

At York to promote his new movie

# Cliff Robertson believes in the truth

By RON GRANER

Actor Cliff Robertson was at York recently to promote his new film *J.W. Coop*. A member of the audience asked, "I noticed that J.W. Coop has the initials 'J.C.'" Robertson, director, producer, writer and star of the film, thought a moment and responded that there were no hidden symbolic meanings in the film. There is abundant use of symbols but they are skillfully used to point out the personality of the hero.

*J.W. Coop* is the story of a vanishing breed, the rodeo rider. Without being mushy or overtly dramatic *J.W. Coop* cuts a clinical view of the rodeo rider, his world, his way of life and his way of death.

*J.W.* was born in a small town in the midwest where his father, an oil worker, died following an accident due to insufficient safety precautions on the job. Memories of his father haunt *J.W.* throughout the film. He is determined not to give his life to a company that doesn't know he exists, so he hits the rodeo circuit to make his mark the hard way.

After a stint in the service he hits the rodeos again. When he runs out of money he passes cheques which he intends to cover but can't, and is jailed. Finally, after ten years he is released. It is here that the film begins; *J.W.* is on his way home.

All this detail is incidental, as the film concerns itself with a view of simple people that make up middle America. The story line is incredibly brief, yet strangely compelling. The actors do not use dialogue to tell their story, they use instead meticulously prepared characterization. Often the characters are not acting but playing themselves. The result is a story that rings true.

*J.W.* returns home to find his mother senile; his home decayed.

He hits the road again, 'time hungry'; ten years have passed and he must catch up. On the way he meets a vast assortment of people; a young hippie (Christina Ferrare) with whom he eventually falls in love, a young inexperienced state trooper, a gregarious truck driver, southern bigots, Texas sheriffs, and the rodeo people themselves.

The appeal of this film is subtle. It avoids any issues and trendy approaches to box office. It is not a great love story, nor anti-establishment, nor obsessed with violence. The film simply traces the career of a cowboy as he tries to reach the finals in the rodeo circuit. 'Grand Champion' is what he is after and he won't let go until he has reached it.

After an ending (that severely injured the stuntman), there is little that we could ask about the rodeo life.

Cliff Robertson was on hand to talk about the production of the film and to answer questions from the large audience. Robertson started his acting career in the Catskill Mountains for \$5.00 a week and room and board. To keep acting and eating he worked as a longshoreman, a taxi driver and a busboy. Eventually he was acting full time. He starred on Broadway with Helen Hayes and acted in Tennessee Williams' *Orpheus Descending*.

Robertson's first self-produced film *Charlie*, based on the television play *The Two Worlds of Charlie Gordon*, won him an Oscar. Seven years of research went into *Charlie*. Robertson spent a great deal of time working and helping retarded children. "After a background like that there was no problem in presenting the character of *Charlie*. All I had to do was follow the

characteristics I had for each mental age *Charlie* progressed through. At this stage he would be seven, at that twelve then thirteen."

Six years of homework preceded the filming of *J.W.* while Robertson tried to amass the capital needed. Eventually production started with all the actors, but Geraldine Page, working for scale. "I would not permit her to work for that small an amount" said Robertson.

The entire film was brought in for \$736,800, with the production working out of one truck and the cast sleeping in \$8.00 motel rooms. The whole movie was shot in 33 days on locations at Red Bluff, Oakdale, Sonora, Woodlake, Angels Camp and Porterville Rodeos. Effective use was made of these locations but don't look for any Academy Awards in the camera work.

The appeal of this movie lies in its character portrayal. What saves the photography, which obviously must have been done by necessity on the most primitive of conditions, is an absolutely super editing job. I sometimes found some of the effects a bit obtrusive though. Changes of scene were usually accomplished by a very abrupt jump cut with only the barest visual hinge. I caught myself gasping, confronted with a Brahman Bull magnified seven fold, seconds after looking at *J.W. Coop* lounging against a door.

Nevertheless Robertson has made a fascinating work out of a subject that few would admit to be their prime passion. With a little more money and a little more time who knows, Robertson might have done for rodeo what Hemingway did for the bullfights.



Cliff Robertson at York.

Illich, Frye, Vanier some of the contributors

## Readability found in Alternatives in Education

By CATHERINE MACK

Readability is not a virtue one usually associates with Ontario Institute of Studies in Education publications. How can one explain then, the fact that *Alternatives in Education* is readable, even one might say entertaining?

Perhaps that the material was given first as lectures? Or that the lectures were given to celebrate the opening of the new building? (At such moments even OISE personnel might feel an exuberance that could lead to a desire to communicate.)

The most probable explanation is that the stature of the contributors, J. Vanier, I. Illich, Northrop Frye, Vinh Bang and N. Postman is such that they need no cloak of verbiage.

It is perhaps significant that the first lecture by Postman calls for an examination of the language of education which he contends needs radical subtractive surgery.

Language being the tool of thought one can concede that a new language might reorient our thinking about education. It is only when Postman gives an example of his new thinking, 100 students organized into teams of 10 being educated on the streets where "the action is" that one feels compelled to answer: Come now, Mr. Postman each high school in Ontario has approximately 1,500 students, if you wish to be treated seriously make your suggestions in terms of those numbers. No one has ever suggested that education couldn't be better for a few.

Vinh Bang's alternative is a proper use of Piaget's theories which he complains have been largely misused by educators. "The techniques used to study thought processes cannot simply be adopted as techniques for the teaching-learning situation." He mentions in particular conservation, pouring scorn on educators who think that they should develop a systematic program to teach conservation as if it were an item in a grammar or arithmetic curriculum.

Vinh Bang sees the need for the establishment of a body of intermediate research... research in educational psychology, based not solely on the theory of Piaget but dependent also upon the contributions of experimental, effective and social psychology and other branches. He concludes with a plea for a clinical approach to education for which Piaget has provided a theoretical foundation, which we should now project onto the reality of the schools. One could observe that the teachers needed for his "clinical approach" will doubtless need more than one year of teacher education.

Northrop Frye in his usual reasoned manner manages a full share of bon mots. — Of compulsory universal education — How did benevolence produce a prison? Of OISE — a cross between an occupying garrison and a colonial governor's mansion. Of education — of all superstitions... one of the most dismal and fatuous is the notion that education is a preparation for life... Education should be defined as the encounter with real life.

Of the seminar — students expect and ought to get something better from their tuition fees than merely the sound of their own ignorance coming back from the four walls.

Jean Vanier on Educators and the Mentally Deficient asks "What can we do in a society that tends in so many ways to stimulate the thirst for abstract knowledge and books, but frequently, so frequently closes its heart to people?" Those who have heard him speak will be moved by the words "Peace comes... by sharing. Sharing my knowledge. Not teaching, sharing."

By now Ivan Illich's demands for the de-schooling of society are common knowledge. In this lecture his generalizations are made with all the finesse of a highway snowplough. However he is the only lecturer who took seriously the title *Alternatives in Education*. He suggests four distinct channels or

learning exchanges that could contain all the resources needed for real learning: Things, models, peers and elders. As he amplifies, one senses that his approach is more suited to the small and middle sized community than our cities. Such sensing is intensified when he cites Tanzania's "plans to integrate education with village life" as one of his arguments.

It would be unjust to omit men-

tioning that Patrick Suppes' exploration of computers and their potential is moderate in its conclusions and thankfully without the exaggerations that computer buffs too often affect.

To reiterate, a readable book, which while it provides few real alternatives has a sufficiency of catalytic material to generate some in the reader's mind.

*Alternatives in Education — The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education c. 1971, Fifth Anniversary Lectures, Northrop Frye — Jean Vanier — Ivan Illich — Neil Postman — Patrick Suppes — Vinh Bang Bang (authors). Edited by Bruce Rusk. Publisher General Publishing Company Limited, Toronto, 133 pages, \$2.25.*

## Horn's Dirty Thirties — it's a fascinating book

By MARILYN SMITH

The *Dirty Thirties*, Canadians in the Great Depression is a new collection of essays, letters, newspaper stories and recollections taken from the era and put together by Glendon history professor Michiel Horn.

It's well done and fascinating reading. The format of primary sources gives the reader realism viewed from the armchair. Beginning with the economics creating the situation, the book moves into the levels of individuals and the effects on their lives.

Government policies — or rather the lack of them — is presented through excerpts of reports, parliamentary dialogue and sundry other sources. Back to back with these are the distress letters sent to then prime minister R.B. Bennett describing the mounting back taxes, ill-health and hardship — all in real-life bad grammar and misspelled words. Bennett often responded with personal \$5 contributions from his own fortune. It's rumored babies named after him received silver cups. These are probably stockpiled in pawn shops across the country.

Horn's selective editing puts the

and breadlines against the big business busts and economic problems of tariffs lack of foreign markets and the inflexibility of the Canadian banking system.

The result is a book wide enough in scope to appeal both to the scholar and general reader. The book is bound to become a standard text in Canadian universities. Students will welcome this encompassing short-cut to research material.

The eye-witness account of the On to Ottawa Trek in 1935 of unemployed single men and the transcript of their unfruitful meeting with Bennett is frightening witness to the paranoid Communist plot fear. Foreign-born Canadians came under a lot of fire during the 30s, especially the central Europeans in the hard-hit prairies. Yet the prejudice was often disguised by communist or socialist labels.

Attempts to unionize or strike received harsh government - implemented retaliation. The example of Ontario premier Mitchell Hepburn's reaction to the 1937 Oshawa strike when General Motors workers attempted to form a union was "this government is going to maintain law and order at all costs." He created an army force of army veterans and

University of Toronto students. They were called Hepburn's Hussars or Sons of Mitches.

The case for unions is developed with the back-to-back accounts of GM record profits in 1937 along with the fifth consecutive wage cut in five years for GM workers. Then there is John David Eaton's memory that the Depression meant taking your girl and friends out on the town for \$10. Meanwhile, his women sewing factory workers were making \$1.75 for every dozen dresses they produced. When the women attempted to unionize, they were locked out.

Horn lets the book run the gamut of conditions during the thirties. The times were harder for some, and merely belt-tightening for others. Attempts to explain the economics of the situation are there, but Horn is no economist. As a historian he rates highly. His historical overview through organized source material creates a sensitive account reviving memories in all those who lived through the Depression. To all others it gives a real sense of the distress of the times.

*The Dirty Thirties, Canadians in the Great Depression edited by Michiel Horn, Copp Clark, 728 pages, \$5.95.*