

INDEPENDENT FILM ACTIVITY OUTSIDE LONDON

Statement by Mike Leggett, Regional Co-ordinator of the IFA, read at a Conference of the Association held in May 1976.

First a correction. I am not the Regional Secretary of the IFA.

I received a phonecall last summer from Simon Hartog, the first and last secretary, saying there had been a meeting and various people had volunteered to take on various functions and that I had taken on 'looking after the regions'; I suppose since I had only recently left London, I was ~~the~~ the only ~~XXXXXX~~ film-maker they knew outside the place. So I have never been voted to this office. What I said to Simon was that I would be prepared to act as a co-ordinator; it seemed at the time that the best level the X new IFA could initially succeed was in the re-distribution of information amongst film-makers and the broadest possible formulation of policy; and in the case of the latter you may be amazed to hear that several film-makers I've spoken to regard the IFA as being 'too political'!

So the task has really been dependent on the ~~XXXXXX~~ ^{information} which other people have been prepared to pass on and which I have re-circulated either directly amongst individuals or through a newsheet called the Regional Digest the first of which appeared nine months ago and the last issue in January. These contained not just information but a certain amount of polemic which I felt should be included to highlight problems which had arisen or which I felt would arise - such as dealings with the BFI, the arts association, the BBC and so on.

A piece dealing with the films officers and their roles and originating from a mis-leading statement made by one of them in relationship to the establishment of regional groups and further confused by me in a short correspondence can be reported to be ^{Now} in much better shape; ~~now~~ at a recent meeting of the films officers in Bristol, I was invited to attend as a representative of the IFA and was amazed at the meeting ^{of} the similarity of problems being encountered by both groups. As a result of the meeting contact ~~is going to be made~~ ~~regular~~ and exchange of information particularly in the tracking down of film-makers, is going to be made regular.

The second issue of the Digest dealt with the BFI and their response to a letter from the IFA seeking funds, the breakdown of which you have read already amongst the conference papers.

I quote; "It may be recalled from the last issue that the BFI, the Bloody Film Institute had not replied to a request made in March for funds; the request was detailed and laid out along the lines suggested by the head of the regional department, Alan Knowles. No reply has been received from him not even acknowledgement of the original letter; a rumour was detected by our secretary to the effect "No!" but counter rumours to the effect that

we were expecting a proper reply fell on fogged frames.....the fact that the Institute appears to be as ever in a state of utter chaos, fighting hard to prevent in this financial year an embarrassment even greater than that which befell them at the end of the previous one, does not improve any feelings of confidence that may have existed in the past in the relationship film-makers have had with that body, (or as it may well soon be, that corpse)

At a time twelve months ago when film-makers were making some coherent and broadly based move to organise not only their production base but that of the context in society, to really make the effort to organise on a national scale rather than perpetuate the cliques that have always been a feature of the London film scene, the Institute was given the opportunity to assist an existent ground move, rather than instigate one. Their response so far has been so contemptuous as to suggest they are dealing with a load of con men.....

But the fact remains, BFI policy is clearly one of directive;" - if only we knew that direction - "inauguration from the top of the institutional pile enacted by a crew of office boys, carpet creepers and armchair revolutionaries Two Facts which have recently emerged in the South-West - quoting from the ~~minutes~~ agenda of the South-West Arts Film Panel meeting held last October 'BFI has just altered the terms of its offer of grant in the current financial year to £4000, on the same condition that a films officer is appointed.' " Incidentally the total amount of money involved here in the appointment of one films officer would be several times the amount the IFA requested to organise on a national level.

"Not content in setting up an irrelevant chain of regional film theatres to bring Culture to the starving provincial masses, they now coerce local organisations into financing their grand plans. The other Fact - in the early stages of establishing the regional film theatre in Exeter several years ago a serious attempt was made to put the local distributor and exhibitor out of business. Had his connections not been more influential than the BFI's miserable friends they would have succeeded - he is now a member of the IFA." And incidentally the ^{film} theatre in question was closed down two years late

And now some observations. Finance, production, distribution, exhibition and publicity are specific ~~film-makers~~ problems affecting film-makers in all regions but I suggest they are more of a problematic to those living outside London simply because of the attitudes and resulting policies emanating from the centralised bodies whether it be self-help bodies such

as the IFA of directive bodies such as the BFI, centralised as they both are in the Metropolis.

The distribution of finance from public coffers for one is largely centred in London and is totally ~~disproportionate~~ disproportionate to that which is collected in that region and is also disproportionate to the number of film-makers resident there; it's difficult to sort the figures out exactly but for anyone keen on pursuing the matter of subsidy, ^{THEY} should first inaugurate a technical analysis of the figures, so that the finance of independently made films, (however you care to define that term), is distinguished from the finance of semi-commercial productions and the expenses involved in distribution and exhibition which the public finance bodies also run. But a problem specific to those outside London is the difficulty of obtaining information about not only the mechanics of applying for a grant but also 'knowing' how to apply; the casual passage of information, the informal meetings between applicants and applicators, is something the subsidy system as it stands at the moment does not cater for, a condition, fellow London film-makers seem also unaware.

On the production side obviously the density of equipment and facilities outside London is lower. ~~Though~~ This makes for ^{BETTER} contact across aesthetic barriers than inside and has encouraged the establishment of a handful, so far, of ~~regional~~ local workshops which the others here will be talking about in detail shortly. Foreseeably the situation could improve in the short-term with the introduction of ~~more~~ larger numbers of accessible portable equipment such as cameras and recorders.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ The particular problems affecting distribution and exhibition are ~~mainly~~ centred ~~on~~ again on lower concentrations particularly ^{of} public transport which in turn affects equally, film-maker and film viewer. ~~and~~ ~~and~~ ~~and~~ The problem of arranging such varieties of films into programmes for exhibitions is not helped by a lot of the bookers and potential bookers when the matter of rentage is mentioned - the 'we're doing you a favour' syndrome is still more active outside London than in, it seems.

Interest shown by local press and television is as ever taken on the level of what can be reduced into a sentence; and the London publishers can only seem to organise their activities in West End pubs.

But these are problems many of which can begin to be solved or at least improved with the kind of assistance a strong and well organised, Co-ordinated IFA can offer, to keep film-makers outside the concentrations of these activities outlined above, informed and in touch with developments and possibilities. But before this can take place the attitudes of those inside the largest concentration, London, will have to modify. The title in the conference schedule is a clue to what I mean; Regional Film Development everyone takes

worth
ringing

to mean, film-makers from outside London, and avoids actually saying so - the inference follows that activity outside London needs development. Well the fact is that is true, but then it is equally true of those inside London as well - London is another region though as has been pointed out a particular one. The session I feel would have been better described as ~~xxx~~ covering Film Activity Outside London. But the metropolitan attitude is nonetheless prevalent and evident far too often; from the casual comment of a personal friend who observes that 'it is all very civilised down here' which means that there is a toilet and bathroom and a wooden floor to the equally revealing remark that 'phone bills must be enormous...' as if the only other phones in the country were in London itself. But the fact escapes many Londoners that it costs just the same to phone Reading, ~~ANYWHERE, x x x x x~~ Oxford or Southend as it does to phone Penzance, Anglesey, Glasgow or the Orkneys. A journey across London ~~is the~~ ^{TAKES THE} same as ~~to~~ ^{to} a train, Bristol or Birmingham. Four hours driving means you can reach most of the rest of England. The orientation here is outward - from London. There is no argument that reasons exist to make London ~~an~~ place where 'things are stored'; a repository of films, books, pictures and administrators - but I feel it does not mean therefore that the storekeepers and others ~~should~~ have a monopoly by definition, of what there is to be passed outward, particularly goodwill and interest.

NEEDED A recent occurrence which has done a lot of damage to the kind of confidence in each other as film-makers, ~~and~~ people that has to be expected before the ideals of the IFA become a reality, was the demise of the 2nd Festival of Independent British Film that was to have taken place in Bristol at the beginning of April. I don't wish to stir for the sake of it but it is important to air this as an illustration of the kind of problems that can arise from geographical separation. If the lesson cannot be learned then it would be better for us to go away and continue building enclaves ~~against the encroachments of Melvyn Bragg and~~ to our own design. The fact is ICW in their statement of intention said and I quote - "The last festival succeeded in achieving its necessarily limited aims of identifying what was going on and of encouraging the cross-fertilization of ideas. The forthcoming event is a development and will be a more structured situation assisting in the growth of new critical attitudes which are born from within independent cinema and are not bound by the irrelevant formulae of the industry. We think that the best way to achieve this is to arrange programmes of deliberately juxtaposed films around daily discussions. The subject for discussion will arise out of the questions posed by the material that is sent in. Selection will not be based on intrinsic quality (whatever that may be), but will be aimed towards an apposite and stimulating cluster of films each day, focussed on a continuing debate on the future of independent cinema - the coming together of theory and practice.

And further down the entry card the names of nine people, the Selection Panel seven of whom lived in the London area.

The organisers were in touch with some 200 film-makers and organised around the country viewings of some 300 films. Several sessions were arranged in London by the co-ordinator and yet it seems only a fraction of the Panel arrived to view the work. The final meeting at which selection and programming was going to be arranged was conducted, I'm led to believe, as if it were an auction of ~~x~~ cabbages. One wonders on what basis the Panel felt able to say in their statement issued six weeks before the event; quote - "We are forced to conclude that a second festival scheduled so soon after the first has not allowed sufficient time for a substantial body of new work to emerge." Compare for yourselves this piece of consumerist slick ~~xxxx~~ ~~talk~~ with the key words on the ICW card; cross-fertilization, critical attitudes and, the future of independent cinema; ~~phrases whose~~ enthusiastic idealism you may say but phrases that ~~ix~~ were totally acceptable ^{TO THE PANEL} some months before. ^{QUOTING AGAIN} "Accordingly, with great regret that we were not in a position to diagnose these problems earlier...." is not good enough - they existed as a panel for five months. I've spoken to the parties involved and it is small wonder to me that the, in my opinion, mis-handling of the organisers by the Selection Panel moved one of the organisers to write in a letter to the Arts Council films officer; quote "It seems(we) have fallen foul of the new urban colonisers who insist upon a bull-headed display of confidence and dynamism no matter how pretentious before they can be convinced that anything is happening. We don't work that way here".

The fact is that ~~is~~ condescension and patronage is going to replace respect for autonomy and variety then co-operation between independent film-makers is going no where and the statement, "The Association's aims are to represent the views of its members and to establish a wider recognition of the role and significance of independent film in the UK", is MEANINGLESS.

The regions breed defensiveness (and I quote ~~again~~ ~~from~~ a letter from a London friend), paranoia at worst. We all know that. The only reason that I pursue the matter, the reason why this mental distance between those inside and those outside must be broken down is that quite obviously when it comes to the making of films and their showing, London the storehouse has the virtual monopoly of those things necessary to the craft. Laboratories equipment houses, spares and maintenance depots, the greater concentration of people with similar production problems, the variety of screening venues allowing the choice of showing or seeing, the variety of publicity media, though in the case of that it seems we all suffer the same boycott.....

Necessary to the craft but not essential, materially. What is essential, morally, aesthetically and simply, practically, is a more honest and genuine show of interest and response.

~~The situation so far has not been particularly encouraging~~

Amber statement
Feedback?

Grouping democracy

John Birt's Coop

Dave ICW

} Over saturation

PG

menzieside - has hotel facility, other rooms

Barry Callahan - Yorks AA

Simon Rasthidge - how soon access?

BC

Women

CW

Sheffield Women Film Group

Tom NE Coop + umbrellas

Andy Boyd Manchester

Esther W. Mansell Collective

Tom

Maurice Hutton - 789 Theatre Group

Tom

Funding

Pool

Distrib

Exhib

Grouping

Residencies

Membership update

Communication Meeting?
Policy

(Funds Res.)

- ① Regional IFA Committee to meet BFI Regional to discuss Film Centres
- ② Technical analysis of subsidy

Members list, RAA facilities

Recognition

BFI
Pubs for newsletters