

Community film

People involved in alternate film projects always face extra problems. Their equipment is old, money is in short supply and their films cover controversial topics that traditional outlets for their work are reluctant to use.

In January 1978, when Bill McKiggan and Tom Burger began work on the video tape "Work and Wages", they were responding to what they call "unfair persecution of unemployed people, particularly in the Maritimes."

The federal government was just launching its "Cheaters" campaign to shift the blame of unemployment from their own backdoor to those who had no jobs; other politicians were calling Maritimers "lazy"; and the media in the region was duly reporting all this without comment.

At the same time, Maritimers were hearing about more and more suicide attempts that were linked to joblessness-depressions. And, the Halifax Coalition for Full Employment was just getting on its feet.

With some funding from the Canada Council and physical resources provided by the Halifax Video Theatre, McKiggan and Burger set about filming the Coalition's endeavors. Using antiquated black and white 1/2 inch video equipment, they produced a five minute tape to be used by the Coalition in community work.

When they requested that the ATV community public affairs program "I.D." broadcast the tape, it was rejected. "I.D." said, "we take 1/2 inch black and white only if it's an airplane crashing". CBC radio agreed to air the audio track from the tape but refused to give it TV time on the grounds that the technical limitations of black and white prohibited its use on TV.

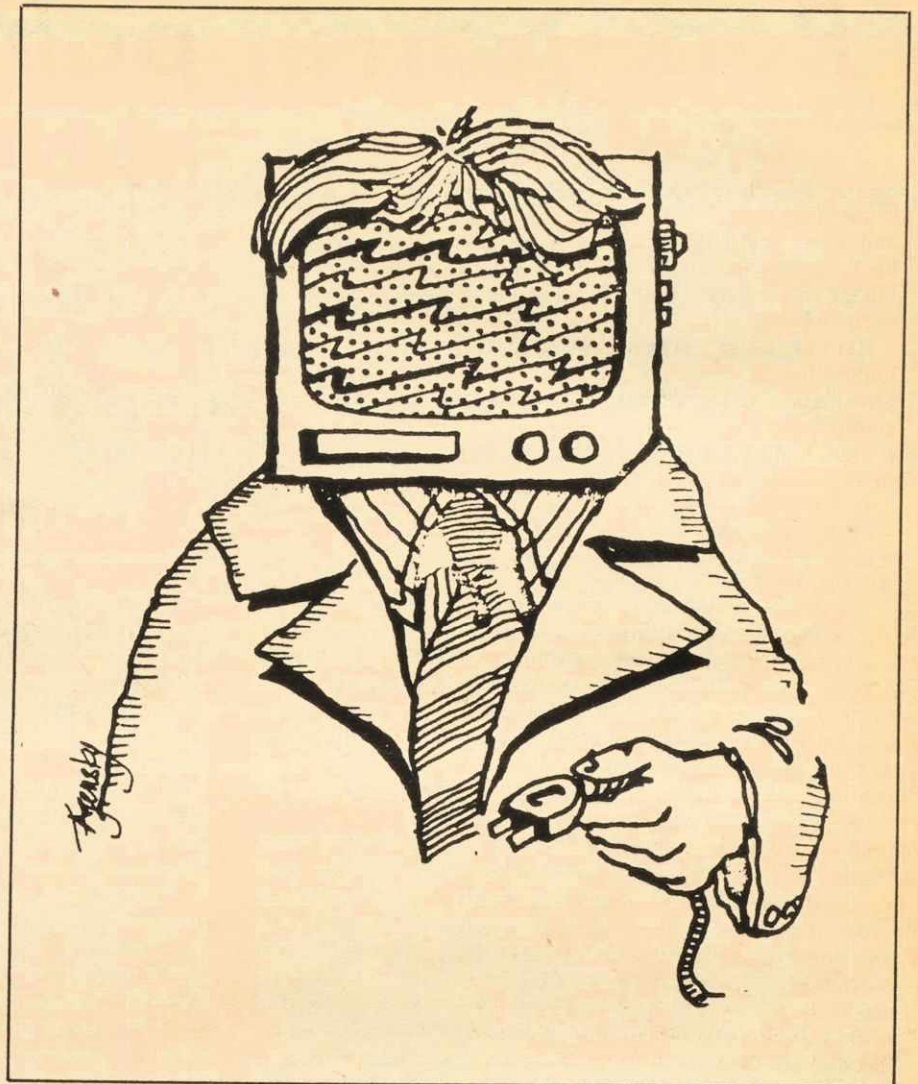
But McKiggan and Burger didn't lose their interest in filming what they found around them: the joblessness of the Maritimes in the '70's. From men on the breadline in the northend of Halifax, to unemployed shipyard workers: it all formed the base of their work in video. While the regular media of the region were promising brighter days ahead—depending on which government was advocating more grants to multi-national companies—the real situation hadn't changed much through the year, and McKiggan and Burger continued their work.

CHARLIE MURRAY TAPED

Charlie Murray was involved in one of the first attempts to organize a fisherman's union in Nova Scotia. In the late thirties he began working with fish plant workers and fishermen along the south shore. In 1940, after warnings from the provincial minister of labour that Murray had to stay "off shore or else", he was arrested and shipped to an internment camp in Pettawawa, Ontario. For 16 months Murray was held without trial.

While the government charged that Murray was a "communist", others—particularly the people he was working with on the south shore—found it easier to believe he was interned because of the threat a union would have posed to businesses in Nova Scotia at the time.

Both of these tapes are available to community groups and schools interested in this different perspective in Maritime history. McKiggan and Burger, working out of the Atlantic Film Makers Co-operative, are interested in discussing their work with those who view it: for the tapes, you can contact the Co-operative at 1671 Argyle St., in Halifax.



Bowater in NFLD.

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Many of the men went to Churchill Falls, Labrador, leaving their families behind. When they returned upon completion of that construction project, many did not want to leave. As Tremblett says, "they knew the misery of it, leaving their families behind. Why should a man with 16 children leave his children and his wife behind and head off to Labrador? Is that living? He had a home which was paid for; it was his. He had a piece of land which was his. It wasn't economic sense for him to sell his home, take his family and move them somewhere else and then start all over again with a \$40,000 or \$50,000 mortgage around his neck; and he might have been 45 years of age."

But many did not want to return to sawmilling, boatbuilding and farming, either. Most had been taught for 20 years, "If you're dumb, you're going to be a fisherman," explains Tremblett, and so they gained skills in construction trades. "How do you tell him now he's got to go and break ground and put in spuds?"

The Bay d'Espoir Development

boat-building operation which has since been taken over by a resident of the bay. Owner John Augot, whose shipyard won contracts to build three 55-foot longliners last year, estimates he could get 90-95 per cent of the materials he needs from local sawmills if those sawmills were geared up for production.

The association has also secured a Canada Works grant to start up a sawmill in the area and views other government programs as potential sources of the initial capital needed for such ventures. The funds, says Tremblett, will not be used for "doing up graveyards, painting picket fences and such, but rather starting up a sawmill to create 100 permanent jobs."

They also want changes in the way Canada Works funds are distributed. What the association proposed, says Tremblett, was that the amount of funding available be divided within the constituency according to the unemployment rates. Then the local organizations would put forth proposals for using these funds

"the only route to prosperity for Bay d'Espoir is to rely on forestry, fishing and agriculture"

Association, now seven years old, has determined that the only route to prosperity for Bay d'Espoir is to rely again on forestry, fishing and agriculture and to make these resources work for the people of Bay d'Espoir.

"It's no good to cut the raw material—lumber, for argument's sake—and ship it out of the bay. But rather you have to look at it from the point of view, what can be done with the secondary processing of lumber to give us those few additional jobs," asserts Tremblett.

"And the development association came to the conclusion that the only way that can be done is if it is utilized for that very purpose, not utilized for the maximum amount of profits by an industrialist but rather maximizing it for its potential for the overall development of the area."

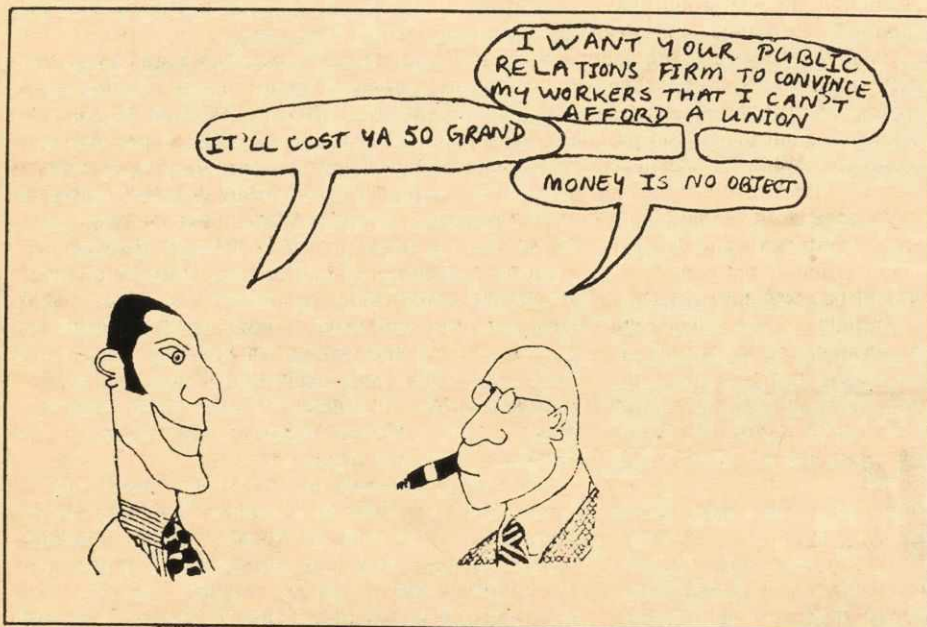
In line with this, the association is drawing up a five-year development plan for the bay, focusing not on one big industry but drawing upon all available resources. They have already initiated a

and, upon approval from the Member of Parliament, would act upon these proposals. But the member for Bay d'Espoir, External Affairs Minister Don Jamieson, replied negatively to this suggestion, he said.

Fearing that the sawmill proposal would be rejected, the association organized a 129-person caravan to Gander, where the decisions were being made. They got their sawmill.

The association is also vocal about the past developments which have led Bay d'Espoir into their present state. In February, 1978, it organized a march of 800 people to the power site of Newfoundland Hydro to protest the transfer of various branches of the operation to central Newfoundland.

And in regards to Bowater, "Bowater will have to go," said Tremblett, "It's as simple as that. It's our resource. It wasn't given them forever and tomorrow. They can't give them the resource and starve the people."



Bank workers organize

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wage increases above the normal cost-of-living increase, are also used to make employees work harder and discourage pro-union feelings.

But the harder the employees work, says Oosterveld, the greater the chance of making mistakes and getting a bad staff report.

"And it's also a question of favouritism by the boss and it allows the banks to play God. It's an abused system in those ways because it's not objective and it's not based on merit."

The banks have generally abandoned the practice of forcing tellers to pay them up to 10 per cent of any shortfall, but Oosterveld says it remains a stressful and demanding job. Tellers estimate they handle an average \$20,000 a day in cash.

Organizing bank workers has not been easy because of traditional fears of trade

unionism, the tactics of the banks and the sheer magnitude of the banks' operations.

Workers must be contacted in cloak and dagger fashion at home individually because any union talk at work could result in dismissal.

The teller says the banks play on the employees' traditional fears about unions and tell them that a minority of union supporters can force their will on the majority.

Oosterveld says many have had little exposure to unions and "don't know that 90 per cent of contract negotiations are settled without a hint of a problem. It's not labour who tries to negotiate fantastic contracts. More often than not, it's management that's at fault. The bank workers are afraid of having to go on strike, but they won't have to unless they decide themselves."