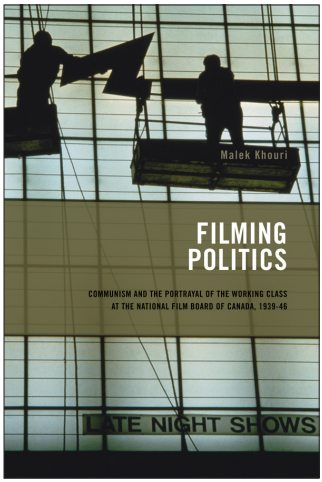
University of Calgary Press
www.uofcpress.com



FILMING POLITICS: COMMUNISM AND THE PORTRAYAL OF THE WORKING CLASS AT THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA, 1939–46

by Malek Khouri

ISBN 978-1-55238-670-5

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

9 THE NFB IN A MOMENT OF TRANSITION: WORKERS IN THE NFB FILMS BETWEEN 1945 AND 1946

This chapter discusses shifts that affected the discourse of NFB films between 1945 and 1946. This was a transitional period where the NFB's discourse on workers and labour began to reflect new social and political influences that ushered Canada's transition into the post-war era. Tensions on the labour front were on the increase, and manifestations of early Cold War strains were ignited by the defection of a cipher clerk in the Soviet embassy in Ottawa. This period also saw the departure of NFB founder John Grierson. In August 1945 and in light of increased criticism and accusations from conservative political circles, Grierson finally resigned from the NFB. Grierson's resignation occurred just one month before Soviet embassy functionary Igor Gouzenko's defection signalled the first shot in the Cold War between the west and the Soviet Union.

NFB films' portrayal of labour-related issues between 1945 and 1946 would signal major changes that subsequently transformed the NFB's discourse on the working class. On the labour front, the trade union movement was reaching a peak in its organizational strength and political activities. While the NFB continued to produce films that showed an interest in labour issues, these films began to reflect aspects of anti-labour and anti-communist rhetoric. These views would later dominate the political discourse of the Cold War period.

CHANGING LABOUR AND POLITICAL CLIMATE

As we saw earlier, the war period itself had witnessed rapid growth in the membership and in the political and organizational strength of the trade union movement. On the political level, as the Allies proclaimed victory in Europe in May 1945, the relationship between labour and the political forces of the Communist left reached an all-time

high. By the time the war ended, a new political climate was taking root in Canada. In conjunction with the growth of the labour movement and its leftist allies, tensions on the labour front were also on the increase. Labour's uneasy truce with business initiated during the war was being hampered by businesses' attempts to retract from the agreements made by the two sides earlier.

The increase in labour's political power and the rise of militant influence within it clearly strengthened the hand of labour in its partnership arrangements with management. By February 1944, the King government introduced a Wartime Labour Relations Regulation that basically recognized labour's status as a bargaining agent on behalf of workers. In addition to allowing all employees to join unions on principle, the regulation created fundamental rules that legally entrenched labour's bargaining power. Those rules also

> called for the certification of bargaining agents in appropriate units; introduced compulsory collective bargaining which mandated the obligation to bargain in good faith and to attempt to reach an agreement; maintained a combination of conciliation officer and conciliation board mechanism; introduced the demand that all collective agreements contain a clause creating mechanisms for the handling of disputes during the life of contract.[1]

The trade union movement and the working class as a whole were clearly assuming a new status as one of Canada's major economic, political and social players. The achievements made by the Canadian labour movement before and during the war placed the working class in a position where it had the potential to play a qualitatively new and unprecedented role in shaping the political and economic future of the country in the post-war era.

This strength, however, was also becoming a major source of tension. By late 1944, in response to attempts by employers to retract from their wartime concessions to the labour movement, a working-class strike movement was rapidly developing. Over that particular year around 500,000 working days were lost through labour strikes. This figure tripled less than one year later, due largely to strikes occurring in the second half of the year.[2] In September 1945, the Ford Motor Company reneged on its wartime commitment to recognize the Union of Auto Workers (UAW) as the bargaining agent for Local 200 in Windsor. Despite attempts by the federal and provincial governments to intimidate them, workers staged a major successful strike that represented a watershed moment in the history of the Canadian labour movement.[3] But the strike also reflected labour's anxieties with the new post-war situation, particularly in reaction to consistent attempts by business to reclaim some of the political losses it incurred during the war.

The labour movement and its militant leadership saw these attempts as a signal to them to become more vigilant in defending the gains achieved during the war:

> The Canadian UAW and indeed the entire Canadian Labour Movement did not see the end of World War II as a time to surrender. Important gains had been made with high employment, and this was not the moment to back down. But corporate Canada was preparing to move in an entirely different direction, looking back to the control of the pre-war years as its goal.[4]

Another major labour action that took place during the same period was the 1946 Stelco strike. Workers' demands centred on wages, union recognition, and the forty-hour work week. The strike ended by defeating the wartime freeze on wages. Subsequently, the success of the strike guaranteed an even stronger position for workers. This was manifested in the company's recognition of the principle of collective bargaining.

All these new labour gains, however, were implemented in the context of several legal and political uncertainties and as such were open to reversals and manipulations by business and by the government. As Kealey argues,

> Aside from the uncertainty for labour of the rule of law in itself, the complex labour relations system finds its rationale in two pervasive myths; first, that the two parties involved – capital and labour – meet as equals in so-called "free" collective bargaining (what liberal theory terms "industrial pluralism"); and second, that the role of the state is simply that of a neutral umpire, aiding the two hostile leviathans to make peace and thus protecting the interests of the unprotected public.[5]

Nevertheless, concessions by employers resulted in the further growth and influence of the trade union movement. By now this movement has become a decisive force in Canada's economic, political and social life. The protracted strike movement around various labour demands, particularly the institution and implementation of collective bargaining, continued until 1947. This movement basically sought to ensure that "rights won in wartime would not be lost during reconstruction [post-war period]."[6]

Within labour there was a major increase in the influence of the forces of the communist left in all the major trade unions. Supporters and friends of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) had been elected to posts within almost all the larger labour unions, including the International Woodworkers of America, the Longshoremen, the Seamen's Union, the Fishermen's Union, the aircraft union, the Boilermakers and Marine Workers' Union as well as other marine-workers' groups.[7]

On the political level, the support for Communist Party Popular Front strategy was greater than ever among mainstream sections of Canadian society. The influence of the left in Canadian politics was translated in relatively important increases in their support on various electoral levels. A few days after winning two Toronto seats in the Ontario Legislative Assembly in 1943, Communists won another seat in the House of Commons during a by-election in a working-class Montreal federal riding (the other pro-communist seat was occupied since 1940 by independent Dorise Nielsen). Fred Rose became the first (and until today, the only) openly Communist Canadian to be elected to the House of Commons. Rose was elected under the banner of the Labour-Progressive Party, which was formed in 1943 in light of the continued official government ban on the Communist Party as such. These successes on the federal and provincial electoral levels accompanied similar accomplishments in municipal elections across the country.[8]

Already influential within the labour movement and among workers, communists were becoming a force to be reckoned within Canada's mainstream political institutions themselves, a phenomenon that was unprecedented in the CPC's history since its founding in 1921. For many Canadians, socialism was now an acceptable and viable political alternative. This counter-hegemonic climate transcended the Communist Party's own fortunes to benefit the other labour-based Canadian socialist party, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation.

As Ian McKay suggests, the new political atmosphere in the country reflected a "certain convergence within a common formation" between the CCF and the communists on the question of the socialist state.[9] Basing his argument on a major CCF propaganda document authored in 1943 by two of the party leaders, David Lewis and Frank Scott, McKay suggests that despite its paramount importance for understanding the dynamics of this crucial moment in Canadian history, the mere presence of this formation, and its influence, remains largely muzzled or ignored by most CCF/NDP historians. Irrespective of various other differences between the revolutionary nature of the Communist Party with its disciplined organization and mobilization, and the mass party and coalition-oriented CCF, McKay argues, both parties still shared at the time a common vision of Canada. They both advocated a country "in which capitalist ownership has been replaced by social ownership, and 'the rapacious system of monopoly capitalism' replaced by a 'democratic socialist society.'"[10] Furthermore, McKay points to the fact that the CCF adopted a similar position towards the Soviet Union to that of the CPC. McKay describes how the CCF looked at the Soviet Union:

> It is in the Soviet Union that "we" find proof of a post-capitalist society's ability to mobilize its population to meet a great purpose. "The Soviet Union is an example of a whole economy being run successfully on new lines." It is the "Russian" people that we can see a vast population embarked "upon a colossal plan of organized social revolution," which has already given them' a powerful new system capable of withstanding the onslaught of the world's mightiest armies.[11]

The 1944 election of Tommy Douglas in the province of Saskatchewan as the leader of North America's first socialist government was in itself a major indication of the level to which socialist politics in general had become more or less institutionalized within Canadian political culture and discourse.

The combination of increased labour strength, and the growing influence of socialist ideas among mainstream sections of Canadian society, raised fears within economic and political establishment circles. With its history of sympathetic discourse on labour and on working-class views now becoming more alarming to the establishment, political pressures on the NFB would result in changes to how its films would depict those issues.

PRELUDE TO THE COLD WAR IN THE NFB

As labour and political tensions loomed on the horizon, the role played by the NFB was itself coming under increased scrutiny. As we saw earlier, the NFB's discourse on labour and workers during the war emphasized ethico-political values that encouraged working-class involvement in politics, collective decision-making in the workplace, and cooperative social and economic development. It also promoted government involvement in social and economic planning and supported the creation of public social systems and institutions. While NFB films never expressed positions in support of labour strikes and actions, they nevertheless encouraged a proactive approach to the role of labour and workers in Canadian politics. Such an approach was incompatible, to say the least, with how the political and economic establishment saw the function of labour in the post-war era.

Inside the House of Commons, the clamour against the NFB was already being voiced even before the war came to its end. In 1944, conservative MP Agar Adamson accused the NFB of being a propaganda machine "for a type of socialist and foreign philosophy." Adamson accused the NFB of attacking the "adolescent mind." The

Board, he argued, was manipulating the "receptive mood" of young people and their vulnerability in their "comfortable surroundings" to "spray [them] with an anaesthesia of propaganda which in most cases [they are] not capable of resisting."[12]

Even as early as 1942, fear of John Grierson's views and displeasure with the discourse of NFB films was being raised in the United States. According to Kirwan Cox, the FBI was concerned that the *World in Action* series, which at the time was being screened in most American mainstream movie theatres, was too leftist in its analysis, and that Grierson himself was a "communistic sympathizer."[13] Cox quotes a 1942 inquiry about Grierson sent by FBI director Edgar Hoover to the American Embassy in London:

> From information appearing in Bureau files, it is indicated that John Grierson is Communistically inclined and that several of the films he has produced in Canada appear to be written and directed from a pro-Soviet viewpoint.[14]

Having Grierson at the helm of the NFB clearly did not sit well with some prominent political forces on both sides of the border. Furthermore, Grierson's plans for the NFB in the post-war era did not do much to reassure these forces about his political motivations and intentions.

For his part, Grierson was contemplating the future role of the Board even before the war had ended. In essence, his peacetime social and political values did not seem different from those he talked about before and during the war:

> In keeping with his firm opinions on the social importance of filmmaking, Grierson wanted the Board to turn its attention to the education and development of a more socially aware and responsible citizenship. Specifically, it seems that Grierson wanted the Board to endorse the concept of an advanced social-welfare state, such as the one proposed in Britain by Lord Beverdige. The Board was also to continue to discuss themes of international importance and, if Grierson had his way, it would be aligned with External Affairs in an effort to promote a new spirit of international cooperation. Education, internationalism, citizenship: these were the Griersonian watch words.[15]

Grierson's vision, however, would not be allowed to materialize, at least not in the manner that Grierson intended to. Grierson resigned from the Board in August 1945. The NFB's first production supervisor, Stuart Legg, left the Board a few months later.

The resignation of Grierson occurred just one month before the defection of a cipher clerk in the Soviet embassy in Ottawa.

In February 1946, just five months after he defected, Gouzenko's case became the pretext for an official campaign against the Canadian left, particularly against the CPC and the militant leadership of the trade union movement. By the time the campaign officially ended in the early 1970s, it had affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of Canadians.[16] For their part, NFB films between 1945 and 1946 featured remnants of the earlier progressive-oriented discourse as well as elements that reflected the rising Cold War climate and anxieties.

REMNANTS FROM THE OLD DISCOURSE

Commonsensical counter-hegemonic ideas inform and are informed by subaltern consensus. This means that the ideological impact of such ideas in a specific moment in history at once depends on their ability to build upon *and* to contest other philosophies that constitute the mainstream ideological dispositions. By 1945, ideas about social solidarity, grassroots democracy and collective responsibility had become integral to the ethico-political values of a wide cross-section of Canadian society. Such values largely remained integral to the discourse of NFB films during the transition period between the end of the war and the full-fledged outbreak of the Cold War. As the ideological significance and impact of the films was being reshaped by an emerging Cold War climate, new NFB films were increasingly inscribing a new emphasis on the role of government officials and bureaucrats, the function of technology and technological innovations, and on the notion of a free-willed individual. Counter-hegemonic ideas that had left their imprint on earlier films, nevertheless, continued to inform, albeit temporarily, the discourse of several early post-war films.

For its part, the 1945 series *Canadian Screen Magazine* kept on depicting aspects in the everyday life of workers, their families and their communities. The series also continued to present glimpses of workers at their picnics, union meetings, and during their discussions of issues of world peace and food shortages in Europe. Occasionally, films also maintained interest in new social programs and how they helped alleviate poverty among working-class Canadians. *Who is My Neighbour* (1946), for example, describes the goals and the growth of welfare organizations and the community chest movement in Canada. The film argues in support of centralizing the administration of revenues and expenditures from overlapping programs to increase the effectiveness of

the Canadian Welfare Council's work. In *Small Fry* (1946, Jack Olsen), workers discuss the positive impact of the newly created Canadian Family Allowance system. The film demonstrates how public aid to needy children enhanced their chances of growing up healthy and "physically and educationally prepared to make their way in the world."

The Third Freedom (1946) discusses a report to employers and other community members concerned with reintroducing amputee veterans into civilian jobs. The film argues that "no job requires all skills such as strength, intellect and manual dexterity in both hands and constant use of both legs." It goes on to suggest that with proper utilization of effective planning and a survey of employment needs and human resources, people and jobs can be matched individually to aptitude.

The 1945 series *Getting the Most out of A Film* upheld the tradition of offering discussion films for use at workers' meetings. Films in the series perceived democracy as an ongoing process involving steady reassessment of labour-related concerns and problems. The series as a whole continued to instigate discussions among workers. As such it also represented continuity in advocating grassroots interpretations of democratic practice among workers in the workplace. Democratic practice in the workplace was presented in conjunction with contemplating the level to which workers, as producers of the nation's wealth, felt part of the actual decision-making process. Three films were produced in the series in 1946. These trailers dealt with issues of work and wages, housing, and the role of trade unions in political elections. One particular film produced by Stanley Hawes (*A Racial Unity Discussion Preface and Trailer*) tackled racial concerns and the need to battle prejudice inside and outside the workplace.

While NFB films continued to tackle themes of labour and public social programs, they simultaneously or conversely accentuated a new discourse. This discourse incorporated several features affecting the depiction of labour. First, an increasing number of films stressed a clearly nationalist slant on Canadian unity. This approach represented a clear departure from earlier emphasis on social (e.g. class) identity. Second, films began to reflect a shift in focus away from issues such as the participation of workers in implementing social and political strategies. Instead, new films gradually highlighted the role of authority, and in particular the role of government, politicians and bureaucrats in articulating and implementing specific economic and social programs. The third feature of this transitory discourse related to its emphasis on science and technology as emblems of human progress. In this regard, films focused more and more on technology as an alternative to labour inefficiency. The fourth feature of the new discourse stressed the case of maintaining labour wage controls in the post-war era period as a means of keeping down the inflation rate. The fifth feature reflected an increased focus on the role of the individual. An important example in

this regard is a group of films that dealt with issues of job safety. All these films advised workers about their personal responsibility in regards to performance on the job. The sixth feature related to the depiction of women workers. Now that "the boys were back from the war front," films encouraged the return of women to their "natural" place at home. This retrograde move away from earlier filmic celebration of the new role of women workers became increasingly noticeable in subsequent post-war NFB films.

NEW EMPHASIS ON NATIONALIST UNITY

A new feature in early post-war NFB films had to do with renewed interest in the issue of nationalist identity. Films were shifting back in the direction of presenting a homogenous image of Canadian society in a manner that subsumed its social diversity and heterogeneity into one ubiquitous national character. This represented a clear departure from the previous emphasis on the specificity and the roles of different social components of Canadian society, such as those based in class and gender.

In and of itself, the notion of national identity is not synonymous with a specific hegemony. For example, the NFB's earlier depiction of national unity was used by way of ushering values of collective sharing and control of social and economic resources. As cultural signs, notions such as national identity acquire their ideological significance within specific historical moments, and are therefore informed by ascending social and political views and perspectives. The ideological significance of cultural signs is largely influenced by the shifts that take place within social and political formations and structures. In the words of Dick Hebdige,

> The struggle between different discourses, different definitions and meanings within ideology is therefore always, at the same time, a struggle within signification: a struggle for possession of the sign which extends to even the most mundane areas of everyday life. "Humble objects" can be magically appropriated; "stolen" by subordinate groups and made to carry "secret" meanings: meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination.[17]

To the background of increased labour tensions and class antagonisms, and as the ruling class began a process of reaffirming its social and political hegemony within Canadian society, the notion of national unity in the period directly after World

War II became increasingly synonymous with loyalty to an essentially socially homogeneous (read: classless) society. Implicitly this meant that attempts to instigate class disharmony would be in effect counterproductive to the interest of the entire nation. Such interpretation of the nation and its interests fundamentally complements advocating the abandonment of the specificity of a working-class social perspective, especially if it is seen hindering or contradicting the interests of the capitalist class.

Stanley Jackson's *This is Our Canada* (1945) discusses how Canada succeeded in developing its resources and industries during the war. The emphasis throughout the film is on a patriotic vision of what it means to be a Canadian. The film begins with a journey across the country's geographic landscape. After it presents a literally bird's eye view of the vast and diverse spaces of the country, the film zooms in to show people playing hockey, in the stampedes, in parades and on the streets. The film delineates the multicultural "English, French, Irish, Scandinavian, Scots, German, and Ukrainian background" of Canada then describes the major industrial production strides made during the war as attributes to "national unity and loyalty." In *Salute to a Victory* (1945) the narrator repeatedly affirms Canada's victory in the war as "a virtue of its unity as a nation." In an attestation to the benefits of national accord and harmony, the film symbolically compares achieving victory through unity to achieving harmony in a musical symphony performance!

LABOUR, AUTHORITY AND THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

NFB films also began to prominently feature government officials and bureaucrats. Dealing with social and economic issues was increasingly being juxtaposed with praising the role of authority. A close examination of the films produced in and after 1945 indicates clear and increased presence of government officials and/or politicians introducing or arguing the case of specific social or economic plans and programs.

In one segment dealing with problems affecting returning war veterans, the commentator in the 1945 film *The Road to Civvy Street* (Vincent Paquette) authoritatively reminds workers that the government "knows better what is good for veterans." In sharp contrast to the earlier emphasis on the responsibility of government towards the collective will of society, and in an obvious departure from the previous accent on participatory grassroots democratic discussion, films such as *The Road to Civvy Street* are characterized by the domineering presence of government officials and bureaucrats intent on getting credit for initiating and implementing specific programs.

Another film, *Back to Work* (1945, Vincent Paquette), deals with how government, with the help of the military, "re-equips ex-servicemen and women to return to civilian jobs." An army rehabilitation officer conducts a final interview with a dischargee. Then, a placement officer assists the veteran in securing new suitable employment. The film gives several examples depicting the process of training veterans in areas such as electrical maintenance, typing, repair work, bricklaying, woodwork, garage work, hairdressing, and secretarial work. The central point in all these examples is to show how government officials estimate, evaluate and determine how veterans could be reintegrated into the work force. The depiction of the military as the administrator of the entire recruiting process further affirms the film's paternalistic celebration of the role of authority.

Along with an increased focus on officials and other authority figures, the discourse on democracy and democratic practice was increasingly becoming synonymous with participating in general elections and with the notion of free speech. Pluralism, diversity of opinion and the free will of Canadians were increasingly submerged into the unitary national scheme of the act of electing a government. *Everyman's World* (1946, producer Sidney Newman), for example, gives a summery of how Canada's political system works. As the film opens, the phrase "you are free, and therefore responsible" sets the stage Prime Minister Mackenzie King to deliver a speech on Canada's policy on international treaties and agreements in front of the United Nations' General Assembly. King affirms that a fundamental component of Canada's policy lies in its belief that "peace affects the well-being of the world's peoples and as such is a concern for Canadian citizens." The commentary affirms the theme of free speech as the essence of Canada's political system. It describes how Canadians enjoy the freedom of belonging to "any political party" and how they practice the "freedom of determining their own political views." Footage depicting election rallies and activities by different political parties (including a glimpse from a communist Labour Progressive Party rally) are introduced as examples of Canada's democratic traditions. "National consciousness," the film argues, is the embodiment of the individual freedom that binds millions of Canadians and allows them to speak in "one voice."

LABOUR AND WAGE CONTROLS

Appearance by government officials not only became a regular feature in NFB films, but it also became the core of a specific argument that would imprint these films at

least until the late 1950s. Towards the end of the war, labour was fighting to lift the freeze on wages. This freeze was part of the price and wage controls that were agreed to earlier by labour, business and government as precautionary war measures.

Naturally, business had no problem with lifting government control on prices but was on the other hand adamant on maintaining the freeze on wages. In light of the tensions on the labour front, and considering that price controls were, to begin with, less likely to be effectively maintained, advocating the continuation of the controls was becoming synonymous with retaining the freeze on labour wages. NFB films between 1945 and 1946 increasingly reflected the views of the business community on this issue.

In *Price Controls and Rationing* (1945, produced by Philip Ragan) the focus is on supporting the renewal of the controls during the post-war period. Reminding us that our government has "learned from the experience of history," the film argues that overcoming potential problems after the end of the war requires the continuation of economic control measures. *Main Street, Canada* (1945, Alistair Taylor) tells the story of small towns living through the prosperity of the 1920s, the Depression of the 1930s and the stress of wartime economy. The film points out that people during these periods worked together using measures such as rationing, and salvaging drives and victory gardens to alleviate the problems of shortages and inflation. The main argument of the film, however, focuses on maintaining wage controls. As a result of this measure, the film argues, and as an outcome of the contributions made by the government to help workers by providing them with "cost of living expenses" support measures, the lives of communities have changed and "youth, men, and women are working and making more than ever before." As in all films with similar themes, *Main Street Canada* uses the situation that prompted imposing wage and price controls during the war to rationalize its continuation in the post-war period.

TECHNOLOGY AND PROGRESS

An increasing number of NFB films accented advances in technology and scientific research, and the role of people who worked in these areas. In this regard, films gave special attention to technology and scientific ventures, and tackled them as potential remedies for social and economic problems. They also perceived scientific and technological advances as prospective contributors to improving work efficiency.

In *Wasp Wings* (1945), images depicting workers and celebrating their role in producing the "tools of victory" as presented during the films of the 1941–44 period are noticeably replaced by a newly found fascination with technology and with the operators of war machines. The film describes the research by aeronautical engineers and the skill of the pilots who helped "keep the Spitfire plane in the air during the war." For its part, *Soil for Tomorrow* (1945, Lawrence Cherry) presents an account of the depletion and erosion of soil on the Canadian prairies. It discusses the restoration measures taken under the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act of 1935. The film opens with a telling dedication:

> To the national leaders, the scientists, the agronomists, and far-seeing farm people who struggle during good years and bad to make the best use of available waters and to preserve the soil.

Summarizing the history of the Depression, the film focuses on problems related to soil depletion, the use of outdated machinery and the effects of drought. It also stresses how the "mistakes by farmers" in planning and economizing their work and their lack of technical and scientific skill contributed to the Depression. In clear contrast to earlier war films, no mention is made here of the role of "chaotic" market production methods that were conceived of as the major instigators of the Great Depression. Consequently, the film makes no mention of cooperative production, marketing and/or distribution practices as possible tools for improving agricultural performance. Instead, it weighs on the role of technology, the government and the need to improve the technical and managerial skills of individual farmers.

A similar theme is presented in *Farm Electrification* (1946, Evelyn Cherry) when it depicts a farming community in Manitoba campaigning to obtain hydropower under Manitoba's Rural Electrification Plan. The film opens with Manitoba's agriculture minister making a presentation on the benefits of the project. It then follows a campaign aimed at convincing hesitant farmers to contribute to covering the initial expenses of the project. Farmers finally recognize the importance of the proposal and the benefits they will get in return in terms of comfort, convenience, efficiency, and financial advantage. The film concludes by a statement which stresses that the implementation of the project will result in "decreased labour, and improved output."

In *Fishing Partners* (1945, Jean Palardy), scientists are conducting research to increase cod fishing productivity. Sea life is studied and possibilities for marketing and processing liver oil are evaluated. Scientists discover that fishing can start in May as opposed to June. As fishermen watch from the sidelines or occasionally lend a

helping hand, scientists carry on with their experiments to help them "perform better in the future."

Tom Daly's *The Challenge of Housing* (1946) surveys ways of dealing with the problem of the slum housing conditions in working-class districts. Daly discusses the causes and effects of such conditions and points out to the progress made by other countries in their attempts to provide adequate working-class housing. While it acknowledges the need to coordinate efforts between industry and labour, and as it describes the menacing social consequences of housing shortages, the film argues that finding efficient technical alternatives in construction methods represents the crux of the solution to the problem. Developing and utilizing technical innovations is the only feasible answer to the problem, the film suggests. In sharp contrast to the earlier 1945 film *Building a House*, where the focus was on the cooperative social organization of work power as one way of dealing with housing shortages, *Challenge of Housing* deals with the issue solely on the basis of finding technical solutions to the problem.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE

As we saw in earlier chapters, during the war women played a major role as part of the industrial working class. The participation of women in the work force helped alleviate labour shortages resulting, on the one hand, from sending large numbers of recruits to the war in Europe, and on the other, from the drastic increase in demand for war machinery. As the war neared its end, however, voices began to demand that women return to "their natural work and role at home." In the words of Beckie Buhay, labour leader and communist activist at the time,

> The war had no sooner ended than efforts were made to drive women back to the kitchen. Married women were driven out of the civil service. Women in higher paid specialized jobs at pay almost equal with that of men, were forced into the less skilled industries and into sweat-shop occupations.[18]

Attacks against gains achieved by women workers during the war years, however, were accompanied by attacks on women's political rights even before the war ended. In 1943, and the midst of the war, the right of women to be part of the political process was itself being undermined by none other than the Prime Minister himself. Inside the House of Commons, Dorise Nielsen expressed her indignation with the Prime Minister's failure to acknowledge the role played by Canadian women in support of the war effort. Nielsen

criticized remarks made by the PM in which he ignored any reference to women during his call to involve returning men in the political process. Nielsen reminded King of the major contributions made by women during the war:

> Women have gone into practically every one of the industries which are vital to war production. They have undertaken heavy physical labour. They have also taken on types of work requiring executive ability and the kind of ability which is of the brain and not so much physical… when we realize what women have done, are doing and will continue to do to fight for the preservation of democracy and for Canada, all must agree that they have a place among legislators to decide on the issues of peace and war, to see to it that this country in post-war years has those things which the people need.[19]

As signs of economic and political discrimination against women became more evident, there were also some shifts back to emphasizing patriarchal perceptions of women's roles in society. The NFB filmic discourse between 1945 and 1946 reflected such shifts.

In a film which makes a point of considering itself a "a tribute to the women of Canada and their part in World War II efforts," the emphasis is in fact on sending a "thank you message" to women for their role in "releasing men to do other jobs or to fight the war." The 1946 film *To the Ladies* (producer Nicholas Balla) makes no qualms about the way it envisions the role of women in the post-war era. After presenting examples of the wide range of jobs that were taken up by women throughout the war, the film revels in the fact that, now that the war is over, a Canadian woman can "look back to do her job: a wife. A better wife."

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND JOB SAFETY

Within a capitalist ideological perspective on change and progress, to be able to pass through the ordeals of social, economic and technological change, one has to articulate one's own survival strategy: one needs to negotiate one's own way of coping with the benefits as well as with the problems associated with inevitable progress. In the end, social and political passivity is conceived of as the only sensible way to ride the tide of this inevitability. In this context, ideas such as individual self-determination and "free will" represent fundamental features of a bourgeois hegemonic discourse. Within

such a pretext, if uninterrupted evolutionary change represented the main trait of the history of humanity, then individuals need to recognize that their survival and success depends on how they privately adjust their own fate to accommodate unavoidable progress.

An important shift in the NFB's discourse on labour occurred in connection with accentuating the role of the individual and personal responsibility in dealing with social and workplace problems. In addition to what I alluded to earlier in relation to NFB films' increased emphasis on technological progress as a remedy for work-related problems, these films for their part virtually put the onus of work safety squarely on the workers themselves.

Vocational Training (1945) presents the story of former Canadian servicemen as they adapt to life after the war. After it describes their training in government-sponsored programs, the film stresses that it is now "up to these veterans to deliver the goods," and that this will now depend on "their desire to help themselves." Along similar lines a large group of films produced in 1946 tackled the issue of safety in the workplace.

Focus in connection with safety issues in the workplace is determinedly put on the individual's role in preventing accidents such as tripping, operating machinery, and handling of heavy loads. Ronald Weyman's (1946) film *The Safety Supervisor* deals with problems confronting the safety manager in his relationship with other management and with labour, and illustrates typical accident hazards. David Bairstow's *Safe Clothing* (1946) conveys the story of a worker who is baffled by the decision of his foreman to send him to the emergency clinic although he was feeling perfectly well. As the nurse begins to operate on his dragging necktie, baggy sleeved sweater, cuffed pants and worn-out shoes, he begins to realize the dangers associated with wearing improper clothing at work. The essence of the argument, however, is on the responsibility of individual workers in avoiding hazardous work practices. *Workers on the Land* (Ernest Reid, 1946) offers suggestions to improve the lifestyle, skills and the working conditions of farm labour. It points out ways to reorganize and plan farm work to guarantee profitable employment during the winter season. The film argues that careful training of farm workers and more efficient planning by individual farmers constitute the main ingredients of successful farming.

The strength of these films is that they do make sense: no one can argue about the need for personal vigilance on the part of workers when it comes to applying better safety and productivity standards. But when these films and their arguments are looked at as the background to the shift that was taking shape in the general discourse of NFB films (particularly the shift away from previous emphasis on collective responsibility),

they begin to reveal an altered ideological slant. Consequently, these films begin to make sense as complementary to a broader hegemonic outlook (and consensus) which in this case reintroduces previous commonsensical values vis-à-vis work, workers, and responsibilities.

But while most films during this period deal with issues of work safety and improving work conditions on the basis of seeking personal remedies (or as we saw earlier on the basis of finding technological solutions), a 1946 film titled *Organization* by Don Mulholland argues in support of creating workers' safety committees to lower the rate of industrial accidents. As an example, the film demonstrates how one such committee investigates dangerous work areas and reports on bad lighting and the hazards of crooked floors. In the end, the prudent training and supervision of newly hired workers is seen as the responsibility of the safety committee. The film then proposes that safety committees should be created as part of a collective strategy that involves labour and management. Another film titled *Silicosis* (1946) by Vincent Pacquette demonstrates how lung disease is caused by exposure to silicate and quartz dust. The film emphasizes improving health conditions through developing better collective supervision methods of mine ventilation techniques.

THE NFB UNDER ATTACK

Accusations by Soviet defector Igor Gouzenko about a Canadian spy ring working for the Soviet Union were publicly disclosed five months after Gouzenko's defection to the RCMP. Just one month later, with the arrest of the lone communist member of the House of Commons Fred Rose in March 1946, a full-fledged political offensive against the Canadian communist left was now in full gear. Eventually the campaign would target a wide range of labour and social activists of different leftist and liberal-oriented stripes.

Among those referred to in Gouzenko's allegations were various NFB personnel, including Frida Linton, Grierson's secretary for six months in 1944.[20] Grierson himself was named as a potential conspirator but was eventually cleared of the charges. On the level of internal bureaucratic politics, Grierson had "too few trustworthy allies and too many detractors." According to Ted Magder, specific films produced by the NFB during the war only added to the political isolation of Grierson:

> Some of the NFB's wartime films, most notably *Inside Fighting Russia* and *Balkan Powder Keg*, had unnerved government officials: the former for its seemingly wholehearted endorsement of the Russian Revolution, and the latter for its criticism of British policy in the Balkans.[21]

Problems faced by leftist intellectuals and filmmakers inside and outside the NFB in the mid-1940s, however, were not simply related to the government's attempt to "curtail a dangerous subversive spy network," as Magder suggests. As we saw earlier, the relationship between the labour movement and the Communist Party of Canada was at an all time high during and shortly after the war ended. The influence of the CPC both inside and outside of the labour movement was also on the increase. At the same time, tensions resulting from labour's concerted push to lift the wartime freeze on wages were also on the rise. In the end, and as Len Scher suggests, the government's anti-Communist campaign was connected with practical labour-related motives:

> Communism was influential in certain parts of the labour movement, and consequently the Mounties increased their surveillance on left-wing unions. Communists had organized unions throughout Canada, fought bitter strikes, and were intensely dedicated to workers. Bill Walsh, a long-time union activist and Communist, told me he believed the real reason for the red-hunting during the cold war wasn't ideological but practical. "There was concern largely because business felt threatened by the ability of Communists to get better wages for their workers," says Walsh.[22]

The practical threat that Walsh was talking about was real. The labour strike movement between 1945 and 1947 was picking up steam on unprecedented levels.

According to the *Canada Year Book* of 1952–53, after the number of strike days tripled from 500,000 in 1944 to 1,500,000 in 1945 (largely as a consequence of the major Ford Strike in the second half of the year), this number tripled yet again to over 4,500,000 in 1946.[23] Strikes spread across Canada to include almost all major industrial production sectors, including lumber, textile, fisheries, steel, rubber, auto, mining and electrical industries.[24]

All these battles on the labour front had major ramifications on social and political stability. At the heart of tensions was what labour and left-wing activists saw as an attempt by big business to retract from earlier commitments on labour management cooperation. Coinciding with the anti-Communist campaign was a "post-war putsch"

against left-wing labour unions. Even before his arrest on spying charges, Fred Rose described the atmosphere that was brewing in the aftermath of the war:

> Workers in various plants and industries have felt for the past year a change in the attitude of employers. Before V-E day, when war materials were necessary, employers were willing to collaborate, but once they felt that the war was coming to an end they started to provoke trouble in the shops. They laid off active unionists and fired certain workers and rehired at lower wages. All these methods were resorted to in order to prepare for the post-war period.[25]

Merrily Weisbord confirms that the push against communists occurred in conjunction with a wider campaign by employers to lay off workers and reduce wages in an attempt to "get back to pre-war conditions."[26] Within five years after the start of this campaign, thousands of communists and their supporters were purged from labour unions. As a direct result of this campaign, and in spite of their ability to sustain some level of authority within a shrinking number of unions, the influence of communists and their allies within the labour movement was radically reduced. The CPC's strategic role within organized labour was to eventually become part of history.

With Cold War hysteria taking hold, the Canadian government calmly continued its witch-hunt – of leftists, internationalists, pacifists, and of other "subversives" in the civil services, in the NFB, as well as in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.[27] In 1986 Rick Salutin would open up aspects of this largely forgotten period in Canadian history in the CBC's television drama *Grierson and Gouzenko*. The film depicts events relating to the NFB during World War II and the Cold War.[28]

Attacks against the left intensified into a fear campaign. In 1947 the Canadian Chamber of Commerce (CCC), one of the main voices of business in Canada, published a pamphlet for mass distribution which accused communists of being revolutionary agents of a foreign power and whose loyalty was to an "imported ideology." It alleged that communists were attempting to destroy Canada's way of life with lies, strife and bloodshed.[29] No sooner had the CCC published its article than business circles began to target the NFB itself.

In a 1949 article titled "Film Board Monopoly Facing Major Test," the *Financial Post* accused the NFB of becoming a leftist propaganda machine. It also revealed that the Board had been labelled a "vulnerable agency" and that the Department of National Defence was no longer using its services.[30] Another campaign by private film production companies compounded the ferocious nature of the attacks against the NFB. Quoted by Len Scher, Margorie McKay, a National Film Board employee

at the time, suggests that an effective lobby by private film producers was pushing to gain access to government money, which at the time was exclusively set for the NFB production unit:

> All government departments were supposed to have all their films made by the National Film Board. Private film producers wanted to cut in and make films for such departments as Health and Welfare, National Defence, the Post Office, and Justice. There was more money for private producers from government than from any where else.[31]

This view is echoed in an article in the *Ottawa Citizen* from the period. The article states that "the National Film Board has its defenders as well as detractors. Its critics appear to be chiefly persons connected with the private film industry… the board's supporters appear to be the public."[32] No further corroboration of how private companies specifically encouraged left blacklisting or any specific evidence that can identify these companies. What is certain however, as Whitaker and Marcuse stress, is that much of the anti-NFB campaign was directly connected to the Canadian "political, bureaucratic and economic elites," and clearly had no support among the general Canadian public. The two writers take the case even further and suggest that, if anything, the NFB enjoyed good public support manifested in strong protests in support of it that were initiated by various grassroots organizations:

> Labour unions, farmers' groups, cooperatives, universities, public libraries, local film councils and movie appreciation societies, women's groups, and small-town service clubs wrote to Ottawa in bewilderment, anger, and concern about the future of an organization that they cherished.[33]

Eventually, in November 1949 fierce accusations against the "leftist bias" of the National Film Board came to a head with direct accusations of "communist infiltration" of NFB employees. Thirty Board employees were presumed security risks. When the NFB's director Ross McLean refused to fire any employee he was himself let go. Consequently, his deputy assistant resigned. McLean was later replaced by *Maclean's* editor W. Arthur Irwin.[34]

The atmosphere of fear created within the NFB as a result of the anti-communist campaign had a major political and personal impact on all NFB employees. Len Scher describes how James Beverdige, an NFB manager and filmmaker during the war and post-war periods, regretted not interfering in support of the employees who were under

fire at the time: "in an emotional moment, he confided to me that 'every fibre in his body' regrets not standing up and fighting for those who were fired at the Film Board. But the overall political climate suppressed acts of individual heroism."[35] Rick Salutin provides a similar account:

> They [the RCMP] asked some employees to inform on others. Some private film makers were asked to provide incriminating information, and at least one happily drew up his own list of possible subversives. People began leaving the board, sometimes for political reasons, sometimes with an ambiguous reference to "budget cuts." New people moved in. Some were assumed to be informers, others enforcers of the new political line.[36]

Even some CCF members of the House of Commons joined in the attacks on the NFB and its employees. Pleading guilty for his party's earlier defence of the NFB, and now calling for complete security screening of all its employees to ensure that they all are "working for us," the CCF's representative from Cape Breton South strongly attacked the Board and its alleged communist connections:

> It was not yesterday that this Film Board became suspect. We remember the espionage trials. We remember Freda Linton and the position she occupied on the Board [Grierson's secretary who was accused of being a Russian spy in the aftermath of the Gouzenko affair]. We remember… [Grierson], who is no longer in this country.[37]

Many filmmakers and employees from the Board were fired and some others, seeing the writing on the wall, simply chose to resign on their own. In reference to the effect this atmosphere had on the entire work culture of the NFB at the time, Salutin recounts moving recollections by one of the Board's most talented filmmakers:

> Evelyn and Lawrence Cherry had been driving forces at the board. "One day we were invited up to Mr. Irwin's office," says Evelyn. "He asked us some innocuous questions, then he said, 'Would your assistant be able to carry on the agricultural section if you were gone?' We said, 'Yes, our assistant has been well trained.' That was that was said. Some time later I resigned. I suppose I should have refused to quit, made them fire me. But I was physically exhausted. There had been all that incredible energy expended during the war. Then with peacetime, the pressures,

> the uneasiness, the opportunism. And always less and less work. I guess at that period we spoke less than at any time in our lives."[38]

The new NFB management tried to bring the Board closer to the government line on communism, and by extension to its position on labour issues. By the early 1950s, the new director of the NFB announced the creation of a series entitled *Freedom Speaks Programme*. The series proclaimed as its main goal "counter[ing] communist propaganda with a positive statement in effective dramatic form of the values which we as a free people believe to be basic to democratic society."[39]

The years of producing films that championed the contribution of workers to society and extolled working people as builders of a "new tomorrow" were coming to an end. Canadian film historian Peter Morris contends that the NFB later concentrated on making films about "ordinary Canadians" that tended to include "middle or lower middle classes" such as "professionals (teachers, bank clerks, editors), skilled workers, or rural workers (who are associated with the prestige of the land)." "Unskilled industrial workers or the chronically unemployed," he continues, "had no place in the NFB."[40]

Morris attributes these changes to the middle-class background of the filmmakers. He suggests that their social background, combined with Canada's "comfortable slippage… into an era of modest social reform under the paternal guidance of Mackenzie King's Liberal government" might have resulted in the Board's shift towards depicting "ordinary Canadians"[41] instead of industrial workers. Morris's proposals are clearly problematic. To begin, when he characterizes the shift which resulted in the NFB's retraction from depicting industrial workers and the unemployed as a shift towards depicting "middle or lower middle classes" Morris is clearly basing his argument on the assumption that clerical wage-earners and other workers from outside of the industrial and blue-collar sectors of the economy do not belong to the working class. The real and important difference between industrial and non-industrial labour has a major bearing on the problems of working-class consciousness and struggle; but it is not the yardstick for setting boundaries to the structure of the working class itself. Changes in the make-up of Canadian labour, which in the post-war period began to move in the direction of an increase in white collar workers as compared with industrial workers, does not as such represent an expansion of a middle class.

The change in labour composition in the post-war period reflected a gradual movement towards less reliance on manual labour. This change partly occurred due to advances that affected the technological structure of the means of production. Furthermore, changes in the working class's demographics also reflected an expansion of the services sectors of the economy and the amplification of government bureaucracy

which was beginning to take shape in the late 1940s. This occurred in conjunction with the major expansion and implementation of government-sponsored social and public programs.

NFB films during the post-war period did indeed reflect a shift towards depicting professionals and skilled workers, as Morris correctly suggests. This shift, however, was indicative of a change of emphasis from one labour sector to another rather from one class to another. It was a shift directly connected to the attacks against communist influence within the labour movement that existed mainly among industrial workers. It also aimed at uprooting the NFB's counter-hegemonic filmic discourse on labour issues in general and, as such, hardly reflected a "comfortable slippage into a period of modest social reforms" as Morris claims. What took place within the NFB amounted to a virtual shutdown of films about militant sections of the Canadian working class at the time (i.e. industrial labour). This shutdown complemented and enhanced the overall campaign against militant labour and coincided with the campaign against the communist left. This shutdown also directly complemented the interests of big business. Under the banner of fighting communism, big business felt the urgency of putting a stop to a discourse that encouraged and sustained a class-conscious orientation in its analysis. As Whitaker and Marcuse attest, big business's indignation towards this discourse even went back to the war years when business leaders lobbied against what they saw as dangerous threat to their interests:

> Even during the war years, private-sector critics were fastening on Grierson's alleged "Communist" tendencies. In the spring of 1942, H.E. Kidd of Cockfield, Brown Advertising wrote to Brooke Claxton, MP, to complain about Grierson on behalf of many of his business clients. Kidd was an invaluable supporter of Claxton in his Montreal riding and was later to become a cabinet minister and one of the most important political figures in the Liberal Party organization. Kidd's complaint to Claxton was to the point: "I have heard from some of our clients that Mr. Grierson is getting a reputation as one of the most dangerous characters in Canada. Somebody had seen the documentary film [*Inside Fighting Russia*]. . . . This film deals with Russia. It glorifies, in the opinion of my informant, the Communist faith and is a very bad insidious piece of propaganda for Communism."[42]

Even the Canadian private film industry (at that point largely connected with Hollywood business interests) was not far from the campaign against the NFB. What is of particular interest in this regard is the possible role played by the pro-Hollywood lobby during this post-war period in jeopardizing not only the development of the

NFB itself with its documentary form (i.e. in contrast with fiction film) but also the development of a Canadian independent film industry altogether. Whitaker and Marcuse insinuate such a scenario:

> Opposition to Grierson's NFB from the private sector was, in the Canadian context, a two-headed beast. One head, much the smaller, was that of the private Canadian film industry which did not, in truth, amount to much. It could, and sometimes did, act as a Canadian lobby against any expansion of the publicly owned NFB. The dynamo of American cultural industries, was well represented in Canada by the U.S. Embassy and by the American-owned theatre and distribution chains. The core of Hollywood production was, of course, feature films, which the NFB did not produce, and which the Canadian government had no intention of sponsoring. Yet the NFB did represent at least a marginal rival, especially in the pre-television age when people still depended on the cinema for images of news and events in the world. Above all, the NFB represented a breeding ground for Canadian talent under public auspices that had the potential of forming nucleus of an indigenous Canadian film industry after the war. Hollywood was (and is) quite intolerant of any rivalry in its market on the northern half of the continent.[43]

This argument bears important consequences for understanding the dynamics of the development of the Canadian film industry and the marginalizing of the documentary form as a whole. There is no doubt that Hollywood and the private sector of the Canadian film industry (irrespective of how insignificant it was), had a joint and vested interest in eliminating any possible growth of a public-sector-supported Canadian cinema. Despite his attempts to lessen the American domination over the Canadian film industry by proposing the creation of a quota system "to ensure at least minimal opportunity for Canadian films to be seen in theatres in Canada," Ross McLean, Grierson's successor at the NFB was clearly no match for a Canadian government increasingly under the sway of C.D. Howe, "economic czar, 'minister of everything,' and forceful exponent of continentalist economic development, who had no interest in subsidizing a local film industry."[44] This episode alludes to some of the politics that accompanied the campaign against the NFB. It also indicates the political significance of what was being achieved in the NFB and the level to which the Board was becoming a source of agitation for big business circles.

The main distinguishing feature of Canadian cinema (and the NFB in particular) during its early years of existence was indeed its near exclusive documentary focus. In contrast, both European and American cinemas gravitated toward fiction narrative.

The start of World War II provided an impetus for Canadian documentary production to thrive. NFB's documentaries brought editorially enhanced presentations of events and labour politics to hundreds of thousands of Canadian spectators. This documentary practice was enhanced by various factors that went beyond the subject matter that they focused upon, and involved the nature of the documentary medium itself. NFB films were cheap to make and economical to market – as we saw earlier they were essentially produced and moved through to circuits almost entirely in-house. As such NFB filmmakers had a ready-made market niche, and as a result their films achieved a level of popularity that remains rare in documentary film history. Therefore the argument as to the possible impact that the attack against the NFB at the end of the war might have had on the development of documentary form in general and on shaping Canadian cinema in particular is certainly of major relevance and begs further research.

By the late 1940s, NFB films dealing with labour issues were reduced considerably. Between 1942 (the year in which Canadian labour and the Communist Party became fully involved in supporting the war effort) and 1946 (the year when the anti-Communist campaign officially began with the arrest of Communist MP Fred Rose), NFB titles that were categorized under "work and labour relations" were produced on an average of 14.8 films per year. The annual production of such titles consecutively dropped to: four in 1947, none in 1948, and two in 1949 (i.e. an annual average of two films between 1947 and 1950). This drop massively exceeded the less than one third drop in the NFB's overall annual average film production output in the two periods (from 97.4 films per year between 1942 and 1945, to 62.7 films per year between 1947 and 1949).

To reiterate my earlier argument vis-à-vis Peter Morris's de-politicization (particularly in connection with the Cold War) of the changes that occurred in the NFB after the end of the war, the atmosphere during this period was anything but "a comfortable" social or political transformation. Canada's entry into the post-war era was brimming with fierce struggles that eventually resulted in a decisive victory for monopoly capital and the "slippage" (to use Morris's term) into a rather uncomfortable reaffirmation of capitalist hegemony. But Morris's account of the transitional years in the NFB after the end of the war is characteristic of how many in Canada tend to look at McCarthyism as something that Canada was immune to or as a phenomenon that never affected Canadians. Unlike in the United States, when we write the history of Canadian cinema we don't even acknowledge the victims of our own McCarthyism:

> All this constitutes a standing rebuke to the bland liberal myth that McCarthyism was something that happened in America but not in Canada. Yet the lesson of this story is worse yet. As Rick Salutin has written, the Americans have actually celebrated the Hollywood witch-hunt by the House Un-American Activities Committee that took place in the late 1940s. The victims eventually became martyrs, even heroes. The victims in Canada have been ignored, relegated to silence. "In the U.S., the film witch hunt all happened under Klieg lights and TV cameras. It was impossible to miss. Here it was done in a more Canadian way: secretive, subtle, even polite. And yet our version was, if anything, more pervasive than the red scare in Hollywood. It began earlier, lasted most of a decade, and the aftermath is with us still in the form of the film industry we have – or do not have."[45]

What took place in Canada in the aftermath of World War II reflected a wider and more in-depth shift in the social and political balance of forces in the country. This shift affected the struggle around capitalist hegemony. Events of the early Cold War period signalled the beginning of a hegemonic reclamation by the capitalist class of whatever retreats it was forced to take during the earlier counter-hegemonic working class's charge as exemplified in the success and the increased influence of Popular Front policies. This charge occurred in the context of a protracted *war of position*, to use Gramsci's famous term, which is characteristically symptomatic of heightened moments of contention between the working class and the capitalist class in advanced civil societies.

In light of earlier successes achieved by the political and ideological forces that constituted the National/Popular Front, the Canadian capitalist class launched a major offensive to reclaim full control of the social and political situation in the country. As the war ended, there was no more need for full labour support to meet earlier increases in industrial production demands; the capitalist class had no urgent reason to maintain its wartime partnership commitments with labour. On the contrary, such a partnership now represented an imposition of some sort on the right of capital to fully control the decision-making process within the private sphere of its economic enterprise. Veteran filmmaker Evelyn Cherry described aspects of this battle as they became evident in the campaign against the NFB and the attempts to silence it:

> The basic thing was an attack on the *kind* of film – of social meaning – we were doing. We felt deeply involved in the country and we were filming it. Canadians were seeing themselves and their country for the first time, and they liked it. We

were a threat to the way things were and the way some people wanted them to continue. In the U.S. there were a few people doing it, but up here it was a movement – the National Film Board![46]

CONCLUSION

Grierson's original project at the NFB envisioned film as a tool to expand the role of government in improving the lives of its citizens. Based on how he saw the need for the intervention of the government, Grierson clearly advocated expanding the participatory role of citizens in discussing public concerns and issues:

> By stressing social purpose, Grierson wanted film to become a buttress of modern democracy, helping to buttress an informed citizenry as the foundation of progressive political development, in an age when communications technology encouraged social interdependence and collective enterprise. The appropriate instrument for such film-making was the State – not simply the government of the day, but a progressive public organized according to the principle of the "general sanction," that is, the limits of tolerable social change across the range of dominant partisan interests.[47]

In itself, Grierson's vision was far from being counter-hegemonic. While his outlook did not necessarily contradict those of the Communist Party and its Popular Front policy and the labour movement at the time, it did not endorse it either, at least not explicitly.

Ideologically, Grierson consistently projected himself at the centre of the political spectrum. Clearly, his pronounced ideas seemed more in sync with the centrist politics of the social democratic movement than with those of the Marxist and communist left. Like the British documentary movement within which he apprenticed his film and political careers in the 1930s, Grierson's ideas were positioned "to the left of dominant conservatism, to the right of Marxist and socialist opinion, and within a constellation of centrist ideologies associated with currents of social democratic reform."[48] In this respect many promoters of these ideas (including Grierson) insisted on projecting an image of themselves as rejecting both Communism and Fascism. But while social reformist ideas were indeed "diverse and heterogeneous… they [nevertheless] shared

a common core of agreement on the value of established social institutions, the need for public regulation of market forces."[49] Such values inadvertently complemented the thrust of the Popular Front policy strategy of the Communist Party of Canada during the war, which by that time had already parted from the earlier class-against-class approach of the 1920s and early 1930s.

Additional influence exercised by prominent NFB artists and intellectuals, many of whom might indeed have been informed by Communist Party ideas and policies, also probably played a role in how Popular Front ideas came to be integral to NFB films. Future research might bring more substantive evaluation and evidence of the practical dynamics that might have motivated specific prominent NFB filmmakers at the time, such as Stuart Legg, Jane March, Stanley Hawes, Evelyn Spice, Norman McLaren, James Beveridge, Tom Daly, Raymond Spottiswoode, and Basil Wright, along with many others. This kind of research could eventually identify some of these figures as major examples of the sort of organic intellectuals that Canada never fully acknowledged or paid due homage to. However, as I emphasized throughout this study, the counter-hegemonic significance of NFB films took shape within much broader social and political contexts that pertained to the political moment within which they were made.

The counter-hegemonic discourse on the working class that underscored NFB films during the early years of the Board's existence was an extension of a specific historical moment, where many practices, forces and players amalgamated. As we examine areas of influence that contributed to the development of the NFB's discourse on the working class, we begin to discover that it was informed by elements that were not necessarily or exclusively related to Canadian cinematic practices, or to the NFB's internal institutional dynamics, John Grierson, or specific filmmakers at the Board. To be sure, this discourse was primarily a materialization of multiple discursive emergences originating within working-class and socialist oriented political and cultural practices that were occurring in Canada and around the world. As such, it was informed by social, political and cultural formations whose dynamic strength existed outside of the Canadian political and social establishment's own discursive ideological domain.

Over the span of seven years between 1939 and 1946, NFB films functioned within a politically and ideologically polarized atmosphere. The vigour of this divergence was not restricted to the war front in Europe, however. Increasing social and political divisions within Canada set the stage for a major showdown between two major class-based forces whose war was temporarily put on hold. The function of NFB films grew and acquired its counter-hegemonic ideological workings in the context of how these films interacted with, enhanced, and/or contradicted the views and values of the

two main forces that dominated the political and social arena at the time, namely a militant-led working class and the capitalist establishment.

Today, the films that we have examined have lost most of their original impact and power. They mostly look and sound crude and overbearing. Tom Daly, a contemporary NFB filmmaker commented recently: "Many of those wartime films don't stand up now. They are too time-locked."[50] Nevertheless, among the unique features of these films was their artistic and dramatic use of a disembodied voice to add historical and ethico-political nuance to their visual images. Rather than presenting bureaucratic reports to Canadians, these films offered fervent editorials. In some respect, these editorials and their filmmakers played a role similar to the one suggested by Gramsci for organic intellectuals who were to respond to and stand for the interests of working-class social groupings struggling to maintain or attain their own hegemonic status. This role was to be achieved through claiming a clear stand, in ideological terms, in relation to the struggle for a new social system which reorganizes the hierarchies of producing and distributing economic and cultural resources and power.

Now customarily decried as manipulation of the audience by what amounts to a Voice of God, the NFB films' voice-over was that of the filmmaker, unabashedly explicating the newsreel footage, re-recreating historic moments, maps, and original footage devised to build his/her arguments. What is missing in some of the critiques against NFB films of the period is their disregard for the political culture of the day, which (relatively speaking), was largely cognizant of the debate around objectivity in politics and in media. The popular influence of Marxist analysis and politics in part encouraged the affirmation of the inherently political, and for that matter, the class natured, and as such acknowledged ultimately the inadvertent bias of all cultural practices. In this regard communist critics were forthright in claiming and even celebrating their class and political impartiality. This stood in contrast to traditional claims of objectivity that were largely associated with mainstream media as well as with the political establishment's pronouncements, particularly when it came to admitting their own class affiliations and biases. This is why the idea of discussing films after they were shown became a popular modifying aspect of the process of watching films during this period. This practice was encouraged, as we have seen earlier, both by the Board and by supporters of the Popular Front.

To claim that the voice-over in NFB films attempted to dupe audiences to consent to government policies (as Nelson and Morris tend to maintain) is, for one, dismissive of the possible impact that the particularly politicized culture of the day might have had on these audiences. One can argue that, in the context of audience's general familiarity and involvement with contemporary political players, the use of an editorialized voice-

over in these films might have even worked reflexively, and in a way that may have enhanced rather than subdued the proactive reading of these films.

Numerous NFB war films subtly celebrated the period's fascination with socialist-oriented programs as an effort to end unemployment, share the wealth, develop the economy, and build a new world of peace and cooperation by sponsoring new communities and attitudes built on cooperative rather than capitalistic principles. These films' arguments, however, were indeed largely muted, suggesting this may be only a short-term solution for larger and more fundamental social and economic problems.

Ideas that became part of the NFB's film discourse (e.g., collective work, sharing of resources, labour solidarity, democratic and equal participation of workers in the affairs of society, and solidarity with the Soviet working-class state), were put forward during a time that witnessed a major development of a militant working class, labour movements, and their supporters on the political left. Those ideas promoted a vision within which the working class assumed a prominent position within the Canadian political and social decision-making process.

By projecting values that complemented a working-class perspective, many NFB films inadvertently stressed the leadership role of workers within a widely based counter-hegemonic historical bloc. The success of several NFB filmmakers in presenting a vision that placed the working class and its role in Canadian society at the centre of their film discourse also placed the Board itself at the middle of struggle around class hegemony in Canada.

A significant characteristic of NFB films between 1939 and 1946 is how they inferred the role and position of the working class within the process of continuity and change in Canadian society. Under capitalism, change is equated with natural and inevitable evolution. Individual self-determination is also a fundamental feature of capitalist ideological values, one that needs to be acknowledged and adhered to if change is to occur without major social upheavals. In other words, in order to be part of late capitalist evolutionary change, one needs to articulate his/her own way of surviving through the ordeals that accompany technological and economical adjustments and readjustments. Therefore, individuals have to negotiate ways of accepting, or at least coping, with the benefits as well as with the negative repercussions of progress.

NFB films provided a challenge to how the working class and working-class individuals were traditionally portrayed and how they functioned within Canadian political and film discourse. As such, these films' discourse on labour and the working class was neither a continuation of preceding Canadian cinematic culture nor a simple reflection of the policies of the Canadian government. Indeed, this discourse

constituted a major (albeit brief) break from what dominated Canada's film culture since the development of cinema in the late nineteenth century. It ushered in the emergence of a new perspective on the issue of social class, which specifically presented a counter-hegemonic outlook on the role of the working people in society.

For the first time in Canadian cinema, working people were not presented as passive observers of a history that links the past, the present and the future in a chain of incessant evolutionary change, or as victims of its inevitability. For the first time, working people were not portrayed as lone heroes, each fighting his/her own way out of the curse of labouring. Instead, and through challenging the commonsensical view of history as fate or as an uninterrupted evolutionary process, these films explored how the conscious intervention of working people moulded and re-shaped history. To this end, these films also urged and celebrated the possibility of expanding democratic practice by making it more reflective of the direct and grassroots involvement of working people, hence they provided concrete demonstrations of the commonsensical feasibility of democratizing democracy.

Intellectual formations were, and remain, especially integral to the modern era (and I deliberately use this term in distinction from the loaded and mostly mystified term of postmodern). Sociological studies of culture remain crucial to understanding the ideological significance of such formations to specific moments in history. But these formations are ephemeral, developing eventually into individual careers or offshoot movements; equally as important, they sometime disseminate their ideas widely, leaving more or less permanent traces on the general culture of their societies. As Raymond Williams contends, such formations are typically centred in a metropolis, at points of "transition and intersection" within a complex social history; and the individuals who both compose and are composed by them always have a "range of diverse positions, interests and influences, some of which resolved (if at times only temporarily)… others of which remain as internal differences."[51]

The specificity of the institutionalized and discursive formations and the ideological workings of the ideas that came out of the specific films dealt with in this book are long gone and are part of history. Aspects of these ideas themselves, however, have indeed spun off "into individual careers or breakaway movements" and more importantly disseminated "widely, leaving more or less permanent traces" (to reuse Williams' words) on Canadian political and cultural discourse. One only needs to look at how Canadians love to define their identity in terms of its compassion and its sense of collective social responsibility, and how we tend to express pride in our collective health and social programs, although we tend to de-historicize these ideas by looking at them as aspects of the Canadian way of life that has been with us from eternity!

Eventual disintegration of the left's historical bloc can be traced to complex economic, political, and social circumstances that can only be addressed in the context of the ensuing dynamics that dominated the period of the Cold War. Nevertheless, what remains clear is that the post-war period heralded the celebration of the Canadian national myth proclaimed in the name of triumphant monopoly capitalism. Under these new conditions the NFB was forced to face a major political offensive that eventually changed the composition of its leadership as well as the ideological crux of its political discourse. In the words of Thom Waugh, the post-war situation in the NFB was a "dramatic reflection of the play of cultural, political, and ideological factors, the confrontation of ideals and realities, in an era that both saw the dissipation of the cultural left of the Popular Front and the baptism under fire of the young Canadian cinema."[52]