



Rarely does the mainstream print media get it right when it comes to the subject of Canadian film, always preferring to give plenty of column space to the hot multiplex release of the week rather than to an indigenous, no-star, low-budget production. This is perfectly understandable, since this is what the majority of its readers really care about—the latest offerings, good or bad, from Hollywood's star-making assembly line. So it was a pleasant surprise when Kate Taylor, a regular columnist for

*The Globe and Mail*, hit the nail on the head with a piece she wrote back in February entitled "Film tax credits are starting to look like a mug's game." (*The Globe and Mail*, 2/23/05.)

Commenting on the recent rush by provinces such as British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario to match each other's tax credits, Taylor made the very good point that "giving tax breaks to foreign producers is a pretty indirect method of nurturing domestic cinema, which just doesn't breathe the same air as [American] movies-of-the-week and specialty-channel fodder that come to Canada to shoot. Certainly there's no evidence that the tax-credit system...has launched some golden age [in Canadian cinema]."

Media-savvy lobby groups such as ACTRA and the Canadian Film and Television Production Association leaned heavily on provincial governments with public demonstrations, while production houses made noises about moving to more tax-friendly provinces, causing British Columbia to increase its credit on foreign productions from 11 to 18 per cent while increasing domestic credits from 20 to 30 per cent. This was done under the threat from B.C.-based Brightlight Pictures and Lions Gate Films to move to Ontario, which had increased its tax credits months earlier. Quebec moved quickly to match its provincial rivals.

These unseemly bidding wars for the latest Keanu Reeves epic production, however, can't fix the real reason for the recent downturn in business, the rising Canadian dollar in relation to the American greenback, nor do they do a wit of good for the struggling indigenous filmmaker. As Taylor concluded in her piece, "If provincial governments really want to benefit domestic film...they should be making direct grants to local producers and filmmakers...and they should be investigating how to improve what remains an abysmal distribution system that allows a deluge of Hollywood pap to overwhelm every screen [in the country]."

While all efforts to challenge the lockhold American companies have on the distribution system in this country have met with failure over the past 80 years, there was a time, during the 1980s and early 1990s before the current era of tax credits, when the Ontario government did give out direct production grants to filmmakers through the auspices of the Ontario Film Development Corporation. The result was the films of the Toronto new wave. Filmmakers such as Atom Egoyan, Patricia Rozema, Bruce McDonald, Peter Mettler and John Greyson flourished during this "golden age," the likes of which we will never see again under the current system of competing tax credits that only serve to fatten the wallets of fickle producers and provide seasonal, uncertain work for production crews.

Wyndham Wise, *Editor-in-Chief*

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