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**“Now is the winter of our discontent.”**

Well spoken lines from Shakespeare's evil Richard III (to reiterate a quote used by Marc Glassman in this issue's "Winter Tales"), and it certainly is evil times for artists and filmmakers in the province of Ontario. The impact of the Reform-minded Premier, Mike Harris, and his slash and burn politics of privatization are cutting deep into the bone. The first round of cuts to the 33-year-old Ontario Arts Council (OAC) ordained by the ruling Reformers (once called the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario) was to the infrastructure—the staff, paper clips and clip boards. The second round in 1996 took direct aim at the artists—filmmakers, dancers, writers, publishers, theatrical groups—fondly referred to as clients. Some “clients” had their grants cut anywhere from 65 to 100 per cent without consultation or warning. For many people in the

community, the cuts came as a freezing cold shower. Rather like receiving your pink slip on Monday morning and being told to leave within the hour without explanation or compensation. At least when the Canada Council initiated its reorganization and cuts, it did so with consultation. Grants were frozen for a year and notification was given well in advance. At the Ontario Arts Council, the cuts have been brutal and it would seem that the surviving staff have taken on the tactics of their political masters. No consultation. No explanation. No money.

To add insult to injury, the OAC has chosen to support Moses Znaimer and his non-profit organization, Bravo!Fact with a \$75,000 grant. The Council's long-serving film officer quit shortly after this arrangement was made. In turn, at a press conference to announce its accomplishments over the first year of operation, Bravo!Fact failed to mention the Ontario Arts Council grant once in all its elaborate, glossy press material. It is appropriate to ask: Why is the Council funding an organization with such deep pockets, with the backing of one of the biggest broadcasters in the country, while cutting filmmakers and legitimate arts organizations?

In a separate, but related incident, John Greyson was arrested at the opening screening of his latest film *Lilies*, when he distributed leaflets denouncing the Reform (oops, Tory) cuts to the film community. The Ontario Film Development Cooperation (OFDC) has had its production funds cut off completely. *Lilies* is one of the last features to be funded by the OFDC, bringing an end to a remarkable 10-year period of building a viable feature-filmmaking culture in Ontario. Anyway, Greyson used the opportunity to demonstrate his displeasure with the Harris cuts. For his efforts he was lead out of his own screening by the police and charged with trespassing. A week later the head of Cineplex, Allen Karp, to his credit, apologized personally to Mr. Greyson and asked that the charges be dropped. But the poignant and piquant nature of the metaphor can not be ignored; a Canadian filmmaker is a trespasser in his own theatres! Cineplex and its sister chain Famous Players showed less than 2 per cent Canadian films in Greater Toronto in 1996. Genie award-winning *Lilies* will do well, but only on one screen at the Carlton, considered the up-scale ghetto for Canadian cinema. At least its better than one week at the Eaton Centre. Karp's heartfelt apology for what was essentially a public relations blunder does not excuse the fact that the major chains' support for Canadian films is minimal at best. David Cronenberg's *Crash* received the full-court press from Alliance Releasing, with an eight-screen opening, including the largest Famous Players screen in downtown Toronto, but Annette Mangaard's *Fish Tail Soup* disappeared after two weeks at the Carlton on one tiny screen and with no support from her distributor. Over half the Canadian films released in 1996 played for two weeks or less in Toronto.

Yes, it is not a good time to be a filmmaker in Ontario. With the gutting of the OFDC, poorly managed cuts at the OAC, and extremely limited access to our own screens, nurturing the next David Cronenberg will be next to impossible in this cruelest of climates. ■

Apologies to Callum Keith Rennie for mixing up his first names in the article on *Hard Core Logo* in issue No. 13; and apologies to Olivier Asselin. The correct title of his second feature is *Le siège de l'âme*, which was misspelt in the "From Sea to Sea" column in the same issue.