

Canada is a very large place with relatively few people. How do they stay in touch? The government has, thoughtfully, built links. The first was the Canadian Pacific Railway, which literally connected the East and the West. The twentieth century links have been the CBC (discussed on page five) and the National Film Board, which was described in some detail in September, 1972. The Board, a source of much pride and occasional outrage for most Canadians, was first guided by a cantankerous Scot named John Grierson. We reprint below a short biographical sketch of Mr. G.

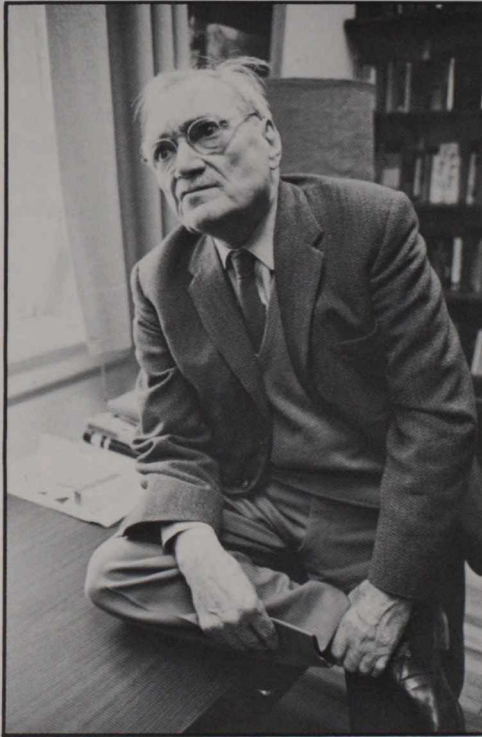
AN ANECDOTE AND A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF John Grierson

THE MOST EFFECTIVE piece of anti-Nazi film propaganda in World War II seemed accidental — a captured Nazi newsreel showing Hitler doing a jig after the French had formally surrendered. It was a strange jig, one might say an insane jig or an obscene jig, Hitler childish and gleeful, jumping up and down in idiot delight.

It seems probable that Hitler never danced that jig — that John Grierson invented it by sophisticated manipulation, by taking the actual footage of Hitler walking and then speeding it up.

It is an interesting tale. If true it gives an interesting insight into the complex mind and motives of an evangelical genius. Grierson almost despised fiction — he and his films were concerned from the beginning with reality. But he also despised cinema vérité.

He was born in Scotland in 1898. He went to the University of Glasgow and to the United States on a Rockefeller grant. In 1929 he made *Drifters* in England for the Empire Marketing Board. *Drifters* was the life of the herring fishermen in the North Sea. It was a new kind of film, a "documentary" as he called it, not unique — Robert Flaherty was making his own astounding films of isolated people — but with its own distinction. When austerity clipped the Empire Marketers, Grierson went to the General Post Office and made *Nightmail* and *Song of Ceylon*. His reputation was now international, and as the thirties were about to end and World War



II about to begin, Prime Minister Mackenzie King persuaded him to come to Canada and be the prime mover and the first Director of the National Film Board.

He remained until 1947 and he left his imperishable mark on Canada and on filmmaking.

He was a man of enormous ego and granite beliefs. He was an elitist. He did not suffer fools gladly. He was against the Establishment but hardly of the New Left.

And he has said: "You may not tell lies to the public. Your duty to the public is more important than your duty to your wife and children not to say your bloody conscience before God. You can tell private lies. That's

OK. That we do in fictional movies. But public lies may not be told."

But he did not believe that truth was a simple thing to tell; that one could simply point a camera and let it run.

"There is no such thing as truth until you've made it into a form. Truth is an interpretation, a perception. You've got moral laws to affect it, you've got social laws, you've got esthetic laws. What is truth isn't a nasty question at all — it's a question that forever is with you when you're a filmmaker. It's to make your truth as many-faceted and as deep, as various, as exciting as possible that you are an artist."

Mr. Grierson died in February, 1972, in Bath, England, at the age of seventy-three.