

Introduction: The Cold War and the movies

History does not always provide set answers even when there is an enormous amount of material available to document a given situation. To highlight just a few instances, consider that serious controversy continues to rage about the need to use the Atomic Bomb, about the origins of the First World War, about the role of Napoleon as an agent of change in early nineteenth-century Europe, about just when the Renaissance began, or about the causes for the failure of the Roman Empire. And so too, intensive debate continues about the beginning and ending of the Cold War. Pre-eminent Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis's recent effort, *We Now Know*, about 'rethinking Cold War History', generally had a favourable reception, but with caveats by such commentators as the writer Neal Ascherson ('We Now Know, But Not Nearly Enough') and the social scientist Tony Judt ('things may look different when we learn more ...').¹

In both East and West the mass media played an important role in the Cold War: propagandising, cajoling, haranguing, distorting. Most of the major players undertook substantial information and disinformation campaigns. Propaganda was a major tool, linked to important diplomatic and strategic actions and plans. As Laura Ann Belmonte in her 1996 dissertation described US propagandists: 'While acknowledging the imperfections of democratic capitalism, they enunciated its finest qualities.'²

The ideological response from the other side may have been less willing (or able) to admit imperfections, but articulated a strong if not too successful ideological defence. Each side, of course, vigor-

ously enunciated what was wrong with its opponent's way of life.

The movies were among the fiercest participants in this war of ideas, in this combat of cultures. This issue of *Film History* deals with various aspects of this battle, with essays highlighting some exemplars of the Cold War years (i.e. the mid-1940s to the latter 1960s). Cultural clashes continued until the fall of the Soviet Empire at the beginning of the 1990s, but in different venues, as the movies everywhere fell victim to what the cinema historian Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has termed 'similar problems of declining audiences and unstable markets' resulting from 'the growth of competing mass media ... especially television'.³

Anti-Communism had been a part of Canadian official life since 1917 and the Bolshevik Revolution. Indeed, as a recent monograph on 'Cold War Canada' has pointed out, 'anti-Communism was part of the fundamental philosophy and self-definition of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police'.⁴

And, as can be gleaned from Mark Kristman's article on that relationship from 1948 to 1953 between the Mounties and the National Film Board, the latter and some of its adherents were victims of Canada's Red Scare during these years.

Conditions were much worse in the United States, where, well into the 1960s, what historian Stephen Whitfield has called 'the politics of film' made itself felt in various ways.⁵

During the latter 1940s and for much of the 1950s and in some ways even the 1960s, Hollywood 'swung into high gear to demonstrate ... its patriotism', in the words of one critic.⁶ My own paper in this issue deals with the genesis and pro-

duction of a vicious 1955 anti-Communist film, *Trial*, which is based on a novel that evenhandedly attacked both Communism and McCarthyism. Susan Carruthers reviews Hollywood's response to the much-publicised 'brainwashing' of Americans taken prisoner during the 'police action' in Korea. Both articles highlight what has been described as the industry's 'particular contribution ... to capture and interpret in a contemporary setting the negative images created by ... anti-Communist agitation ...'⁷

That agitation also resulted in other kinds of assault on cultural integrity. As John Noakes reports, a branch of the FBI as part of its anti-subversive activity tried to categorise whether Hollywood efforts such as Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* were subversive, if they, in FBI director J. Edgar Hoover's words, were a 'purveyor of alienisms who seek to transform the America we know and love to a land of class struggle'.⁸ Much more determined was the effective unofficial censorship of the 1953 movie *Salt of the Earth*, an attempt by black-listees to produce a movie about a strike and its effect on Mexican-American workers and their families. James Lorence details (to borrow historian Ellen Schrecker's words) 'how many different forces were arrayed against the ... showing of their movie' in what should have been the friendly locales of Detroit and Chicago.⁹

The articles by G. Tom Poe and Nicholas Cull deal with a different, less negative kind of propaganda. Poe, in relating the production history of Otto Preminger's 1962 filming of Allen Drury's Pulitzer-prize-winning 1959 novel, *Advise and Consent*, describes what has been properly called 'a supremely ambivalent' film. Cull shows how what then was described as 'the largest national information organisation in the world' produced two of its most effective films.¹⁰ Pierre Sorlin presents a different slant on what has been called 'America's mastery of news and entertainment' in post-World War II Europe.¹¹ Another important aspect is considered in Thomas Doherty's article on Senator Estes Kefauver's televised hearings on the impact of organised crime in the US, pointing up how events not directly related to Cold War politics do have an effect (the televising of the hearings won an Emmy).

The Communists found it difficult to counter American propaganda efforts – Reinhold Wagenleitner has argued that 'practically the whole East

German population chose to emigrate to the West every night via television'.¹² The articles by Stefan Soldovieri and Gerd Gemuenden deal with Communist Germany's attempts to counter that Western medium's impact and to do so in a way emphasising its political ideals. The East German 'Indianerfilme' – much akin to Westerns – as Gemuenden reports, succeeded; Soldovieri deals with a much less-successful effort, an attempted science fiction adventure that failed both critically and at the box office.

'Spin' is at the heart of the articles by John Haynes and Elaine Spiro. He recounts how the author Lillian Hellman developed her well-known stand against the Congressional committee investigating her. Ms Spiro, a bit player on the Hollywood scene in the mid-1940s, reminisces about her involvement with the Warner's strike of 1945.

Why should there be any interest in the details offered by each article? We need to know the processes involved in order to understand the historical impact touched on by each author. The bulk of these articles deal with the production and distribution of propaganda. During the Renaissance, the art work we now revere was part of the marketplace. So too the systems which produced the films discussed by these authors were and are part of a marketplace, ideologically as well as commercially. We need to understand the meaning of these films as well as the detail which governed their production and distribution in order to place them in a larger context. If one assumes that the movies discussed are 'texts', we need to know the source. And where the attempt was made to censor individuals, we need to know how effective was that attempt. These articles are an introduction to a complex subject – the selling of ideas. It remains unclear just how successful the Cold War manifestation of that sale was. But with these articles we have an overview that may serve as a guide to further study and investigation.Ω

Daniel J. Leab

Notes

1. Neal Ascherson, *London Review of Books*, 19 (#20, 1997): 2; Tony Judt, *New York Review of Books* (9 October 1997): 20.
2. Laura Ann Belmonte, 'Defending a Way of Life:

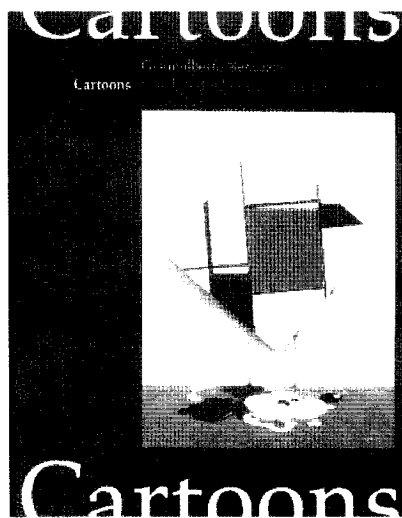
- American Propaganda and the Cold War, 1945–1959' (unpublished Ph D diss., University of Virginia, 1996), 21.
3. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ed., *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 463.
 4. Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945–1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 216.
 5. Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 2nd ed.), 127.
 6. Michael Barson, *'Better Red Than Dead!': A Nostalgic Look at the Golden Years of Russia Phobia, Red-Baiting, and Other Commie Madness* (London: Plexus, 1992), unpagged book.
 7. Les. K. Adler, 'The Politics of Culture: Hollywood and the Cold War', in Robert Griffith and Athan Theoharis, eds., *The Specter: Original Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism* (New York: New Viewpoints – a Division of Franklin Watts, Inc., 1974), 243.
 8. 'J. Edgar Hoover Alerts the Nation' (28 October 1945), in Albert Fried, ed., *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 17.
 9. Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1998), 335.
 10. Donald W. White, *The American Century: The Rise & Decline of the United States as a World Power* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1996), 236.
 11. Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans have loved, hated and transformed American culture since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 210.
 12. Reinhold Wagenleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: the Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (translated by Diana M. Wolf, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), xi.

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