short plays, we could do four or five in an evening. *Meerut* was a mass recitation about some Indian political prisoners. Very powerful and direct — it called for their freedom. When we did these plays we didn't have many settings but we devised certain props we could use to localise it. If it was evictions we might have a cut-out of a house. On our tour of the Niagara Peninsular we mostly played in small halls, usually Ukrainian or other ethnic halls. Whether it was St. Catharines or Port Cobourne they would be most anxious to co-operate — they would help us with some lighting and other details. We wore a basic costume and we added to it. If it was a capitalist he had white gloves, a silk hat, a cane, maybe spats. If it was a farmer you would add coveralls — very simple. We also had with us an artist, Avrom, who did 'chalk talks' (political cartoons with verbal puns) and it was very successful. It was a complete programme that took an hour and a half. In St. Catharines we played on a picket line, for the cannery workers — mostly women that were on strike. We got into trouble and were accused of being

Ric Amis

Toby Gordon Ryan, a founding member of Toronto's Workers' Theatre(1932) and Theatre of Action(1935)

agitators and asked to leave town which we did. It was very exciting. There was no separation then between actors and audience so we felt very much like a people's theatre.

FUSE: Though it's different talking from the current perspective what I found hard in the book was the debate over amateur v. professional theatre. As I read accounts of your theatre and its counterparts in the States or Germany it was precisely a new theatrical form that had little to do with the professional-amateur debate. It was not only formally different but functionally different particularly with regard to its audience.

T.R: I think that's true. Remember of course that in places like Germany before the Depression, in the Twenties you had directors like Irwin Piscator who used many innovative techniques — agit-prop, film, moving stages. We think that's so marvellous now, but they've always had a sophisticated theatre.

FUSE: When did you first learn of directors like Piscator and their work?

T.R: I read about him, I was a great one for clipping the (N.Y.) Times with articles on both the Russian and German theatre. I had this material long before it was published in book form.

FUSE: One of the productions I thought we could use as an example of **Theatre of Action's** working methods was John Wexley's *Steel*. In the book you mentioned that two members of the Steelworkers Organising Committee joined the cast and also the Canadian Regional Secretary of the Steelworkers' assisted in the research for the play. *Steel* must have been a rewarding production to have been involved with.

T.R: It was. That was the period when the CIO started its drive to organise the steelworkers. Of course it's an international union and it had started in the States. When we discovered this play, since we really tried very hard to interest the trade unions in our theatre, we felt that what we had to say would make a lot of sense to them. It was very tough work. Quite a few of us went out to address union locals before every production to stimulate interest. With *Steel* we had a vehicle that was especially direct, since the play dealt with the organisation of a steel plant. It went beyond bare-bones description because it reflected the organising drive as it affected one family. We decided to go to the Steelworkers organisation, because we didn't know much about a steel mill. So we asked some of them to read the script. They liked the play but had strong opposition to the language. I should add that in those days to use 'hell' or 'damn' or 'goddamn' was terrible. The objection was that yes, steelworkers in a plant use pretty strong language but when we bring our wives to the theatre, we don't want them to hear this language. So both sides compromised. They were excited because the play was so timely. They then explained to the cast what it was like in a steel mill, how hot it was, what ailments steel-workers experienced and so on. When the play opened the Steelworkers' union local took a benefit night — we gave them a discount which also helped them financially. They packed the small theatre.

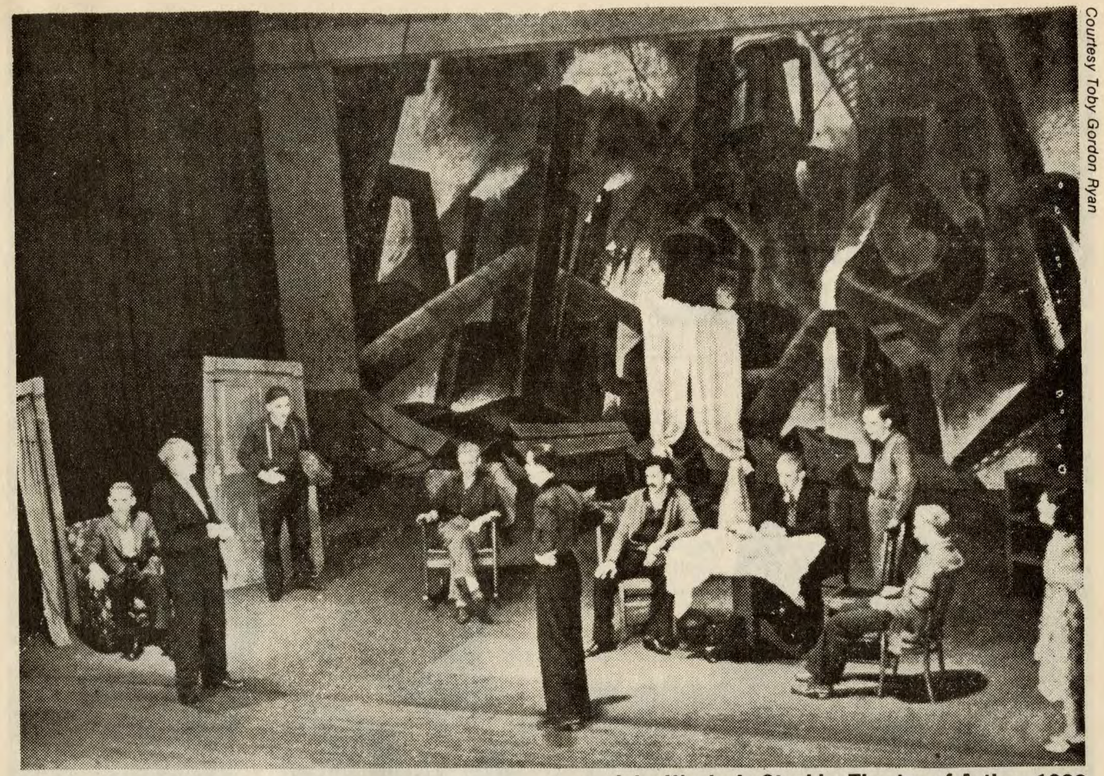
In the family depicted, two brothers, one of whom already in the union has offered to help the organising drive. The other brother reacted with fear that he could lose his job. The family split over the issue but it was finally resolved. At the time I think the critics were amazed because it had such a happy ending—so Pollyanna. We did *Steel* for a U.A.W. local in Oshawa and then we went to Hamilton. Such audiences when they relate to seeing themselves on stage, and relate to the subject matter are so animated — it's marvellous for actors. Another important aspect of *Steel* was that the workers were not all Anglos. There was a German worker, a Ukrainian worker, a Polish worker, an Irish worker — it was a true reflection of our population. When we played it in Toronto at Hart House the Dominion Theatre Festival adjudicator was knocked out. We entered one scene from *Steel* for the Festival, won the regional competition and then played in Winnipeg in the finals. Even one act of this play in the Festival was important because no other group made the same kind of contribution. I felt with *Steel* that not only was **Theatre of Action** fulfilling its job by doing a working-class play but also by bringing it to other, quite different, audiences.

FUSE: In the book there are many references to the Dominion Drama Festival and the irony of these often direct Socialist plays being presented in front of the Governor-General, the Prime Ministers, etc. Was it that the adjudicators were enlightened? How much of it was that they were only too aware of how politically popular workers' theatre was at that time? Did they understand the political contra-dictions?

T.R: I am not so sure. Our productions set a very high standard and they had to accept us. **The Vancouver Progressive Arts Players** (the theatre of the Progressive Arts Club) was the first PAC theatre that won their own regional drama competition and travelled across Canada to go to the Dominion Drama Festival in Ottawa. Bear in mind that these were young people that were unemployed, who didn't maybe have all the social graces. You should also bear in mind that in the Dominion Drama Festival, or even the local drama festival, there was an awful lot of dressing up and formal occasions. We appeared, which ever group of us it was, just in our Sunday best — but it wasn't very best, so we stuck out anyway. And now these people had come that long way from Vancouver to Ottawa playing *Waiting for Lefty* all the way across the country to do their performance before such an audience. First of all, they are aware that out front was the Governor-General and other government repre-sentatives and officials and some of the play's action takes place with actors strategically spotted in the audience. And here were all these well-dressed people shushing these actors because they thought they were interrupting the play. When the performance was over, there was tremendous enthusiastic applause. **The Players** couldn't understand it. They had real concern that they might be arrested. They had no idea how it would go over. I'm not sure the Ottawa audience was happy with the plot (a strike situation among taxi-drivers). But they were caught up in it simply because the script was unique and powerful and actors and audience interacted.

FUSE: What did the interaction consist of?

T.R: For example the chairman on stage would make a statement and an actor from the audience would shout back: "Bullshit!" (the language in *Lefty* was considered pretty rough.) The audience didn't know whether the heckling was someone trying to stop the play or whether they were partici-pating actors. In Vancouver I was told that when an actor had to rush up on stage and say something to the chair-man — the people in the audience actually tried to stop him. The interplay was very serious. Another example, when **Theatre of Action** played *Bury the Dead* at Hart House for the Festival, the adjudicator bounced up onto the stage — he was so excited. He said this play should be



Courtesy Toby Gordon Ryan

John Wexley's *Steel* by Theatre of Action, 1938

shown all over the world, it's the most important thing that's ever been written — he couldn't say enough about it. We went to Ottawa with it and heard later that a World War I Canadian army commander was sitting in the second row. This script too packed quite a punch. The adjudicator in this case described the play as propaganda, and said it couldn't really be considered a play. Here you have two people discussing the same play with different views on its anti-war theme. At that particular Festival final the adjudicator announced that he had given the award to a comedy because he felt there was not enough comedy in the Festival. Of course we were not exactly living in a comedy world. I think some people understood the irony.

FUSE: You mentioned in the book aggressive instances of state and local government censorship and the activities of the police "Red Squad".

T.R: That was earlier in the Depression when the police tried to intimidate all progressive organisa-tions. When **Theatre of Action** decided to enter the Festival we knew that our work would have to be extra-specially good because our plays would not easily be accepted. Our strongest play about what society can do to an individual was *Life and Death of An American*, it could have been a Canadian. It didn't matter. It starts with the birth of this young man, goes through all the things that happened in his lifetime. From the war to unemployment, to strikes, and in the end to his death on the picket line. Everything was in that play — it was powerful. It used music, dance, theatre scenes all done on an open platform; not sets, just lights. We played it in the Festival and the production really knocked them out. It was a strong indictment. We presented *Life and Death of An American* in 1939.

FUSE: Perhaps the most difficult aspect of your book is the contrast between the popular and political success of workers' theatre in Canada — including official recognition and then the failure of the larger political struggle and the subsequent fallout through red-baiting which in many ways made it difficult for your theatre to continue. As a blanket was placed over theatre even discussing issues as it had, how did people take that negation of their work?

T.R: Once the war started and even during the period known as the phoney war, it was hard for people to figure out what our role should be. There were people who felt that since it was a war against Hitler really they should be in it. And then there were jobs to go to. If you hadn't been working for the bulk of your life it made its impact. There was a malaise that set in, it didn't exactly disintegrate. The minutes of the production council of **Theatre of Action** show signs of this malaise over things we had taken for granted. So those that didn't join the armed forces tried to get jobs. This disagreement in **Theatre of Action** led to some people leaving and others carrying on for a while longer. The war finally was the reason for the **Theatre**'s demise.

There was one more attempt in 1953 during the McCarthy period to try and re-form our theatre, though differently. I and two of my friends decided to do something about McCarthy. What was happening particularly to the arts in the States was so outrageous. We decided to take a crack at it. We formed the **Play-**

Press Porcepic

The Workers' Theatre on tour; (back row)"Jim" Watts, Percy Matthews, J.P.Smith, Toby Gordon Ryan (front) unidentified actor and Avrom Yanovsky

Actors. Little did we know what we were undertaking, it was far more difficult, the climate was different. We did *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, not a great play but very timely. It said something that had to be said. We attracted some interesting people, one especially so. A Black actress. We produced some interesting plays including *The Good Hope*, a Dutch classic by Herbert Heijermans. It was about the exploited poverty-stricken and endangered Dutch fishermen and their families — a powerful workers' play. I should add that **Theatre of Action** had, during the Thirties produced cabarets on Sunday nights. Because Toronto had "blue" Sundays, at our studio it was standing room only. We would do all kinds of things like readings of plays, Living Newspapers . . .

FUSE: What were "living newspapers"?

T.R: The Living Newspapers were written for the Federal Theater Project (U.S.). For example, *One Third of a Nation* dealt with the lack of housing. They were what might be called docu-dramas. We also did one act plays. Sometimes they were evenings of improvisation. All this happened in our studio at 490 Yonge.

FUSE: Did you follow street-theatre in the Sixties?

T.R: What was called street-theatre or guerilla theatre I think was much more anarchistic. Ours was highly organised, rehearsed and prepared. It wasn't a process of spontaneous combustion. Any performance needs that discipline to deliver full theatrical energy.

FUSE: What about the possibility of reviving workers' theatre? Similar issues are now becoming more dominant again as they were in the Thirties.

T.R: I think there have been some important qualitative changes that make a re-creation difficult. Like television. People now have a certain concept of theatre. When people claim workers don't go to the theatre I say they're watching theatre every night of the week for hours. It's theatre whatever you want to call it — good or bad. And of course it's sixty thousand times removed from their own experience. I think however, particularly in alternative theatre in Canada, that somewhere, somehow, theatres now have to in some way try to reflect life in the Eighties for ordinary people, the majority of people. Not for an elite but for people who work for a living and have all these problems that they are faced with now. It's bound to be different. ●

3. StageLeft: The Political Art.

StageLeft by Toby Gordon Ryan provides a surprising number of historical precedents for contemporary Canadian cultural concerns. Its main purpose is a memorial to anglo-Canadian workers' theatre in the Thirties. The book is composed of anecdotes and accounts from actors, directors, writers and critics interwoven into a story told by one of the founding members — the author herself. As a history of Canadian theatre it contains a loose account of the plausible evolution from agit-prop to workers' theatre to politicised mainstage theatre. *StageLeft* does not include much comparitive evaluation of workers' theatre as it existed in the U.S., Germany, Sweden, Britain and the USSR. Nonetheless it does invoke the social conditions and collective spirit in which the theatre movement developed.

The following include some of the book's significant revelations:

1. There was through the workers' theatre network both a widespread and popular innovative theatre and Performance which in many ways qualled in political effectiveness the German theatre of Piscator and Brecht. This hidden Canadian phenomenon obviously displaces with ease the onerous and overstated burden placed for example on the Group of Seven and Canada's early international avant-garde accomplishments.
2. Prior to contemporary artists' organisations such as **CAR/FAC, ANNPAC** or the **Cultural Workers' Alliance** there existed an interdisciplinary artist-based organisation: **PAC** (Progressive Arts Club) which had numerous branches both in urban and rural centres. **PAC** existed to encourage political dialogue among art workers and facilitated many forms of cultural production that attempted to address their contemporary social issues. PAC developed its network through cultural periodicals such as their own Masses and later through New Frontier and New Frontiers.
3. The book indicates how such artistic practice found other means of support and patronage particularly with Labour, ethnic and minority groups and oppositional political parties.
4. It documents blatant forms of state censorship and accompanying police harassment through "Red Squads".

CANADIAN AGIT-PROP AND WORKERS' THEATRE IN THE 30's

"Single unemployed" march up Bathurst Street in Toronto

Agit-Prop?

Toby Ryan, at age seventeen in 1930, went to study theatre at the **Workers' Theatre Alliance (Artef)** in New York. The daughter of a needle trades' union organiser, it was in New York that she first saw the German agit-prop group, Prolet-Buhne. Returning to Toronto in the lengthening Depression of 1932 Ryan describes a rally at Queen's Park (Ontario Government Legislature) and the sudden violence of a police attack conducted on horseback, motorcycles and on foot. She writes, "as the unemployed began to organise and speak up in ever larger numbers, urging governments to act on their behalf . . . this was invariably met with harassment and harsh repression." Frank Love, electrician, trade-unionist and member of **PAC** wrote *Looking Forward*, a two-act play. In *StageLeft* he says, "the situation in *Looking Forward* was that the family — mother, father and daughter were on welfare. The daughter had a boy-friend and he was a radical. He had influenced the daughter and their argument was that unemployment

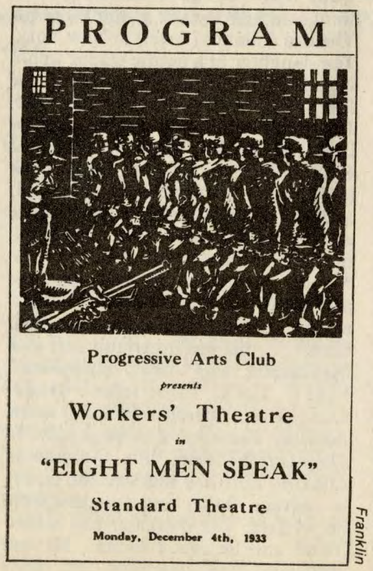
insurance was a necessity. They wouldn't have to be on Welfare." The play was used during a Hunger March to Ottawa, written for the occasion it was played on the back of a truck, in halls, wherever the march stopped. The idea was to gather more marchers. Love says: "Most of the people in the audience were out of work, or so close to being out of work that a lot of them were on Welfare. They were just going through (what they saw) it themselves and (so) they didn't consider it as a propaganda play." Though the theatre itself may have been simple the strategy of tying a hunger march together with a fight for unemployment insurance was not. What is impressive about many of PAC's short plays is their specificity and their ability therefore to focus otherwise general manifestations of alienation and despair. Undoubtedly there was both humour and social warmth generated at a time when the artists and audience were virtually one and the same.

Because of its directness and Pavlovian spirit agit-prop needs qualifying. Bertolt Brecht wrote: "What is known as agit-prop art . . . was a mine of novel artistic techniques and ways of expression. Magnificent and long-forgotten elements from periods of truly popular art cropped up there, boldly adapted to the new social ends. Daring cuts and compositions, beautiful simplifications (alongside misconceived ones): in all this there are often an astonishing economy and elegance and a fearless eye for complexity. A lot of it may have been primitive, but it was never primitive with the kind of primitivity that affected the supposedly varied psychological portrayals of bourgeois art." (*Brecht on Theatre*, trans. John Willett)

Though agit-prop is often written-off by historians as being a crude form of theatre its development into transportable one or two act plays as Ryan's book suggests was a crucial and effective development. In Canada agit-prop overlapped with early workers' theatre as shown in programmes presented on tours of small towns and communities. The impression from reading StageLeft (though it isn't specifically articulated) is that both agit-prop as potential Party recruitment and workers' theatre as supportive parable were interwoven. The Toronto-based theatre group itself underwent a number of name changes which suggest continual analysis of presentation. First it began as **The Workers' Experimental Theatre**, shortened then to **Workers' Theatre** (1932-5) and finally, **Theatre of Action** (1936-40).

Eight Men Speak

One important play written within the Toronto group was undoubtedly *Eight Men Speak*. Authored by Oscar Ryan, Edward Cecil-Smith, and Mildred Goldberg the play was based upon an incident in 1931 when eight leaders of the Canadian Communist Party were arrested in simultaneous raids across the country. The incident was a climax to events arising out of Section 98 of the Criminal Code which had been introduced at the time of the Winnipeg General Strike (1919). It allowed the police to pick-up people in their homes, in meeting halls, simply because they had no means of subsistence. It was with *Eight Men Speak* that the workers' theatre in Canada came closest to its counterpart in Germany in its effect on, and reaction from, the State. The only full performance of *Eight Men Speak* was held at the Standard Theatre (Dec. 1933), Toronto and drew a capacity audience of 1500. A second performance was planned but the police threatened to cancel the theatre's licence. The same tactic was used in Manitoba when the Winnipeg police banned the Winnipeg New Theatre from performing the same play. This use of theatre licences as censorship weapons was underlined when in Manitoba the pretext used was that the play was considered 'obscene' . . . (FUSE readers will remember past articles on provincial censor boards and political censorship). *Eight Men Speak* warranted a report from the RCMP and the wrath of then Prime Minister R.B. Bennett. The play was thereafter presented in part in working class halls where the police were less willing to interfere. Meanwhile in Montreal the **New Theatre Group** were confronted with Duplessis' Padlock Law which was broadly applied to repress social and political activities thought to endanger his government.



Franklin

One fault with *StageLeft* is that it does not give a very clear picture of the relationship between art practice and political affiliations. It is only in discussing what is unavoidable as in the case with *Eight Men Speak* that we get any semblance of the kind of political analysis available for example with German workers' theatre. Toby Ryan has herself been undoubtedly dragged through more than one political hedge backwards and she chooses thematically to project "the development of Canadian theatre". This avoids what is most apparent: the failure of the ideological struggle upon which workers' theatre was based. We know that in most Western countries many hundreds of thousands of artists and intellectuals were members of the Communist Party, particularly after 1935. And yet if you look in any popular history of the Canadian Communist Party you will find a clear disassociation and omission of the existence of workers' theatre, culture or art. This combination of repression from society itself and self-censorship from within is not an encouraging legacy for the present cultural Left. The continued existence of inappropriate anti-communist propaganda which smears all the Left has to be faced and met — at least by our own generation. Even those of us who have little interest in seeking an explicit 'proletarian culture' still have no desire to default by serving the interests of those who deny our needs and block our aspirations. Though this question of political context hovers over the book it does not distract from its invaluable function as a source book littered with clues to be followed by others. For all Canadian artists whose work addresses a broad audience *StageLeft* is necessary reading.

AGIT-PROPS AND STREET THEATRE FOR THE 80's

4. In the streets with Partisan

FUSE: Many people have seen the puppets and other props at rallies and demonstrations. Can you give us some chronology and history?

Mike Constable: This work came out of Partisan which in turn came out of film nights that DEC (Development Education Centre) held. There was a separate group that began by discussing the films and later on reading their plays. A number of artists were attending these meetings so we decided to have a show not just of films, stage stuff but also visual art, poetry. The show was called Partisan in late 1975, early 1976.

FUSE: How did that evolve into working with Labour?

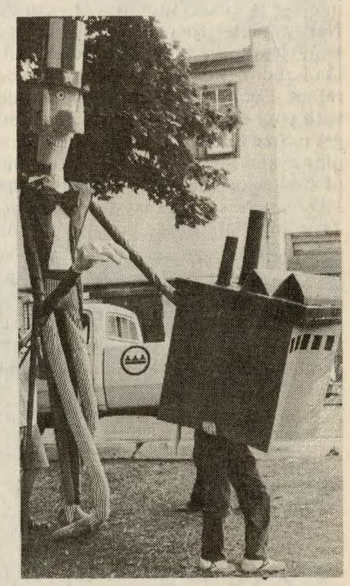
M.C: We approached Toronto (Metro) Labour Council to do work for the annual Labour Day parade. Its a large parade, it involves over 20,000 people. We'd noticed over the years that there wasn't too much content except for banners and the floats that maybe showed the particular trade. The 'Day of Protest' was coming up and we approached them on that basis — let's have some street theatre for agitation to get people's interest. That was our first of such projects in 1976.

FUSE: What did you make?

M.C: We made Pepins, Trudeaus, Davis and the giant screws that people can wear about five feet long. In the parade people were wearing the screws: students and in one case a pensioner. 'Pepin' had a screwdriver, with his minions around him, and you could actually twist the screw with the screwdriver. Then the Labour Council set up a preparatory committee for the Day of National Protest, they invited Partisan to have representation on that board. We had one officio and two ex-officio people, to work around skits for the events on that day. We started about 5:00 am in the morning, got our gear together and went off to the government offices trying to entreat the people who were going to work to join the demonstration that was to be held at Queen's Park. There were about 15,000 people that came out for the demonstration itself, they circled around for about an hour before the speeches started. We had two skits that provided them with some entertainment. That was October 14th 1976. For Labour Day we did a huge float on the back of a flatbed truck — a big iceberg with a couple of guys with blowtorches, the sign read "End the wage freeze". There were actors Jim Bird, Robin Endres, plus a couple of people on top also doing skits. Subsequent to that we had calls from people wanting to use the screws for one thing or another.

Apart from Labour Days there was a student protest the next spring. We did skits around the campus. At that time the University of Toronto was in the OFS (Ontario Federation of Students) and there again we worked with actors at Convocation Hall. We also started getting calls from peace groups. So we made a 'neutron bomb'. We have our second neutron bomb now — the first went missing at Ryerson. We also have a second (Bill) Davis — at the student demonstration-against-the-cuts the puppet ended up in a tree and was trashed. There is that hazard with props — people really go at them, literally. For the recent demonstration in Ottawa (November 15th 1981) we were just getting (Allan) MacEachen out of the car and someone said, "I really want to get that guy", and proceeded to swat the puppet with their sign and knocked his nose off.

After the demonstration there were


Uncle Sam with 'ambulatory' factory, 1981

Apart from Mike Constable and Richard Peachy other Partisan contributors have included Francesca da Venza, Ted Jackman, Liz Kelly, Barbara Hurt, Robert Kell, Alf Rushton, Ian Ornstein, Krysantha Sri Dhaggiyadatta, Sara Barker, David Anderson, John Williams, Jim Kempkes and Joe Macaleer.

requests to burn the puppet. However these things take about fifteen hours of work. The puppets obviously function as a focus on which people like to heap abuse.

FUSE: The puppets show up at many other rallies including those outside the American embassy. What other demonstrations have you worked with?

M.C: Sometimes we'll give them to people and they will use them for their own purposes. The recent students day of protest, they came in and took them. We've lent them also to Chilean groups.

FUSE: What about other props, I remember seeing factories that were used in demonstrations against the cut-backs.

M.C: The 'ambulatory' factories. That was a big deal that marked the first appearance of our Uncle Sam. The Labour Council was getting more interested, and they hired singer Nancy White. There was a rally at City Hall then a march to the Exhibition. On Labour Day there didn't used to be rallies. You would march in the parade with your trade union group and then get in free to the Ex. There would be a dinner and then a statement from one of the union leaders and one of the NDP leaders and that would be it. That function would involve maybe three hundred people — the 20,000 people in the parade weren't too involved in those proceedings. In the last couple of years the Labour Council has hired a band at City Hall square. The factories were at the '81 Labour Day Parade. An incident occurred as we were leading off the parade with our Uncle Sam: some Americans started throwing ice-cubes from the hotel directly across from the place where the parade was forming. The ice hit one of the actors on the head, he was taken to hospital and it turned out that the ice-throwers were from New York who didn't like seeing Uncle Sam abused.

FUSE: What's the response from the American unions?

M.C: The Steelworkers and the U.A.W. guys like them.

FUSE: Did you ever take the cut-back props out of Toronto?

M.C: When the cut-backs first started we did a giant padlock with links the size of a person. The padlock 'puppet' was six foot tall. The chain went down the street with about forty links. People were in that — locked in, wage controls — not cut-backs. That subsequently went off to Hamilton; I don't know where its gone from there. That was paid for by the Labour Council. The Labour Council pays for a lot of the stuff we do, on Labour Day they also pay for our technical work too so often the props are at their disposal.

In the 1980 Labour Day Parade we also printed up lay-off slips listing the industries on one side, and the real reasons why they were laying people off on the other. It looked like a pay-packet and we handed them out on both sides of the parade.

FUSE: So all of this work comes from Partisan?

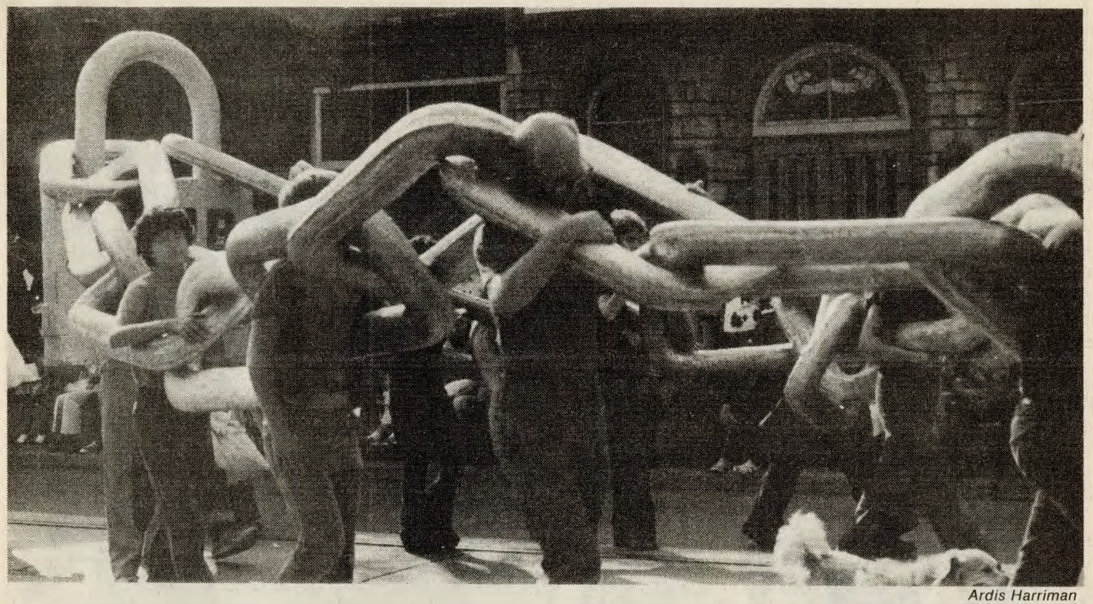
M.C: Yes, the Labour projects are also approved by the Labour Council.

FUSE: The A.I.B. (anti-inflation board) skits seemed to involve more recognizable street-theatre. Does that happen very often?

M.C: Not too often because that necessitates a stationary area to work in. Parades are difficult. In the AIB piece though there were large fly-swatters which had slogans on the back.

FUSE: How do you feel about the stuff politically? Is it something that is simpler than party politics being work for more general support?

M.C: It's more agitation within the labour movement. We're not really bringing ideas in, we're working with their ideas and trying to give those ideas some visual dynamic. It also importantly gives us the budget to run our operations throughout the year, it subsidises the Partisan gallery and



Ardis Harriman

John Sabas

A.I.B.(Anti-Inflation Board):"Take the sting out, Swat the A.I.B." City Hall, Toronto

stuff we've done on our own. For example during the Sudbury strike five photographers went up to Sudbury and spent the day with the Local taking pictures. The photos were then shown here as a fundraiser for the Steelworkers and subsequently shown at a Steel convention. This is the time when Stuart Cooke and some of the labour people, although vocally supporting Dave Patterson and the strikers at Sudbury, were militating against them. There was enough grass-roots support to get the photos shown at the conference which allowed other regional reps to get a better view of what was happening at Sudbury.

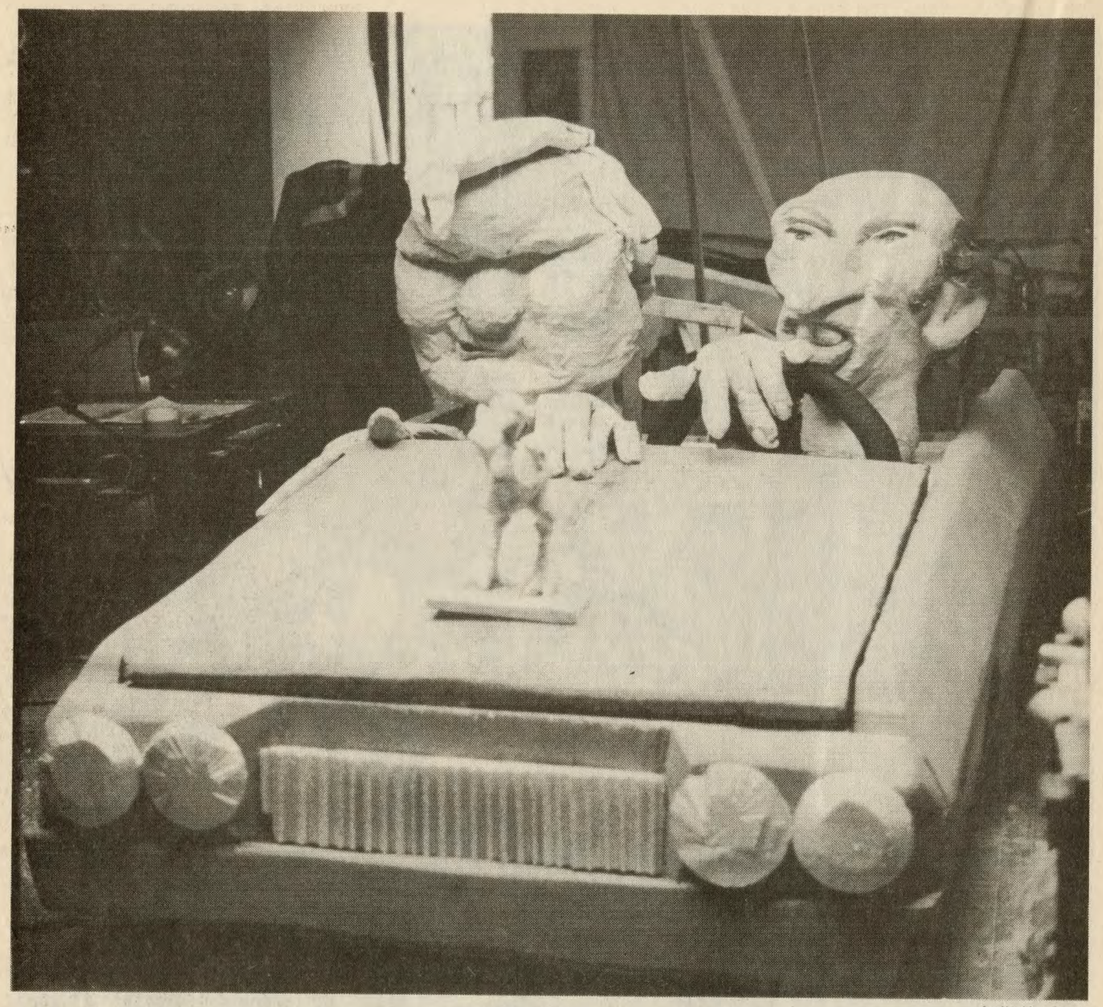
FUSE: Has your work with props encouraged a working theatre group to come out of Partisan?

M.C: No. We have a catch-all skit crew. Skits are different than theatre, in that skits rely heavily on props. At times professional actors have worked with us, like Charnie Guettel and Cheryll Cashman and her friends.

Richard Peachy: We also worked with the Argentinian Solidarity Committee at the time of the shipment of heavy water to Argentina.

M.C: We had a jail, a General and big box labelled Candu. Underneath the Candu box was a bomb prop. Our work is agitational and not propaganda which requires a lot more thought. We estimated that in a parade

Ardis Harriman



Ardis Harriman

you have about sixteen seconds in which to do a skit.

R.P: Its diverting, it uses humour but that allows for agreement on the scenario that's being presented. Its been hard to get Labour to do innovative stuff. The Metro Labour Council has been consistently more enthusiastic and supportive. Other unions are beginning to pick-up, Dave Patterson (Steelworkers) commissioned a lot of posters. There's also a lot more graphic work that can be done.

M.C: C.U.P.E. has also commissioned work.

R.P: There is a tendency for unions to go to commercial graphics agencies that are also being used by companies that the unions are working against.

M.C: Our first 'Trudeau' got trashed at the OFL convention, we found it on the tenth floor of the Holiday Inn in little pieces.

R.P: At a demonstration the puppets set a tone, no matter what factions are present. In that sense its a unifying phenomenon. In a way you're allowing the unions to make their own propaganda in the media. It used to be workers with their kids eating ice-cream at the Ex. Now often the papers will print a photo of a float with a cut-line reinforcing the message.

FUSE: Remember the model house that was built and burnt by, I think it was a U.A.W. local — they then carried the ashes on their 'Marathon of Despair' run to Ottawa for the November (1981) demonstration. Maybe your influence is being felt?

R.P: Anyone can do this, there's an institutional resistance to doing spontaneous publicity but the rank and file often help us carry props, they love it. It's a great form of political organizing. Before the last mayoralty election we organized the Island Show just as the issue was coming to a head during the election. A lot of people weren't taking stands. It showed in City Hall before the election and since October 1980 the show has been in circulation. It's composed of photos and stories. The islanders were often portrayed in the media as being hippie leftovers when in fact there were fourth generation people living there. So there are other means at our disposal in which we can be more in-depth with our work than the immediacy of the puppet props.

AGIT-PROPS AND STREET THEATRE FOR THE 80's

5. Toronto Street Theatre Group.

FUSE: How did the group get together?

Michael Riordon: It began with a couple of people involved with El Salvador Solidarity, and talking about the need to find other ways of speaking to people — the general public, so-called, about El Salvador and our involvement with it. Ways other than the traditional means of pamphlets, placards, trying to get the newspapers to do what you want them to do — which never happens. One of the ways we came up with started as being things we would more or less do impromptu at demonstrations but developed more quickly by person-to-person recruiting. It evolved into a less impromptu, more rehearsed and structured, mime piece with very simple goals, simple characters and caricatures. Over the course of time we have done this piece, we have made it more complex but still with the same basic goal in mind.

FUSE: So I am right in saying that the group evolved out of dissatisfaction with the tired and weary fare of most demonstrations?

M.R: Yes. Unfortunately we haven't been able to do away with speakers at rallies. Everybody always talks about how boring it is to have speakers, and yet everytime there is a rally of any kind there are often the same speakers present.

FUSE: The Red Berets, and Partisan being two lively exceptions.

M.R: Yes. The expression, 'street-theatre' covers almost an infinite range of things. I heard of someone yesterday in an environmental studies programme and he makes events in supermarkets where he and somebody else will get into a loud argument about some product and attract a huge amount of attention. They work it out in advance, inevitably it's to do with the grotesque imbalance between prices that the farmer gets and the supermarket mark-up. That to me is wonderful kind of street theatre. What we're doing is I guess what you'd call a classic kind of agit-prop.

We've actually started to move in two directions it seems to me in that kind of general even-structured theatre. One being strictly agit-prop where a group of people make a work to convey a message to other groups of people, the other is where we are beginning to talk and think about trying to use theatre as an organizing tool where we aren't the performers and the other people the audience. But where we can encourage other people to make their own theatre. In so doing to realise that they don't have to be especially skilled. By doing that they can create models of situations which suggest there's a possibility to take power.

FUSE: What material have you been dealing with other than El Salvador?

M.R: There are two projects that started in the same group in which other people have become involved. One is a piece which is close to being developed now on native people in Canada, including questions of land claims, and particularly self-determination for Dene people, in the North-West Territories. Also within the group, but adding other people into another kind of grouplet, has been a project about police in Toronto and in Canada — we try to keep that as non-specific to Toronto as possible. It seemed to us that peoples' lives were at least as affected by the RCMP for example. Now we're talking about the possibility of doing something on disarmament for the summer. Also the possibility of working with groups like

Ric Amis

El Salvador performance

tenants associations, — being the type of theatre I talked about where it's a tool for community organising, where we would not take in a set piece and perform it, but go in as stimulators. That so far is it.

FUSE: The first thing I heard about the group was interventions you made at meetings — how have you carried that out and based on what decisions?

M.R: Since it became too cold and too wet to perform comfortably out of doors we decided that there were three kinds of things we could do. One was still to seek out random audiences in public places which would mean university buildings, shopping malls, public areas. Another was schools. The third was to perform at existing events where people were already gathered for some purpose. We had a lot of trouble deciding which was most effective so we've done them all. Specifically the intervention model we developed was a way of avoiding just being an entertainment, where audiences would, by clapping and being generally excited about what we did, be able to remove themselves from what we were doing. So we worked out a way by informing the organizers of a meeting but not informing the audience. We intervene after a pre-alerted speaker had begun to speak when one of the group comes in unexpectedly with a stick and starts to yell that public meetings can't be held here, announcing he's closing the meeting down, and that the speaker has to shut-up. In the audience a member of the group, which has been a woman so far, is a plant. She jumps up and starts to protest. She gets attacked by this bully and gets dragged out of the meeting in classic South American practice of someone 'disappearing'. And then the piece begins.

What's happened so far — the first time we did it we didn't tell the organisers and unexpectedly they had very good security and the intervener was attacked and we almost caused a riot. Since then we have told the organisers, and still people tend to react with real shock because its very unexpected for people here to have their meeting intervened at all, other than in ways which they can deal with such as rude questions from the audience. What it means for us is that the audience is then in a different frame of mind where anything that follows has a different effect than it would have if it stated on the programme — there's going to be this group, and then people are waiting for it to happen. This way the audience is sufficiently unsettled. The piece which is only seven or eight minutes has I think a more powerful impact.

FUSE: You mentioned that you have already discussed whether or not you should perform in front of people who would already support you. How difficult is that objective?

M.R: We think about it continuously. Every meeting we have when suggestions are brought up for performance opportunities that particular question arises and we've never really completely settled it. There still is an inclination to think that we can still express something to people that a speaker can't and that written forms can't. And we can still say something with a kind of immediacy or impact. But given that we can only do so many performances — everybody's doing it on time off work, borrowed time and so on so we have to arbitrarily decide. There are exceptions, for example, a couple of weeks ago we did the El Salvador piece at the Oscar Romero Memorial Service and we talked a lot about that and there were some doubts. What we felt in that situation was that it would be a context in which there would be a lot of reverence and a kind of churchly atmosphere and doing the street theatre there, especially because we did it right at the beginning, allowed us to remind people that it was not just a dead Archbishop that was being talked about, but it was also the lives of ordinary people in large numbers as martyrs. Generally though we've arbitrarily said no to situations where other sources of information essentially tell people the same thing. For example when there were films or speakers.

FUSE: What's the composition of the group?

M.R: Its a mixture. There's more women than men, that's been right from the beginning. Occupationally? One woman works for CBC, one woman is a consultant to native people's groups, there's an actress, a couple of writers, a translator, a woman who works for the Cross-Cultural Communications centre, I can't remember the rest.

FUSE: How many people are in the group?

M.R: Probably including the new offshoots there's twenty. Generally the El Salvador piece involved ten to twelve people. There's also a couple of musicians involved including a Chilean singer and guitarist. I forgot to mention that one of the techniques has been the use of music at certain moments. After people are shot, this musician plays. We did something for the first time at the Romero service that I thought was really pleasing dramatically where we unusually had two musicians available that night Both of them played flute, one South American, one steel flute. That person, the musician has generally played a student also that gets shot. When we tried to reduce the numbers of it in order to be able to do it during the day at schools and have enough people available, we combined the role of student — who is somebody that actually leaflets and then gets shot in the course of leafleting — with the musicians role. What we did in the Romero service was have the student/musician get shot after escaping several times and popping up again to play. Almost instantly after a short silence, the other musician who is in the audience and hadn't shown herself at all suddenly got up and started playing. That gesture was very pleasing, what it said.

FUSE: Do you feel that as a learning experience you can develop what you need from the group and the current social situation and/or are there short-cuts that you might take based on other performance histories?

M.R: We've tended to approach the business of constructing . . . I think at the beginning there wasn't any information that we would become a street-theatre group. I think there was this notion that we would do this piece on El Salvador. So none of us thought consciously about: if we were better at this could we do it better and therefore have more effect? It seems to me that one of the things that's happening to us now — is the discussion around effectiveness. That being so, we're now groping to find ways of doing that. Just this month we are beginning to have rehearsals every second week. We, through exercises and improvisational games, will take the first tentative step towards developing some kind of ability. Its backwards to the contemporary established theatre though closer to the traditional theatrical model. There hasn't been a conscious sense in the group of looking at what's been done. It does become a responsibility. Personally, I have been very resistant to acquiring a lot of information about things I'm involved in. Information about the issues yes, — that's essential to understand them in order to be able to do something about them. But information about how you do what you're doing, I've tended to avoid that.

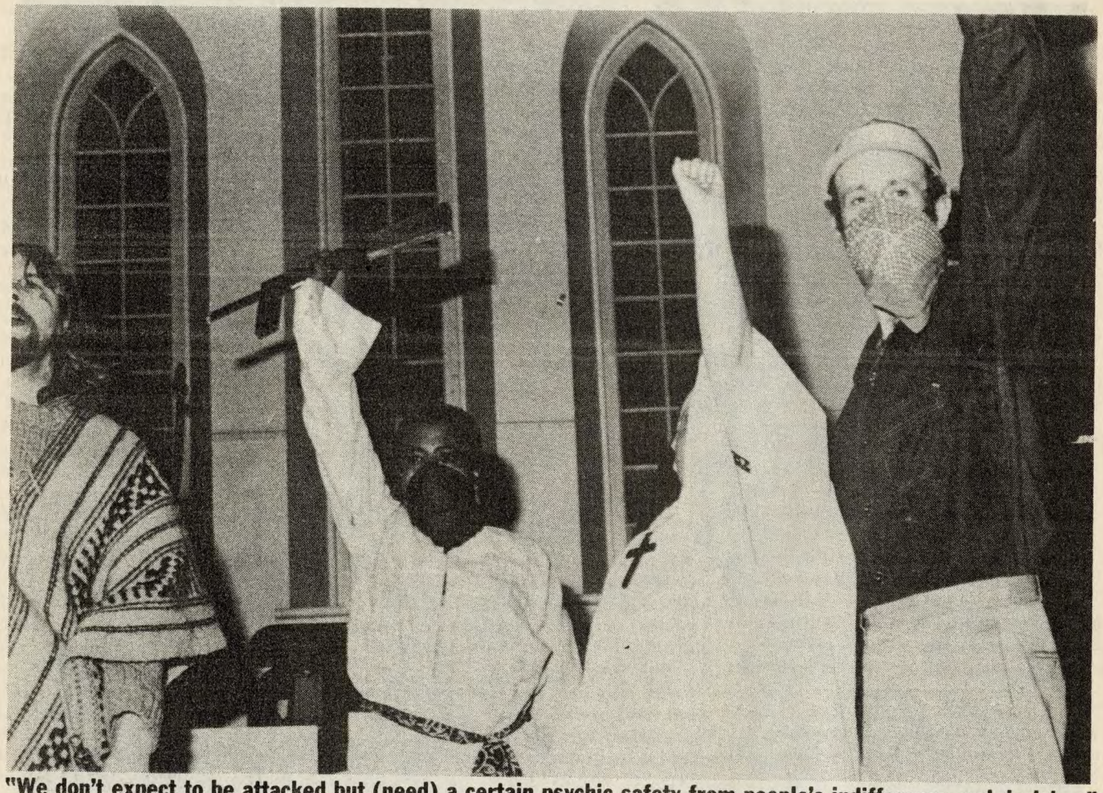
"It's a problem to know how to ally with groups involved in the same issues without being dependant on their approval."

That's limiting in a certain way. There's no need to be governed by what you learn but to be able to choose, to have access to what other people have thought, tried and done and especially why things haven't worked, at what points and with what audiences things have worked, would be useful to know.

FUSE: Have you had any problems with organising committees in terms of doing this work? There still is some resistance from progressive groups and organisations to embrace the contemporary function of what you are trying to do.

M.R: That's a real dilemma. It's been very important to us that we be able to develop the pieces that we've developed and to do the work we're doing independently of any kind of dictated line. Yet on the other hand the things that we're doing are so connected with the political work that organised groups are doing that it's been sort of a problem to know how to ally ourselves with groups involved in certain issues without being dependant on their approval. In the case of the El Salvador piece after an initial resistance by the executive of the *Committee of Solidarity with the People of El Salvador* (COSPES) there has been no resistance at all. In fact we developed the piece completely outside the organisation within the membership of the group which is almost entirely outside COSPES as well. In the case of the piece on police we made several mistakes. We became dependant on the technology of a theatre since we were going to do the first performance in conjunction with a film on police in the Real-to-Reel Series. And also we became dependent, almost without realising it, on the sponsor of that event which was C.I.R.P.A.. Very late in the process of constructing that piece we heard from the executive of C.I.R.P.A. that they felt the piece was, what was described to us as, "too simplistic". And that their relations with the police were very delicate and that they were afraid that the piece would be seen as anti-police. It is important to C.I.R.P.A. that they not be seen as anti-police but pro-civilian control of the police. So they said that we couldn't do it on April 4th at their event.

What we learnt from that was what we knew in theory already but forgot, which is, that in order to be able to function independently it was a serious mistake on our part to, in any part of the process, depend on the approval of an existing organisation. Their understanding of it? That's harder to read. In the case of COSPES they weren't afraid of the content because no content existed then. They were afraid of in fact the form, and they were afraid because they didn't think it could be done well. That to me is just a failure of imagination. In the case of C.I.R.P.A. they had actually already approved the form and it was the content that made them nervous. What that tells us is that in neither case, with form nor content can we be dependent. We're doing odd things in



"We don't expect to be attacked but (need) a certain psychic safety from people's indifference and derision."

response to this now. We're starting to be asked by organisations to do things. If it's an existing piece and we think it's a useful place to do it then we'll do that, but we would be very resistant to a) being on the programme and b) making things to order, at the risk of being seen as self-indulgently artistic. There's a qualifier to that. The people who are developing the native people's piece, before they perform it on the street they are going to present it to native groups and ask for their comments. What they're saying in advance is we want your uninhibited criticism but you must understand in return that you don't dictate what we do. So it's respecting the autonomy of the theatre group but at the same time respecting the right of the native people's whose issue, whose lives are being dealt with — the right of that group to have some say in what we do. The controlling say seems to be the subtle point.

FUSE: How functionally do you see yourselves?

M.R: I have never been aware of any sense consciously expressed in this group that people saw themselves as artists. Nor even very much as performers. I think we've been concentrating so much on what we've been doing and it's direct or indirect political impact that we've probably by and large functioned as political workers. The feeling still seems to be that centrally governing the whole thing is the question of who do we want to speak to, and how?

A larger percentage of us in the group are gay than in the average population. I forgot to mention earlier that one of the roots of our street theatre group exists when several gay people got together last summer and started talking about the possibility of having a gay theatre group; gay, satirical, agit-prop. We laboured away for a while doing something on re-born christians but we found that the group wasn't expanding, so it lapsed. But four of those people are now in the street-theatre group. But it is odd that we haven't developed anything that is predominantly gay, any work. The police skit was an attempt on my part and others to come to terms with that, to deal with something that was closer to our home. We've been temporarily stymied, but what we're going to do with that police piece is put it in the archives until the beginning of June and then develop as a much tougher and freer piece that will probably be more gay-based. Although obviously to suggest that the only people who have problems with the police are gay people would be nuts. It still offers us the chance of expressing more of ourselves which is crucial. I think we've felt that in doing this kind of theatre. With the Salvador piece we had to efface ourselves in a way, in fact we've done that literally — some people wear masks.

FUSE: You've used mime. What are the limitations and advantages of using mime?

M.R: I suppose its limitations have more to do with the people that are doing it than of the form itself. I've seen pieces like the Mime Company Unlimited, I think it's called that. They did Union Made, part of the history of labour organising in Canada. That was very rich. None of us are trained in mime so that's a limitation on us. For the El Salvador piece the mime has a practical advantage in not involving problems with the use of Spanish or English. In the police piece as originally developed it was very talky, but that was not necessarily a good thing because it was heavily dependent on two hidden voices — unseen powerful entities which we designed so that the audience couldn't have access to them, which of course is one of the problems with the Police Commission. In some ways, the native people's piece I believe does not use much language partially again because there is more than one language involved. There are some lines in it that I think the group is going to get translated into Ojibway because if they're performing for native groups as well as mixed and non-native groups then it's important that they not assume, as people always do, that people can or should be able to speak English.

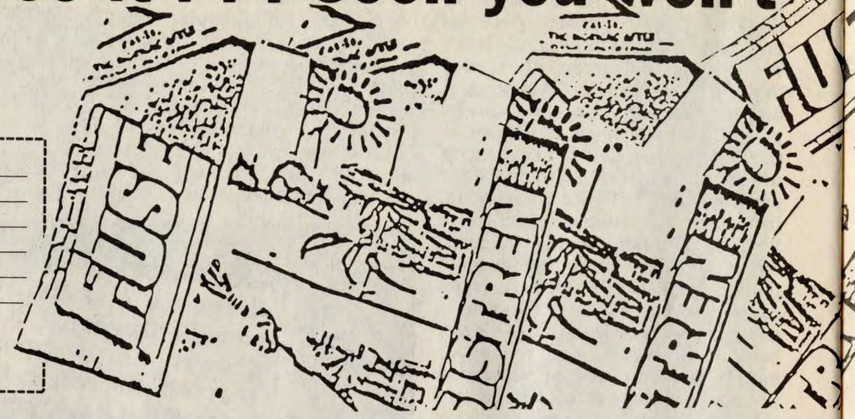
On the street we found that the El Salvador piece — is silent except for two words and the sound of gunshots which are quite dramatic given that they come out of this silence we create. We've had the impression that silence in noisy environments actually attracts attention to itself. Because we do it silently, apart from the gunshots and the two words people seem to be remarkably attentive to it.

FUSE: You mention the gunshots and earlier the woman at the intervention being forced to 'disappear'. How problematic is the use of aggression or violence in the group's work as a device for attracting attention?

M.R: I would regard aggression as meaning certain kinds of ways of making contact with the audience and we've been quite shy about making such contact. What we've tended to do on the street is to form a circle facing inwards. When the music begins on the South American flute we turn outwards and begin performing. There's a certain safety in the circle, not a physical safety — we don't expect to be attacked, but a certain psychic safety from people's indifference, derision and so on. As we've moved to the intervention version I mentioned earlier so we've in small steps ventured into making more contact. In the school performances what we do afterwards is that each of the people in the group describes the character that he or she played for example: "I am worker in El Salvador. This means that I'm probably not in a union, I make six hundred dollars a year. I would like to join a union but if you do you get killed." After these character explanations it's open season for the students.

As for techniques that demand a certain kind of attention from the audience we've been cautious about that as well. Even the move from using blocks of wood for gunshots to using a starter pistol was a step for us, just because it's louder. There's two kinds of blanks you can buy, there's Czechoslovakian and German and the German are louder, we use Czechoslovakian. But I've been considering 'escalting the arms race' (laughs) talking about getting louder blanks. Because it's tempting, not so much with an audience who has already made a contract with you by standing there and watching what you're doing, but all the people in the parks and the street who aren't paying attention to you.

Now you see it . . . Soon you won't



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Women and Culture

MUSIC
The Women's Music Industry - Susan Sturman (Dec. '80)
The Slits - Martha Fleming (Dec. '80)
The Raincoats - Andrew Paterson (Dec. '80)
Inuit Throat and Harp Songs - Ellen Moses (Dec. '80)
Mama Quilla II - Clive Robertson, John Greyson (May '80)
Hildegaard Westerkamp - Clive Robertson (Mar. '82)

VIDEO
It's Not Your Imagination (Women in Focus) - Lisa Steele (Mar. '81)
Nellies (Terry Chmilar) - Lisa Steele (Mar. '81)
Love, Honour and Obey (Third World Newsreel) - Tony Whitfield (Mar. '81)
Black Women: Bringing It All Back Home (Black Women for Wages for Housework) - Lisa Steele (Mar. '81)
Feminist Film and Video Conference - Nancy Johnson (Aug. '81)
Domination in the Everyday (Martha Rosler) - Tony Whitfield (Nov. '81)
Secrets from the Street: No Disclosure (Martha Rosler) - Tony Whitfield (Nov. '81)
Gloria (Lisa Steele) - Clive Robertson (Nov. '81)
Sacrificial Burnings (Nancy Nicol) - Clive Robertson (Nov. '81)
Split (Ardele Lister) - Clive Robertson (Nov. '81)
Delicate Issue (Nancy Nicol) - Clive Robertson (Nov. '81)
And Now the Truth (Vera Frenkel) - Clive Robertson (Nov. '81)

FILM
In the Bag (Amy Taubin) - Meg Eginton (May '81)
Nine Months; Two of Them; Just Like at Home (Marta Meszoros) - Isobel Harry (May '81)
Thriller (Sally Potter) - Tony Whitfield (Nov. '81)
Shadows of a Journey (Tina Keane) - Tony Whitfield (Nov. '81)

BOOKS
Sterilization/Elimintation (Nan Becker) - John Greyson (May '81)
Seven Cycles (Lucy Lippard) - John Greyson (May '81)
Project 73-80 (Miriam Scharon) - John Greyson (May '81)
Jails (Romaine Perin) - John Greyson (May '81)
Women and the Mass Media (Matilda Butler and William Paisley) - Alison Beale (Aug. '81)

PERFORMANCE
L.A./London Lab - Tony Whitfield & Lisa Liebmann (Nov. '81)
Mind the Gap (Rose Finn-Kelecey) - Lisa Liebmann (Nov. '81)
Spinning into the Eighties (Martha Rosler) - Lisa Liebmann (Nov. '81)
Broken Shoes (Cheri Gaulk) - Lisa Liebmann (Nov. '81)
Yoga with interference . . . (Carlyle Ready) - Lisa Liebmann (Nov. '81)
Sprouttime (Leslie Labowitz) - Lisa Liebmann (Nov. '81)

Labour and Culture

PHOTODOCUMENTS
Houdaille:Closing Down - Frank Rooney/Karl Beveridge (Dec. '80)
Canadian Farmworkers Union - Carole Conde/Karl Beveridge (Mar. '82)

FILM
A Wives Tale - Gillian Robinson (Mar. '81)
Moving Mountains - Gillian Robinson (May '81)
Les Voleurs du Job - Lisa Steele (Nov. '81)
A Time to Rise - Frank Luce (Mar. '82)

VIDEO
Enclosed (Nicola Mallson/Dawn Mason) - Lisa Steele (Mar. '81)
The Michelin Bill (Tom Berger/Bill McKiggan) - Lisa Steele (Mar. '81)
On Est Au Coton (Denys Arcand) - Lisa Steele (Mar. '81)
Building your Future - Women in Manual Trades (U.K.) (Mar. '81)
Telecommunications Workers Union (Amelia Productions) - Gillian Robinson (Aug. '81)
This Line is not in Service (Amelia Productions) - Gillian Robinson (Aug. '81)

OTHER
Maritime Labour Struggles - Kenneth Coutts-Smith (Mar. '81)
Art in the Workplace Conference (Australia) - Jody Berland (Mar. '82)

Native Rights and Culture

Native People's Rights - Norman Zlotkin (Dec. '80)
Treaty 9 Rights - Norman Zlotkin (May '81)
Crow Dog - Kenneth Coutts-Smith (Aug. '81)
The Aboriginal Nations - Heather Ross (Aug. '81)
Corporate 'caring' in North - Lisa Steele (Aug. '81)
Aboriginal Art (Australia) - Kenneth Coutts-Smith (Jan. '82)

Immigration

Trial by Television - Clive Robertson (Mar. '81)
Immigration Raids - John Greyson (Mar. '81)

VIDEO
Wataridori : Birds of Passage (Visual Communications Inc.) - Tony Whitfield (Mar. '81)
Pinoy (Sonny Izon) - Tony Whitfield (Mar. '81)
Omai Fa' Atasi : Samoa Mo Somoa (Mai Fa'Atasi) - Tony Whitfield (Mar. '81)

Black Culture

The Secret History of Black Music in Toronto - Norman Richmond (Dec. '80)
Diasporic Music - Norman Richmond (Mar. '81)
Gayap Drummers - C. Robertson /John Greyson (May '81)
Betty Carter - Norman Richmond (Mar. '81)
Music in Cameroun - Hank Bull (Jan. '82)
Political Thought of Archie Shepp - Norman Richmond (Jan. '82)

THEATRE
Sistren - Honor Ford Smith (Nov. '81)
Sistren's QPH - Lisa Steele (Nov. '81)

FILM
Valerie: A Woman, an artist . . . (Monica Freeman) - Valerie Harris (May '81)
But Then, She's Betty Carter (Michele Parkerson) - Valerie Harris (May '81)
The Cruz Brothers and Mrs. Malloy (Kathleen Collins) - Valerie Harris (May '81)

Race Relations

Blacks Britannica - Richard Royal (Dec. '80)
Nazis are no fun - Rock Against Racism (UK) (Mar. '81)
Two Versions - John Greyson (Dec. '80)
A Minor Altercation (Jackie Sheaver-film) - Valerie Harris (May '81)

Gay Culture and Rights

Telling Stories (CBS Gay Power, Gay Politics) - George Smith (Mar. '81)

Telling Secrets (CBC Sharing the Secret) - John Greyson (Mar. '81)
Nothing Personal (Ieuan Rhys-Morris & Ron Moule) (video) - John Greyson (Mar. '81)
Gays go to work on Bill C-53 - John Greyson (May '81)
Fighting the Right (5th bi-National Lesbian Conference) - Sara Diamond/Helen Mintz/Lisa Steele (Aug. '81)
Homosexuality: Power & Politics (Gay Left Collective) - George Smith (Aug. '81)
Pink Triangles: Radical Perspectives on Gay Liberation (ed. Pam Mitchell) - George Smith (Aug. '81)
Dangling by their Mouths (Colin Campbell) (video) - Clive Robertson (Nov. '81)

Cultural Policy

CBC 2: Seeing Double - Clive Robertson (Mar. '81)
Flagging down the Gravy Train - Clive Robertson (Mar. '81)
Video Crisis - Clive Robertson (Mar. '81)
Save the Last Dance for Me - Clive Robertson (Mar. '81)
Less Screening, More Trouble - Clive Robertson (May '81)
Artists' Rights Societies - Roland Miller (May '81)
Services or Commodities? - Cultural Workers' Alliance (May '81)
Love and Money: Politics of Culture (Oberon Press) - Clive Robertson (May '81)
The Decline and Faults of Ontario's Empire - Lisa Steele (Aug. '81)
Business as Usual - Gillian Robinson (Aug. '81)
Business and Culture (Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee) - Clive Robertson (Aug. '81)
Affirmation Action (Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee) - Lisa Steele (Aug. '81)
CRTC and PAY-TV - Clive Robertson (Nov. '81)

Dominant Culture (Ideology)

Twilite's Last Gleaming - Robert Reid (Dec. '80)
"The Worthington Letters" - Clive Robertson (Mar. '81)
The Chinese (John Fraser) - Anthony Chan (May '81)
Wealth and Poverty (George Gilder) - David Mole (Aug. '81)

Oppositional Culture (Ideology)

Photography/Politics: One (Photography Workshop, London) - Terry Smith (Dec. '80)
Television in Nicaragua - Richard Fung (Mar. '81)
Waking Up in NYC (PAD, NYC) - Jerry Kearns/Lucy Lippard (Mar. '81)
Manufacturing the News (Mark Fishman) - Paul Weinberg (May '81)
The Mozambique Caper - Jamie Swift & Art Moses (Aug. '81)
Post-Franco Spain - Jeffry House (Aug. '81)
Rattling the Chains (Kent Commission) - Clive Robertson (Nov. '81)

The New Underdogs - Lisa Steele (Nov. '81)
After the Cataclysm (Noam Chomsky) - Richard Royal (Nov. '81)
The Sociology of Youth Culture & Sub-Cultures (Mike Brake) - Alexander Wilson (Nov. '81)
Subculture: The Meaning of Style - Alexander Wilson (Nov. '81)
Modernism and Modernity (symposia) - Bruce Barber (Nov. '81)
Too Long a Sacrifice (Jack Holland) - Andrea Lynett (Nov. '81)
Militant Culture (theatre) - Timothy Rollins (Nov. '81)
Route 1 & 9 (theatre) - Tony Whitfield (Nov. '81)
Public Art (PAD Festival, L.A.) - Micki McGee (Mar. '82)
At the Lenin Shipyard (Stan Persky) - Robert Reid (Mar. '82)

Oppositional Culture (Production)

VIDEO
Transvideo - Tom Sherman (Mar. '81)
Michelle on the day of surgery; Steel and Flesh; Transvideo; Love Tapes; Weak Bullet; Videage; Get Ready to March; Ma Vie C'est Pour Le Restant De Mes Jours; The Breakfast Table; Peter George; Dogmachine; Casting Call; Virtuality; Test Tube; I Bet You Ain't Seen Nothing Like This Before - Clive Robertson (Nov. '81)
Prime Cuts; Wonder Woman; O Superman; Remnants From the Beginning of the Period of Destruction - Lisa Steele (Mar. '82)

MUSIC
Industrial Records (U.K.) - Clive Robertson (Dec. '80)
Guest List/Government - Clive Robertson (Dec. '80)
Green Fields of Canada - Norbert Ruebsaat (May '81)
The Mixed Means of Production (artists audio studios) - Clive Robertson (Mar. '82)
Horizontal/Vertical Band - Clive Robertson (Mar. '82)

OTHER
Fresh Air - Laura Kipnis (Mar. '81)
Performance Text(e)s & Documents (ed. Chantal Pontbriand) - Clive Robertson (Mar. '82)
Books by Artists (ed. Tim Guest) - Clive Robertson (Mar. '82)
Off The Wall (Derek May) - Clive Robertson (Mar. '82)

The Law & Civil Rights

Constitution: What's Really at Stake? - Jeffry House (Dec. '81)
Constitution: Who's Going to Profit? - David Mole (Dec. '80)
The Shit Shops Here! - Clive Robertson (Mar. '81)
Dowson v RCMP - Jeffry House (Mar. '81)
Covert Action Information Bulletin - Daniel Tsang (Mar. '81)
CounterSpy & C.A.I.B. - John Greyson (Mar. '81)
A History of Metro Police - Allan Sparrow (May '81)
Padding the (Police) Budget - Gillian Robinson (May '81)
Malicious Prosecutions - Mitchell Chernovsky (May '81)
In Us We Trust - James Dunn (Aug. '81)
The Corridart "Fiasco" - Jean Tourangeau (Aug. '81)
Family Protection Act - James Dunn (Aug. '81)
Censored! Only in Canada (Malcom Dean) - Lisa Steele (Nov. '81)
In the Belly of the Beast (Jack Henry Abbott) - Jeffry House (Nov. '81)
Writers and Human Rights Conference - Patrick McGrath (Jan. '82)
C.I.R.P.A. - Clive Robertson (Jan. '82)

Environment

VIDEO/FILM
The Uranium Question (Andy Harvey) - Lisa Steele (Mar. '81)
Song of the Canary (Josh Hanig/David Davis) - Tony Whitfield (Mar. '81)
Experts of Evil (Fugitive Films) - Nick Macrombie (Nov. '81)

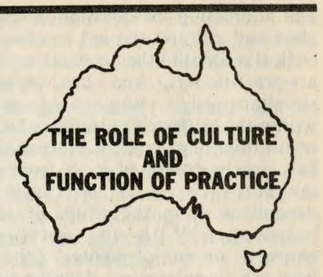
BOOKS
Acid Rain: The North American Forecast - Bill Glenn (Nov. '81)
Before the Rainbow: What We Know about Acid Rain - Bill Glenn (Nov. '81)
United States - Canada Memorandum of Intent on Transboundary Air Pollution - Bill Glenn (Nov. '81)

OTHER
Artists Against Uranium (Australia) - Jody Berland (Jan. '82)

Everything you might have missed in FUSE Volume 5

"...the Aboriginal communities had a well developed system of land ownership and rights of occupancy before the arrival of the Europeans; that land was acquired not peacefully, but through armed force; that at no time was there bargain, negotiation, compensation or treaty, with the indigenous people during this period. They were forced to accept the occupancy of their land."
Justice for Aboriginal Australians
from the Report of the World Council of Churches team visit to the Aborigines 1981 p.21

AUSTRALIA



In the last issue of Fuse (March 1982), Jody Berland reported on the *'Art and Working Life'* conference sponsored by the Australian Council of Trade Unions. The following articles describe the history of radical art in Australia, and outline some examples of work being done by and for the labour movement today. These examples only touch on a small portion of what is being done, and were selected to cover a range of different activities. With the exception of Terry Smith's *'Dirt Cheap'*, and Charles Merewether's *'Australian Artists and the Left'*, these articles first appeared in a pamphlet produced by the Community Arts Board of the Australia Council for the A.C.T.U. conference, and are written by the practitioners themselves. A much shorter version of Merewether's article also appeared in this publication.

Aside from the specific qualities of the work described, what should be of interest, particularly to Canadians, is the socio-political context within which this work is produced. In many respects Australia and Canada share common historic and cultural precedents. But, as is usually the case, it is the differences that are illuminating. The most notable of these is Australia's relative isolation from direct U.S. influence. Not that the U.S. isn't trying its damnedest, but compared to what we experience in Canada it is nothing short of refreshing. The question of a 'national identity' is not the subject of hot debate, and there is a strong sense of an organic working class culture, although it is, admittedly, infused with racist and sexist prejudices. Politically, an independent trade union movement allows activity almost unheard of here, including the topic of the following articles. Another immediately perceived difference is the polarization of the left in Australia. But, upon reflection, this probably has more to do with the peculiarly North American phenomenon wherein anything left of Greenpeace is considered totalitarian. With this in mind, I will quote extensively from an editorial by Michael Dolk (who co-authored 'There's no success like failure — or the story of a mural in the workplace) which appeared in a recent issue of Art Network. It describes better than I could the political issues involved in cultural production in Australia. The similarities to issues in Canada should be self-evident.

"The attack on modernism in the late sixties and early seventies help to bury a corpse that had already been institutionally incarcerated. The aim was not only to save art from its tautological self-absorption, but also to question those avant-garde postures of radical subversion which culminated in a proliferation of privatised languages and esoteric references. The dividing lines were never clear. They still aren't. But the idealism of the new left, its fusion of romantic revolt and revolutionary rhetoric has now given way to a more sober commitment to the possibilities for social and cultural change.

"The nature of these possibilities is in need of constant reassessment — the slogans of "Peoples Art" and the promise of creative liberation are both naive and plainly inadequate in application to specific techniques, images, meanings, contexts and audiences. It is, nevertheless, in an understanding of the way artistic values acquire contradictory meanings in the social spaces that define them, that possibilities emerge for a practice which goes beyond the self-definition of art and the artist within an art history which is witnessing its own redundancy . . .

". . . In attacking the commodification of art

and addressing the question of social class and culture, the left has been a critical irritant to the "mainstream" of art-practitioners, and has perhaps simultaneously marginalised itself within the professed pluralism of state institutions of patronage. Since the left has largely exempted itself from the marketplace it is particularly dependent upon the whim of such patronage. With the increased emphasis on complementary funding with private enterprise under the guise of "community support" more subtle pressure to *integrate* comes into play. The "socially responsive" arts are a rewarding target for public relations strategies from the local government level through to the multinational corporations (e.g. the reported Mobil offer to the AGDC for sponsorship of an exhibition of Australian political posters).

"What is at stake is not ideological purity, but the extent of artists' control over the content of their product and how it is constituted before an audience.

"In a time of 'economic crisis' or attacks upon the public purse it is not surprising that the class prerogative of culture reasserts itself and the efficiency experts retire the Arts to where they've always belonged.

"Apart from the funding crisis in art education, Community Arts, (the only social democratic reform to government patronage), is particularly vulnerable to cutbacks in public social services.

"If conservatism is the order of the day, it should perhaps be asked whether planning for the marriage of leisure and creativity in a "post-industrial society" — the social democratic utopia — is still a realistic objective. What needs to be examined is the role of culture and the function of community arts practice within a de-industrialising society with escalating unemployment, social and industrial conflicts, and the marginalisation of social minorities. Appeals to community consciousness and celebratory creativity cannot answer to a reality of economic debilitation and social fragmentation. (Adequate funding for child care, for example, is a prerequisite for womens' art activities and community involvement.)

"Community arts practice cannot afford to dissolve itself into a perpetual process of participatory social therapy. Neither should it be deceived by the patter of media approval when glossy products such as murals serve to disguise the rumblings of social discontent, or folkloric colour is paraded to mask the identity conflicts of migrant communities.

"Despite the problems met in tackling the contradictions of "popular culture", these are fundamental to the development of a viable public art. While it is impossible to isolate "progressive elements", one can at least avoid the uncritical appropriations which in the name of "new wave" have degenerated into decorative eclecticism and narcissistic posturing.

"Perhaps one of the most positive directions which have emerged over the past ten years has been the possibility of exploring new contexts and social spaces for the production of art — from incidental manouevres in the public domain, to the more sustained links with sections of the union movement, resident action groups, the Aboriginal land rights movement, migrant communities, and the anti-uranium and nuclear disarmament campaigns.

"Such associations have their limitations and are often beset with conflicts. But they should not be underestimated in their potential for engaging wider horizons than the circle enclosing the "art community" within its specialised obsessions."
Karl Beveridge

1. Australian artists and the Left

The following comments outline the broad historical character of radical cultural work in Australia during this century, and then specifically focuses around the development of a radical visual tradition which had emerged by the period of the Depression.

The relationship between cultural practice, the trade union movement and the Left in Australia goes back to the early 1890's, when both the Union and Socialist movements first emerged as a relatively cohesive social force. It is here that we can begin to detect the production of a more organised and specifically orientated form of visual work, which appeared in their various publications. Outside of this visual work the only field of imagery that had been fostered was to be found in the craft origins of the Union movement. This was the tradition of bannerwork.

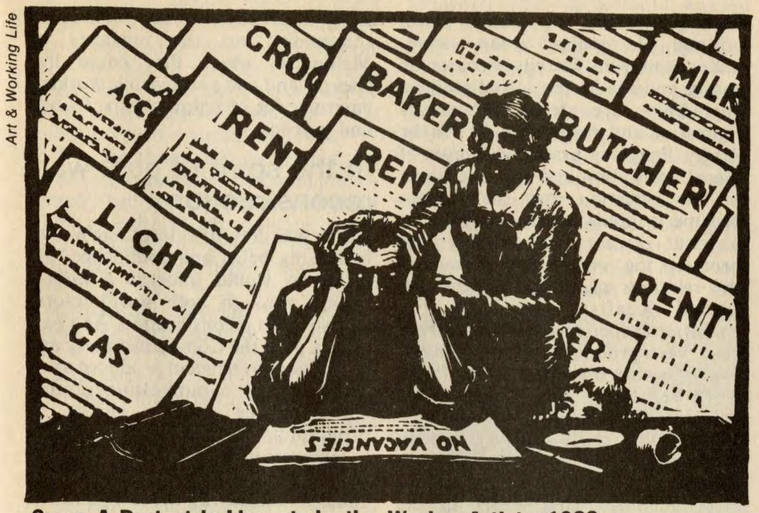
Both the IWW (International Workers of the World) and the various socialist groupings in their respective campaigns for industrial unionism and against an imperialist war and conscription, generated a considerable body of visual work in support of these causes. Out of this there is a clear indication that by the Twenties the founding of both socialist and communist educational programmes recognised the central place that should be held by theories of a socialist culture and the development of a local revolutionary cultural practice.

Alongside these people were a number of artists who were committed to a more consciously considered social function for their art. This meant not only attending directly to contemporary social crises and the ensuing class struggle, but organising a cultural base and establishing a means of distributing their work.

By the early years of the Depression a number of left, communist and worker organisations had been established. Without exception this seems to have been a response to events occurring on both an international and local level. It was the founding of the Workers Art Clubs, in 1932, that initially provided this base and focus not only for artists, but equally writers, theatre-workers, intellectuals and interested members of the working class. As in other countries the positive affect of the Communist International's change to a united front policy in 1935 was the development of a network of organisations which sought to cover every aspect of the conditions and experiences of working class lives.

Up until this point almost all visual imagery used by the communist press had been drawn from overseas contemporary work, especially from the cartoons found in the American **Masses** and **New Masses** magazines.

Although Australia rapidly became one of the most highly urbanised and industrial countries in the West, following World War One, the dominant visual culture remained tied to the landscape and pastoral tradition. This elevated the notion of a class harmonious regional culture and the concept of a resilient and progressive nationalism. The fact that



Saga: A Protest in Linocuts by the Worker Artists, 1933

the majority of people lived in urban centres and that the economic and social conditions of the workforce, especially the industrial sector, had suffered a severe downturn, seemed hardly to disturb the image or values of a nationalist ideology.

Artists and modern culture

In the midst of this a new generation of artists appeared, which in quite distinctive ways from each other challenged this orthodoxy with an aggressively assured and vital experimentation in painting the image and life of a modern, urban Australian culture. Their interest and commitment to the contemporary led to an active espousal of Socialist and progressive beliefs, and for some an engagement in progressive social movements.

However this avant-garde group, working primarily in Melbourne, also firmly believed in the autonomy of their art. It was not independent of society, indeed it opposed bourgeois culture, but equally opposed any subservience to political ideologies or organisations. It would contribute to social change by offering new perspectives and a new consciousness of the world. In this they were against the concept of an objective description of nature, against illusionism, and for an individual response to and expression of ordinary everyday experiences and events. During the Depression many of them were forced to find work, however poorly paid it was, and yet they were not interested in contributing to socialist or working class-orientated organisations or publications, and almost exclusively worked in oils and exhibited independently. Nevertheless they did form an integral part of an environment and milieu of critical discussion and intellectual debate across a range of subjects, and drew together a quite diverse group of progressive intellectuals, artists, writers and others.

In general this work throughout the interwar and immediate postwar period, represented the working class through images of the industrial workforce especially mining, iron or steel-works and the waterside. This was due in part to the strength and militancy of these particular Unions. As such their press and publicity machine actively sought and could use effective visual imagery to represent both their current struggles and a more general critique of Australian capitalism and reactionary government rule. However, it also corresponded to a traditional conception of labour and the heroic image of the proletariat. For although the specific historical conditions suggest good reason for representing this sector, the influence of Soviet art and the ideology of masculine labour power must have also informed these choices. There is virtually no trace of visual images being produced around or for secondary industries and more specifically factory work. This was an increasingly important source of employment, especially for women.

During the Depression two notable Communist artists (working with these images and themes) were Jack Maughan and Noel Counihan. Both of them were founding members of the Melbourne branch of the Workers Art Club.

Maughan, who worked almost exclusively in pen and ink, held the first worker-artist exhibition in the Club rooms. In this exhibition and in his work reproduced at the time, we find images focusing on two major themes: the depiction of the capitalist and the experience of the working class. Throughout, the forms are drawn in a stark, rough expressionist manner, showing the influence of artists like Otto Dix and Kathe Kollwitz. They contrast sharply with the elegant line with which he drew the ruling class, suggesting in this manner a form of parody.

Counihan on the other hand, worked both with pen and ink and in relief printing, particularly linocut. These images mostly appear as front covers in cartoon form for a number of Left publications. In this work the representations of class are located within a specific context and issue of the day.

Towards a modern culture

At the same time, the Thirties is distinctive for the concerted effort to bring Australia into touch with modern European art. This would, in effect, challenge the dominance and confining complacency of a landscape tradition which evoked Australia as a conservative backwater. This was aided by the importation of art books and colour prints or reproductions of the 'modern masters', and the organisation of small, touring exhibitions of European work. The most notable example of this type of venture was a large exhibition held on the eve of the World War Two, financed and organised through a leading newspaper house — the **Herald and Weekly Times**.

Artists on the Left and contemporary art

However the influence this exhibition had on contemporary artists in Australia was enhanced by one of the most significant developments in the course of Australian art, the founding of the **Contemporary Art Society** (C.A.S.) in 1938. It was in part a direct response to efforts made by conservative politicians and artists to set up an Australian Academy, but it also reflected the spirit of the Popular Front and its formation of broad

alliances in defence of contemporary cultural life and a democratic society. Within its first years it had not only established an active branch in almost every State capital, but was organising regular and well attended lectures and discussion programmes and holding a major annual exhibition of contemporary Australian art.

For ten years it provided a crucial base for artists committed to contemporary art. Not only was it an avenue for the exhibition of work, but it created a forum for discussion and debate. These discussions raised such issues as the value of cultural practice in the face of fascism and war, and the function of art under such conditions as well as the relationship between artistic practice and social or political beliefs and activism. At the forefront of these discussions were to be found not only communist artists, but others now more attracted by the politics and theories espoused by Trotsky and by various strands of anarchism. For the latter artists, the Communist party came to stand for an authoritarian organisation and the repression of the individual. They were attracted both to the work of Otto Dix and George Grosz, and to the theories and practice of the Surrealists. In contrast there emerged another group in Melbourne who sought to maintain their relation to the Communist Party and to express the conditions and experience of working class life. They came to be known as the 'social realists' as against the former group, the 'Angry Penguins', so-named after the magazine of which they were a part.

Anti-Fascism and the war

One of the most significant moments in the relations between the above two groups was reached in the Anti-Fascist Exhibition of 1942. Organised through the C.A.S. and under the initiative of the communist artists, the Exhibition was the most public, though last occasion on which these artists were seen together. It included the majority of those artists already mentioned and was based almost exclusively around Melbourne work. Much of the imagery dealt directly with the war and the forces of fascism. However, it also revealed the profound differences of belief and vision, that were to increasingly emerge both through their paintings and for some, their public statements or writing.

The common thread in the work of both groups was a profound moral critique of modern urban society under capitalism. The city becomes the source and site for moral and physical degradation, of anxiety and despair, of repression and destruction. In this the Angry Penguins produced images of moral corruption and evil, the figure of the madman and the woman became symbols of either mental or physical disease. Sexual difference produces the corruption of power and the relations of patriarchy. For the Social Realists, however, the conditions experienced by the working class was a product of fascism and less explicitly class divisions. Most of their work represents the figure of the working class as dispossessed and isolated as a class. And yet through this image they also sought to construct a sense of conviction, of class solidarity and belief in the resilience and capacity of the working class to overcome the forces of oppression. The work is distinctive not simply for the artist's profoundly humanist beliefs, but their active participation in the construction of a progressive nationalist ideology. This can, in part, be understood by the politics of the Popular Front, the election of a labour government and Communist party's decision to collaborate in the war effort (and programme of social reconstruction.) Hence although their work is marked by an imminent class analysis, located within the context of the international struggle against fascism; it is also an image of national unity and solidarity in defence of the country. Such a contradictory position is most pronounced in some of the images produced for Union and working class organisations. An explicit critique of class division is now subsumed either by directing attention to the captains of industry or by the image of social reconstruction.

With the end of the Contemporary Art Society there was in Melbourne a dispersal of artists and the end of a broadly-based forum and point of focus for viewing and discussion of contemporary cultural practice. Most of the communist artists remained close to one another and to the Party. Many other artists however, who had been central to the debates and the shaping force of contemporary and progressive art during the war, were either to leave the country with the chance to see Europe for the first time, or leave behind the closed urban environment of their youth. This was particularly the case for the Angry Penguin artists, who formed a small community on the outskirts of Melbourne where they could live cheaply and had a supportive working environment of fellow artists, friends and patrons.

In the spirit of post-war reconstruction

As the war drew to a close there was an increasing belief and confidence that Australia would undergo a radical change through both social reform and socialist reconstruction. As a part of this both the Communist party and the labour government produced a far-reaching range of publications around these issues and a series of programmes for a Socialist Australia.

However in the period following the war, the political situation rapidly changed and as with the early Thirties, the class struggle was again thrown into sharp relief. The progressive demands and programme set out by some of the Unions became the subject of direct attack by the mobilizing forces of the Right, leading to a greater urgency and militancy in the actions taken by contending interests. By 1949 the Cold War politics had become a ruling force in Australia and had successfully carried in one of the most reactionary governments the country had seen.

Within this context a number of artists and others involved in the production of imagery took a far more active part in the struggle towards the ideals of a progressive Australia. It is a period in which the participation in a more militant cultural practice was extended and consolidated. This was aided by strengthening of the relations between the Communist party and more progressive and larger industrial Unions, which allowed for an increase and more direct involvement in Union work. What was at stake was the vision of any change and cultural renewal. For the Left it seemed the progressive cultural traditions that had emerged so clearly during the interwar and war years in Australia, were now under threat of ruthless suppression.

Resurgence of realism and the Cold War

These years also witnessed the growth of interest and use of both photography and film in Australia. As in Europe these forms had been given an enormous boost through their application to government propaganda campaigns. In Australia the local film industry had already made its mark from the Twenties on by producing a string of popular films. And yet by the post-war period these companies had been almost completely taken over by American interests bringing local production to a virtual standstill.

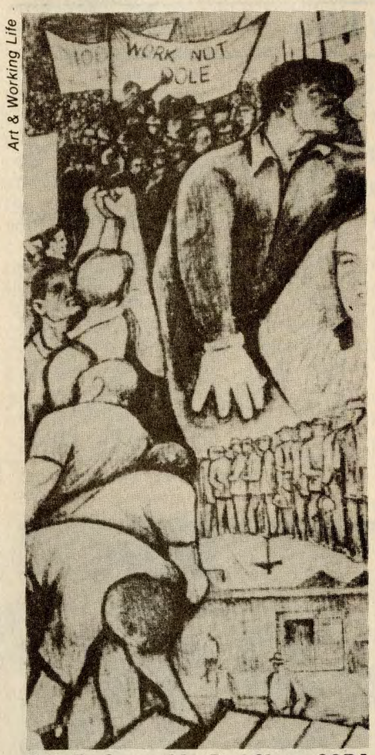
For the communist movement, the production and use of film and photography had also become an important field of cultural and political work, and although its practice had been fostered in Europe in the Twenties and after, it had not been actively encouraged in Australia. On the other hand, the screening of Soviet film had been successfully introduced in Australia as early as the late Twenties, and was influential in promoting an appreciation of Soviet culture and socialist reconstruction. Film was also used to support the Spanish people's fight against fascism, with screenings organised throughout the country by the Spanish Relief Committee.

It was not until after the war that a small group of film enthusiasts began the **Realist Film Unit** in Melbourne. Prior to that their experience in film production was negligible, although some of them had been actively involved in the distribution and exhibition of progressive European film. Over the next sixty years the Unit produced on a threadbare economy, a series of documentaries, newsreels, shorts, trailers, and compilation films. The material covered not only the living and working conditions of the urban working class, but the experimentation and experience of new social programmes (i.e. a progressive school) as well as the activities of the Communist party, demonstrations, May Day marches, campaign work and the theatre production. The Unit was however forced to close down in 1951 failing to gain the financial support of the Communist party and the Unions, whom they had supported through their work.

The Unit had also set up in 1948 a **Realist Film Association** as part of its overall project. Organised by the same people, it established the basis for an important Library of progressive film work from Europe, America, England and elsewhere, as well as held regular screenings every week both in its city building and in the suburbs, developed a library of film literature and published a small weekly bulletin. In short the activities of the Association provided the basis for the growth of a film culture in the following years.

In Sydney there was nothing comparable to this work in the immediate post-war period. It was not until the early Fifties that a film unit began, and as in all major cities much of the energy and time of those committed to developing a revolutionary or socialist culture worked in the New Theatre. This had been founded in the mid-Thirties following the demise of the Workers art movement, and has continued to this day.

Nevertheless one of the most significant cultural organisations to be found in the post-war years in Sydney was the **Studio of Realist Artists**. In a manner similar to the Workers Arts Clubs, they established evening classes, encouraging a belief in more democratic access to learning artistic skills and as a consequence, the engagement in more popular forms of cultural practice; the production of murals, placards for demonstrations and marches, posters, cartoon work, banners for May Day and Labour Day processions as well as holding annual exhibitions of their own painting and an active programme of evening lectures and discussions, and a regular bulletin.



Art & Working Life

Detail of mural by Rod Shaw, SORA members and waterside workers in the early 1950's, Sydney

One of the last ventures of SORA in the early Fifties was a major mural project at the offices of the Waterside Workers Federation. Although it was never quite completed, the series of panels represent a history of the waterside workers and Union interwoven with the course of the Communist and labour movement from the 1890's.

During the early years of the Fifties, there was also a Sydney based Waterside Workers Film Unit founded by three people who had had both experience on the waterside and had worked with New Theatre and a Maritime Theatre group. And throughout the years of the Cold War, the Unit made some of the most significant and influential newsreel, documentaries and dramatized documentaries about working class life in Australia.

The Fifties and beyond

Throughout the Fifties the Cold War climate and offensive taken by reactionary forces and institutions, as well as the disillusion and disenchantment with the Communist movement and the Soviet Union, led to a withdrawal by many from organised and public forms of cultural practice.

There was nevertheless a continuation of a realist school of painting throughout these years and the early Sixties especially in Melbourne. Much of this work extended and transformed the different kinds of imagery that had emerged in Melbourne painting during the War. There is on the one hand, an extension of the image of the bush or the outback as a site invested with and producing a mythic structure through which the moral forces of good and evil can be laid bare. At the same time, an image of the city is painted as a bleak, passionless environment wherein any vision of a future for urban dwellers is contained by a spirit of resignation. Certainly cartoon and illustration work for the Union and Labour movement continues as it had throughout the postwar period, but it is also marked by a lack of a broader point of reference. The work seems confined to the exigencies of the day-to-day struggles rather than also referring out to the broader political and ideological forces constituting the specific character of local issues.

In short, the larger social milieu and environment through which a progressive cultural and intellectual movement had been founded and

invigorated, and which had infused and given form to a belief in the possibility and value of a progressive culture, had been seriously contained and eroded. It was not until the Peace movement of the early Sixties and more the movement against Australia's participation with America in Vietnam, that the cultural left once again begins to take shape as a significant social movement for change. Throughout the course of Australia's social history and most significantly within the past eight years under a reactionary government, cultural work has played a crucial role in strengthening and articulating both the fight against oppression and the need for radical change.

Charles Merewether

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2. Art and Working Life

A workers' journal of creativity

925 was born out of a series of poetry readings organized by Thalia and held in a cafe in the inner Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy. The readings were held weekly and the pressure on the six readers to produce new poems resulted in a search for new material. Following on from a number of poems I'd written and presented, Jeltje Fanoy decided to focus on writing 'work' poems. Taking Jeltje's cue, everyone else began to produce work poems — so that, by the end of the readings, we had a body of work, about work, but no where to publish the poems. The idea of a magazine suggested itself and we received both financial and literary contributions and numerous invitations to read on shop floors, we had the first issue out within a week (November, 1979).

Initially *925* was to be distributed through 'normal' channels: bookshops, readings, street corners etc. But friends and acquaintances thought it such a great idea that they took copies to work in bulk. By the end of the second month we'd moved the whole print run of five hundred, without effort. *925* was given away — *free* (as it is still) — but financed by us (and whatever contributions people saw fit to donate, which is also still the case). The success of *925* was amazing: schools, festivals, prisons, etc. We received poems from process workers, mechanics, hairdressers, brickies, labourers, etc.

Unlike many other left-wing 'do-gooders', *925* did not pretend to be anything other than what it was: a magazine about work, by the people who wrote for it. We weren't patronizing about work or workers, cos (a) we didn't know what an adequate definition of a worker was — e.g. was a student a worker? a prisoner? a housewife? — so rather than act as the lawyer, we decided we'd accept the lot; (b) we insisted on a high literary standard, something which is usually left lax (by others) on the grounds that the authors were workers; we didn't care if they couldn't spell, but they had to produce a sufficiently strong and exciting piece of prose or poem to be accepted, which had the dual effect of insisting on originality and developing skills of writing; (c) the workers were talking for themselves about their own perceptions and predicaments, and not having someone else (e.g. academics or sociologists) doing the talking for them.

As *925* was totally committed to workers/writers writing about their 9-2-5 world, the idea developed that it was, in reality, *one epic poem*. We began to notice that as each contribution came in more of the jig-saw was being filled in, so in effect *925* was producing a *portrait* of Australia, in the words of the workers themselves. To make the portrait even more accurate, we decided to approach Max Ogden at the AMWSU to see if we could arrange readings in factories, firstly, to relate and air the poems and experiences of other workers, and secondly, to stimulate further contributions. The readings were organized and the results were outstanding: in one factory the workers responded by spontaneous clapping and the rapping of cups on canteen tables. George Seelaf of the VTHC organized further readings in pubs and festivals.

925 is now on a print run of 3000, making it the largest poetry/prose magazine in Australia (unsubsidised, to boot!). If you want to be on our mailing list write to:
P.O. Box 2430V, G.P.O., Melbourne 3001.

925

Art & Working Life

Woman's Theatre Group - lunchtime performance of "A Woman's Place Is..."

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- Ann Stephens is a writer working in Sydney.
- 925 Magazine
- Michael Callaghan and Gregor Cullin run the Redback Poster workshop in Wollengong.
- Michiel Dolk and Merilyn Fairskye are muralists working in Sydney.
- Helen Grace is a photographer working in Sydney.
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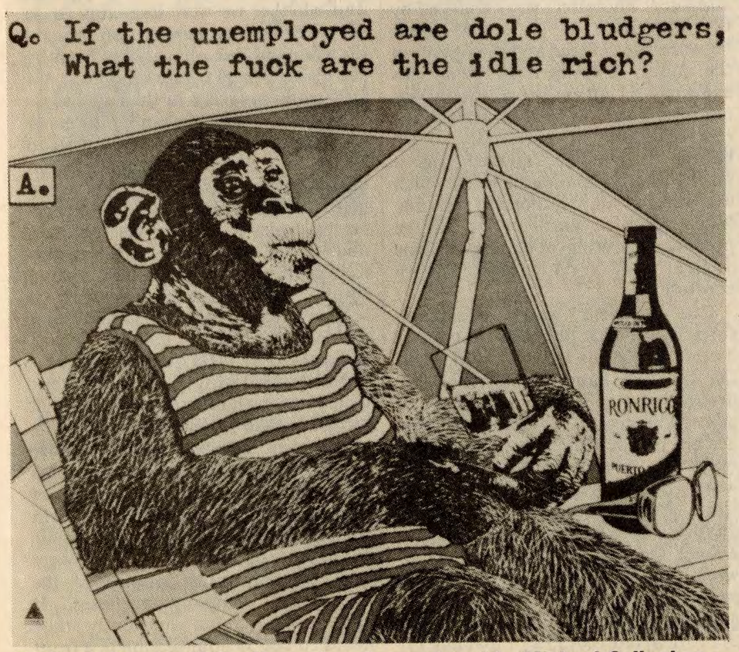
Redback Graffix

Redback Graffix is a poster workshop established as a result of an Artist-in-Residence programme associated with the South Coast Labor Council (New South Wales). Early in 1980 we were in the Wollongong region involved in issues such as unemployment, workers' conditions and struggles. During the year we produced pamphlets, publications, handbills, posters, murals, banners and filmwork for many community groups and trade unions in the area.

Early in 1981 grants were received from both NSW State and Federal Government arts funding boards to further develop the role of cultural work in Wollongong. This has enabled us to consolidate our working relationships with various unions and groups and to centralize our activities through the workshop. The Redback Graffix workshop is a staging point and facility for visual media which reflect the needs of a largely industrial and multicultural community. Most of the production is done by the artists, with much of the research and content coming from activist groups such as the Rank and File workers of the FIA, the Waterside Workers Federation, Wollongong Workers Research Centre, the South Coast Labor Council, and Migrant Resource Centre. These organizations can provide political knowledge and an understanding of the day to day reality of the work process and industrial and community issues.

While the needs of an industrial community cannot be separated from on the job struggles for better working conditions and wages, these struggles are also echoed throughout the local community. Therefore new initiatives in community arts practices must be relevant to the region and its population. The trade union movement is currently reassessing the need for more effective media to both communicate and counter the constant flood of anti-union propaganda in the mass media.



Redback Graphix *If the Unemployed...* produced by Michael Callaghan

There's no success like failure — or the story of a mural in the workplace.

Present initiatives to develop the Arts in the Workplace program are, we believe, bound by fundamental political contradictions. Our experience as artists and as participants in the program seem to confirm this.

Art and creativity in the workplace usually mean for the workers, not by the workers. Often, in such programmes, there is a lack of choice involved in being rendered a spectator. The performing arts, film, slide shows and video can be both extremely successful and intrusive in that thirty minutes of respite from work.

It was an awareness of such problems which led us to suggest a mural project to NSW Trades and Labor Council, in late 1979. But why a mural?

Industrial psychologists have long been aware of the influence of the work environment on attitudes to work. The benefits of a brightly coloured coat of paint on the walls has been demonstrated on many occasions. It stimulates productivity to an alarming degree. (A recent invitation to paint a mural in a factory at Castle Hill revealed that the owner regarded the exercise as a cheap substitute for the installation of air-conditioning.)

While we consider the improvement of working conditions to be more important than art in the workplace, our commitment to a mural project was not guided by a wish to subsidize private enterprise in the task of brightening the work environment. Neither did we see ourselves as artistic agents of industrial pacification, as management perhaps sees the ACTU

Arts Program.

Many problems encountered were the inevitable result of the contradictions which the ACTU Arts Program is faced with, problems of gaining support from management, workers, trade unions, and funding from the State. In addition it became apparent that the expectations of workers did not necessarily coincide with those of the Trades and Labor Council which is responsible for implementing ACTU policy.

Funding was obtained ($4,000) from the NSW Premiers Department (Division of Cultural Activities) and we were invited to work on the project, with Jeff Stewart a Melbourne artist then residing in Sydney. We settled for a wall in the drab works canteen of the ACI Glassworks in Waterloo, Sydney. Management were agreeable — various lunchtime programs had already taken place there. Through the main unions involved, the AMWSU and the Glassworkers Union, we made contact with the shop stewards at the plant, and gained their full support. We sought additional support from management in the form of paint supplies and masonite panels to reface the wall. (Detachable panels are useful in the event of building modifications or of disputes concerning content of the work. In retrospect, we recommend that the issue and conditions of ownership of the completed work should be resolved between all parties concerned at the outset. We don't believe that ownership of or reproduction rights to the mural should automatically pass to the owners of the building.)

The first two weeks of the project were spent in the factory talking to workers, taking photographs, showing them slides of other murals, researching in the library, and preparing designs for discussion. Contradictory opinions were expressed regarding subject matter of the mural. We felt that these would be better resolved through discussion than by adopting a market survey approach.

Initially, some workers were suspicious of the project or expressed indifference. Some were justifiably resentful of the fact that money was to be spent on a mural when nothing else had been done about the wretched conditions of the canteen or the quality of food available. (As a painted substitute, a banquet on a canteen table in nearby Centennial Park was included.) Jeff attached a sign to the wall naming our sponsors which was enough to dispell rumours about who

Art Network

Panel from mural at ACI Glassworks, Waterloo(NSW), 1981 by Merilyn Fairskye, Michiel Dolk and Jeff Stewart

was really paying us.

At first, it was difficult to reach agreement about subject matter. Some people were enthusiastic about the idea of reflecting life in the factory, others did not want to be reminded of it in their lunch break or didn't think it proper subject matter. People also wanted to see images of nature, sport and leisure.

One of the most successful features of the mural in the eyes of its audience was its capacity to mirror the audience. This effect was enhanced by the continuity of scale and space between the canteen and the figures in the mural. A concern for detail was expected by an audience which was quick to point out inaccuracies in the representation of machinery, work habits, etc. What emerged was a mutual understanding of skills which was perhaps more important than any token form of participation in the process of painting (at no stage was the desire for such participation expressed).

One problem which constantly surfaced was that posed by the contradictory functions of the mural itself. On the one hand, the demand for decoration and of animating a depressing space through colour and design; on the other, the demand for realism — to reflect the reality of the work environment and the nature of work. How to achieve these contradictory demands without reproducing the depressing monotony of work on the assembly line, without beautifying or idealising this reality in a decorative manner, or aestheticising the forms and rhythms of machinery?

In the end it was the demand for realism which caused difficulties with management — a week after the mural had been completed. The first panel was devoted to a pictorial montage of aspects of working life and the natural environment in which the glassworks was originally built. It included an image of glassworkers on a horse-drawn cart with an eight-hour day banner in a May Day procession in the 1890s. We were asked why we had not chosen to paint a banner of the 35 hour week as had earlier been requested, and whether we were intending to do so. We were reminded on several occasions of our obligations, even by the glassworkers whose union was not as directly involved in the campaign.

We went ahead, not under duress or apprehension, but realising that to leave it out would make a mockery of any artistic claim to realism. Including images of a union meeting — workers voting under a 35 hour week banner and leaving the meeting, leading into the leisure panel of the mural — was a simple and non-rhetorical way of representing an aspect of reality that would have been notable in its omission.

Not surprisingly management which had been resisting the campaign for more than six months resented its inclusion in the mural. Perhaps more surprising was the manner in which they reacted and the lack of tolerance displayed. What happened is worth recounting in summary. The public relations department of ACI, we were told, wanted to use photos of the mural for company purposes. It appears that, quite innocently, they included the 35 hour section in a front cover layout for a company

publication. It landed on the desk of the managing director of ACI at Melbourne Head Office . . . and never saw the light of day. Management was notified and so were we. The 35 hour week banner was to be painted out. We refused and initiated discussions with the workers, shop stewards and union officials who expressed determination to leave the mural intact. Two representatives from Head Office in Melbourne were sent to check out the trouble. Eventually a compromise was struck — no publicity, no official opening, conversion of beer cans in the mural to beer glasses and the banner stayed in.

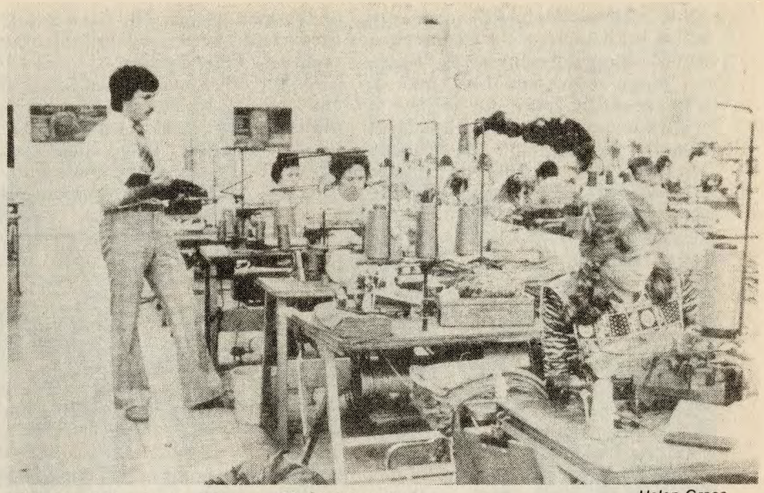
It is perhaps ironical, given the support which management exacted from the Labor Council of NSW, that the 35 hour week campaign in the glass industry was successfully concluded six months later.

If there is a moral in this story it's this: In a situation, such as a workplace, where antagonistic interests are at stake, a claim to neutrality is no claim at all. If culture is used to define a harmony of interest between management and workers, then such harmony can only be a disguise for class interest.

Poster by Redback Graphix during 1980 Miners' Strike

Where this leaves the ACTU Arts programme is self-evident: in the contradictions of politics. Any project which expresses the interests of workers is more than likely to antagonize management. There's no failure like success.

Michiel Dolk and Merilyn Fairskye



"Method Engineer Timing Machinists" *Helen Grace*

Photography

The ACTU is planning a photography exhibition around the theme of 'Australia at Work'. This project represents an important initiative on the part of the union movement which, until now, has given little attention to ways in which it might more effectively use photography.

Business has long recognized the importance of the photographic image — particularly in its advertising and in company reports. Some commercial photographers have built their businesses and their reputation on the photography of plant and people for big companies.

Their work is influential in presenting to us a view of the industrial environment which the companies would like us to have. We are shown appealing images which always present a rosy picture of industrial relations. Or, if any critical comment is made at all, the work is presented in a context which reduces its effect.

CSR, for example, commissioned a group of photographers to photograph its Pyrmont (NSW) refinery for its centenary in 1978. The images which were produced were powerful and the project was highly successful. Because it had the support of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, the project could also present itself as 'art' in some sense, — to avoid calling itself advertising (which ultimately is what it was). The photographs, in the form of an exhibition, toured art galleries throughout Australia. A selection was used in a well-produced and moderately-priced book which functioned as the catalogue of the show, but also reached a wider audience through bookshops. CSR was undoubtedly pleased with the project, receiving wide praise for it. So successful was it in fact that the company is continuing the policy of commissioning photographers to record aspects of its extensive business.

Many of the photographs taken to advertise companies could also be used in a different context to present a 'shopfloor' perspective on the industrial environment.

However, it is also useful to think about producing different photographs — pictures which are concerned less with making work seem like a bed of roses and more with producing an understanding of the work involved in establishing and maintaining wages and working conditions.

In recent years, increasing numbers of photographers have turned their attention to producing work for unions, the public sector and community groups, and to questioning ways in which photographs are taken and used.

Union newspapers (one of the union movement's most important resources) are beginning to extend their use of photography beyond the traditional, boring, mugshots of union officials surrounded by acres of unrelieved newsprint. However there are still problems . . .

A fundamental difficulty is getting the pictures which are needed. This difficulty can be understood in terms

of the widespread de-skilling of work which is a feature of the introduction of technology in many areas. Within the union movement itself there is, what might be called, an attitude of 'de-skilling' towards cultural work. It is assumed, for example, that anybody can take pictures, so that when photos are needed, little thought is given to whether or not the person arbitrarily chosen to take them knows, a) how to use a camera, or b) how to get the best picture for each situation. It is also assumed that there is no distinction between a) and b).

Not only is the work not regarded as skilled, but it is not even regarded as work-in-its-own-right! It is merely tacked on to the other jobs which people are paid to do. Under these conditions of production, it is hardly surprising that unsatisfactory results are frequent. Until photography is regarded as work, requiring certain skills which are only acquired through constant practice it is unlikely that the union movement will obtain the sorts of images which are of most use to it.

Photographers and other cultural producers working in this area have begun to organise within appropriate unions to improve their working conditions. This work is part of a broadening of discussion of cultural issues which is now taking place within the union movement.

Helen Grace

Public broadcasting

The trade union movement in Australia has a fairly ambivalent attitude to public broadcasting. At a formal policy level, it supports this sector of the media whilst slating the increasing centralisation and control of the mass media. The 'Unions and Media' Conference in April this year re-affirmed this position.

On the other hand, actual financial and practical support has been intermittent, low-key and charitable rather than committed. Even those few unions that have been consistently involved have had their Councils locked into battle over this.

Of course, from a union point of view, that's investing money into public broadcasting; the question arises: is there an audience? (Or, is it the one we want? in other words — does our membership listen?) What, finally, are we getting for our money?

No doubt these questions need to be asked. But the irony that's involved for the public broadcaster is this: often it's the unions that ask these difficult questions that are spending thousands of dollars each year on advertising with the mass media. Their contributions to public broadcasting are paltry by comparison.

It should not be a surprise to anyone to learn that this sector of the media will never attract the audience it deserves unless it is made financially viable. But it's not simply a money problem. There is a prevalent attitude within trade unions that public broadcasting is a bit of a Mickey-Mouse Club. Perhaps some stations have contributed to this — nevertheless many are the stories that tell of interviews being given, news being released or international visitors being taken to the mass media ahead of public broadcasting (or worse, public broadcasting stations not even being notified).

However there have been exceptions to this general attitude. In Melbourne there are two public broadcasting stations that make themselves available to trade union participation: 3CR and 3RRR-FM.

3CR is a community radio station in which a union can be involved as an affiliated member. For a small annual fee, a union joins the broadcasting association that makes it a party to major decisions of the station. This also allows direct access to the airwaves; each affiliated organisation is allocated a half hour of programming time each week to autonomously compile and present within station policy guidelines. Unions such as the TTUV, VSTA, PKIU, ATEA, Wharfies, Seamen and Builders' Labourers have all taken up this option and many have had regular weekly programs broadcasting for several years now.

This option has its difficulties. A weekly program needs personnel to research, compile, interview and present. Often the resources available mean that the programs lack quality, become repetitive, conflict with union policy (or the leadership) and inevitably run out of steam.

In recognition of these problems, the AMWSU (a major 3DR affiliate) paid a qualified person to do the job for them. Initially this was a member of their union, but over subsequent years the program was produced by professionally-trained people. A number of other unions joined this project and eventually the presenter was employed full time to make a half hour program every morning, five days a week. The presenter had a degree of independence over certain political issues and provided news/views/interviews in line with the basic concerns, interests and policies of the unions involved.

3RRR-FM is licenced as an 'educational' station and therefore union involvement requires a different formal relationship. The station has a larger professional staff employed to produce a wide variety of educational programs. Affiliation to the station therefore is more expensive than 3CR, although membership does mean a substantial involvement in policy decisions and access to a full-time production staff to produce high quality programs.

Public Broadcasting has a great deal to offer a trade union movement concerned with its relationship to the community in general, with media access and media control. However, its success depends on the realisation that quality and influence is not something bought cheaply.

Reece Lamshed

Dirt Cheap

Oenpelli, N.T., 1978 - The 'Signing' of the Ranger Agreement. From *Dirt Cheap*

3. *Dirt Cheap:* Film as resistance

DIRT CHEAP
A film by David Hay, Marg Clancy and Ned Lander (88 mins., 16mm., colour)

How can progressive members of the labor movement and politically-commited cultural workers help each other to achieve our shared goals? The struggles, setbacks and disunity of the past few years have made any dreams of systematic relationships seem hopelessly idealistic. Resistance has been reduced, often, to survival . . . or focused on micro-struggles, locally, even personally based. We have come to see more clearly how the larger, 'public' issues are constituted by the small and the specific. And we are still sorting out the political implications of this both-ways movement of power.

Three years ago the debate about whether or not Australian uranium should be mined and exported was raging fiercely. There was still a chance of stopping it before it started. As the Oenpelli Aborigines were being swindled into signing away their rights, thousands of other Australians were marching to demonstrate their opposition, activist groups were conducting massive public education campaigns and most trade unionists refused to be misled by a vague referendum which some of their leadership was trying to foist on them.

But since then a veil of silence has been drawn across the issue. There seem to be at least two reasons for this. In Queensland, one of the two mining states which have been turned into quarries for the multinationals, the Premier has modified the law to make his state the conduit for the export of anything. Equally important, the three companies which monopolize the media — at least one with investments in the industry — have dried up, confining their coverage to unavoidable reports of nuclear accidents overseas.

Meanwhile, the mining has begun, safeguard requirements are diluted in the mad scramble to secure orders in a diminishing market, and the Federal Government continues to expand its fundamental policy of making the country safe for exploitation by the multinationals at the expense of Australian workers. But resistance continues. Despite some wavering, the Labor Party remains tied to closing down the industry if elected, and Australian Council of Trade Unions policy prohibits members from servicing the mining and from transporting the deadly mineral. Such opposition is not, however, rock-solid. It is subject to the attacks of official ideology, media misrepresentation and the self-interest on right-wing unionists. The need for a continuing campaign to maintain conviction was obvious to the thirty-eight unions which financed the film and are taking part in its distribution.

Dirt Cheap is a timely reminder of what we are fighting about. It shows that the issues are Australia-wide: the Oenpelli people lose their land, metal-workers in Melbourne lose their jobs. The connections are both stated, and shown in the lives of individuals.

It is not a didactic film, asserting the case against uranium mining step by step. This kind of approach is employed by Union Media Services in their slide-tape kit *Uranium Mining: Whose Decision?* and pamphlets such as *Uranium Undermined* by the Trans-National Cooperative and *Australia Uprooted* by the Amalgamated Metal

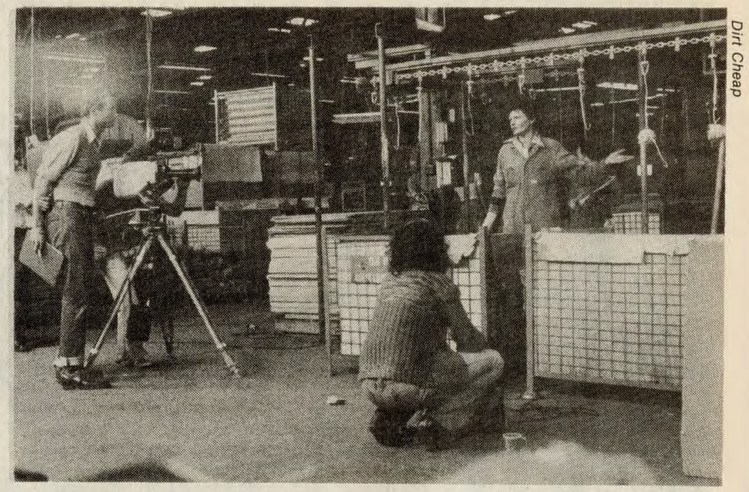
Workers and Shipwrights Union. Nor does *Dirt Cheap* simply make an emotional plea to stop the mining. Rather, it contains elements of both modes, alternating between 'talking heads' who give out information and opinions of many different sorts and predominantly visual sequences which explore the lifestyles, the cultures of those effected by the issue.

Visual quality is high, from the clarity of performance artist Aleks Danko's graphics to the lush coloration of many scenes. Countless tons of bauxite pour down endless conveyor belts, the macabre computer control centre at Gove fills the screen to the mechanical drone of the company official's voice. Sunday morning at the local outdoor pub: workers puzzle out the complexity of their situation in a setting which reeks of obsessively-compensatory self-entertainment, racism and chauvinism. Raw, unchecked developmentalism claims its natural and human victims.

This is typical of the complexities in which *Dirt Cheap* is embedded. How many of us, no matter how active in campaigns against uranium mining and for Aboriginal landrights, fully appreciated the struggle of Aboriginal women against the destruction of their culture? It was they who formed the strongest opposition during the meetings at Nabarlek and Oenpelli during October 1978 when the Agreement to mine at Ranger, proposed by the Federal Government acting for a consortium in which it would soon sell out to the private interests, was rejected. This forced the hand of the Minister for Aboriginals, all-white Ian Viner. Three weeks later he browbeat the Northern Lands Council and the traditional landowners at Oenpelli into 'signing' the Agreement.

We see Viner ordering the crew to stop filming the meeting, despite the fact that they had permission to do so from the chairman of the local Council. Above all, we see the traditional landowners we have come to know throughout the film reduced to powerlessness, packed off with a silver souvenir pen and a MacDonalds-type lunchbox. The subtle documentation of the infamous instance of white colonialism, of a 'liberal' politician fronting for multinational capital, is a unique and permanently valuable achievement of *Dirt Cheap*.

But the very fact that *Dirt Cheap* does not shirk the complexities of the issues causes it some problems as a film. Some questions just are



Dirt Cheap

Filming with women workers in a metal fan factory in Preston, where jobs are being lost. From *Dirt Cheap*

extremely difficult to handle visually, mainly because they come precoded with ways of seeing which tend against critical usage. For example, how do you visualize the aboriginal peoples' relationships to their land without including images of places which most white audiences cannot help but see enframed in postcard fashion? Toby Gangali is traditional landowner of the Ranger site: his image is frequently cut against still shots of the extremely picturesque Mount Brockman. He is obliged to work for the National Parks and Wildlife Service, but clearly he does not have a tourist relationship to his land. Yet it was he who positioned the white filmcrew.

Dirt Cheap is also interesting as one of the few Australian feature films recently made which is **not** a mystifying historical romance. Much of this romanticising, individualising of our past has been financed by Film Corporations set up Federally and in each of the six states on the model of the Canadian National Film Board. Generous tax incentives are offered — currently, a guaranteed 150% return to investors. But distribution is still tied up by a few U.S. companies — the same ones, indeed, that clubbed together to strangle the earlier, great age of Australian film production, the 1920s. And costs have been forced up beyond the possibility of coverage from local markets, forcing an orientation to horse-fairs such as Cannes and to overseas markets, especially, inevitably, the U.S.

The N.S.W. Film Corporation did partly finance *Dirt Cheap*, but they are not exactly clambering over the competition to get it to Cannes. International capital does loom large in the film, but only as part of its subject. The important thing is the union funding mentioned earlier. Not just for production costs but, crucially, for distribution. This is one way that the deadly noose of U.S. and U.S.-type domination of film can be loosened. Such defence of Australian culture is a stated aim of A.C.T.U. cultural policy.

A.C.T.U. President Cliff Dolan launched the film in Sydney in 1980, affirming trade union opposition to uranium mining and support for land rights. *Dirt Cheap* joins an increasing body of cultural work around these issues, reminding or alerting us to the threats of ourselves and our futures of the continuing sellout of people and resources to the local and the international rich. We need more such work. As I write, scab labour mines uranium at Ranger and year-long union resistance to its export from Darwin, against constant police harassment and the construction of new wharves from which waterside workers are excluded, has collapsed. Land rights for Aborigines remain token in all states except N.S.W., where a new Ministry has been set up for the purpose. No land has, as yet, actually been handed back.

Terry Smith

4. Urban Aboriginal Culture

Australian Aboriginal culture is identified principally with traditional artefacts — bark paintings, boomerangs, string bags and wood carvings. However urbanized Aborigines*, like other indigenous people living in the 1st and 2nd world, have in recent years developed music, film, radio and other media in their struggle against racism.

Before looking at two works produced last year (1981) it is important to emphasize that this urban culture has its origins in the Land Rights movement that developed in the early '70s and which is sustained by the network of Aboriginal-run services ranging from health and legal-aid, to child care.

The film *Wrong Side of the Road* is a road movie made from the "other side". Based on a weekend in the lives of two Aboriginal bands from South Australia, it is the first among the recent wave of Australian Black films that has set out to deal with urban culture.

The film does not adopt an anthropological or a political documentary form. Rather it comes across as being written and shot from a very close involvement with Aboriginal people and made, in the first instance, to reach a broad, popular audience. It is the music in the film which gives it both a popular and a political dimension. For instance in the opening sequence, shot at a local dance with the bands playing for a Black audience, the music provides the 'reading' for the subsequent action. The police arrive as the band US MOB sing: "All we ever get is a stabbing in the back . . . when will they ever learn to stop this genocide", as the camera cuts from band to police bashing.

Another sequence drawn from the bands' working experience takes place when a hotel manager in a country town fails to honour a booking when he discovers that the band is black. Confronted by his racism he retorts: "I try to keep a clean hotel!" The band feels powerless in the face of his authority and have no choice but to leave without work.

Affirming Aboriginal identity in the face of racism is not the music's only social function. The film shows music as an integral part of community life, whether it's country and western music sung around the kitchen table with the backing of rhythm sticks, or reggae at the mission hall.

The most marked feature for a white viewer is the absence of any age segregation; older people are as much part of the dance as young kids.

Much of the strength of the film comes from the close relations that exist between band members, whether they're fooling around over a hamburger, breaking the lock on a pair of handcuffs, or playing on stage.

Interrupting the loose narrative of the weekend is a series of flash backs which identify individual band members by establishing a sense of their past. The most developed sequence is concerned with the all-too-familiar experience of Black children being taken from their families and adopted out to whites.

Les, guitarist from the band NO FIXED ADDRESS struggles to establish his sense of Aboriginal identity by finding his Black family. He has to confront both the patronising manner of the white bureaucrat in the registry office ("That's about as much as I can tell you, Les") and the oppressive obligations of the white foster home, strewn with religious artefacts.

from "Wrong Side of the Road"

For a white viewer, the film makes apparent the social relations of the Black community which are denied by white Australian society. Relationships are not circumscribed and privatized by the family. Pedro replies "We're brothers" to the taunts of "boongs" from a copper attempting to divide him from the darker-skinned Aborigines. The film is all the more remarkable for showing the strong social role of older people particularly older women in the community — this in a road movie about two bands! The institutionalized racism of Australian society has, until recently, effectively suppressed Aboriginal voices, but the final number from NO FIXED ADDRESS expresses the developing culture of resistence:

"'Cos we have survived the white man's world
and the horror and the torment of it all"

The two bands, who released an album through EMI with songs from the film, have provided much of the energy for the very popular Rock Against Racism concerts organized over the last twelve months.

Town of Disco-Bashed

Another work that reflects the culture of urban Aborigines is a reader produced for literacy programs called *Black Tales*. Although far removed from the stories of the Aboriginal Dreamtime this book is based on an

* Australia's Aboriginal population numbers 150,000. With the exception of a few hundred still following the nomadic life, aborigines tend to live in and around country towns, missions and to some extent in the inner suburbs of big cities. The process of urbanization of aborigines has accelerated in the last 20 years, with about 25% of the total aboriginal population being urban dwellers.

oral tradition, the short tales being compiled from tapes of storytelling made with a number of Aboriginal people.

Black Tales is a reader, so the text on each page is brief and accompanied by strong graphic illustrations drawn by Jeff Stewart. The stories tell of the lives and experiences of urban Blacks through a series of incidents — like going camping or being hassled at a dance. A story set in a country town called "Disco-Bashed", describes very sharply the experience of racism and the frustration of being under suspicion because you're black: ". . . my mother asked one of the officers just what I had been locked up for. He said that my friend and I had been drunk and disorderly, which wasn't true. After, when we got back home, we told our parents what they did to us, and what they tried to blame us for, but they said we could do nothing . . ." Such works as these which express the reality of urban Aborigines lives, confront the myth of Australia as a harmonious multi-cultural society. Rather, they stress the inheritance of two centuries of 'white Australia'.

Wrong Side of the Road directed by Ned Lander, music by US MOB and NO FIXED ADDRESS. Distributed by Sylvie Le Clezio, 33 Riley St. Wooloomooloo, N.S.W.

Black Tales compiled by Sally Haines and Leanne Haines for The Reading House at The Settlement, Redfern, N.S.W.

Ann Stephens

CANADA: THE HOSTILE REFUGE?

KARL BEVERIDGE AND CAROLE CONDE

While the events in Poland and Central America have dominated headlines for the past year, and the question of refugees from those countries is at least debated, our knowledge of India and the question of refugees from that country barely makes page ten. In fact, the only time India or its people are mentioned is when racial violence appears in their community, as with the recent courtroom shootings in Toronto, or the beating of East Indians in Vancouver.

India is officially considered a parliamentary democracy, and is an important trading partner for Canada. It would thus appear embarrassing if the political turmoil in India were to gain too much attention here. It is also embarrassing to the Canadian Government if it suddenly finds a large number of East Indians claiming refugee status on its doorstep.

This embarrassment goes much deeper, however, than the pleasantries of international diplomacy or the balancing of trade and the domestic job markets. In fact, these serve to excuse the political motivation behind refugee selection. While Canada warmly welcomes the refugees of what it considers 'socialist' nations, it does little or nothing for those refugees escaping right-wing regimes. The point, as is often stated in the following interviews, is not the reversal of this situation, but to base refugee policy on the legitimacy of each claim, irregardless of the country of origin and its political nature.

The following interviews are with a community immigration worker who looks at Canada's refugee policies, and with a member of the East Indian Refugee Aid Committee who discusses the recent detention and deportation of East Indians. Their names have been withheld for fear of recriminations. The short insert on the Komogata Maru demonstrates that history forgotten returns to haunt.

a Community Organizer Working with Refugees is Interviewed

Q: What are some of the origins of Canada's refugee policy?

After the Second World War, Canada signed the U.N. Human Rights Declaration. Prior to that, MacKenzie King's government had made a conscious and publicly known decision to limit the number of Jews entering Canada. That's the last example of an explicitly racist refugee policy. By the early 'Sixties all the overtly racist laws had been eliminated and we moved into a situation where indirect methods of control are used.

In the late 'Sixties Canada signed the U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. It pledged to accept "any person who by reason of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or of a particular political opinion, is outside the country of his (sic) nationality, and is unwilling to return . . ."as a refugee. This is the basis of Canada's legal obligation, and as such was incorporated into Canada's Immigration Act in the late 1970s.

The U.N. now has a much broader definition and these are termed 'non-convention' refugees. They can come from any nation as a result of civil war, natural disaster, famine, as well as political etc. persecution. This is the more popular sense of the word 'refugee.'

The Green Paper on Immigration, which sets guidelines for government policy and considers such questions as the effect of immigration on jobs, communities etc., admitted that there are more refugees than Canada could ever handle; a hundred thousand El Salvadorians are in Honduras, another hundred thousand refugees are in the U.S., upwards of two to three million in Africa, plus Eastern European, South East Asian etc. Approximately one-eighth of Canada's immigrants are refugees, and we have the reputation for picking the cream of the crop. There are three categories of immigrants: family, refugee, and independents. Refugees who arrive in Canada to claim refugee status do not fall under the quota system, but are judged independently. So, obviously, it's an advantage to get here before applying.

The quota system

In 1981 overall quotas totalled 122,000, of which 16,000 were designated as refugees, with a contingency for 2,000 extra from Poland. They estimated roughly 4,000 for Eastern Europe and 1,000 for all of Latin America. Now with figures like that you start asking questions. What are the politics behind it? How are they deciding who they're going to take in? With the Latin American quota of 1,000 only a couple of hundred are actually accepted — they haven't the people to process them. Yet the Eastern European quota is always filled.

The number of refugees who go through the determination process (those who arrive in the country) is minuscule. There's no danger of being swamped by these types of claimants as some would like us to believe. For one thing it's not that easy to get here. In 1981 the Immigration Department received 2,500 refugee claims of this sort, and processed 2,000 of them. From that they accepted 400. For East Indians, they received 1,000, processed 400, and rejected *all of them*. Their reason for not accepting the East Indian claims stems from the fact that India is not considered a refugee producing country. This policy decision is clearly contrary to the International Convention that Canada signed. To discriminate on the basis of country of origin is illegal. They've publicly admitted at this stage that 60 per cent of the refugee claims they receive they don't even read. It's probably higher. The term they use for rejecting these claims is that they are "manifestly unfounded". There is a list of countries that Canada won't take any refugees from. Just looking at the statistics three of these countries are India, Guyana and Jamaica. They're all countries that have parliamentary elections. Probably El Salvador will be added to this list now.

Q: It seems that these difficult classifications are used to confuse the public and slow down the flow of refugees into Canada. What qualifies a person as a refugee in the eyes of Canada?

Well an El Salvadorian refugee in Honduras who doesn't personally fear persecution, has no political involvement, but fears being killed in the civil war is not considered a convention refugee. If a Guatamalan, say, gets involved in unions, or the student movement or whatever and he/she fears for his/her life because a friend was just killed, this is still not enough for a Guatamalan to be accepted.

Who qualifies for refugee status?

When a Canadian Embassy staff member in Guatamala got a death threat, they all pulled out. So it's not as if Canada is not aware of the seriousness of the situation these people live in. But Canada has strict standards for acceptance. You have to have actually been tortured, scars on your body, or raped, or have a tangible death threat before you can be considered. If you just freak out, too bad. But it shouldn't make a difference whether you're a convention refugee, misplaced by civil war, or you live in fear.

Q: How do Eastern Europeans qualify then?

What Immigration here does with say the Poles is different than what they do with the Latin Americans. Eastern Europeans are termed self-exiled groups. That's a specific category that states if you're outside your country and don't want to go back, you're eligible. With Latin Americans, they must state they are a convention refugee, and come under the designated classification. This was brought in with the visa requirement for Chileans. It was a trade-off (a Uraguayan, Chilean or Argentine goes to a Canadian Embassy from within the boundaries of those three countries, and asks for refugee status. Whereas with Poles it's a much broader category. They can be accepted here by saying they don't have enough gas for their two cars, whereas a Chilean can only get in if they've got one arm left and they're afraid of losing the other. The quota for Poland is six times larger than Latin America, and it's always filled; Latin America's is always less than half filled. Linguistic ability and the suitability of refugees to Canada's job market is how they justify quotas and why they pick which refugees they do. Of course, it's politically popular for Canada to support the resistance to martial law in Poland by accepting their refugees. It's a public propaganda stunt. Whereas with El Salvadoreans or Chileans the politics behind rejecting them is even clearer. The Canadian ambassador to Chile was a supporter of the coup and it took a lot of pressure in Canada before

we would accept Chileans. It was common knowledge that the refugees were political leftists and activists, and, of course, they didn't want that kind of person in Canada.

El Salvadorians in Canada

With the El Salvadorians, the Americans didn't accept them as refugees and put pressure on Canada to do the same. In the States this issue is so grotesque and pathetic; planeloads of El Salvadorians are being deported. Canada will not deport them at this point. The Churches have followed up on those being deported from the States and all of them have been imprisoned or killed. In Canada we give them work permits, but they are kept in perpetual limbo until Canada decides the situation has changed there. In fact, the special directive on El Salvador ran out in March, at the time of the elections. Hopefully public pressure will be such that Canada won't have the nerve to ship them back.

Q: What is the situation with regard to East Indian refugees, particularly the ones who arrived last year?

The thing with the arrival of the East Indians a year ago is that they don't fall within the regular quota as they are making claims from within Canada. The majority of claims submitted this way are usually Latin American because of the proximity and direct flights. A few South Africans or Iranian students have also made claims this way, but it's more of an oddity. There have been a few East Indian claims in the past. Only one has ever been accepted and that was probably during Indira Gandhi's Emergency period. In 1980 there were 25 claims, all of which were rejected. In 1981 there were a thousand.

What happened was that a number of Canadian immigration lawyers and consultants went to the Punjab, worked with local travel agents, and touted the fact that there was a loophole in Canadian immigration law whereby a refugee claiment could obtain a work permit while the claim was being processed. This could take up to a couple of years.

Five Demands of the East Indian Refugee Committee

- Detainees that are presently being held should be released.
- Travel documents and passports should be returned.
- Visa system should be removed.
- Work permits granted.
- Racist Immigration laws abolished.

Visa requirements for East Indians

It didn't take long before Immigration realized there was a racket going on. They reacted in two ways. First they raised the amount of the bonds to $10,000 or $15,000. This is on top of $1,500 these people pay for lawyers and consultants here as well as whatever they paid the consultants back in India, the air fares etc. Most of them sold everything they had back home. If they can't come up with the bond they are held in detention. Now they need an additional bond to cover their support while the claim is being processed. (This is a real catch-22. If you can get the money for a bond you probably don't need to work. If you need to work, you probably can't pay the bond.) Secondly, the line comes down from Immigration that while Canada has an obligation to provide work permits, this cannot become an incentive for people to make refugee claims. So they introduced the visa requirement, which forces East Indians to obtain a visa before leaving India. Now there's only one place in the whole of India to obtain such a visa, and that's in New Delhi. If you live in the Punjab it could take a week of travel to New Delhi; then they're faced with incredible line-ups, interviews — the whole process could take months. It means that everyone, whether they're coming to visit, coming as a tourist, on business or whatever has to go through it.

It would help if they had more places set up for obtaining visas, but, of course, it operates as another control factor. A similar situation exists in Central America. There's one office, in Mexico city, that serves 9 countries, including Cuba. The Mexico office only has three officials to process claims. They're adding two more once they've finished their ten-month Spanish courses.

The visa requirement for India is politically sensitive. It's the first Commonwealth country that's had such a requirement. Immigration knew there would be repercussions in the community here, and it's a slap in the face to Indira Gandhi. But she wants the recognition of refugees even less. So Lloyd Axworthy (federal Immigration Minister) went to India and talked her into it.

Originally the East Indian community here was divided over the issue of the refugees, but the visa requirement has united them. The refugee issue is no longer the subject of hot debate.

Behind all this is the question of whether India is a refugee-producing country. It is at least as repressive, if not more so now, than it was under the Emergency. There are political murders and fighting in various parts of the country. There's a developing peasant revolutionary movement and so on. All of these produce refugees. So among the East Indians arriving, there are genuine refugees who are rejected out of hand. The ones who arrived last spring are at the deportation stage right now. Two have just been sent back.

Now if these people had been Eastern European they would have been allowed to stay. Axworthy instructed his officials to use "broad discretion" in applying the selection criteria to the Poles. This isn't against the Poles, mind you, but points to an obvious discrepancy in our policies.

Q: The East Indian Refugee Aid Committee calls the deportations "Komagata Maru II". Are there similarities?

The Komagata Maru would not have occured had those on board been European, just as the Avion Motel (detention centre) would not be overflowing with European detainees as it is now with East Indians. No matter what the refugee situation is, or the country of origin, they must be put through fair process. That's what the Committee is calling for, that's the law. If it's determined they're not refugees that's one thing. If they are, then we have to accept them no matter what country they come from. •

KOMAGATA MARU

Originally the Komagata Maru which sailed from Calcutta to Vancouver in 1914 had little to do with politics. The British claimed that Indian subjects had the same right to travel and reside in any part of the British Empire as a white citizen had. But the humiliating treatment given the East Indians on board hoping to immigrate to Canada by the Canadian authorities in Vancouver harbour changed all that. The first Sikhs to visit Canada were soldiers brought to celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday in 1897. Returning home they told of employment, wages, and the need for farmers and labourers. In 1905 there were a handful of East Indians in Canada; by 1908 there were 4,000, most of whom became farmers and railway labourers in British Columbia.

In 1908 Mackenzie King, then Minister of Labour, went to England to discuss Oriental immigration (East Indian in particular). The aim was to restrict or stop all immigration from India. The official policy at the time was to keep Canada "a white man's country . . . not only for economic and social reasons, but highly necessary for political and national grounds".

By 1909 the Government of the Dominion passed an order prohibiting the entry of East Indians, and those already here weren't allowed to bring their families. A number of public meetings were held to protest the inferior treatment given them as British subjects. The Chinese and Japanese were allowed to immigrate bringing their families. They also demanded the elimination of a two hundred dollar entry fee (which only East Indians had to pay), and that the continuous journey clause be dropped. This clause had been created to stop the flow of undesirable aliens from the U.S. but was used to keep East Indians out, as there were no direct shipping lines from India. What enraged East Indians even more was the fact they were loyal British subjects with inherent rights to travel and reside in any part of the Empire.

One Mr. Stevens, an elected member of Parliament and Immigration Officer, was absolutely opposed to the entry of Hindus (East Indians) into British Columbia. He considered these public meetings as acts of sedition and created a public outcry claiming East Indians were taking jobs away (even though compared to 50,000 Chinese and Japanese, they were a small handful). Later Stevens was in charge of the Komagata Maru incident.

In 1913 thirty-nine Sikhs were to be deported on arrival in Vancouver but their court case was won on a technicality. Hearing this, Gurdit Singh, a small businessman, chartered the Komagata Maru in Japan and planned to sail from Calcutta directly to Vancouver. After a month at sea with his 376 passengers aboard the K.M. arrived a few miles off Victoria on 22nd of May. A strong guard was immediately thrown around the ship to prevent its landing. The press ran headlines like "Invasion of Canada by Hindus" or "Hindu Inundation". The stranded Sikhs wired several appeals to Ottawa to allow them to land, but the government was bent on deporting them and tried to dispatch the ship without allowing a test case to be heard.

After weeks Gurdit Singh wired the Governor General requesting permission to sell his cargo of coal to feed the starving passengers. The government replied "that a precedent would be created by feeding these people." In desperation the passengers wrote a letter to government officials: "Better order to shoot than this miserable death". On the 26th June "there was not a drop of water to drink". The test case was finally heard and turned down by the appeal courts. This meant all were to be deported (except 20 who were already domiciles in Canada). One informer on board the ship was allowed to bring his family ashore. Every pressure possible to make them leave Canadian waters failed, the passengers refused to leave without supplies for the return voyage.

People's Publishing House, Deli

Gurdit Singh and others aboard "Komagata Maru" in Vancouver

The Dominion Government had realized the desperation of the passengers and that they were not intimidated by the threats to kill them. They knew the repercussions that an armed attack on an unarmed vessel with imprisoned passengers would have on the world. Still, 400 armed police attacked on the 18th of July at one o'clock in the morning. The passengers held them off with lumps of coal. No doubt the retreat was embarrassing to the Government. The next day full military preparations were undertaken to subdue the 'rebels'; additional police, uniformed militia and the cruiser Rainbow were enlisted. But word came down that their demands for food would be met for their journey back. The K.M. left on July 24th. A court order required them to return to Hong Kong, but on arrival they were not allowed to land and were shuttled from port to port in the East. On September 26th, a cruiser approached the K.M. just 14 miles from Calcutta and forced them to land at a small harbour. The police ordered them to leave ship. The officials hadn't wanted the 313 passengers to arrive in Calcutta, as they'd been proclaimed heroes by the people. On the first day, 62 were sent to the Punjab by train. The next day, during a round up by the police, 19 men were shot. The remaining passengers were imprisoned, nine of whom escaped. The Komagata Maru became a symbol in the struggle for Indian Independence. Clearly East Indians were "British subjects entitled to the protection" of the British Crown, "but do not now, nor ever have exercised the right of citizens even in their own country. They cannot claim the right of citizenship in Canada, at least, not until they have exercised those rights fully at home." (Stevens 1914).

Not unrelated to this, East Indians in Canada did not get the right to vote until 1947. •

An interview with the East Indian Refugee Aid Committee

Q: Of the East Indians that came to Toronto Airport last year asking for refugee status, a number are still being held in custody. Could you tell me where that's at now?

The first people that came in the spring of 1981 were not granted real refugee status. Next, Immigration imposed a visa requirement on everybody coming from India. These people are detained at the Avion Motel. There's thirty to forty of them still there who came last spring, who have never left their room or corridor. The rooms are 12′ x 12′ and there are five people to a room. The pressure is on these people to withdraw their claims (for refugee status) and fly home on their return ticket or to a third country that might take them. If they protest or open their mouths they're immediately taken out and kept like a common criminal in a jail. Right now there are sixty East Indians in such a detention centre out at the airport.

Q: How many have arrived and have all of them been asked to post bond?

We don't have the exact figure for all the people that arrived, but it's under 1,500 for all across Canada. Some individuals were asked to post $10,000 in bond and all the people who were suspected of being too political were detained. If you're a refugee most likely you won't have money — not that kind of money anyway — or a family here who can post bond.

Q: There certainly seems to be two kinds of criteria for allowing refugees into Canada. Did your Committee originally come together around this issue?

Yes, because we felt these people were facing two kinds of injustice, the horrendous treatment from the Indian Government and now racist treatment by the Canadian government. The people coming in under refugee status from Europe don't have to post that kind of bond; the officials even help to settle them. Why are there two kinds of treatment? We say we're in support of these people coming from countries of repression, while at the same time we have that same kind of repression at home. It means those that are racist use the law against certain groups. There are only ten or twelve countries that have the visa requirement in order to enter Canada from their own country. How can someone who needs to come as a refugee apply for a visa if Canada's not granting refugee status to that country, such as India? If they went to the Canadian Embassy there the embassy wouldn't grant them a visa, and their fear of being turned over to the police is very real. When the protest started inside the (Avion) Motel, our Committee went out there to support them, because under Canadian law if someone applies for refugee status, they are allowed to remain free and, if need be, to work, in order to fight their case.

Q: How close are any of the East Indians to gaining that status?

So far none of them have been granted refugee status. In fact the deportations have begun. No one has heard from any of those who've been deported since their arrival home.

Q: There was a law passed in 1976 allowing police to investigate the workplace and homes of immigrants.

I don't know what law it is, but the police always go to the workplace and residence. They're always doing that. I've lived here ten years and I've been interrogated many many times, so many I can't even remember. As the economic depression deepens the Canadian government has historically put the load onto the shoulders of the immigrants. 'They' take the jobs, 'they' cause the problems and now they tell us they won't accept these people at the airport. With the economy going down, public pressure — especially in the press — is building up against the immigrant.

Progressive politics can mean deportation

The people who came here before the visa requirement just bought a ticket and went through the immigration channels. These people are now afraid they'll be deported. Also immigrants taking part in *any* progressive politics in this country can be deported too. We formed the East Indian Refugee Aid Committee in July 1981. During the first few months we were very busy. We protested at the Avion Motel with 600 people. Then we organized a demonstration in Ottawa of 800 people from Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa. We also had support work done from Montreal and Vancouver. When you're in this situation you know what is not just, and you have to fight against it. I don't know how long we will have to fight back, but we've been doing a lot of work in the community to keep this feeling alive. One of the questions that is most asked is 'Why are we being treated this way?'. The (Sikh) temples have given a lot of support to the refugees and other Canadian support groups have helped too.

Q: In what ways has your community been defending the refugees?

We've been fighting the deportations through the courts. We don't have a lot of money for lawyers, but we do go and appear in court. The legal costs are very hard on the people, as they're not being allowed out of detention or, if so, are not issued work permits. But the people in the community have been very supportive through the Temples, raising money etc. Our committee works on two fronts. One is to negotiate with Immigration and various government agencies. The other is to get people organized around the issues. We went to see Trudeau last month and informed him of what is happening. We've had a number of successes, but that's because the community's been behind it.

Q: What are some of the conditions in India that have caused people to claim asylum in Canada?

For one, the systematic oppression by the Indian government and the economic crisis. It's the ordinary person who's facing this oppression and as they try to organize against it they face the government head on. Since 1967 there have been various political uprisings. There are political martyrs. Indira Gandi's government has murdered more people than during British rule. Since 1947 there has been one ruling party, except for one or two years when the Junta came in, but they're from the same ruling class.

Millions protest

Everybody assumes that Canada takes refugees. So to escape from that oppression they leave for Canada. Some are from the separatist movement (I don't agree with that struggle, but I'm not going to say they're not refugees.) The others supported certain political parties and some are from the Naxalite movement, some the Junta party as well as others. Indira tried to use the Sikhs that were fighting for their own homeland to suppress all the other progressive groups and things like that. She tried to ban strikes, but in January last year there was a strike by people in the public sector. In some provinces there was a complete shutdown in public works. To protest her policies, the people came out in the millions, not in the hundreds, but millions across the country. Sixteen people were shot, thirty were injured and hundreds were jailed. The sixteen who were shot were demanding the right to strike. If you can shoot them for that, for only asking for a basic right, what happens when you demand that the government feed the people and give them jobs? The government is forcing people to leave.

Q: Do you feel that most of the cases over the past year are genuine refugees?

That's not the point. The East Indian Refugee Aid Committee doesn't make that judgement. We've taken up this cause in reaction to the Canadian government's policies regarding East Indians.

Q: Your committee has called this incident "Komagata Maru II". Why is that?

In 1914 a ship came to Vancouver with East Indians wanting to immigrate. The ship was called the Komagata Maru. The people on board were forced to return home. They became quite politicized as a result of this experience and many became involved in the struggle for Indian independence at home. These recent deportations are the second major incident of this kind, and we have to learn from that history. They turned that boat back at gun point. They are doing the same thing again, now. We've always been forced to fight for our rights. We don't know how long this will continue, but we are always fighting against injustice, whether it's refugees, or the community . . .

Q: Has the recent courtroom shooting and the resulting press coverage had an effect on your committee's work? (In March, two Sikhs and a lawyer were shot in a Toronto courtroom, allegedly by another Sikh.)

There are racist attacks on the community related to the shooting but this has happened before, especially in 1975-77 in Toronto. The police have tried to stop our work and we are under constant surveillance, but we will just continue. We won't let this thing slip away.

East Indian Refugee Aid Committee
269 Pape St., Toronto, Ont.

Double jeopardy.

It refers to the traditional right of citizens not to be tried more than once on the same set of charges and, especially, the right not be tried again after being found innocent.

It's a phrase that smells of raids in the middle of the night, show trials, the sledgehammer tactics of authoritarian regimes around the world.

There's a good reason why double jeopardy carries the odour of authoritarianism. A regime with an unsavory political agenda could dissuade opponents by bringing charges against them over and over again, regardless of the findings of its own courts. It could do so until it secured a verdict more to its liking or until it wrung a plea of guilty from the exhausted victim.

It doesn't happen just in faraway places. It's happening here and now.

In 1979, a searching five-day trial ended in the acquittal of *The Body Politic* of charges laid after a police raid on the magazine's office. But Ontario Attorney General Roy McMurtry didn't like the verdict. So he just asked the courts to do him a favour, cancel the verdict and order a new trial.

The courts obliged. And people were shocked. They knew you could appeal a guilty verdict; that's all part of giving the accused the benefit of the doubt. But appeal an acquittal? It seemed to fly in the face of justice.

But that's what double jeopardy is all about. It contravenes our sense of justice, but there's no law to stop it from happening in Canada whenever an attorney general feels the itch.

And there's no doubt McMurtry and his cabinet colleagues, including Premier Bill Davis, are feeling the itch, especially where gay people are concerned. In the past two years, they've refused to extend human rights protections to include us, ignored police intervention against a gay candidate in Toronto's municipal elections, financed an extensive spy network in the city's gay community and okayed the brutal raids on our baths. An unsavory political agenda indeed.

On May 31, the second trial of *The Body Politic* begins. The defence at the first trial — which cost more than $30,000 — was entirely financed by people who were angered by the campaign against this magazine. The second trial won't cost as much, but it still won't be cheap. We need your help to win again.

In the game of double jeopardy, *they* may set the rules, but *we* can still win. Make your contribution today.

THE BODY POLITIC FREE THE PRESS FUND

Send donations to
The Body Politic Free the Press Fund
c/o Box 7289, Station A, Toronto, Ontario
Canada M5W 1X9

Cheques payable to: Lynn King in Trust for TBP
Information: (416) 977-6320

In travel, archtypes become alerted symbolism: a film which looks at mutual dependence

Sifted Evidence
Patricia Gruben

42 min. 16mm Colour
Distribution: Canadian Filmmaker's Distribution Centre, Toronto


Patricia Gruben

from *Sifted Evidence*

Sifted Evidence, a film by Patricia Gruben which premiered recently at Toronto's Funnel Theatre, probes along the edges of fractured understandings for the signs that will reveal the agents of collision.

The film is structured in three principal sequences, each of which offers evidence and interpretation of the power of archetypes to direct belief, behaviour and response. The opening and closing sequences frame the central events and provide the context within which the relationship of the central characters reverberates in an elaborate stalemate.

A female narrator introduces the film in voice-over, situating its location in Mexico, describing the Christian transformation of the Aztec symbols of fertility and death into the chaste and revered Our Lady of Guadalupe. The historical appropriation of powerful symbols of the female operates as a metaphor within the film; the ancient origins of the symbols are forgotten, but the altered symbols retain a potency saturated in imperialist and patriarchal ideology.

The narrator ponders upon what tourists may signify in the countries they visit, exotic presences lacking the protections of language and biography. She tells the story of a Canadian tourist in Mexico who was kidnapped by a man who mistook her curiosity for desire, and wonders what they came to mean to one another. She demonstrates the "elements of voluntary bondage: a bus ticket, a statuette, a handful of flowers, representing the ideals of adventure, mystery and romantic love." She is the objective social scientist, shown in the sanctuary of her home, sifting through the exotic artifacts of her own distanced history for the significant clues that will yield a fuller reading.

The tourist ritual

The central portion of the film is enacted by two players, both on location and before front-screen projections of Mexican landscapes. A woman tourist, drawn by the archaeological mysteries of Mexico, arrives at the bus depot in Tlatilco seeking to visit nearby ruins. She is befriended by an English-speaking local who offers to guide her to her destination. He seeks to engage her interest with tales of his invented past and spontaneous gestures of courtship, to which she extends a neutral response. The filmmaker intervenes in voice-over, impersonating the woman's unspoken thoughts, commenting on the character of the protagonists: "He only reads a face for audience response, she reads whatever she puts into it."

The rituals by which their mutual expectations are conveyed are rendered with comic nuance: a detached deflation of the turgid mannerisms of courtship, a send-up of the dead-ahead authority of tourists soliciting the co-operation upon which they utterly depend. Ironic formal devices within the film compound the ambivalent quality of this enacted narrative and the barbed observances of its narrator.

The woman surrenders her authority to the man and becomes both trapped in and protected by her passivity. Purporting to act as facilitator, he obstructs her journey and thwarts her retreat, while enacting his authority as guide ("you don't know where you're going; we passed the ruins on the way") and instructor ("he names the signals she's been giving him all day"). The journey and their relationship are overlapping roundelays of missed connections.

Her failure to observe conventional codes of behaviour leaves him without his bearings, but she too lacks the authority to impose her will. At the close of each futile day, a dead-locked night: to foreground the sexual dynamic between them would tip a precarious balance of behaviour, belief and accord. The actions of the characters are neutralized by their parallel withholdings, their relationship suspended in evocative disjunction. It is within these disjunctions that the filmmaker hangs her attention.

Conventions revealed

The woman decides to leave, still not having seen the ruins; the man insists on seeing her off. "Can't I put myself on the bus?" "I don't think you've learned how to do that yet": a wry announcement of his power, her entrapment, their agreement. She escapes in the night while he sleeps in a nearby chair, the insistent custodian of his claim. At dawn she boards a bus, from which she visualizes his image jogging in pursuit and wonders whether he will remember her.

Their disjointed relationship is underscored by the formal strategies

of the film, in which the frame glides, images lose focus, props are revealed as artificial, voices slip out of sync, colours bleed, backdrops hang heavily. Gruben reveals the scrupulous conventions by which film fantasy is constructed as she unravels the fantastical conventions by which their relationship is played out.

Within the final sequence of the film, a man prepares to photograph a Mexican girl clothed in a confirmation dress, a metaphorical rendering of the chaste bride being groomed for her ceremonial role. The passive child/woman, encased in her symbolic attire, submits to the man's guidance as he positions her in the appropriate arrangements of body and expression. The scene acts as the symbolic signature of the film.

The film is at once personal and political, and the contradictions that result create their own disjunctions. The feminist analysis of patriarchal imperialism is compromised by a context in which the narrator/woman resides as imperialist. Gruben sketches the contours of belief systems but sidesteps the restraints of an ideological interpretation. The film pursues a numinous and complex vision of human motivation which seeks to encompass the political and the mythological within its aspects. The ambivalences of the film correspond to the underlying ambiguities that form part of the filmmaker's intention.

The style of the film is layered and elliptical, its tone more tentative than declarative, its spirit more animated than analytical. Its intention, finally, is to inquire rather than instruct. □

Renne Baert is a writer living in Toronto.

AVI SOUDACK

BRANCH PLANT CULTURE

Emanating from the few to the many, can mass communictions ever be democratized?

Dependency Road:
Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada.
Dallas W. Smythe
Ablex Publishing Corp. (Temple University), 1981, 347 pp. with index and bibliography.

In **Dependency Road**, Dallas Smythe sketches a solid if not subtle theory of mass communication in modern capitalism. Building on his theoretical work, Smythe describes the history of Canadian mass media as a response to the imperatives of a growing American consumer economy. This generally useful overview is marred by a tendency to caricature historical events and by the omission of an explicit consideration of national culture.

Smythe's history of Canada's trip down dependency road starts with the familiar Marxist proposition that technology is determined by society's system of political power and resource allocation. Economic imperatives not only dominate the development of industrial technology — from the factory to the fast-food chain — but also structure communication technology. There is, for instance, nothing inherent in television that makes it a one-way medium. Rather, the division between few broadcasters and many receivers is an economic one which reflects the relationship between producers and consumers.

Smythe seeks to update this traditional Marxist theory with an intriguing proposition: the function of the media is the production of a unique commodity, the audience. In Marx's time the factory and the workplace — the sphere of production — underwent a process of rationalization. With the growth of monopoly capitalism the next great hurdle was the rationalization of the sphere of consumption — the creation of mass markets. Smythe argues that the mass media were created to serve this rationalization: to 'produce', to organize the population into audiences of consumers. Ironically, this interesting metaphor represents a theorist's discovery of what ad men have always known — that the mass media "deliver" audiences of a certain size and demographic character to the advertiser.

TV programming — the "free lunch"

Smythe's identification of the audience commodity focuses his analysis on the sphere of consumption. An area he sees as rife with exploitation and alienation — and so, an arena of contradictions, independent of the contradictions of the workplace. The basic contradiction of the consciousness/consumption industry is that consumers work at organizing themselves into markets. With some finesse Smythe describes how the cost of the mass media is supported by the audience. He demonstrates that the technical costs of reception — TV sets, radios, cables, etc. — are directly supported by the audience. And he points out that the cost of advertisements and the programs which surround them is included in the price of the commodity. Smythe calls TV programming and all non-advertising content of the media a "free lunch" analagous to the free food that bar owners serve to entice customers into their establishments. The bar owners' purpose is, of course, the selling of beer; needless to say the cost of the pretzels is included in the price of the beer.

In **Dependency Road** the content of the free lunch — TV programs, editorials, photographs — is of secondary importance. The primary issue is the expansion of American commodity markets which demand a subordinate Canadian communication system. The biproduct of this process is a mass culture which bulldozed indigenous Canadian culture.

A Canadian mass culture — What would it be?

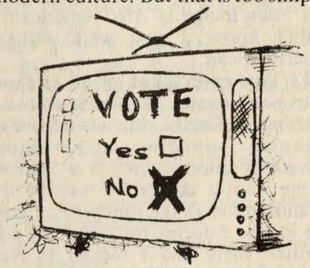
Smythe attempts to substantiate his theoretical argument with an overview of Canadian mass media history. As expected, he documents the encroachment of American-based monopoly capitalism on the Canadian economy, and points out the parallel growth of our branch plant media. Beginning with the decline of British colonial power, he describes the failure of an autonomous Canadian mass culture as part and parcel of American political and economic domination. However Smythe's analysis is overly personal. His 'economistic' and 'systemic' view of history tends to slide into caricature. He sees the failure of Canadian communication technology in the short-sighted, mean-spirited decisions of the Canadian ruling class, and in inept legislative decisions. But if his theorizing is correct, then in a society such as ours these political actors could not have prevented the Americanization of Canadian mass culture.

And that is perhaps the work's weakest link — culture and Canadian culture. While Smythe admits his bias is political and economic he does not come to grips with the problem of culture. In a sense, he retreats from a fully materialist view of society — bypassing issues of immigration, ethnicity and labour history — arguing an economistic perspective instead. It seems more fruitful, and realistic, to argue that culture must deal with contradictions, that it must explain the world. And it must be assimilated — made meaningful by real people in real circumstances. Reading Smythe one wonders what happened to the population of the oppressed he champions. Why did they buy those TV sets and support their own alienation? American mass culture is effective because it is the prototypical industrial culture, and so, well serves an industrial consumer-oriented Canada. The contents of the free-lunch are not without importance; to extend the metaphor of the free lunch, the beer drinker has to like pretzels if the ploy is to work. The failure of an indigenous Canadian mass media culture is also found in the role that American culture, the free lunch, plays in the lives of Canadians.

Is there a socialist alternative?

And if an independent Canadian mass culture would have been established, as Smythe suggests it might have, what would it consist of? By his argument, if Canada developed as a capitalist country then its mass culture would, necessarily, be alienating and exploitative. And what about the socialist alternative? There is a hint in Smythe's analysis that even a socialist country would not be immune to the development of a manipulative culture. Smythe provides a short description of China's recent adoption of a TV broadcasting system. He points out that this system, based on the communications of few to many is inconsistent with a people's republic. What he neglects to see is that insomuch as China is a hierarchical society it will avoid interactive telecommunication, and will bureaucratize, if not commercialize, its media culture.

While Smythe's analysis of the audience commodity — the production of a population of consumers — is interesting it is not compelling and it leads him away from a consideration of nations and national culture. Smythe's proposition that the audience works for its own manipulation and exploitation by supporting the cost of the media seems at first to uncover a major duplicity in modern culture. But that is too simple.



Can we have a society in which people experience culture without 'paying' for it? Probably not; once a society has a division of labour there will be a class of symbol and culture producers who are supported by the labour of the rest of the population. A more useful critique would examine how society invests in those symbol producers, and would ask: what are the ecological and social returns on this investment? Smythe does pose these questions — pointing out that the production of commodities and of technology is always a choice among alternatives. Unfortunately, it is not clear from his discussion what role an autonomous national culture might play in establishing new and more democratic ways of choosing among the alternatives.

Smythe shoulders the burden of all revolutionary theorists — explaining why people within a repressive society are unaware of their own repression, of their own exploitation. But his analysis, by focusing on political and economic patterns, ignores the role of culture and leaves an incomplete picture of the stability of modern capitalism. Sadly, while the strength of his analysis is in the explanation of the institutional process of Canadian subordination to the American economy, he can provide no similar institutional or political basis for change. Rather, his scenario for liberation involves the raising of people's political and social awareness. The question remains whether mass media and mass culture can accommodate the degree of self-awareness and self-criticism that would be necessary for the changes he envisions. □

JAYNE CORTEZ:
"It's what we've been doing all our lives"

Jane Cortez was born outside of Nogales, Arizona. In 1964 she was the director of the Watts Repertory Theatre in Los Angeles. She also has worked in Mississipi with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. In addition, 1964 was the year when she first started collaborating with musicians.

Norman Richmond: Do you feel in the Eighties there will be a renaissance with with Black Culture, black music and poetry say the way it was in the Sixties and Twenties because I see Amiri (Leroi Jones) Baraka's (New Music, New Poetry) is out. I'm speaking specifically about the States?

Jayne Cortez: You must remember that we people have never stopped what we were doing. What we did in the Sixties and what we're doing now is just a continuation of what we've been doing all of our lives. Since the Twenties and before we got here (in the U.S.) it's a continuation of that struggle and that resistance, that creativity.

N.R: Is 'Unsubmissive Blues' your second album?

J.C: This is my second album — there's a larger group of musicians. I have more musicians on this album than on my first one which was 'Celebrations and Solitudes' with the fine bass player Richard Davis. On the new album I have Bill Poe playing the shinai, Joe Daley playing tuba, Dernado Coleman is on drums and Bern Nix is on guitar.

N.R: What type of airplay have you been receiving on this and your first album?

J.C: Well I don't know about the first album I know more about this because I receive a lot of things in the mail about it being played on certain stations in certain cities. I can't tell just yet. With my first album it was handled under Strata East Records and they would know or have the details on how much it was played and so on.

N.R: Wasn't Strata East the company where the artists put up the money and owned the masters?

J.C: You'd be a producer and they'd be working as the company or you'd be part of the company and try to handle some of the distribution which was a great idea. I think it's still functioning but I'm no longer with them.

N.R: You spent some time in Los Angeles . . .

J.C: Yes, I grew up there.

N.R: The name Cortez seems Spanish, yet your image is Afro-American, I didn't know if you were perhaps Puerto Rican.

J.C: You never think of all of those European names like Jones as being German or English, but when there's a Spanish sounding name those questions arise. Cortez is a Spanish name and it comes by way of my grandmother in the Philipines. I grew up in Los Angeles, my first book was written there and I moved to New York City in 1967, and have been living there since.

N.R: You were born in the same place as (Charles) Mingus in Arizona.

J.C: Yes and his family went to California and mine moved there too, but I met him in New York City.

N.R: Was Los Angeles a conducive environment for a black poet at that time or did you have to go to New York to get things going?

J.C: Los Angeles was a good place to write in. The time is slower, the pace is slower — you're full of a lot of images and a lot of space and therefore you can get a lot of work done. On the other hand there are no book publishing companies, therefore you have to go to New York to put your poetry in the marketplace. New York City is a marketplace for the artist.

N.R: At what point did the music and poetry come together for you and in what way?

J.C: Well it came about when I did a programme where music was going to be used as a comment on the poetry. I found that I could work in that kind of situation easily and well. It helped me with my work and at the same time I could hear my work in relationship to another art. I loved working that way, I always loved the music they called 'jazz'.

N.R: Langston Hughes has been given credit with being the first black poet to put jazz and poetry together. I don't know how true that is. People probably did it before.

J.C: I'm sure if you just take out the word 'jazz', and you use African music as played in the United States or African music played someplace else. You could go to Africa and find the greos or poets — reciting with music all the time. So it's not a big thing. So if Langston did it in New York he just happened to be a known poet doing it with probably known musicians. If you go to Jamaica you can hear the same thing — somebody reciting or chanting to African music. When I started writing I knew about some of the poets but they weren't my influence for writing. I liked the music before I knew that much about other poets.

N.R: The title 'Unsubmissive Blues', how did that come about?

J.C: One of the pieces I wrote that's on that album is called "You Know" and in there there's a line that says 'Unsubmissive Blues'.

N.R: Some of the poems' titles are self-explanatory like "The Brave Young Students in Soweto", I guess that's 1976.

J.C: I wrote that at the time of the rebellion in Soweto, which is a township in Johannesburg, South Africa. The students had decided to revolt against the use of the Afrikaans language, and they had a confrontation with the police. I wrote this piece in solidarity with the student's movement.

N.R: I've heard it said that African-American artists weren't that concerned about Africa but I see you've done this and I've heard the group Sweet Honey In The Rock. I know you've heard them, they did two or three songs about Soweto.

J.C: At that time I wrote it I was travelling through the South. I had worked in the South during the Civil Rights movement in 1963 and '64 and I saw the connection between Soweto and what was happening in the South and throughout the United States. So I felt very supportive of the liberation movement in South Africa as well as

Angola, Mozambique and so on. A lot of the hope and a lot of inspiration comes from the struggle of other people in other countries. I can use that in my work because I'm very inspired by that.

N.R: You did some work on Cabral from Guinea-Bissau and on Leadbelly so your world view is not limited to the United States, California or New York.

J.C: I see the connections with people who are trying to make a better world in other places.

N.R: Don't you find it almost impossible to earn a living in North America by doing the type of work you're doing?

J.C: Most Third World people in the United States always have two or three jobs, they don't have one particular job. They have things that are related. I'm a poet, so I teach creative writing at a University or some place else. A Third World artist will always have to have two jobs in the United States. That's the way it is. Other artists may not have to do that.

N.R: Would you be opposed to hiring a Rick James or Earth, Wind and Fire to put music to this, to say the same thing?

J.C: Well I'm not really familiar with their music. Some of what I've heard has been O.K. I really would like music that's more in depth or music that is not as surfacey. Music that is not one beat, music that is more complex, music that has more feeling in it, and more having to do with the lives of African people throughout the world, not just one kind of commercial thing. Because it doesn't lend itself to what I'm doing. I could do one piece maybe with some group like that but I would have to have more intensity and more dynamism than just that one piece.

N.R: Were you able to get a lot of things happening with Richard Davis? How did that music come about, did you let him do what he wanted to do or did you direct him?

J.C: We went through it once. I said, "This is what I am going to do Richard," and he doesn't like to rehearse and he says, "O.K. we'll just do it". So we went into the studio like he said and did it, and he listened to me and I listened to him and we got involved with what we were both hearing. And that's how I work with the other group. We just listen, there's not really one formula. If we decided to use a blues, its a blues based on the work.

N.R: Some of the content on that album; I really listened to that Malcolm X "How long has Trane been gone " (1968). You were saying things about a new Black geography: State of Malcolm, James Brown Park and Ornette Street. The whole question of self-determination for Black people in America is again becoming a more discussed issue. The possibility of Black people controlling certain areas of the United States. For you to come out with that in the Seventies shows some advanced thinking.

When i look at this ugliness
and think about the Native Americans pushed
into the famine of tribal reserves
think about the concentration camps full of sad Palestinians
and the slave quarters still existing in Miami
the diamond factories still operating in Amsterdam
the gold market still functioning on wall street
and the scar tissues around our necks
swelling with tumors of dead leaves
our bodies exploding like whiskey bottles
as the land shrinks into the bones of ancestor "Bushmen"
and i tell you Soweto
when i see you stand up in the middle of all this
stand up to the exotic white dogs
in their armoured churches
stand up to these landstealers, infant killers, rapists and rats
to see you stand among the pangas the stones
the war clubs the armadillos dying along this roadside
to see you stand with the ocean the desert
the birthright of red cliffs
to see you stand with your brave young warriors
courageous and strong hearted
looking so confident in battle marks coated
in grief and gunmetal tears
to see you stand up to this epidemic of expansion
and flame passbooks into ashes
fling stones into the mouths of computers
to see you stand on the national bank of america
like monumental sculpture made of stained bullets
to see you stand empty handed
your shoulders open to the world
each day young blood falling on the earth
to see you stand in the armed struggle
next to Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe
Soweto i tell you Soweto
when i see you standing up like this
i think about all the forces in the world
confronted by the terrifying rhythms of young students
by their sacrifices
and the revelation that it won't be long now
before everything
in this world changes

(From "The Brave Young Students in Soweto" — Jane Cortez © 1976).

J.C: I think it had been on people's minds all the time. It may not have been ever said that way on a record before with the connections between Coltrane and a lot of other things. However the thinking came from the community itself, that's the feeling of the people. Being a part of it I just put it in a poetic way.

N.R: If you talk to somebody and you say, "I was born in the United States but I see myself as an African and I think that Black people in America have a right to self-determination just as people in Grenada, or St. Kitts or Dominica." Off the top of your head you say, "We want five States." People respond by saying "You must be Nuts! All American people are the same, you guys all want to eat hamburgers." I'm exaggerating, but it continues: "Why would you guys settle for these five States when you could have this great big country of America." Listening to that poem where you name Black States and parks, I've heard people talk like that.

J.C: I don't see anything wrong with being able to determine your own life and what it should be. I think people should have the right to self-determination in South Africa as well as in other places. I think now that what is happening in the United States is that Black people are looking back at the past, at what has occurred and they are trying to really come to a particular conclusive goal. As well as figuring how, as a people, we could go about attaining that goal. Looking more into trying to organize and unify — I think that's more prevalent now in the thinking of the Black people in the United States.

N.R: In terms of communicating your ideas . . . are you satisfied with the distribution of this album?

J.C: I think the problem with this album as well as other albums made by African-American people is that the distribution could be better. It's hard. You have to deal with companies that already have companies set up to deal with albums on a mass level.

N.R: What I'm getting at is could you get this album to Shreveport Louisiana, or Seattle, Washington, or Kingston, Jamaica, to Angola — CBS can do that, can you?

Sally Hutchinson

Bass: Jamaaladeen Tacuma; Drums: Dernado Coleman; Jane Cortez; Guitar: Bern Nix

J.C: We couldn't do it like CBS but we could still do it. You can make the effort. Maybe one of the things that CBS or another company wouldn't do is to try to make it available to the Third World. This is what a smaller company can do and be willing to do because that's where it really should be. A lot of records and a lot of books written by Black people are not available throughout Africa. That's where a smaller company could play a role in getting material to those places.

N.R: As an African artist coming out of the United States how do you think you can get your work into Cuba, where they speak Spanish or into Brazil, where they speak Portugese?

J.C: You have to translate your work into those languages.

N.R: Do you see a need for that?

J.C: Yes I do. That's why my books, if not my records, have been translated into different languages such as Spanish, Portugese, French and African languages.

N.R: I was studying Marcus Garvey's movement a couple of years ago and one of the things I found out is that during the Twenties his paper had English, Spanish and French sections and I don't know of any other Black publication that came out of the United States that did that. I don't know if since the Twenties we have reached that level again.

J.C: Most poets can get translated but as far as newspapers go that's another problem.

N.R: Do you see yourself going to those places?

J.C: I've travelled in the Third World quite a bit and I've been to Africa. That's why I can see the necessity of making that work available in other languages. A lot of people there are interested in works by African-American people.

N.R: In the places you have been on the African continent how much would they know about the so-called jazz musics of Max Roach, Ornette Coleman, Coltrane, or Miles or Hamit Bluiett.

J.C: They wouldn't know very much. In Nigeria, maybe in Lagos they would know about Ornette or Max Roach. I know one person, Lindsey Barrett that has a radio programme there. He is a critic and a fan. And also the musicians there are influenced — they're always the first ones to know. On a mass level I don't know but it's wide open for someone to take on that responsibility.

N.R: But in Nigeria they would know about James Brown, The Commodores . . .

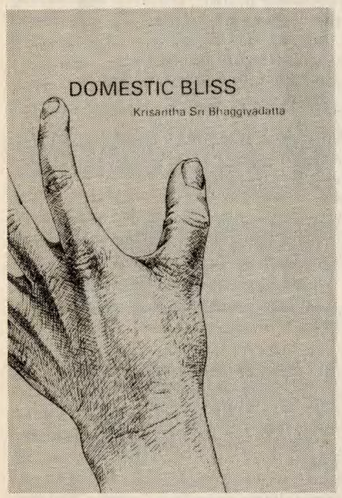
J.C: They would know about popular music. The people who deal in popular music make sure that that kind of music goes to those places, but they don't make sure that the music called 'jazz' would get there, that's the problem.

N.R: Do you think that people there underestimate your intellectual ability because of that?

J.C: I think if you're talking about Africa I think you have to remember that at the same time we were enslaved, Africa was partially enslaved too. It was colonialized and the people there didn't even know that the other half was taken. There were a lot of problems there. It's going to take a lot of time for any kind of change to come about. I do feel drugged (angry) that I can go to these places and they don't know anything about people or what has happened. But I also understand why and I also think it's the responsibility of some of us to take that information to them.

Books by Jane Cortez
Mouth on Paper (1977); *Scarifications* (1973); *Festival and Funerals* (1971); *Pissstained Stairs and The Monkey Man's Wares* (1969). Available from Bola Press, P.O. Box 96, Village Station, New York, N.Y. 10014.
Recordings:
Unsubmissive Blues (1980) New Music Distribution Service (N.Y.); *Celebrations and Solitudes* (1975) Strata East Records.

DOMESTIC BLISS



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Toronto is a city of causes. This makes up for the lack of political cohesion. Each cause enlists its own dedicated employees who occasionally phone each other to announce a coming event; a benefit, a picket line, etc. These notices constitute the loose network of Toronto's progressive community; its left.

Across the spectrum of earnest issues, there are those who try to pull the strands together, who try to articulate a common cause. Among them is a poet, Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta, whose work traces a path through the terrain of immigrant life, sexual politics, manpower retraining, clerical employment, racist reaction and fast food.

Usually he can be found at any one of the various benefits for an equal variety of causes, reading his work. Krisantha has finally self-published a collection of his poems under the title of **'Domestic Bliss'**. The book is well worth getting, but his poetry is at its strongest as a vocal narrative.

The audience is disarmed by the apparent naivete and calculated wit of his presentation.

Employee Benefits Branch
Ministry of Government Services
DEATH IS TEMPORARY
Pictures on desks
indicate
there is life
after work

The calculation works. Idealistic polemic is reduced to mush,

. . . if my presence is really worthwhile
at this finance committee meeting
i mean they're friends of mine
at least they're not enemies yet
so they wouldn't fuck me around
but i'm a bachelor
in a one-bedroom city
and living alone is a luxury
cos i pay $200 a month
and they pay $250 a month
which makes me think
i should have at least
3/4 of a fridge and
at least 3/4 of a relationship
thus i have a lot of catching up to do
which is why i'm here at the finance
committee
meeting waiting
for full-time love waiting for the
revolution waiting for my rent
notice.

and stereotypes are turned over, as we witness the immigrant family conspiring in its own desperation.

My Family
my family fears god
were immigrants
for technology . . .

. . . we
were clerical christians
the brown-almost
but-never-bourgeoisie
created by roving imperialists
("we spoke english you know")
to shit on our own
(the natives seeing a brown arse
not a white one)

we
were the blacker kings
the fatter calves
no diseased trawlers of misery
for us
we came

in 747s
to sink
to the bottom
of the upheld mosaic:
to push mailcarts
(beaverbrook started this way you
know")
to become complacent clerks
sexless secretaries
send a couple of gillette blades
in a christmas card home
("we are not niggers
we do have straight hair") . . .

. . . my family
fears god
say god
directed them here
not unskilled labour requirements

my family are canadian now
the men watch through beer
the world and hockey
repeat in all originality:
"the poor
want to be poor"
go to church
drop consciences
into collection boxes
if feeling good
give to the united (s)way
come home
beat the wives
beat the children
and the women phone each other
to complain of the rising violence
in toronto
or so they were told
on the multi-coloured six o'clock
news
and so they say
"we gotta keep voting liberal
cos they're the boys that brought
us here"
this family . . .

The strength of Krisanthas' poetry lies in its ability to politicize the sacred substance of poetry itself — the personal moment. Its weakness, however, lies in the distancing of such moments by an off-handed humour. It is, perhaps, a necessary defence where either political 'correctness' lies in wait to claim its own particular historically determined victory, or the demands of aesthetic sensitivity detect the odor of political sweat.

Radio Free World
my pet, my cat
who i kidnapped
into my world-
ly apart-
ment,
reduced
his reality,
controlled
his food and drink,
directed him to shit
in appropriate boxes,
and when he rubbed my leg
interpreted it as love.

On several occasions the defences are dropped and politics achieves the real force of experience.

lets have some race talk
some pakiniggerchink talk
let's have some race talk
some white talk some joke talk
let's have some lynchdeportbash
talk

let's have some sex talk
some broadwhorechick talk
let's have some sex talk
some pig talk some cunt talk
let's have some pinchfuckrape
talk

let's have some fag talk
some fairypansyprick talk
let's have some fag talk
some man talk some jock talk
let's have some bootjerkcock
talk

NORBERT RUEBSAAT

BREAKING THE SILENCE
Twenty-five Cuban women provide a comprehensive overview.

Breaking the Silences is a book of poetry by Cuban women. It brings together the work of 25 writers from three generations, and is the first collection of its kind to appear in English. Translated and edited by American-Cuban poet and writer Margaret Randall, who provides a thorough historical introduction as well as a look at the current situation of women writing in Cuba, it presents a comprehensive overview of the work women have been doing in Cuban poetry since the 1920's.

From Margaret Randall's Introduction: Excerpts —
Poetry — literature in general — has been the slowest of art forms to show a forceful women's participation in these years of revolution when, for the first time, human dignity is based on a society where there is education and work for everyone. And where the means of appreciating and for making art is being made available on a mass scale. Cuba has always had outstanding women poets, but they have appeared to be the exception, the unique voice. Not the norm . . .

The particular Cuban social structure and the superstructural manipulation of women within the general picture of exploiters vs. exploited merged to produce the situation inherited by the Revolution that came to power in 1959. Illiteracy throughout the country was 23.9% but among women it was 43% (rising much higher in the rural areas, where often not a single woman had ever been to a school.) Only 9% of the country's women were in the salaried labour force, and of those, 70,000 worked as domestics. We can only guess at the number of prostitutes exploited and oppressed in this playground for U.S. Marines and business tycoons, Mafia and Crime Syndicate members . . .

The first steps to creating equal conditions for women in this twenty-year evolutionary process included the giant literacy campaign of 1961, opening up schools and workplaces; not just making entry a possibility, of course, but creating the conditions necessary for women to come out of the home and into the larger social space . . .

Providing women with real access to education meant inventing all sorts of provisional step ladder courses for peasant women, maids, prostitutes, housewives who perhaps hadn't dared to dream of studying before. It meant scholarships, stimulation and encouragements. It meant a systematic breaking down of the traditional image and self-image. It meant drawing women into areas of higher education formally reserved for men . .

By the mid sixties half of Cuba's graduating doctors were women. High percentages were evident in other professional fields. Women were becoming engineers, architects, chemists, mathematicians. Women were working in construction and managing state farms. Women were officers in the Revolutionary Armed Forces. They were slowly but steadily climbing within the ranks of the mass and political organizations. And within the art world there were more than a few extraordinary women. But still there were not many women poets — at least with public recognition.

But today, some fifteen years later, that situation has changed. In the 1977 national literary contest sponsored by the Cuban Union of Writers and Artists (the most important national contest of its kind) first prize and mention in poetry went to two women, Minerva Salado and Georgina Herrera. The following year, two more women were among the poetry winners in the international ***Casa de las Americas*** contest, held in Cuba each year. They were Giaconda Belli from Nicaragua and Claribel Alegria from El Salvador. This year Maria Gravina from Uruguay carried off the only such honour in the ***Casa*** event. In 1979, the Union's "David" prize for a first book of poems went to Marilyn Bobes . . .

Women writing poetry in Cuba today are most often direct in their statement, courageous in their exploration of a new world in the making (with all the questioning the break with old thought patterns implies), passionate but acutely intelligent, innovative in form while attaining a high level of inter-relationship between form and content. Are these qualities new? Perhaps they are as old as women writing and only recently coming into our line of vision.

YOLANDA ULLOA

SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF A WASHERWOMAN

Emilia
strung her lines of white laundry
toward the horizon
and the suds grew
leaving no trace between her hands

Emilia's back
curved
like a flower
in the heat of the day:
She passed, unhurried, between the
laundry
then faded away.

MINERVA SALADO

THE NEWS

All arguments break down before the news
The church remains to offer an *ave maria*
its brief tower searching the hollow space
of loneliness,
who knows: perhaps a gothic paradise
hidden beneath the monks' skirts.
It seems that deep among the minor
bourgeoisie
there's always some adverse sentiment,
Marx predicted escapism and flight
but lovers don't
those still anxious and hopeful
witnesses.
Now where we move at this implacable
spot
a collection of intentions will flower
another word in your vocabulary
a song repeated by multiple jugglers
a new place for a poem in peace
innocence
the sinuous noun
language's useless home.

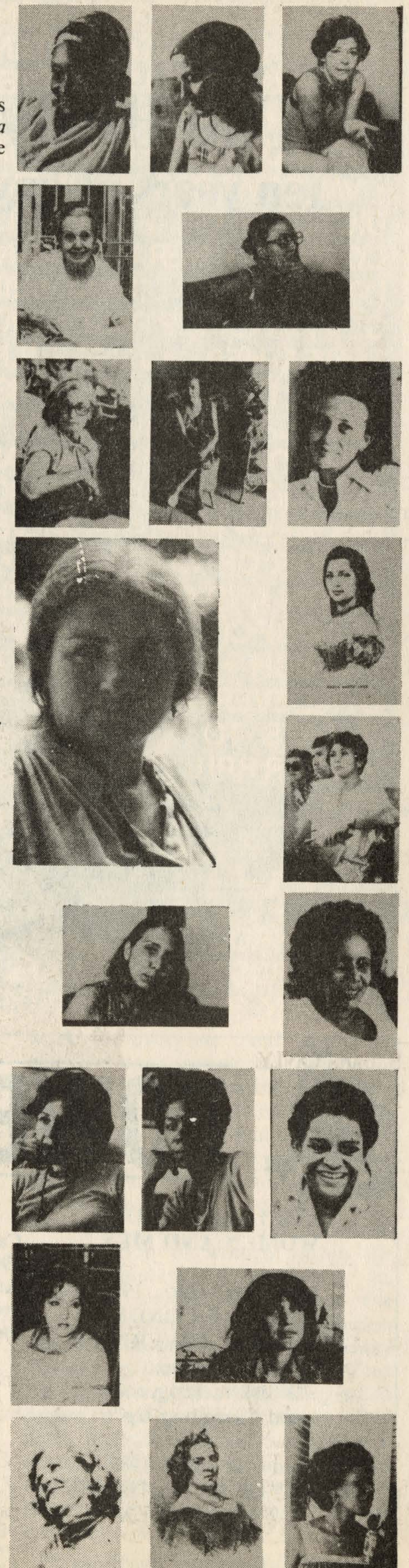
DIGDORA ALONSO

TWO POEMS FOR MY GRAND-DAUGHTER

1
You'll soon know your name is Vanessa
and then
that Vanessa is the name
of a brilliant butterfly.
Then you'll learn other words
like
atomic bomb
napalm
apartheid
and we'll have to tell you
what those words mean as well.

2
Vanessa asks me what a beggar is
and absentmindedly, thumbing the pages
of a book,
I say:
"someone who asks for alms."
Then she asks again,
more insistently,
"what is asking for alms?"
I put down my book and look at her
I look at her long
I look through my tears
I kiss her and kiss her again
and she doesn't understand why.

My granddaughter doesn't know what a
beggar is,
my granddaughter doesn't understand
asking for alms.
I want to run through the streets
congratulating everyone I see.
I want to go out into the streets
knocking at all the doors
and kissing everyone.
I want to go out into the streets.



NANCY MOREJON

WOMAN IN A TOBACCO FACTORY

A woman in a tobacco factory wrote
a poem to death. Between the smoke
and the twisted leaves on the racks
she said she saw the world in Cuba.
It was 1999 . . . In her poem
she touched flowers
weaving a magic carpet
that flew over Revolution Square.
In her poem, this woman
touched tomorrow's days.
In her poem there were no shadows but
powerful lamps.
In her poem, friends, Miami wasn't there
not split families,
neither was misery
nor ruin
nor violations of the labor law.
There wasn't any interest in the stock
exchange,
no usury.
In her poem there was militant wisdom,
languid intelligence.
Discipline and assemblies were there in
her poem,
blood boiling out of the past,
livers and hearts.
Her poem was a treatise in people's
economy.
In it were all the desires and all the anxiety
of any revolutionary, her contemporaries.
A woman in a tobacco factory
wrote a poem to the agony of capitalism.
Yes sir.
But neither her comrades nor her
neighbors
guessed the essence of her life. And they
never knew
about the poem.
She had hidden it, surely and delicately,
along with some *cana santa* and *canamo*
leaves
between the pages of a leather bound
volume
of José Marti.

REINA MARIA RODRIGUEZ

FROM MY GUARD POST WATCHING THE WORLD

the silent world i guard
builds with its dream
while loneliness recedes,
asphalt turns comrade
and each tree moves through the city
like a gnome.

everyone's here, intact before the wind.
alone, my heart with its entrance gate
knows who touched it somewhere,
already old,
broken at dusk.

i throw out the eye's clasp
over all the doors,
night opens its echo of cocks
and grasses sighing, walls and stoops alert
from my guardpost watching the world.

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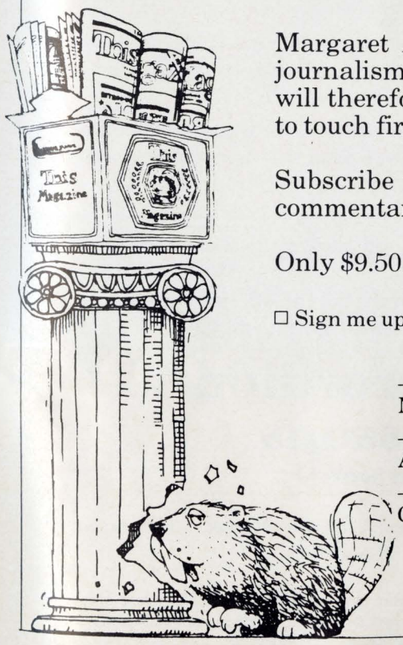

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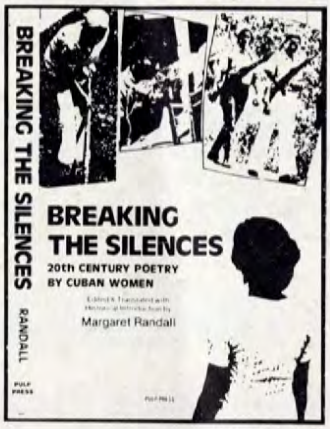

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Breaking the Silences

An Anthology of 20th-Century Poetry by Cuban Women

Edited by Margaret Randall

This anthology is the first book of its kind to appear in the English language. The 25 poets represented span three generations of poetry in Cuba. In addition to the poems, the book features a lucid introduction by Ms. Randall, biographies of all the poets, and personal interviews with each of them. At once a powerful political and poetic statement and a provocative human document, this book gives the North American reader a rare look into the realities of Third World aspirations and achievements.

Margaret Randall is an American poet who has lived in Cuba for ten years and now works with the Women's Association in Nicaragua. Throughout a courageous and productive career, she has distinguished herself as a poet, translator, editor and political commentator, as well as being one of the strongest, clearest and most eloquent voices of the expatriate consciousness in the Americas.

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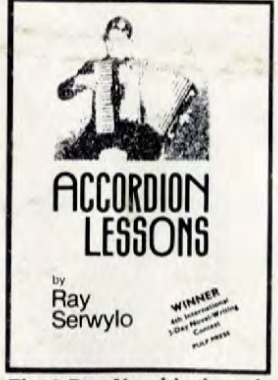

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